Opportunities to Respond: Response Cards

Response cards are cards, signs, or items simultaneously held up by all students to display their responses to a question or problem presented by the teacher. Response cards are an easy to implement alternative to the traditional method of choosing individual students to answer questions posed by the teacher.

There are two basic types of response cards: preprinted and write-on. When using preprinted cards, each student selects from a personal set of cards the one with the answer (s)he wishes to display. Examples include yes/true and no/false cards, molecular structures, parts of speech, constitutional amendments, and formulas. A single preprinted card with multiple answers can also be given to each student (e.g. a card with clearly marked sections identified as igneous, metamorphic, and sedimentary). The student responds by holding up the card with his/her fingers pinching the part displaying the answer. Colored clothespins can also be used to indicate the answer.

When using write-on response cards, students mark their answers on blank cards that are erased between learning trials. Personal dry erase boards—sometimes available at dollar stores—provide a fairly inexpensive, re-usable option. To make your own dry erase boards, purchase a sheet of laminated bathroom board (available at builders' supply stores). A set of 40 durable write-on response cards can be made from a 4 by 8 foot sheet of board. Ask the builders supply store to cut the sheet into 9 x 12 inch response cards. Distribute dry-erase markers for students to write their answers.

Suggestions for implementation:
- Model several question and answer trials and give students practice on how to use response cards.
- Maintain a lively pace throughout the lesson; keep intervals between trials short.
- Give clear cues when students are to hold up and put down their cards.
- For preprinted response cards:
  - design cards to be easy to see
  - make cards easy for student to manipulate and display
  - begin instruction on new content with a small set of fact/concept cards, gradually adding additional cards as students' skills improve.