NO OPT OUT

OVERVIEW

In a high-performing classroom, a verbalized or unspoken "I don't know" is cause for action. When a student begins by being unable or unwilling to answer, you should strive to make the sequence end as often as possible with the student giving a right or valid answer. Choose among four basic formats to respond:

Format 1. You provide the answer; your student repeats the answer.
Format 2. Another student provides the answer; the initial student repeats the answer.
Format 3. You provide a cue; your student uses it to find the answer.
Format 4. Another student provides a cue; the initial student uses it to find the answer.

This is surely among the most helpful and efficient techniques for raising classroom expectations, especially if

- Students tend to duck away from questions rather than answer them.
- Students don't hear themselves getting answers right.
- The class lacks a culture of accountability and incentive for each individual.

Take the rigor of your interaction up a notch by wrapping up the sequence with a request for another correct answer or an explanation of the "why."

WHERE AM I NOW?

	Proficiency			
	I'm brand new to *No Opt Out* . . .	I'm in the planning and practice stage, though I haven't tried it yet in class . . .	I'm beginning to try *No Opt Out* in my classroom . . .	I use *No Opt Out* regularly . . .
Comfort & Confidence	❏ . . . and excited to try it.	❏ . . . but know that with more practice I'll make it work.	❏ . . . and love how it basically works.	❏ . . . and am adding my own distinctive touch.
	❏ . . . and undecided about my ability to pull it off.	❏ . . . because I still have questions about how to do it right.	❏ . . . with mixed results I need to evaluate.	❏ . . . but I may be overusing it.
	❏ . . . and not at all sure it's for me.	❏ . . . because, frankly, I still have serious doubts.	❏ . . . but it doesn't seem to work or suit me.	❏ . . . but when class isn't going well, I do it poorly and it doesn't help.

Work from your strengths! If you find yourself in the bottom left portion, leaf through this technique to locate related ones that could help you build the classroom culture that will make you more confident and able to execute *No Opt Out*—perhaps *100%*, *Positive Framing*, or *Cold Call.* Or look for a setting in which to try it out first with greater safety and less risk, perhaps in a smaller group in which you interact with students or with a group of especially positive students. But take on *No Opt Out* as soon as you can. It's a game changer in building a culture of accountability and high expectations.

ANALYZE THE CHAMPIONS

| 22 **COLD CALL** |
| 36 **100%** |
| 38 **STRONG VOICE** |
| 43 **POSITIVE FRAMING** |

View each video clip, ideally more than once, and answer the following questions. See the end of the technique for some possible answers.

Clip 1. Teacher Shadell Noel, Grade K

1. Which format(s) of *No Opt Out* is Ms. Noel using? Do you already use the same format(s) often and with ease?
2. What seems to be Kayla's attitude when she says, "I don't know"? What is it when she repeats the answer?
3. How do the other students seem to feel about the sequence and Kayla's answer?

Clip 2. Teacher Patrick Pastore, Grade 6

1. Which format(s) of *No Opt Out* is Mr. Pastore using? Do you already use the same format(s) often and with ease?

Clip 9. Teacher Lauren Catlett, Grade 5

1. Which format(s) is Ms. Catlett using? Do you already do the same?
2. What is Ms. Catlett's initial question? Where does the *No Opt Out* technique begin?
3. How many students does she go back to at the end for correct answers? Who and why?

EXPAND YOUR SKILLS AND REPERTOIRE

An incorrect answer is not opting out. But saying "I don't know" in good faith or with impassivity *is* opting out. The goal of *No Opt Out* is that *the student will eventually state the answer,* even if that amounts to repeating an answer that you or another student supplied. Your goal should be to establish *No Opt Out* as the norm in your classroom, so that students will try to answer, knowing they will succeed with dignity even if they're not right the first time.

No Opt Out and *Cold Call*

No Opt Out is especially useful in supporting *Cold Call* — selecting a student to answer without asking

| 22 **COLD CALL** |

for hands. Teachers who use *No Opt Out* well often *Cold Call* effectively also. What do you think the connection might be? How might the techniques support each other?

The Moment of "I Don't Know"

Have you already noticed moments when you've received silence or some form of "I don't know" and accepted that response? What keeps you from addressing the problem?

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What simple language could you rehearse and use to indicate that you don't accept it and plan to come back to the student for an actual answer? Consider these examples and add some of your own:

"Take a little more time to speak your thoughts. I'll wait."

"Give it some more thought. I'll be back."

"Let's see how you might begin to answer. I'll come back to you shortly."

"We can work on this problem together. I'll bring it back to you in a moment."

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What Is an Answer?

