

### Caveats

This is a comments-only FACT. Research indicates a less positive effect on student learning when grades are given in addition to comments (Black & Harrison, 2004). Because this strategy reinforces the notion that the teacher wants students to improve their work and that their improvement is being monitored by the teacher, time should be provided in class for students to read and react to the comments. If possible, provide time in class for students to work on their revisions and reflections.

### Use With Other Disciplines

This FACT can also be used in science, social studies, language arts, health, foreign language, and visual and performing arts.

### My Notes

## #16. FIST TO FIVE

### Description

*Fist to Five* asks students to indicate the extent of their understanding of a concept, mathematical procedure, or directions for an activity by holding up a closed fist (no understanding), one finger (very little understanding), and a range up to five fingers (I understand it completely and can easily explain it to someone else). For example, after giving instructions for a mathematical game, teachers might ask for a *fist to five* to do a quick check on whether students understand the directions before proceeding with the game.

### How This FACT Promotes Student Learning

*Fist to Five* provides an opportunity for all students in a class to indicate when they do not understand a concept, procedure, or set of directions and need additional support for their learning. It is especially effective with individual students who are reluctant to let the teacher know that they are experiencing difficulty during a lesson. It encourages metacognition by raising self-awareness of how ready students feel to proceed with their learning.

### How This FACT Informs Instruction

*Fist to Five* is a monitoring technique used to check understanding of concepts, procedures, or directions at any point in a lesson. It is particularly useful when new material is presented, a new procedure is introduced, or directions

for a task are given. It allows the teacher to direct the challenge and pace of lessons toward the needs of the students rather than following a prescribed instructional plan. The quick read of the class provides teachers with the feedback they need to modify the lesson or pair students up to help each other.

### Design and Administration

At any time during a lesson, ask students to hold up their hand for a check of understanding.

The closed fist indicates "I have no idea."

One finger indicates "I barely understand."

Two fingers indicate "I understand parts of it but I need help."

Three fingers indicate "I understand most of it but I'm not sure I can explain it well enough to others."

Four fingers indicate "I understand it and can do an adequate job explaining it."

Five fingers indicate "I understand it completely and can easily explain it to someone else."

Some teachers post a *Fist to Five* chart in the room so students remember how many fingers to hold up. Make sure all students hold up their hands. It can be used to group students for peer assistance by putting the students who hold up two or three fingers with the students who hold up four or five fingers. The teacher can then take the closed-fist and one-finger responses aside for differentiated assistance.

### General Implementation Attributes

Ease of Use: High  
Time Demand: Low  
Cognitive Demand: Low

### Modifications

This FACT can be modified to a three-finger strategy: one finger means "I don't get it," two fingers means "I partially get it," and three fingers means "I get it." Likewise, you can use thumbs up—I get it; thumbs sideways—I'm not sure I understand; thumbs down—I don't get it.

### Caveats

When matching students who claim to understand with students who need help, make sure that the students who held up four or five fingers really do understand well enough to explain it to others before putting them into peer assistance groups.