Affirming Students' Correct Attempt Rubric

Learning Objectives:

- Explain the importance of affirming students' correct attempts to reinforce learning and build confidence.
- Identify strategies to effectively affirm students' correct attempts while encouraging further engagement.

Research Recommendation(s)

Research Says…
Affirming a student's correct attempts plays a crucial role in building confidence and reinforcing learning. Research shows that positive reinforcement enhances motivation and persistence, helping students feel more capable and secure in their knowledge (Neerigen Brook Primary School, 2022; ACL Anthology, 2024). For this reason, the correct response to the scenario above is:

"Yes, that's correct! Well done!"

Simple affirmations such as *"Yes, that's correct!"* or *"Great job!"* immediately validate success and encourage continued effort. When affirmations highlight effort or process, they do more than celebrate correctness—they reinforce understanding and motivate students to stay engaged.

A recent study of Tutor CoPilot, a human–AI system that provides tutors with real-time, expert-like guidance during live tutoring sessions, offers further evidence on effective tutor actions. The study found that tutors who used affirming strategies were more likely to adopt high-quality teaching practices that supported deeper student engagement. Notably, students of less-experienced tutors who affirmed correct attempts achieved up to 9 percentage points higher mastery rates compared to peers in the control group (Wang et al., 2024).

As a tutor, even a simple response affirming a student's correct attempt can be highly impactful.

Here are some examples you can use:

- *"Yes, that's correct! Well done!"*
- *"Great job—you got it right."*
- *"That's absolutely right! Keep it up."*
- *"You nailed it!"*
- *"Exactly—you've got it."*

Research Recommendation

Research supports the use of specific affirmations to reinforce students' correct attempts. This approach not only builds confidence but also encourages students to stay persistent in their learning (Neerigen Brook Primary School, 2022; ACL Anthology, 2024).

In the scenario above, the most effective strategy is:

"You're absolutely right, it is 43!"

This type of affirmation is effective because it directly validates the student's correct reasoning and highlights their success in the moment. By acknowledging accuracy with enthusiasm and clarity, the tutor communicates that the student's effort and process are valued. Over time, this builds a stronger sense of capability, encourages persistence, and reinforces a positive learning mindset.

PREDICT RESPONSES

Answers-
-"Yes, that's correct! Well done!"

-"You're absolutely right, it is 43!"

Tutor responses need to: Acknowledge the student's success and offer praise.

Correct (1): Tutor successfully acknowledges that the student was successful, and provides positive reinforcement.

Incorrect (0): Tutor does not acknowledge the student's success.

Tutor response:	**Rationale**
Awesome job! Your process was spot on and the final answer looks great.	1 The praise is direct and also process-focused.
That is correct! you would compute the exponents separately, then add their result.	1 The tutor gives positive reinforcement, and is clear about what the student did right.
Great job thinking through that Fiona! That's correct, the answer is 43.	1 Praises process as well as the correct answer, and is clear that the student's answer is right.
Yes, good job!	1 Simple affirmation can be effective as well.

Okay, next problem.	0 This doesn't acknowledge the student's correctness.

EXPLAIN RESPONSES

Answers-
-It helps build their confidence and reinforces learning.

-It motivates students to persist and stay engaged.

Tutor responses need to: Demonstrate an understanding of how positive reinforcement/affirmation can strengthen a student's learning.

Correct (1): The tutor's response demonstrates an understanding of how affirmation provides positive reinforcement and benefits the learning process.

Incorrect (0): The tutor doesn't demonstrate an understanding of the benefits of positive reinforcement.

Tutor response:	**Rationale**
So that she knows that we care and that she is doing well.	1 Being reminded that the tutor cares and that the student is doing well are forms of positive reinforcement.
Positive feedback feels good!	0 This doesn't make the connection between feeling good and building confidence.
it provides confidence and motivation.	1 Correctly focuses on the outcomes of affirmation being confidence and motivation.
So they get happy when they get it right not just disappointed when they get it wrong.	0 Needs further connection to the benefits of positive reinforcement beyond "happy" and "disappointed."
It provides positive reinforcement. This helps the student stay motivated and enjoy the math.	1 Explains the results of positive reinforcement.