In order to take on opt-out responses, you need to have a clear idea of what kind of response is *not* opting out. In other words, what would be an acceptable attempt at responding? One solution is the "However/Best" approach. In it, a student can say, "I don't know" if it's followed by the word "however" and his best try, as in "I don't know; however, I think I need to multiply here."

Try scripting a few "However/Best" phrases that you could model for your students:

1. _____

_____

2. _____

_____

You can always repeat the question in case it wasn't heard or understood. *Format Matters* suggests several criteria you can request the student to follow before you conclude he is opting out, including audibility and complete sentence format. When a student is opting out by mumbling, you can comment,

| 4 **FORMAT MATTERS** |

"John, please speak up so everyone can hear. I'll repeat the question . . ."

"I didn't catch that. Can you say it again more loudly and at a little more length? Say it as a complete sentence. The question I'm asking is . . ."

"I'll accept that you don't know all of it if you follow that statement by summarizing what you *do* know. Try it again."

Try writing two similar responses that would fit your style and grade level of students:

1. _____

   _____

2. _____

   _____

Rehearse them by speaking them aloud, preferably to a peer or colleague. What did you learn from speaking them aloud? Did you make any changes or adaptations?

_____

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Rather than remaining silent or saying they don't know, students may also try to opt out using strategies mentioned in *Right Is Right*: they may "answer" some question other than the one you asked. In that case, stick with them with a response like this:

2 RIGHT IS RIGHT

"Delia, I'd like you to focus on the question I've asked. My question right now is . . . "

Try writing and speaking two similar responses that would fit your style and grade level of students:

1. _____

   _____

2. _____

   _____

Rehearse these as well. Or go back and rehearse several prompts that would request that the student answer the question you asked and do so in the correct format. Did you make any changes after speaking them aloud?

Start Simple

When students aren't used to the discipline of *No Opt Out,* start out with questions that have one clear, correct answer and can be answered in a *single sentence*:

"What did you get for problem 24? Paula?"

"What phrase shows that Hemingway's old man is tired? Anna?"

What are two other ways to get students used to *No Opt Out* by starting simple?

1. _____

   _____

2. _____

   _____

Supplying Answers or Cues

The goal of No Opt Out *is to get the student to answer.* One way to get him to do so is to get the answer from another student (or supply it yourself) and have the first student repeat the answer. This does train him to know that he can't opt out, and it helps him keep his mind on the lesson and listen to what other students are saying. So you can turn to another student and ask,

"How would *you* answer that, Yolanda?"

But often better is to arrange some cue (a precise and intentional clue that helps students recall critical information), especially by asking a question of another student. By *Cold Calling* on that student as well, you signal all students to regard themselves as potential call-ons for assistance.

Perhaps the best kind of cue is one that calls attention to a resource that a student has overlooked, such as

- *The place where the answer can be found.* "Who can tell James where he could find the answer?" This is especially useful in reading classes.

- *The step in a process that's required.* "Who can tell James what the first thing he should do is?"

A cue can also directly simplify the question in some helpful way, such as by supplying another name for a term that the student may not know:

"Who can tell us what *synchronous* means in this question?"

As a fallback, you can also provide a cue yourself:

"By synchronous, I mean two things occurring simultaneously—at the same time."

"Let's all look at the top of page 25. James, what do you see there?"

"There's some useful information on the board. James, what looks useful there?"

"Let's all look at our notes from yesterday."

Adding Rigor

Think how you might add rigor after a successful sequence of *No Opt Out.* One way is to ask a follow-up question (see *Stretch It*) that lets the student show himself and others what he can do. Phrases such as "Good, let's try a harder one," "Good, now give me another example," or "Good, can you tell me why?" are important for older students who will want to show that they can do more than repeat an answer. Add several more questions that add rigor in language appropriate to your students and subject.

> 3 **STRETCH IT**

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Negative Reactions

In some classrooms, a student may be inclined to react negatively to being called on, or mock or laugh at another student who can't answer the question. Prevent this by teaching students how to react before it happens for real. See the "rollout" ideas in the "Try *No Opt Out* in the Classroom" section. As part of rollout, you can ask students how they should react. Give them a clear model of what it should look like, role-play it, and practice it with simulated examples.

42 **NO WARNINGS**

Once a student does react with clear disobedience, however, tackle the behavior with a consequence as described in *No Warnings*.

PRACTICE WITH STUDY GROUP OR PARTNERS

Revisit the individual work you did in the previous section to share and compare your responses and see other options.

Why Students May Try to Opt Out

1. Brainstorm as many possible reasons as you can for why students might be unable to answer a given question in your classes. You might think about reasons students may not know the answer, reasons they may know the answer but not want to say it, or reasons they don't want to hazard a guess.

