

Opportunities to Respond: A Step-by-Step Guide for Virtual Learning Environments

What are opportunities to respond?

Opportunities to respond (OTR) allow students frequent opportunities within a specified time period to respond rapidly to questions or prompts related to instructional content. The use of OTR promotes engagement and prevents off-task behaviors. When utilizing OTR during remote instruction, teachers provide students with numerous opportunities to engage in practice with academic content using virtual tools for prompts or questions and responses. In the virtual learning environment, teachers can utilize a high rate of OTR to keep students engaged in lessons, provide a high rate of immediate feedback, and help students stay focused on academic materials. It allows for teachers to quickly know if students are in need of additional instruction or guided practice.

How do I use this strategy in the virtual classroom?

In the table below, we provide the steps for how to get started with OTR in a virtual learning environment. Following the steps are a few quick tips and two illustrations, one for an elementary age student and for a middle and high school age student.

Steps	Description
1	Identify the lesson content to be taught and the instructional objective.
2	Prepare a list of questions, prompts, or cues related to the content. Click here for examples.
3	Consider the modality by which content will be delivered (e.g., full class PowerPoint with a prompt on each slide, breakout rooms for small group reviews, asynchronous or synchronous online tools such as Kahoot, Pear Deck, Quizizz or Quizlet).
4	Consider the modality by which students will respond (e.g., typing in the chat, submitting work in the online classroom, using the “reactions” feature, verbally responding, using a personal white board and holding it up to the camera, online response tools).
5	Explain to students how the modality works and the rationale for using it. Check students’ understanding of how to respond and the functionality of the technology.
6	Conduct the lesson with a minimum of three opportunities to respond per minute using either single-student or unison responding.
7	Respond to students’ answers with encouragement and growth focused evaluative feedback.
8	Offer students an opportunity to give feedback about virtual learning activities.

Quick Tips for Success:

- Share your screen with questions and prompts to maintain engagement from your students. Posting the questions will also give students a visual prompt and the opportunity to reread the question and think before offering a response.
- Precorrect students with how you would like them to respond before posing questions. Preplan and test the response system selected.
- Go over the features of your virtual classroom and have students practice using certain features of the online platform to ensure everyone can respond.
- Review expectations so that all students can respond when the prompt is given.
- Vary the response type for different practice sessions to increase interest, reuse the student's favorites (e.g., thumbs up, asking for choral response, using the “animations” feature to draw on shared screen, virtual polling, online response games such as Pear Deck or Quizlet).
- To give students an opportunity to provide feedback, consider polling the class about their thoughts on the OTR activity. Did they like the activity, modality, was the feedback helpful for them, was it an acceptable way to engage in practice opportunities?

Using Opportunities to Respond in a Virtual Learning Environment

Example: With an elementary-age student...

Step 1. Oliver’s teacher, Ms. Scarlett, felt that it was more difficult for her to gauge students’ understanding of material in the virtual classroom than in the traditional in-person classroom. She is also concerned that some students are less likely to answer questions posed in the whole class groups. Oliver is one of the students she is most concerned about. Ms. Scarlett was looking for a way to quickly gain information about student understanding and also increase Oliver’s participation in the virtual learning environment. She decided to use the OTR strategy in the next day’s reading lesson. Ms. Scarlett decided that this would be a good strategy for reviewing vocabulary.

Step 2. Ms. Scarlett prepared a list of questions and prompts related to the new vocabulary for week’s story and previously learned vocabulary (e.g., cloze sentences with and without picture cues, matching word with definition, word match with synonyms).

Step 3. Ms. Scarlett decided Pear Deck, a new online tool shared at her last staff meeting would be a good choice. She decided to provide OTR at the start of the lesson for a quickly paced activity. It would also provide information about students’ understanding of the vocabulary so that she could reinforce any that need reinforcement. She decided to use the instructor only view of responses.

Step 4. Ms. Scarlett asked students to respond to the questions by answering the prompts on the Pear Deck slides.

Step 5. Ms. Scarlett met with Oliver privately, using a breakout room at the start of the day, to explain the importance of participating in the Pear Deck activity during the vocabulary review. Ms. Scarlett asked him to share his screen to practice using the Pear Deck functions to respond to a few practice questions.

