



Monitoring: reasons and strategies

Monitoring students is an essential part of the task cycle, which starts with a short introduction to the task along with instructions. Then the teacher usually monitors students while completing the task before conducting feedback.

Monitoring students while completing a task is crucial if it's conducted appropriately. In training courses such as the CELTA and CertTESOL, I have noticed that trainees may over-monitor students and engage with them during the task, turning the monitoring into counterproductive interference. They may also be unaware of what to do exactly while monitoring students during different stages of the lesson. The following reasons and strategies explain why and how effective and discreet monitoring can be conducted.

Ensuring students are on track

Monitoring allows you to confirm that students understand your instructions and are completing the task correctly. For simpler activities, such as matching pictures with words, students rarely go wrong. However, you might occasionally find students completing the wrong task or skipping ahead. For more complex tasks, especially communicative activities, unclear or incomplete instructions may cause confusion.

While monitoring, if you notice that several students are not completing the task correctly, pause the activity briefly and clarify. Provide an example, guide the class through the first item or ask some instruction-checking questions (ICQs) to reinforce understanding.

Assisting struggling students

Monitoring helps you identify students who are having difficulty. Some may pause or struggle to complete the task because they are unsure of a word or phrase or need additional guidance. Offer brief and discreet assistance without overhelping or distracting other students. This ensures that they stay engaged and complete the task with confidence.

Managing early finishers

Early finishers can become bored or distract others if they are left waiting for the rest of the class. Monitoring allows you to address this by providing them with extension tasks. For instance, if students finish reading a text and answering comprehension questions, ask them to find five adjectives describing places in the text (if the text is about this topic) or to identify two surprising facts.

Depending on the task, you can prepare mini-extension activities in advance to keep these students engaged.

Observing for feedback

Monitoring is key to identifying areas to focus on during the feedback stage. Take notes on common errors, difficulties or interesting patterns in students' work. During feedback, prioritise discussing these issues rather than items students handled successfully. For example:

- If students are completing sentences with the past simple tense and you notice errors in specific items, focus on these during feedback. Elicit the correct answers from the class and provide a brief explanation if needed.

Mahmoud Dahman

offers some sound advice.

- In speaking tasks, you might notice grammatical or pronunciation errors. Avoid interrupting students mid-task to allow them to build fluency. Instead, address these issues in a delayed-error-correction session, sharing examples without singling out individuals. This approach benefits the entire class.

Sometimes, it's better to avoid monitoring students closely to prevent distracting them while they focus on a task. For example, when students are reading a text or listening to an audio track, walking around and monitoring might not be very helpful. In such cases, it's often more effective to step back and allow them to concentrate fully on the task.

After reading or listening, you can monitor their progress during pair or group discussions when they're sharing answers. This will help you determine whether they need to revisit the text or audio and what aspects to emphasise during feedback.

Finally, be mindful of your approach to monitoring. Your stance and movements should not distract or intimidate students, as this could affect their focus and comfort. While students are speaking in groups or pairs, you could stand close to them but avoid looking in their eyes. This may make them feel a bit uncomfortable. Look in another direction, but listen carefully to what they say and take notes on their output to use in the following feedback stage.



Mahmoud Dahman is a CELTA and Trinity CertTESOL trainer and Professional Development Coordinator at the School of Languages, Ibn Haldun University. He holds

a BA in English Language and Literature, an MA in Linguistics and the Cambridge DELTA. Email: mahmoud.dahman@ihu.edu.tr