Wait Time: What Is It?

Processing information requires that students engage in multiple cognitive tasks of varying complexity for which they need uninterrupted time to reflect, integrate information, and form a response. This is especially important when asking students to "dive deep".

Unfortunately, in many classrooms, students are not allowed sufficient time to process information. Sometimes, this is called "wait time". Wait time is the time that elapses between a question and the next behaviour.

Educators often make the mistakes of:

- Asking a question and then answering it themselves
- Asking one student a question, providing insufficient time, and then posing the same question to another student
- Asking more than one question at a time and confusing students

Wait time is an instructional tool that can enhance students' learning experiences. In 1972, Mary Budd Rowe conducted classroom research to assess average wait times used by educators. The majority of teachers were found to wait less than three seconds after posing a question to their students. Rowe identified that when teachers increase their wait time, the following benefits were demonstrated

- Increased length of responses
- Increased complexity of answers
- Increased voluntary responses
- Decreased superficial, ambivalent responses
- More peer to peer interaction and listening
- Increased use of logical consistency
- More questions are *asked* by students

Increasing your instructional wait time also allows the teacher to have a variety and flexibility in their questioning strategies. This, in turn, results in higher levels of student thinking. Using wait time also means that the instructor now can ask few questions, and can connect meaningful questions together more carefully for the students to scaffold their learning.

Extensive research has demonstrated that the quality of instruction increases significantly if educators utilize at least 15 to 20 seconds of wait-time. Teachers must resist the natural temptation to jump in too quickly to answer or rephrase.

Wait-Time: How Can I Use It?

Many educators worry about what they should do in the event that they wait – but no one responds. Do not have the fear of crickets in the room. If 20 seconds is not enough time for students to respond to your prompt, it's a signal that the prompt just needs to be reworked.

After waiting 15 to 20 seconds with no responses, you can try the following strategies:

- Repeat the question
- Rephrase the question using clearer language
- Simplify the question using less words
- Break the question down into components
- Ask a student to attempt to rephrase the question
- Ask what about the question is unclear to students

It is natural for students to merely wait for the teacher to "fill in the blanks" to their own question. So, when you start using this new technique, students may actually get slightly frustrated with the new approach – they aren't used to teachers *not* providing answers!

If students are getting frustrated with the approach, keep the following in mind:

- They are not frustrated with you, they are merely adjusting to a new school routine
- Student histories and experiences may reduce their confidence in answering questions, build up their self-esteem by asking small questions, and scaffold them to harder ones
- Value any response – not just answers! Show it is appropriate for students to respond with a clarifying question, or an explanation as to why they may not know the answer

Wait-Time: A Practitioner's Checklist

Write down things that educators can do (practically or ideologically) to implement this strategy effectively:

☐ Pre-plan questions prior to a lesson

☐ Ask questions in clear, plain language

☐ Build a culture of confidence within your classroom to encourage participation

☐ Be okay with awkward silence!

☐ Maintain eye contact with students when waiting for answers

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Socratic Method: What Is It?

The oldest, and still the most powerful, teaching tactic for fostering deeper thinking and student autonomy is the Socratic method. Socrates was a Classical Greek philosopher who developed a Theory of Knowledge.

Socrates believed that the answers to all human questions and problems reside within us. Unfortunately, as human beings, we are often unaware of the answers and solutions that we possess. Socrates was convinced that the surest way to discover those answers and attain reliable knowledge was through the practice of disciplined conversation.

In essence, Socrates believed that we need to engage in meaningful reflection to uncover the answers and ideas we have inherently within us. Otherwise, we will never get "at" the answers if we never seek them out, and are never pushed or challenged to uncover them. Uncovering the deeper answers that lie within us is best done with the use of purposeful questioning.

The goal of using the Socratic method in literacy education is to help students understand ideas, issues and values that are presented by a text. This is a process of listening, making meaning, and discussing rather than merely trying to prove a particular point – there is questioning, speculation, and respectful debate.

The Socratic method is difficult sometimes for educators to use because it goes against the natural inclination to present answers. Instead, the Socratic method encourages practitioners to ask questions, even after students have already provided them.

This method, however, puts the student in control of their own learning – the teacher is merely asking the right questions, whereas it is the students' own knowledge, ideas and experiences that inform their answers, or, their quest to *find* those answers. By having students explain their own thoughts and ideas aloud, it encourages them to think more critically and purposefully.

