

The Comprehensible Classroom's

WHAT IS CIRCLING?

*an instructional resource from
Martina Bex*

HOW TO CIRCLE

DEFINITION

Circling is the instructional practice of asking a series of prescribed questions in the target language about a statement in the target language.

PURPOSE

Circling is used to provide students with contextualized repetitions of target structures. (A repetition is an instance in which a language learner understands a structure when she or he hears it or reads it.) Research shows that language learners need between 70-150 repetitions of a structure in order to acquire it into their permanent vocabulary. The range is so wide because (1) different researchers have given different numbers, (2) each learner has a different general 'threshold' of repetitions for acquisition, and (3) each structure requires a different number of repetitions for acquisition. The higher the value of the structure to the learner, the fewer repetitions will be needed.

PROCESS

Begin by making a statement in the target language. The statement should contain only ONE new target structure (vocabulary term or phrase), and the rest of the statement should be completely comprehensible to students (previously acquired vocabulary, cognates, and proper nouns). Follow it up with yes/no, either/or, and open-ended questions, and restate/recast the original statement after the answer to each question is given. **To see the process in action, read through the example on page 3. The explanation of each step is in the right-hand column. Then, use the blank template on page 4 to plan out the questions that you will ask about a statement when you first try circling. Post the graphic from Page 5 on your wall to serve as a visual reminder of what questions you can ask and when.**

Once a teacher has acquired the practice of circling, it is no longer necessary for him or her to ask EVERY question about EACH component of a statement. If we were to do this every time that we made a statement, students would quickly become disengaged. Once the teacher has acquired the practice of circling, the next step is to develop discretion: learning how to balance the number and variety of questions asked with the engagement level of students. To reduce the need to ask so many questions about a single statement (to get a high number of repetitions of a target structure from a single statement), use strategies like Personalized Questions and Answers and Storytelling that use the target structures many times in different statements. Instead of trying to elicit 20 repetitions from 1 statement, you can strive for 5 repetitions from each of 4 statements. This is a demonstration of me using circling during a story asking session in Spanish 1: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Eg1vaaXFLA

CIRCLING TEMPLATE

Adapted from Laurie Clarcq

SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT ETC	EXPLANATION
John	eats	a pizza.	Make a statement.
Does John	eat	a pizza?	Ask a question to which the answer is YES!
Does Bob Does Michael Jordan Does the French teacher	eat	a pizza?	Ask questions to which the answer is NO by substituting other subjects, verbs, and objects (or prepositional phrases, etc.). Follow them up with "either/or" questions (ex: Does John drop a pizza or does John eat a pizza?)
Does John	throw sell drop	a pizza?	
Does John	eat	M&M's? basketballs? the coffee?	
WHO eats a pizza?	WHAT does John DO?	WHAT does John eat?	Ask open-ended questions to which students know the answers.
WHEN does John eat a pizza? WHY does John eat a pizza? WITH WHOM does John eat a pizza? HOW does John eat a pizza? HOW OFTEN does John eat a pizza?			Ask open-ended questions to add more details that are not yet known.

Remember to always re-state the original statement correctly after each question.
For example, T: "Does John eat M&M's?" S: "NO!" T: "John does not eat M&M's; *John eats pizza!*"

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SUBJECT

VERB

**ANYTHING
ELSE**

Make a statement.

YES ?

Yes! Repeat correct statement.

EITHER/OR ?

Yes! Repeat correct statement.

NO ?

*No! Negate incorrect statement,
Repeat correct statement*

INTERROGATIVE ?

Yes! Repeat correct statement