

Technique: Signpost the methodology

A student can be autonomous, but still be wasting their time in out-of-class work if they follow procedures that are unproductive or unhelpful, for example, making long lists of every random word and translation they come across, or always listening to new recordings with the printed text open in front of them.

If we want to encourage our students to continue learning independently outside the classroom when there is no teacher, we need to make sure that they know something more about classroom procedures and their rationale. Think of it as teacher training for your students!

By doing this, you help them to gain important insights that inform their choices as to which techniques they will use when working on their own. Maybe a student who has noted the procedures, and understands the logic for task-based listening, is more likely to use a variation of that in their own independent study.

We help students to understand these things by *signposting* the *what* and *why* of our methodology.

- 1 Focus on the *what* of methodology and techniques by using questions that ask students to recall what happened, e.g. 'What was the first thing we did in the speaking activity?'
- 2 Focus on the *why* by asking reflective questions about the methodology and techniques, e.g. Why did I set a task before you started reading, instead of just asking you questions afterwards?

Here are two examples:

- 1 Teacher: We've been working on vocabulary for half an hour now. Do you remember the first thing we did?
 Student: We made a list of all words we knew about trains and stations.
 Teacher: Good. Why do you think I asked you to do that?
- 2 Teacher: In that listening activity, I told Mariel and Luisa to close their coursebooks. What was the purpose of that? Why didn't I let you read the text while you were listening?

Technique: Integrate personal review and reflection into signposting

A lot of classroom work proceeds, activity following activity, at a pace that allows little chance to pause and consider what has been learnt. Yet without a reflective gathering in of the harvest, many activities will be much less useful than they might have been.

When you signpost the end of a stage, it's a good opportunity to also encourage learners to look back and review what they have done, what they have achieved and what they still need to do. For example:

Well done! You worked hard there! So ... I wonder ... what do you think are the three most important things you have learnt from the work in this first 40 minutes? Look back over your notebooks and the coursebook. List three things that you definitely want to remember, and say why they are important for you. When you are ready, tell your partner, and find out what he or she has chosen.

Technique: Putting the day plan on the board

This is a basic structuring technique used by many teachers and actually required by many schools and colleges.

At the start of the day or individual lesson, the teacher writes up on the board a summary plan for the day. On a traditional blackboard or whiteboard, this is typically in one corner of the board.

Check homework

Listening: People talking about whether they like sports

Grammar focus: comparatives

Exercises to practise the grammar

Set new homework (project)

On an interactive whiteboard, it could take up a whole page (which can be returned to and referred to at various points in the lesson) and, of course, could be prepared in advance, and hence be more detailed.

Why do it? The idea is that seeing such a plan will help the learners to understand the shape of the lesson and where it is going (which may not be as self-evident to the students as it seems to the teacher). Also, by being let into 'the secret of the lesson', the process of study is demystified slightly – and, in doing so, the same sort of procedural approach becomes more available to students to use for themselves when working on their own.