Comprehension Checks
How to Check for Understanding

When we ask a comprehension question, we use students' response to determine whether it's time to move on or if we need to spend more time reviewing whatever we are studying.

Comprehension Checks are one of the essential tools in a language teacher's toolbox. When used effectively, comprehension checks guarantee that all students understand the teacher when he or she is using the target language. When the input is comprehended by all students, *all* students will further their language acquisition.

Key Guidelines to comprehension checks:

- ✓ Check for comprehension continually. It is important to keep your finger on the pulse of your students' comprehension so that you do not lose students (cognitively or emotionally) by venturing into incomprehensible territory. This requires continual informal checking for comprehension.
- ✓ Modify instruction as needed based on students' responses. Comprehension checks are only valuable when you use the information gathered to inform your instruction. They help to see if you should spend more time on a topic, backtrack, or move forward based on all your students' needs.
- ✓ Use comprehension checks in sequential order unless it's clear that students have advanced from a previous question.

The comprehension checks in order:

1) Yes or no questions
    a. Expected response: either a yes or no answer, simply nodding or shaking the head.
    b. Question examples:
        i. Is this a _____?
        ii. [throw the ball to John] Does John have the ball?
        iii. Is there a plate on the table?
        iv. Was the bear scared? Sad? Happy?

2) Either/or questions also known as "this or that" questions
    a. Expected response: a student may choose a one-word answer which is imbedded in the question, or they may be able to say, "That is a _____." etc. depending upon their level of language knowledge. Switch around the items in your questions so the correct answer isn't always the last thing spoken.
    b. Question examples:
        i. Is this a _____ or a _____?
        ii. Do you like _____ or _____? [Such as in two different foods]
        iii. Does this make _____or _____? [Such as an addition problem]

3) Open-ended questions (What is this?)
    a. Expected response:
    b. Question examples:
        i. What is this?
        ii. Who has the ball?
        iii. Who is wearing the dress?
        iv. What time is it?