

Though most teachers recognize the importance of active student participation, it can be difficult to accomplish during group instruction. A common strategy used by teachers to obtain student participation during group instruction is to pose a question or problem to the entire class and then call on one student to answer. This provides an active learning opportunity for only the student who is called on and often results in more frequent responses by high-achieving students and few or no responses by low-achieving students (Maheady, Mallette, Harper, & Saca, 1991).

There are several alternatives to the one-student-at-a-time method of student participation. Choral responding—each student in the group or class responding orally in unison—is an easy and proven method for increasing active student responding (ASR) during group instruction (Heward, Courson, & Narayan, 1989; Sainato, Strain, & Lyon, 1987; Sindelar, Bursuck, & Halle, 1986). Response cards offer another alternative. This article describes several types of response cards and shows how to use them to engage *all* students in lessons and class discussions.

Using Response Cards

Response cards are cards, signs, or items (such as felt boards) that are simultaneously held up by all students in the class to display their responses to questions or problems presented by the teacher. Not only do response cards enable every student to respond to each question or item, but students can learn by watching others. With response cards, the teacher can easily detect the responses of individual students, which can be difficult with choral responding. Response cards can take many forms, including preprinted and write-on cards.

Preprinted Response Cards

When using *preprinted response cards*, each student selects from a personal set of cards the one with the answer he or she wishes to display. Examples of preprinted cards include Yes/True and No/False cards, colors, traffic signs, planets, science terms, punctuation marks, and concepts such as cause and effect or before and after (see Photo 1):



Photo 1. Preprinted response cards can be developed for any curriculum area or lesson content.

Another type of preprinted response card is the "pinch card." Instead of a set of different cards, each student is given a single preprinted card with multiple answers (e.g., a card with clearly marked sections for math operations or the parts of an orchestra). The student simply holds up the card with thumb and forefinger "pinching" the part of the card displaying his or her answer. Brightly colored plastic clothespins and Velcro-backed cutouts or markers (for felt boards) make excellent "pinching" tools; students simply clip the pin or attach the marker to the selected part of the response card and hold the cards overhead (see Photo 2).

Preprinted cards may also have a built-in, movable device for displaying answers, such as a cardboard clock with movable hour and minute hands, or a wheel and a pointer for choosing and displaying answers (e.g., parts of speech).

Preprinted response cards have several advantages:

- They produce high rates of ASR.
- Instruction can begin with few errors by beginning with only two cards and adding more cards as students' repertoires develop.
- They are easier for the teacher to see than write-on response cards.

Possible disadvantages of preprinted response cards:

- Students are limited to the responses printed on the cards.

- Instruction is limited to recognition tasks.
- They are not appropriate for lessons with a large number of different answers (e.g., 50 states, elements of the periodic table).

Write-on Response Cards

When using *write-on response cards*, students mark or write their answers to each instructional item on blank cards or boards that are erased between each question-and-answer trial (see Photo 3).

It's easy to make write-on response cards for each student. To obtain a set of 40 durable write-on response cards, purchase a 4- by 8-foot sheet of white laminated "bathroom board" carried by most builders' supply stores or lumberyards. The cost is generally less than \$20, including the charge for cutting the sheet into individual 9- by 12-inch response cards. You can find suitable marking pens at most office and art supply stores. Use "dry erase" markers (one good brand is EXPO) or "China markers." Paper towels or facial tissues will easily wipe clear the dry erase markers. If you use China markers, a bit more "elbow grease" is required to erase answers; old cloth towels work best.

Small chalkboards can be used as write-on response cards, but students' responses may be difficult to see in a full-size classroom.