Step 6. During the Pear Deck vocabulary review, Ms. Scarlett made sure there were enough prompts to allow sufficient OTR for students to participate and also gather information on their understanding of the content. Ms. Scarlett used the questions identified in Step 2.

Step 7. Ms. Scarlett made sure to verbally acknowledge students intermittently using behavior specific praise for participation. In particular, she gave Oliver behavior specific praise privately in chat encouraging his participation, “Thank you, Oliver, for making your decision and submitting your answer!” She also sent a quick text to his parents acknowledging Oliver’s full participation in the lesson.

Step 8. Before the next lesson, Ms. Scarlett asked Oliver if he enjoyed the different ways he was asked to participate. He said, “It was fun and easy to give an answer in the Pear Deck! I didn’t feel embarrassed in case I wasn’t sure of the answer.” Ms. Scarlett invited the class to give her feedback on the Pear Deck technology using a class wide social validity survey. She also met with Oliver and his parents to learn their opinions on using the strategy to support Oliver’s participation.

Using Opportunities to Respond in a Virtual Learning Environment

Example: With a middle or high school student...

Step 1. Marie’s Spanish teacher, Mrs. Anderson, noticed Maria’s participation was lower than expected, so it was hard to tell if she understood the lessons and how engaged she was during class. Mrs. Anderson prepared the lesson for the day and identified the instructional goals. She decided during the Spanish lesson for the day, students would identify recently learned vocabulary words, define them, and give examples of use in sentences one would use every day. Mrs. Anderson had the lesson goals on a slide ready to share with her students.

Step 2. Mrs. Anderson then prepared a list of possible questions and brief assessments to review previously taught Spanish vocabulary, for example, “How many of you can define the word ‘duda’?” “In which sentence is ‘duda’ used appropriately?” with brief responses for a quickly paced practice session. Mrs. Anderson decided to use the OTR strategy for the last 15 min of the lessons for the week. On Monday, she showed them how to use the polling feature with practice low-stakes questions, such as, “¿Tienes un perro?” and “¿Cuál es tu comida o alimento favorito?” She wrote multiple choice questions or prompts to use at the end of each class meeting during that week.

Step 3. Mrs. Anderson already offered different modes for student responding during lessons, such as sharing their screen, using platform reactions when ready or agreeing, and answering questions through the polling feature. Students could also use a whiteboard at home and show their definitions and examples through the video camera when done. For the vocabulary review practice using the OTR strategy, she decided to introduce a new technology tool format to increase interest with increased OTR practice. She selected Quizlet.

Step 4. Mrs. Anderson introduced Quizlet to her students, and showed them how to create vocabulary cards, and then share those study cards with everyone in the classroom folder.

Step 5. Mrs. Anderson took extra time to review why she was offering different modes of participation and answered questions from students. She offered practice time for everyone to create their Quizlet account, and ensured everyone had access. She then practiced with a couple of prompts and questions in Quizlet using the planned practice questions in Step 2.

Step 6. Mrs. Anderson conducted the lesson and ensured she provided at least three opportunities to respond every minute, to assess progress and keep students engaged. Mrs. Anderson asked her students to give her a virtual thumbs up when they were ready. After the group practice, she was able to know how to customize the needed Spanish vocabulary practice. She shared the study cards on Quizlet in the classroom folder. Students could continue to practice and prepare for the next day.

Step 7. When Marie and others increased their knowledge and fluency with the Spanish vocabulary using Quizlet, Mrs. Anderson responded enthusiastically in an encouraging manner. She acknowledged effort and publicly and privately praised those who had not often participated in the past, like Marie, using the chat feature in the virtual classroom. Mrs. Anderson also acknowledged those who shared their study cards on Quizlet and incorporated the student-made cards in the next practice session.

Step 8. At the end of the first week, Mrs. Anderson asked for feedback from her whole class what they thought about the OTR strategy (e.g., pacing, chance to show what you know, options for practicing the vocabulary with Quizlet). Most students shared they enjoyed the different options, and Marie said, “I liked having the option to participate without talking! I participated more than other days and it felt good. I appreciated being able to practice ahead of time, so I felt prepared.” Mrs. Anderson asked the class to fill out a brief social validity form to give students another chance to provide feedback and collect data on their opinions.

Watch a brief introduction to opportunities to respond [here](#) and watch the updated video for virtual learning environments [here](#).

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