In its foundation, the Socratic method is about asking meaningful questions that challenge someone into uncovering *why* they think a particular way, and *how* they know their ideas are valid.

Socratic Method: How Can I Use It?

Many educators worry that the Socratic method cannot be used in a variety of different contexts.

However, this strategy can be easily used between one-to-one and group instruction.

In a one-to-one setting, practitioners can ask poignant questions to students that encourage their deeper thinking and invite them to justify or challenge ideas:

- What is this question asking for?
- Why are you thinking of it in that way?
- Give me an example of that.
- Can you summarize the discussion up to this point?
- Can you think of another way to think about this?
- How is your point of view different than..?
- Can you be more specific?
- Where can we go to find this information?
- Let's write down everything we know about this topic.
- How would you define this in your own terms?
- What do you think about that?
- What do you need to do next?
- How did you do that?
- What are you assuming?
- How can that be?

In a group setting, educators can use the Socratic seminar method. This is merely a group conversation where redirecting questions is used with multiple students, rather than just one, at a time.

Socratic Method: A Practitioner's Checklist

Write down things that educators can do (practically or ideologically) to implement this strategy effectively:

☐ Focus on "why" questions

☐ Avoid the temptation to answer a question

☐ If a student answers a question, ask them *how* they know they're right (push!)

☐ Coach students on how to ask good questions to each other

☐ Create "checks for understanding" – questions you can post in the room

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Active Listening: What Is It?

Active listening is a skill that can be acquired and developed with practice. However, active listening can be difficult to master and will, therefore, take time and patience to develop. Active listening means, as its name suggests, actively listening. That is fully concentrating on what is being said rather than just passively 'hearing' the message of the speaker. It is listening with a purpose – it's more than just hearing (the act of perceiving sound), it involves receiving and interpreting sound, then creating meaning from it.

Active listening involves listening with all senses. As well as giving full attention to the speaker, it is important that the 'active listener' is also 'seen' to be listening - otherwise the speaker may conclude that what they are talking about is uninteresting to the listener.

Listening is the most fundamental component of interpersonal communication skills. Listening is not something that just happens (that is hearing), listening is an active process in which a conscious decision is made to listen to and understand the messages of the speaker. Listeners should remain neutral and non-judgmental, this means trying not to take sides or form opinions, especially early in the conversation. Active listening is also about patience - pauses and short periods of silence should be accepted. Listeners should not be tempted to jump in with questions or comments every time there are a few seconds of silence. Active listening involves giving the other person time to explore their thoughts and feelings, they should, therefore, be given adequate time for that.

Active listening, in essence, shows the speaker that you are genuinely interested in what they are saying. Using active listening skills can help minimize conflict and tension. It brings clarity to conversations. And, it brings power and respect back to the learner – they know they're being thoughtfully listened to by their teacher!

Active Listening: How Can I Use It?

Educators can use active listening when their students are discussing or answering questions in class. Realistically, however, active listening is a skill that should be used in all aspects of the classroom to build a culture of respect, compassion, and understanding.

Active listeners often:

- Spend more time listening than talking
- Let the speaker finis their sentences (no interruptions)
- Let the other person finish speaking before responding
- Is aware of their own biases
- Asks open-ended questions
- Focusses on what's being said rather than what their own response will be

Active listening can take the form of encouraging, clarifying, reflecting, and summarizing prompts. See below for some examples:

What Is It?	Why Are You Doing It?	How Do You Do It?	Examples
Encouraging	to convey interest in the speaker and to keep them talking	do not agree or disagree; use noncommittal words with a positive tone	"I see..." "Yes..."
Restating & Clarifying	to show you are listening and understand	restate basic ideas while emphasizing the facts	"If I understand, your idea is..." "In other words..."
Reflecting & Paraphrasing	to show your understanding of the speaker's feelings	restate the other's basic feelings	"You feel that..." "You must feel angry that..."
Summarizing	to pull important ideas together for further discussion	restate major ideas and feelings	"These seem to be the key ideas..." "What I'm hearing is..."

Active Listening: A Practitioner's Checklist

Write down things that educators can do (practically or ideologically) to implement this strategy effectively:

☐ Do not think about how you will reply

☐ Maintain open, friendly body language

☐ Don't *just* agree – summarize, engage and reflect

☐ Coach students on using active listening with eachother

☐ Remember: the more students talk, the more they process and construct!

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