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47 **EMOTIONAL CONSTANCY**
49 **NORMALIZE ERROR**

2. In most cases, you won't know what is causing a student to opt out, but when you do, discuss how that cause should affect your tone and manner in responding.

3. Pairing off, ask a simple question (for example, What's 3 plus 5?) and have the partner opt out in a way that reflects the various motivations the group identified. Practice responding to each.

No Opt Out Role Play

Practice the *No Opt Out* techniques with two other people. Start simply. Rotate roles before moving on to the two variations here. Listen for how your tone and body language change so that you can find versions of each format that are natural to you.

The roles are *Teacher, Student A,* and *Student Z.* Here is the basic sequence:

1. *Teacher* asks *Student A* a simple question. ("What's 3 plus 5?")
2. Unable to answer, *Student A* responds in a way that suggests genuine effort.
3. *Teacher* asks *Student Z* to provide a correct answer.
4. *Student Z* answers directly and correctly.
5. *Teacher* returns to *Student A* for repetition of correct answer.
6. *Student A* answers correctly.
7. *Teacher* acknowledges correct answer.

Practice this way to *Normalize Error* so that it makes *Student A* feel as though getting it wrong and then getting it right are a normal part of school. Record your observations.

> 49 **NORMALIZE ERROR**

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Variation 1

1. *Teacher:* Follow the basic sequence several times, but notice differences in your own tone and manner of response when *Student A* responds as follows.
2. *Student A* says "I don't know" negatively, challengingly, indifferently.
3. *Student Z* answers directly and correctly.

    Teacher: What was more or less effective about your choices of tone and manner?

    Reflection: How did your response change when *Student A* was negative, challenging, sarcastic? What were the two most effective things that members of the group did?

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Variation 2

Teacher: Follow a similar pattern, but now also try formats 3 and 4.

    Format 3: You provide a cue; your *Student* uses it to find the answer.

    Format 4: Another *Student* provides a cue; the initial *Student* uses it to find the answer.

Students: Start out with relatively cooperative responses. As the *Teacher* gets more comfortable, become a little more challenging.

    Reflection: What actions or phrases were effective in this situation?

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_____

What useful feedback did you get from this group work? What else did you learn? What parts of this were particularly challenging that you'd like to plan for or practice more?

_____

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_____

TRY *NO OPT OUT* IN THE CLASSROOM

Basketball coach Bobby Knight would say, "Everyone has the will to win; only some people have the will to prepare to win." Remember, you won't get it right the first time. You will master this on the tenth or fifteenth try!

1.   A "rollout speech" tells your students in advance that you're going to use a technique and explain why and how they should respond. By rolling out the technique, you head off any potentially awkward misunderstandings and publicly commit yourself to trying it. Then you have to follow through! Draft your rollout speech for *No Opt Out*. (You may recall the video of Colleen Driggs's *Cold Call* rollout speech in *Teach Like A Champion*; rewatching it now may help you draft a similar one for *No Opt Out*.) Try to frame things as positively as you can. You might address

> **43 POSITIVE FRAMING**
> **48 EXPLAIN EVERYTHING**
> **49 NORMALIZE ERROR**

- What will happen when you use *No Opt Out*
- How students should respond
- What will be tricky about it
- What it will be like over time as they get used to it
- Why you are doing this

2.   While you are learning the basics, anticipate *No Opt Out* moments in your lesson plan. Working with a partner if you can, script three questions into your lesson plan that you think students might

> **6 BEGIN WITH THE END**

struggle with and require *No Opt Out* help on. Write out the responses you anticipate and how you'd respond. Your answers can include what students say or what they do (if their actions speak as much as their words).

> **22 COLD CALL**

3.   Revisit your thoughts in "Why Students May Try to Opt Out." Draft a *No Opt Out* response for each reason you identified. Practice saying it aloud five times.

4.   After class, go back to the lesson plan and write what you want to pay attention to next time you teach.

5.   In future sessions, continue to focus *No Opt Out* on questions with relatively clear-cut answers. As you improve, script and try more open-ended questions. Practice until the format is a comfortable part of your style.

> **25 WAIT TIME**

6.   One of the reasons students might opt out is that they haven't had enough thinking or processing time. How could you remind yourself to leave sufficient *Wait Time*?

TROUBLE-SHOOT

Steady On

You may need to fight the temptation to let students opt out—or to slide to the simplest format (providing the answer yourself). Think about what you can learn from Mr. Harris in this example. How does he avoid these temptations? What's the message he sends to Jalon and the rest of the class?

