

Effort Activity 5: The Clarity Countdown (a safety system for difficult topics)

Students have to deal with hundreds if not thousands of pieces of information per week.

Every teacher is convinced their course is the most important, and they're all throwing out new content every day; new ideas, new topics, new vocabulary... it can be exhausting just keeping up.

But it can get way worse if we fall behind. New ideas arrive and we haven't even figured out the old ones; new topics are started but we don't fully understand the bits we're supposed to have finished. Over time, these tricky, half-understood topics can build up and build up... and pretty soon there's huge amounts of stuff that we haven't got our heads around. It can feel overwhelming and stressful.

If this describes you, the following activity could be really helpful. It's like a safety system to prevent you falling behind. Here's how it works. Begin by attending a class and staying alert. Listen carefully to the content, engage with the topic and...

...as soon as something crops up that you don't understand, imagine a countdown clock starts ticking.

You have until the end of the day to get clarity on this confusing point. You cannot let this confusion wait, it'll only get worse with time. You have to sort it **on the day**. Don't worry though, here are your five chances to get clarity while your clock is ticking. We've organised them from immediate to delayed:

Immediate  Delayed

| CHANCE 1: | CHANCE 2: | CHANCE 3: | CHANCE 4: | CHANCE 5: |
|---|--|---|---|--|
| Raise your hand, ask the teacher right then and there | Wait until the end of class and ask the teacher | Ask another class member for a quick one-minute recap | Go to see the teacher at (i) lunchtime or (ii) at the end of the day and ask | Research the issue yourself at home using a textbook or online resource |
| <p>This gets the problem solved quickest, and lowers your stress levels.</p> <p>But it can be embarrassing to use over and over.</p> <p>However, if in doubt, go for it.</p> | <p>This is also a quick solve, and avoids the issue of slowing down the whole class.</p> <p>But sometimes teachers are in a rush and don't have time.</p> <p>However, most will make a few minutes for you, so it's worth it!</p> | <p>This is a speedy solution too, and can often give you quick clarity.</p> <p>But sometimes your peers are also confused, and can't help.</p> <p>However, if you pick the right student, you can often get the answer you need.</p> | <p>This is a delayed response, so by the time you get there, you may not be able to fully express your confusion.</p> <p>But you often get a few minutes more of your teacher's attention, and get the answer you need.</p> | <p>This is the most delayed of responses, and you're left on your own, trying to figure out the tricky topic.</p> <p>But you can take your time, spend twenty minutes or half an hour to be sure you've really got it.</p> |

The alternative is to let confusing information go, and never sort it. We've seen this happen with plenty of students over the years, and it's not a nice situation to be in. These poor folks often end up stressed, confused and dreading tests and exams.

By trying a clarity countdown, you might put yourself under a little bit more pressure on the day, but you ensure that problems don't build up.

Why not try...

1. Using a clarity countdown for a particular subject

Commit to doing this in your Maths class, or a tricky run of lessons in Biology or English. Reserve a small amount of time for clarity countdown work at the end of each day. Keep it up until you feel you're through the tricky section of the course.

2. Using a clarity countdown for all subjects, but for a short period of time

This works particularly well in the run-up to test, mock exams or even the real thing. It can be an intense week or fortnight, but you end it knowing you're absolutely on top of everything.

And your future self will thank you for it!