

**Module 7**

*Starters*





## 7.1 Objectives of the module

2 minutes

Briefly introduce the session by showing **OHT 7.1**.

**Objectives** OHT 7.1

- To promote the use of a range of starter activities as a means to create purposeful beginnings to lessons
- To develop an understanding of the range of different starters available to introduce lessons

## 7.2 A demonstration starter

5 minutes

- Ask the participants to read carefully their own 'starter activity' card (that they were given at the start of the session).
- Then tell them that the task involves the creation of a continuum, from high to low challenge. Ensure that they are clear what is meant by 'high challenge'. In this case it refers to the extent of 'high-order' thinking that is demanded by the starter activity (and not the level of challenge to the teacher in actually managing the task!).
- Explain that participants are only allowed to talk to those people on either side of them and that the idea is to 'negotiate' their position along the line either towards the words 'high challenge' or 'low challenge'.
- Allow about 4 minutes to carry out the activity. (With larger numbers of participants two or more lines can be created. This provides the opportunity to identify and discuss differences in the continua.)

## 7.3 The importance of starters

8 minutes

Use **OHT 7.2** to debrief the activity and emphasise the importance of starters.

**Starters** OHT 7.2

Starters:

- fulfil a wide range of purposes, in particular using prior knowledge to introduce new topics;
- develop early levels of engagement and motivation;
- help to get all pupils quickly on task and to inject a sense of pace and challenge;
- are an alternative to commencing with a whole-class question-and-answer routine;
- create a level of challenge which is dependent upon:
  - prior learning;
  - level or order of thinking;
  - management of pupil response;
- create an expectation that pupils will think and participate in the lesson;
- create a climate of interaction and involvement;
- create a sense of purpose in a part of the lesson which can be derailed by administrative and organisational tasks.

Ask these questions:

- In creating the continuum of challenge, how did the participants differentiate between what constituted a 'high' or 'low' level challenge activity? (Refer to **appendices 7.1 and 7.2** – Bloom's taxonomy and the National Curriculum thinking skills. Be diagnostic: Have the participants considered levels of challenge previously? If not, it might be useful to suggest future training in either module 9 'Challenge' or module 4 'Questioning'.)
- Which 'starter activities' were particularly difficult to position on the continuum? Why?
- Participants should be encouraged to recognise that the level of challenge in many of the activities can be influenced by the way the teachers manage discussion about them. For example, the level of challenge may be raised through the use of teacher questioning which requires pupils to analyse, justify, evaluate, etc. Without knowing the context of the activity within the sequence of learning, it may be difficult to determine whether or not the task requires pupils to recall or build on prior knowledge, or to formulate new thinking.
- Challenge is not the only characteristic of an effective starter. Which other key characteristics are present within one or more of the starters described on the cards? Seek to draw out:
  - pace;
  - interaction and involvement;
  - connecting with prior learning;
  - curiosity/intrigue.

Make these points:

Starters are about purposeful, whole-class, interactive teaching which involves all pupils. They:

- are essentially active in nature and get the lesson off to a flying start;
- focus on an appropriately demanding pace in thinking and learning rather than on the business of activity;
- provide thought-provoking and engaging beginnings to lessons;
- are not 'compulsory' but can add greatly to a lesson's effectiveness;
- can be used to create lively introductions and are the first stage in meeting the key lesson objectives;
- can include brief, small-group activities prior to whole-class work;
- can be used for 'little and often' teaching of skills;
- can be planned as a sequence of discrete units to build knowledge, understanding and motivation over a series of lessons;
- exploit prime learning time – pupils are often at their most receptive at the beginning of lessons and concentration levels are high, yet this time is often devoted to administrative and organisational tasks.

## 7.4 Successful starters

20 minutes

Now introduce the **first video sequence**. It shows two contrasting starters. Distribute **handout 7.3**. Ask participants to watch the video carefully to look for the range of things the teachers do to establish **engagement, pace** and **challenge** (the key characteristics of many successful starters) and use handout 7.3 to record examples of the teachers' strategies.