Mr. Harris *Cold Calls* Jalon with a question about something the class covered yesterday. Jalon says truthfully, "I don't know. I wasn't here."

In response, Mr. Harris

- Acknowledges that Jalon was absent
- Says he will ask someone else
- Forewarns Jalon to expect to be called on to answer again in a moment because Jalon needs to be able to move forward today
- Asks another student
- Returns to Jalon for the correct answer
- Provides cueing to Jalon as needed

Other Challenges

Ultimately, you'll learn *No Opt Out* by practice supported by planning and frequent referral back to the basics, rather than by trying to memorize situations and how to respond. But these suggestions might be useful. Discover and add your own.

Possible Challenge	Possible Solutions
No Opt Out slows me down, and we don't get everything done.	True. Balance using *No Opt Out* against the need to keep momentum going. Focus *No Opt Out* most on questions closest to the session's main learning objective. The earlier in the year that *No Opt Out* becomes the norm, the less students will slow things down by trying to opt out. In the long run, you will have more time to teach. 6 **BEGIN WITH THE END**
I call on another student for the answer, but she doesn't know it.	Give *that* student a clue to find the answer. Give the answer and have *both* students repeat it together for the class. Or have the whole class repeat it using *Call and Response.* Remember, you are building culture.
I call on a student to give a cue, but he does not know how to give it and wants to give the answer instead.	Say, "When I ask you for a cue, I am not asking you to answer. The difference is important, and I expect you to pay attention to it." Then (1) ask him to provide the cue he could have provided after the fact, or (2) for the very next question, call on the helper student to provide a cue before you ask for someone to answer the next problem.
I ask a question that no one can answer.	Did they hear it? Were you sure there was a right answer? Were you sure of exactly what it was? Have you used *Wait Time* well? 25 **WAIT TIME** Was there a more effective cue you could have used? (Ask a peer to suggest some!) Was the question appropriate to the moment? Was it clear? If not, say, "Let me ask a better question for now."
The initial student resists repeating the answer out of embarrassment, shame, and so on.	Build culture. Say, "Thank you, Jeremy. It's great you struggled the first time around. It helped us all see this is challenging. Say the answer now to solidify." Or "Thank you, Jeremy. I'm proud of you for persevering."
The other students grow impatient waiting for someone to get to the right answer.	Stop the lesson. Teach your class how to respond. "Just a second. Kareemah is doing what we'll all be doing at some point in this class, working hard towards getting it right. I'll expect you to show your support just as she'll show it to you. That means silence, tracking, and a supportive expression on your face."

BE CREATIVE

Grade 1 teacher Sultana Noormuhammad devised a routine that allows students to call on other students for either a cue or an answer (within a limiting countdown of time). Usually she frames a question for the "helper student" in a way that elicits a cue, thus putting cognitive work back on the initial student.

SUSTAIN YOUR PROGRESS

1. Using feedback from your study group or other peers, and reviewing your own lesson notes and observations, monitor your progress on *No Opt Out.*

Date	Attempt to Opt Out	What I Did or Could Have Done

2. Revisit "Where Am I Now?" Are you ready to build out to some other new technique?

ANALYZE THE CHAMPIONS: SOME OBSERVATIONS

▶ Clip 1. Teacher Shadell Noel, Grade K

You may have noticed that at the start of Ms. Noel's phrase "Do you know . . . ," all students enthusiastically raise their hands, but when the teacher mentions the word "clever," Kayla puts her hand down. Seeing this, Ms. Noel asks her if she knows what it means, and Kayla honestly answers that she doesn't. Ms. Noel then uses format 1 with a slight variation—she has another student provide the definition of clever, which she then repeats before going back to Kayla to provide (by repeating) the definition. The entire exchange takes no longer than fifteen seconds and ends with Kayla confidently providing a right answer.

▶ Clip 2. Teacher Patrick Pastore, Grade 6

Mr. Pastore first tries format 3, providing a cue himself. Then he uses format 2, getting the answer from another student. He is sterner than Ms. Noel and persists in requiring the initial student to repeat the answer as a complete sentence, per *Format Matters.* He's sure to praise the second student's answer as a model—"flawless"—and after it's over, they move on quickly. No lecture necessary (or worthwhile).

> 4 **FORMAT MATTERS**

▶ Clip 9. Teacher Lauren Catlett, Grade 5

Ms. Catlett first uses format 3, attempting to prompt the student herself. Then she uses format 2: another student provides the answer; the initial student repeats the answer. But she also uses a *No Opt Out* within a *No Opt Out* to address multiple students. This normalizes the process and underscores that it applies to everyone. Her positive tone is critical to achieving this.

> 49 **NORMALIZE ERROR**