

Do you sometimes worry that your lesson might be too fast or too slow for your students? This lesson can help you find out if that's true and what you can do about it.

Task 1 – Test yourself



Answer 'yes' or 'no' to the following questions:

Do you like to ...

- | | |
|--|----------|
| ... wait for the last student to finish an activity before doing feedback? | Yes / No |
| ... explain language points in a good level of detail? | Yes / No |
| ... help as many students as much as possible when monitoring? | Yes / No |
| ... always do teacher-controlled feedback? | Yes / No |

Now check your answers in the key below. 

Task 1 Feedback

If you answered 'yes' to 2 or more of the questions in task 1, you might have a problem with pace in your lesson. It could be a bit slow and sometimes, your students might get bored.

Key skill

Pace will vary according to different stages of the lesson. However, it is important that teachers are aware of how variations in pace can affect their learners' motivation and learning.

Task 2 – Bored or rushed students?



Look at teacher actions a to j. Some actions can make students feel bored in a lesson, while other actions will make them feel rushed. Place the actions into the correct column in the table below.

Teacher actions

- a. You teach to the level of the weakest student in the class.
- b. You often can't find your plan and materials and get a bit lost in the lesson.
- c. You stick rigidly to time limits you set. It doesn't matter whether students have finished the activity or not.
- d. You immediately nominate a second student when the first student can't answer a question.
- e. You like to use the same kind of materials in your lessons because you know what works best.
- f. You do really lively drills to keep students' energy up.
- g. You give instructions as you hand out worksheets.
- h. You give students a lot of time to answer open class questions.
- i. You don't let students ask questions about activities after doing feedback.
- j. You wait for students to read all of a worksheet and then give instructions for the activity.

Bored students	Rushed students

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key skill

Maintaining an appropriate learning pace for a group of students is a key part of good classroom management. If students feel bored or rushed in any way, they don't learn as well as they could.

Task 3 – What else can affect pace?



Below are some other factors that can make the pace of a lesson feel too slow. Why do you think they do this?

Jot down your answers on a note pad, then check the answer key. 🗝️

Factors that can make the pace feel too slow

- a. Monitoring students.
- b. Teacher talk.
- c. Dominant student.
- d. Teacher's personal style.
- e. Student interaction patterns.

Key skill

The answers in task 3 show the degree to which the teacher often controls the pace of a lesson. It might be useful to imagine that you are like the conductor of an orchestra and be aware that your interventions will affect the rate of learning in any lesson.

Task 4 – Ways to find a better pace



Letters a to j describe a problem associated with pace. Numbers 1 to 10 are strategies that can help deal with these problems. They are not in the same order. Match the strategies to a problem.

Problems with pace	Strategies
a. You think you talk too much to students.	
b. You let activities continue for too long.	
c. You get stuck with students when monitoring.	
d. You always get your students to work in the same pairs.	
e. You let one student dominate the lesson.	
f. You stick rigidly to time limits.	
g. You teach to the weak learners in the class.	
h. You think your personal style is too fast or slow.	
i. Your open class feedback sometimes goes on for too long.	
j. You think your materials are always the same.	

Strategies that can help with pace

1. When planning lessons, think about using a variety of interaction patterns: pairs, small groups, mingle activities. During the lesson, change pairs frequently.
2. Make a conscious effort to use alternative materials – once a week if teaching full-time, once a month if teaching part-time.
3. Monitor student-centred activities more carefully. Do feedback when most, but not all, students have finished.
4. Record yourself to see if it is true. If so, try using student-centred discovery tasks to help you get ideas across to students.
5. You can give feedback on some answers to a task when monitoring. In open class feedback, deal only with the questions students found more difficult.
6. If you think this is happening in the lesson, go immediately to whole group feedback. What you were explaining to one pair might be useful to all students.
7. If you are worried about this, invite a colleague you trust to observe one of your classes and give you feedback on this.
8. Monitor students carefully and check their real progress on a task. If it's taking them longer than you thought, be flexible and allow them more time.
9. Teach to a middle level of ability in your group. If necessary, deal with weaker students' questions when monitoring or after class.
10. Nominate other students and politely ask the enthusiastic student to let other students contribute. If necessary, talk to the problem student after class.

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Thinking about your teaching ...

Sometimes the pace of the lesson can be created by the learners. Try keeping a record of lessons that felt fast-paced to you and those that felt slower. Note the time of day, day in the week and anything else that might have affected your students' pace. Also make a note of what kind of materials you use. After about 10 or more lessons, see if you can note any patterns in this information.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Try getting feedback on the pace of your lessons directly from your students. At the end of each lesson ask them if the lesson was too slow, too fast or about right. If you do this, you will need to expect some negative feedback, but it might help you to keep your students happier in the long term.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 153 to 160 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching (4th edition)* by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007), there is reading on problem behaviour of students which looks at issues such as boredom and dominant students, and how to manage these successfully.

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

bored students	rushed students
<p>a. You teach to the level of the weakest student in the class. Comment: <i>This will be too slow for the majority of students in the class.</i></p>	<p>c. You stick rigidly to time limits you set. It doesn't matter whether students have finished the activity or not. Comment: <i>Your estimated time limits may not always be correct and students might need extra time.</i></p>
<p>b. You often can't find your plan and materials and get a bit lost in the lesson. Comment: <i>This can take time and it makes you look disorganised to the students.</i></p>	<p>d. You immediately nominate a second student when the first student can't answer a question. Comment: <i>You are perhaps not giving the first student enough thinking time to come up with an answer.</i></p>
<p>e. You like to use the same kind of materials in your lessons because you know what works best. Comment: <i>This can be very repetitive and students feel they are always doing the same old thing.</i></p>	<p>f. You do really lively drills to keep students' energy up. Comment: <i>The drills might be too lively and weaker students can't hear or understand the words or phrases they are being asked to repeat.</i></p>
<p>h. You give students a lot of time to ask open class questions. Comment: <i>This can drag on and sometimes it is only the weak student(s) who asks(s) questions.</i></p>	<p>g. You give instructions as you hand out worksheets. Comment: <i>Students will probably feel pressure because they are trying to understand your oral instructions and make sense of the worksheet at the same time.</i></p>
<p>j. You wait for students to read all of a worksheet and then give instructions for the activity. Comment: <i>Some students will be quite slow at reading and the faster readers will often have to wait for them to finish.</i></p>	<p>i. You don't let students ask questions about activities after doing feedback. Comment: <i>The students' questions could be important to their learning.</i></p>

Answer Key (Cont'd)



Task 3 - Feedback

a. Monitoring students

Answer: *There are 2 possibilities here. First the teacher may not monitor enough in order to find out students' progress on a task. She may let tasks go on for too long. Secondly, the teacher might spend too much time with one student or one group of students and the others get bored waiting for her.*

b. Teacher talk

Answer: *If the teacher talks too much, the students might not understand what she is saying and switch off. Students can only process a limited amount of explanation in a second language. Often it is better to get them working on discovery tasks.*

c. Dominant student

Answer: *The student may demand a lot of the teacher's attention and ask a lot of questions that are not relevant to the group as a whole. This is boring and sometimes frustrating for the other students.*

d. Teacher's personal style

Answer: *Some teachers speak too slowly and do not vary their voice enough.*

e. Student interaction patterns

Answer: *If the teacher always uses the same interaction pattern (e.g. working in pairs) and she never changes the pairs in a lesson, this can result in the students feeling the activities are repetitive and boring.*

Task 4 - Feedback

- a) 4
- b) 3
- c) 6
- d) 1
- e) 10
- f) 8
- g) 9
- h) 7
- i) 5
- j) 2