The details of the schools and lessons are:

- 1 Geography, Year 9, St Thomas More RC School in Greenwich.
  - The school is a mixed comprehensive in an inner-city area.
  - The class is a Year 9 mixed-ability class. Pupils' attainment ranges from below what might be expected for their age to well above age expectations.
  - The lesson is an introductory lesson to a study that will enable pupils to enquire into standards of living in different parts of the world and begin to understand why there are differences between them.
- 2 Art, Year 7, Matthew Holland School in Nottinghamshire.
  - The school is a mixed comprehensive in an urban area of western Nottinghamshire.
  - The class is a Year 7 mixed-ability class. Pupils' attainment ranges from well below what is expected to well above age expectations.
  - The lesson is part of a painting unit where pupils are increasingly required to blend colours.

Handout 7.3	
Theme	Specific devices and strategies used
Engagement	
Pace	
Challenge	

After watching the video, ask participants to compare lists, in pairs or groups of three, and agree on one strategy to discuss. Log responses for each section on a **flipchart**.

Give out **handout 7.4**, which reinforces the main strategies used by the teachers.

Handout 7.4

Theme	Specific devices and strategies used
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Problem built into task</li> <li>• Unusual routines</li> <li>• Objectives and values made explicit</li> <li>• Interesting activities (exciting, curious and relevant)</li> <li>• Similarity to contextual tasks</li> <li>• Expectations made clear</li> <li>• Use of 'conscriptor' rather than volunteers</li> </ul>
Pace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pupils able to pace to as they wish</li> <li>• Very precise time targets</li> <li>• Focus on pace of thinking and learning</li> <li>• Time targets reaffirmed and pursued</li> <li>• Competitive elements</li> <li>• Modeling</li> </ul>
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of usual 'scaffolding'</li> <li>• Open-ended questioning</li> <li>• Speculative questioning</li> <li>• Links difficulty as motivation - 'this is going to be hard'</li> <li>• Increasing levels of complexity</li> </ul>

## 7.5 Overcoming the problems with starters

10 minutes

Ask participants, in pairs, to consider for 2 minutes the problems that starters can bring. Discuss responses, which may include the following.

Starters can:

- take too long;
- take over the whole lesson;
- lose pace or direction;
- lack clear learning outcomes;
- lose pupils who need extra thinking or speaking time;
- make it difficult to provide for different levels of ability;
- become a fixed routine;
- be derailed by wayward responses;
- be derailed by practicalities such as the arrival of latecomers.

This discussion needs to be managed well to extend understanding and to ensure participants do not dwell on the negative. Effective questioning and fielding of responses is particularly important. Where teachers highlight resources as an issue, draw out the value of resources which can be used for a range of different purposes. Whiteboards are particularly important because of their versatility. Resources such as photographs can be laminated and 'banked' for departmental use.

Show **OHT 7.3** and suggest how these issues can be overcome.

**Overcoming problems with starters**

OHT 7.3

Problems can be overcome by:

- careful planning and preparation;
- establishing a clear focus and dealing decisively with distractions;
- rigorously adhering to planned timings;
- using a variety of starter activities over time;
- using activities and routines which latecomers can quickly assimilate and join (for example, the initial task in the starter is explained briefly on a card which can be picked up and read by each pupil as they enter the classroom even if they arrive late);
- skilful teacher questioning, coupled with an insistence on thinking time;
- providing additional support for some individual pupils (for example, use of classroom support);
- adding extra challenge for some by, for example, increasing the complexity or sophistication of the activity.

Point out that the last three bullet points suggest tactics for meeting the problem of providing for different levels of ability, within what is essentially a whole-class activity.

Indicate that the next set of video extracts shows how some teachers have met these problems and developed starters across a range of foundation subjects.

## 7.6 Extending the repertoire

20 minutes

Introduce the **second video sequence** which shows brief extracts from a number of foundation subjects. The starters are all designed to boost engagement, pace and challenge. They involve a range of different strategies, some of which are listed on **handout 7.5**. Distribute handout 7.5.

