■8 Post-task

> *After students have finished an activity we go through each question, one by one, and it always feels so predictable and boring.*

Aim
To use feedback stages after exercises and activities in a more productive way.

Introduction
When students have finished working on an exercise or a task, teachers often want to check answers or give feedback on the answers students have come up with. This lesson stage is often curiously underexploited. Many teachers use it purely for validating correct answers, for example:

Teacher:	Question 1?
Student 1:	Have eaten.
Teacher:	Good. Number 2?
Student 2:	Has gone.
Teacher:	Good. Number 3?
…and so on.	

All this is achieving is confirmation of the correct answers. At times this may be sufficient, but, in many cases, this has the potential to be one of the most important opportunities for classroom work. Chapter 5 Unit 6 looks at some techniques for involving more people in answering questions and especially avoiding immediate teacher rubberstamping of answers. In this unit, we look at ways of making use of varied styles of post-task feedback and reports.

Techniques: Checking answers after exercises
Your students have just finished doing a standard exercise (e.g. 12 multiple-choice vocabulary questions). Here are some ideas for various ways of checking (or not checking) the answers:

1 Traditional: whole class
Go through the answers, question by question, in the whole class, asking different students to call out the answer to each question, and then have the teacher confirm them.

2 Led by students
Ask one or more students to lead the checking and feedback.

3 Hold-ups

Ask each student to write their answer on a piece of paper or tablet computer and hold it up. You can get a quick sense of whether the majority of students are right or not and spot students who have problems.

4 Student response

When students call out answers, don't confirm or comment yourself. Tell students that the class as a whole has the responsibility of saying whether they agree or disagree, and if they think it's wrong, discuss and decide which answer is correct. Or choose an individual to confirm or challenge a student's answer.

5 Nominated nominations

Ask the individual student who is answering a question to nominate the next student who has to answer the following question.

6 Read out other people's answers

Just before you start checking, ask students to pass on their answers to someone else. Students then call out answers from the page they have been given, rather than from their own (NB If you think that bad handwriting or poor answers might make this embarrassing, best avoid this option).

7 Don't check everything

Although out of habit as much as anything, teachers typically check through every answer to every exercise, it may not always be necessary. Try: 'OK, let's check only the answers you are really not sure about. Which ones shall we look at?' or 'Choose the three questions … yes, just three … that you really want to check or discuss'.

8 Traditional read to check

Students look up answers in the back of their books or on a handout you give. They use the answer sheet to check their own or another student's answers.

9 Lay bets – then read to check

Rather than the checking becoming a rather dispiriting affair as students realise how much they have got wrong, this variation both adds a light touch and allows even weak students to feel good about their achievement. When students have finished an exercise, but before they check, ask them to make a bet as to how many they will get correct. For example, 'Piotr thinks he will get only four right out of 12 questions.' Everyone should write down their bet or tell the teacher who can note it on the board. Students then look up the answers and see how close they got to their prediction; the closest is the winner. And perhaps Piotr will feel quite pleased at getting seven right – three more than he expected (whereas in a normal post-exercise check, he would only have felt bad about getting five wrong).

10 Monitor, and then don't check in whole class

There are times when your monitoring will inform you that an exercise was no real problem and that students can do the task without errors. In such a case, further checking is just a waste of time. Move on!

Techniques: Getting students to present reports

When groups do discussion tasks (e.g. puzzle, problem, planning or other types), at the end, there can sometimes be a sense of 'What was the point of all that?' Students may feel that they have spent a long time working together, discussing and agreeing, but then the teacher just brings the task to a close and suddenly moves on to the next piece of work. One important way of giving added value to such work is to add on an extra post-task stage: a report-back or presentation from students. This gives them a chance to show others what they have done (and find out what the others have done). It is also a good chance to reuse language that has been in circulation during the task, but with the useful added pressure of having to upgrade it a little for a more public, less-informal audience.

1   Preparation for a report

In order to be able to prepare a good report after a task, it is important that students can recall what they discussed and agreed.

- At the beginning of a task, appoint (or ask students to appoint) a secretary in each group. The secretary's job is to make notes about what is discussed and concluded. At the end of the task, these notes can help the group review how they did the task and prepare a report.
- At the end of a group task, allocate some extra minutes for students to prepare an oral (or written) report back on the task process and outcomes to others. Make sure they have enough time to review how they did things, to think about what they have discussed and concluded and to make notes if they need to.
- Prepare a template to help students review their task and draw conclusions. The template could have questions (such as, 'Which point did most people in your group have strong feelings about?') or headings (such as, 'Our three most important suggestions').

2   Students report in groups

It is often useful for students to report group findings directly to other students. There are various ways of doing this:

- Go round the groups, allocating a different letter to each person in a group, i.e. within one group of five, the students would be given A, B, C, D and E. When all students in the room have a letter, say, 'All A's meet up over here … all B's make a new group over here … All C's …'.
- Ask two students from each group to stand up and move on (clockwise) to join the next group, while the remaining students stay seated. The students who moved report to their new group on outcomes from their old group and then hear the report from the students they have joined.

3 Students report to the whole class

You may decide that you want groups, taking it in turns, to give an oral report back to the whole class.

- Make sure that they've had a chance to prepare and that they have agreed which members of the group will speak.
- Alternatively, you could appoint the speakers yourself or require that every member of a group has to say something in their report.
- Listen positively. However many mistakes, make sure that your feedback includes positive encouragement and acknowledgement of their achievement in making the report.

Technique: Following on from role play or dialogues

A 'public performance' can seem the natural way of ending a sequence of activities involving role play or dialogue practice. Invite students to come up to the front to show what they have been working on. If students are embarrassed about performing before everyone, you could divide the class into two 'theatres' at different ends of the room, with each group performing to the other students in their half. The fact that students know that this will happen may help 'concentrate their minds' during the 'rehearsal' stages.

Questions for reflection

• Could you get more learning value out of what happens after a task has finished?