

Commit and Toss

Description

This is an anonymous technique used to get a quick read of student thinking. It provides an opportunity for 100% active student engagement without students having to worry about being wrong.

Purpose

The purpose of this check for understanding is to give the teacher a quick picture of whole-class understanding.

How it improves student learning

As students process the question, commit to an answer, and then describe their thinking, they are building understanding. Then they get the opportunity to refine that understanding as they read others' thoughts and listen to others. Because this technique is anonymous, students are more likely to risk and reveal their own ideas rather than providing the "safe" answer they think the teacher wants to hear. It also helps students understand that "wrong" answers can be just as valuable for building understanding as "right" answers.

How it informs instruction

Commit and Toss allows the teacher to get a quick read on ideas and explanations from the students. It is a quick and engaging way to get a class snapshot of student thinking

How it works

- This can be used with an open-ended or selected response or right/wrong question. Pose the question, have students think and then write their response on a blank paper. Tell students to explain their ideas, writing a rationale for the response to make their thinking visible to someone else. Give think and write time. Remind students NOT to write their names on the papers. When everyone is finished, instruct students to crumple their papers into a ball. Then they are to toss the "ball" to another student. Students are to keep tossing the crumpled papers until the teacher tells them to stop--enough so that nobody know whose paper they have.
- After the teacher calls stop, each student gathers a "ball" off the floor, unfolds, and reads the response silently. They use this opportunity to "get into another students' head" to understand his or her thinking. Then students are grouped to discuss responses.
- "Four Corners" is one structure the might be used for discussion, with each response assigned a different area of the room. Each student will read the response and rationale from the paper she has caught or gathered. The groups will discuss answers and rationale and each student will have the opportunity to reaffirm, build upon, or change his/her thinking on the question.
- The teacher can then hold a whole-class discussion with opportunities to share from each group, listing rationale and ideas, and eventually uncovering the "right" answer or identifying questions for further exploration.

Variations

- This check for understanding is appropriate for numerous topics or questions.
- For a less rambunctious activity, it could be changed to "*Commit, Fold, and Pass*".
- Do not use "Commit and Toss" too often or it loses its effectiveness.
- Remind students to honor anonymity, even if they recognize handwriting.
- The teacher could gather all of the papers for further examination, if desired.