

The opposite of students who speak out of turn are students who will not respond or who like to say, "I don't know."

When students do not respond or say "I don't know," don't blame the students. The teacher may be at fault for encouraging students to say, "I don't know."

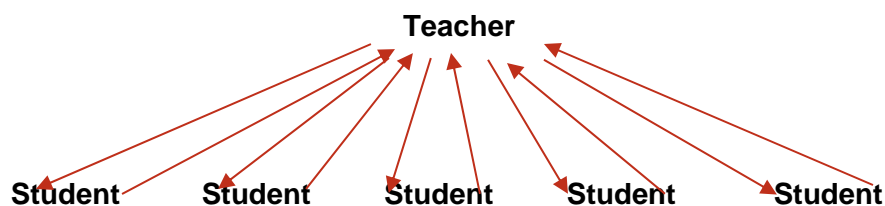
Mary Budd Rowe, who taught at the University of Florida and Stanford University, did extensive research on the concept of wait-time. Her study found that the typical teacher pauses, on average, between 0.7 and 1.4 seconds after asking questions, before continuing to talk or permitting a student to respond. Worse, when teachers perceive a student as being "slow," minority, immigrant, or unable to answer, this period of time is frequently less than 0.7 seconds, when in fact, the opposite should be practiced.

Through research, she discovered that too many teachers ask a question, wait about one second (in Australia, it's half a second), and if there is no reply or a raised hand, the teacher asks the same question again, or even worse, grimaces and loudly implores, "Think!"

The kids are thinking, and the constant talking only disturbs their thinking. When students determine that a teacher is constantly talking and only allowing a second or less before talking again, they learn to give incomplete answers, one word answers, or "I don't know."

If a student does answer, the teacher immediately goes on with another question, without allowing for wait-time or think-time. Teachers need to allot a period of silence that allows students to respond, add additional questions, reflect on what has been said, or allow additional thoughts from all the students.

Regrettably, in too many classrooms, the interaction is between the teacher and a single student. There is no time for the students to interact with each other.

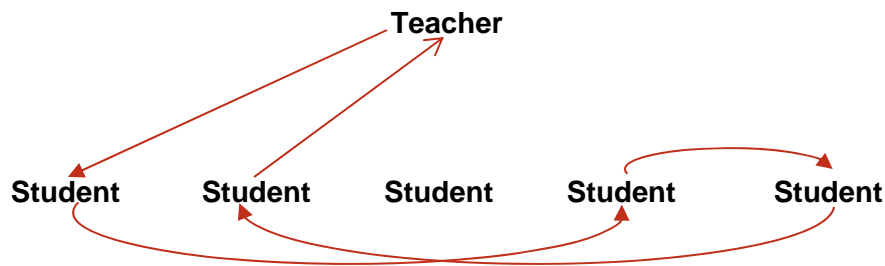


In a classroom where the teacher is constantly talking, students have learned to train their teachers. All they have to do is say, "I don't know," and the teacher, who does not practice wait-time or think-time, continues, thereby letting the student off the hook.

Mary Budd Rowe discovered that increasing the wait-time, from one second to at least three seconds, produced remarkable improvement in the language and logic of the students.

- The number of unsolicited responses increased, even from students who were reluctant to speak.
- The number of appropriate answers increased.
- The student responses were lengthier, and they responded in full and correct sentences.
- The number of "I don't know" and "No" responses decreased.
- More creative answers were given.
- Achievement test scores tended to improve.

Class Interaction When Wait-Time Is Practiced



The application of wait-time to allow for student think-time is quite simple—just wait three or more seconds for a response. This may seem like an eternity to someone who is used to talking constantly; kill time by checking the board, drinking some water, or walking over to adjust something.

Students must have uninterrupted periods of time to process information, reflect on what has been said, observe, and consider what their personal responses will be. After a question is asked or a direction is given, wait a minimum of 3 seconds—5 is even better.

Wait it out. The students will soon learn that your style is to wait. You are not going to talk; and you are waiting for a response.

1. Announce early the first week of school, or before the first discussion, that “I don’t know” is not an acceptable response for the procedure. Instruct students to provide answers in full and complete sentences.
2. The first time you have a discussion and a student says, “I don’t know,” remind the student that “I don’t know” is not a proper response for the discussion procedure. You can say, “And what’s the correct procedure please?” Or, “I will wait until I receive a full sentence response. You will not be penalized for a wrong answer.”
3. Learn the concept of wait-time. Ask with a smile. Ask gently, and then WAIT—WAIT three seconds or more.
4. When the student responds, thank the student. Then, wait three or more seconds to encourage other students to respond. If no one responds ask, “Anyone else with a response or comment?”

Enjoy your frequent 3- to 5-second moments of silence. They’ll soon realize “I don’t know” is not the correct procedure.

More importantly, smile, take a deep breath, relax, and enjoy life while students think and create proper responses.