

## Learn to satisfice

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**Perfectionism can contribute to teacher stress. It is important to know when your work is sufficient for purpose.**

*Satisfice* is a portmanteau word that comes from the combination of 'satisfy' and 'suffice'. It literally means to do something in a way which is good enough. Rather than aiming for an ideal or perfect plan of action, it means selecting an approach which suffices for the purpose.

This notion is important for teachers who may tend to perfectionism and may set unrealistically high standards for all aspects of their work. Given the excessively high workloads that teachers typically face, it is important for teachers to set priorities and release the stranglehold of perfectionism. Satisficing is one way to do this.

In lesson planning, for example, there is a point at which any further tweaks to a lesson plan will make no meaningful difference to learning outcomes or to the quality of the lesson. While it can be motivating to strive for excellence, it can be crippling and anxiety-inducing to strive for perfection. Sometimes good enough will suffice. Additionally, overplanning can stifle a willingness to embrace spontaneous opportunities.

The following questions may help you to satisfice in your work:

1. What tasks need doing this week?
2. Which ones require excellence? (Certainly, not all – if that is your answer, you may need to look again with a critical friend!)
3. To what extent can you prioritise tasks according to importance and need for excellence?
4. What are the consequences if a task is not completed to the highest standards but is done in a way which is good enough?
5. For which tasks would it be enough to satisfice?

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Philp, M., Egan, S. & Kane, R. (2012). Perfectionism, overcommitment to work, and burnout in employees seeking workplace counselling, *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 64(2), 68–74.

## 43 Use *us/we* instead of *me/you*

The language teachers use can impact the sense of community and shared group identity.

Language ‘creates realities and invites identities’ (Johnston, 2004, p. 9). Teachers are often the key source of target language for learners serving as models of language use. However, teacher language also impacts on the positionings of learners and teachers in relation to one another in how they talk, the words used and patterns of interaction employed.

Compare the relationship and power dynamics implied by a teacher who says: *You have to work on this task now before you can go to a break* with: *Why don't we finish up this task now so we can relax and enjoy the break afterwards?*

Teacher language can create perceptions of work/fun, obligation/choice and learning/knowing, among others. In this tip, we focus on the potential strengthening of group identity and sense of community when teachers use *us* and *we*, instead of *me* and *you*. Obviously, sometimes the distinction remains relevant and necessary – you may wish to stress something is *their* choice; however, there are many instances where teachers can express solidarity and implied shared investment in learning goals. Naturally, such language use should mirror teacher actions, and students need to feel its use is authentic and welcome such a connection with the teacher. Consider the following examples and reflect on when and why you might use these:

- *Today we are going to work together towards the following learning goal ...*
- *Are we ready to move on to the next task?*
- *Do we want to take a brief break now?*
- *How are we doing for time?*

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Johnston, P. H. (2004). *Choice Words: How our language affects children's learning*. Portland: Stenhouse publishers.

## Use cold calling but do it with care 71

**Cold calling students can keep them actively engaged, and can provide teachers with a diverse range of feedback. However, it must be used with caution.**

*Cold calling* or *nominating* refers to the technique where teachers call on specific students to answer questions irrespective of whether they volunteered to do so. It is controversial as there is a sense that students should take part in whole class discussions voluntarily as they may be anxious, shy or socially uncomfortable. However, there are also good reasons why its careful use can boost student engagement and enhance their sense of responsibility for learning. An additional benefit for teachers is that it may provide feedback from a broader spectrum of students than happens when teachers form an impression of the whole class based on the responses of a select number of volunteers.

There are a number of caveats to consider.

1. Cold calling must never be used as a punishment or to catch a student out for inattention.
2. It is best used in circumstances where there are low-stakes responses. Its use must be consistent and associated with encouragement.
3. Teachers need to keep track of who has responded to ensure no one feels unduly focused on or neglected.
4. A compromise can be to give students coloured cards to put on their desks which indicate degree of willingness to participate (red = not at all; yellow = for some things; green = anything).
5. A teacher can randomly select students such as by picking student names from a bag or turning over name cards on a desk chart.
6. In the nomination, put the student's name last to maintain whole class attention, e.g., *What is the past of buy, Elsa?*

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O'Conner, K. J. (2013). Class participation: Promoting in-class student engagement. *Education*, 133(3), 340–344.

## View feedback as a dialogue 97

**For feedback to achieve its potential, learners must see the need for it, its value, and must engage with it.**

Hattie and Timperley (2007, p. 81) state, 'Feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement, but this impact can be either positive or negative.' They suggest that effective feedback covers three main points:

1. Where am I going? (The goals) – Feed Up
2. How am I going? (My current performance/level) – Feed Back
3. Where to next? (Strategies and pathways of action) – Feed Forward

Feedback can be more effective when the learner shares ownership of the process with the teacher. One way to do this is to see feedback as a dialogue. Feedback can be a two-way process with teachers providing learners feedback on their performance and approaches to learning, but learners can also provide teachers with feedback on what kind of support they find helpful or feel is missing. Such dialogue works best when an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect has been established.

The feedback dialogue can also be directed by learners (see 77). For example, learners can ask teachers for feedback on specific aspects of their work such as in a cover letter or digital dialogue box. Teachers may respond in writing or audio-recordings which can easily be embedded digitally.

Naturally, in large classes, this can be time-intensive; however, teachers can maintain a dialogic element with learners sharing their comments with teachers individually, but teachers providing just one whole-class response (e.g., *Dear Class 7B, Thanks for your stories about elephants. The things I really enjoyed in the texts were ... Several of you asked me to look specifically at the use of adverbs and this is what I noticed ...*).

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Hattie, J. & Timperley, H. (2007). The power of feedback. *Review of Educational Research*, 77(1), 81–112.