Handout 7.5		
Strategy	Context on the video	Useful for (in my own subject)
<b>Using photographs</b> Pupils examine photographic images.	Y9 Geography class of mixed ability (Belmore Hallam School, Nottingham)	
<b>Analogue</b> Pupils develop understanding by exploring relationships between words.	Y8 mixed ability geography class (Belmore School, Southwell, Nottingham)	
<b>Taking notes</b> Pupils share a case for a point of view.	Y8 Geography Spanish class (Chew Valley School, Sutton, South London)	
<b>Show me!</b> Pupils spontaneously reveal responses (in this case, with enthusiasm).	Mixed ability Y8 French class (Bibbelsford Primary Community School, Bristol)	
<b>Visual stimuli</b> Pupils take part in a compare and contrast competitive exercise.	Y8 mixed ability geography class (Chew Valley School, Nottingham)	
<b>Visual stimuli</b> Pupils take part in a compare and contrast paired exercise.	Y8 mixed ability geography class (Chew Valley School, Nottingham)	
<b>Text me!</b> Homework is used to create a starter.	Y8 mixed ability geography class (Belmore School, Southwell, Nottingham)	
<b>Others</b>		

Participants should record potential applications on the handout. The 'empty' bottom row can be used to record other ideas that the video may stimulate. Presenters should emphasise that the video shows only a small selection of the possible strategies that can be used for starters. It does not represent an exhaustive or prescriptive list.

Presenters should seek responses to the strategies illustrated on the video by asking participants to suggest how they would use the strategies in their own subject. Probe for justification and reasoning. Ask participants for other ideas for starters they know about, for example from mathematics and English.

Use this opportunity to indicate that:

- it is important that all pupils feel able to contribute to starter activities;
- pupils at early stages of learning English as an additional language benefit from starter activities which pupils tackle in small groups, as this helps to support the development of English;
- teachers need to ensure that starter activities involve challenges and opportunities for pupils with SEN to explain or describe what they are doing at their level.

## 7.7 The keys to successful starters

5 minutes

Show **OHT 7.4** and summarise the elements that lead to successful starters.

<p><b>Some keys to successful starters</b> <span style="float: right;">OHT 7.4</span></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan the starter as a discrete element of the lesson.</li><li>• Ensure that each element contributes directly to the overall lesson objectives.</li><li>• Choose a type of starter that best meets those lesson objectives.</li><li>• Take account of the range of learning needs of the group.</li><li>• Plan for the activity to be brief and keep to your planned timings.</li><li>• Make sure that your starters show progression over time.</li><li>• Keep instructions clear and concise.</li><li>• Deal with diversions and red herrings decisively.</li><li>• Use varied and unusual routines to create motivation.</li><li>• Plan for a brief conclusion at the end of the starter to consolidate the gains made.</li><li>• Talk to colleagues in other subjects to exchange ideas.</li></ul>
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## 7.8 Ready for more?

5 minutes

Use **OHT 7.5** to stimulate active follow-up by participants.

<p><b>Ready for more?</b> <span style="float: right;">OHT 7.5</span></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Trial three different types of starter that you have not used before.</li><li>• Use your experience as a basis for a detailed departmental discussion about the possible inclusion of starters in the next unit of Year 7 work to be planned.</li><li>• Ensure that the discussion includes active sharing of strategies that teachers already use or that they have heard other teachers talk about. (Module 8 'Plenaries' also contains ideas that can be used as starter activities.)</li><li>• In a department meeting in about eight weeks' time, discuss the starters that team members have tried and the responses from pupils.</li><li>• Add a list of potential starters to your departmental planning documentation.</li></ul>
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<p><b>Knowledge:</b> this involves recalling information. <i>Activities will ask pupils to state, recall, list etc.</i></p>	<p>Lower-order skills</p>
<p><b>Comprehension:</b> this involves understanding information or making sense of ideas. <i>Activities will ask pupils to explain, describe, illustrate etc.</i></p>	
<p><b>Application:</b> this involves applying knowledge or understanding in unfamiliar contexts. <i>Activities will ask pupils to apply, solve, predict etc.</i></p>	<p>Middle-order skills</p>
<p><b>Analysis:</b> this involves using methods or theories in unfamiliar situations to identify structures and patterns and to solve problems. <i>Activities will ask pupils to list component parts, identify cause and effect, distinguish between irrelevant and relevant, compare and contrast etc.</i></p>	<p>Higher-order skills</p>
<p><b>Synthesis:</b> this involves combining ideas to make something new. <i>Activities will ask pupils to generalise, summarise, design, hypothesise, invent, create, compose etc.</i></p>	
<p><b>Evaluation:</b> this involves discriminating between ideas and making judgements about value based on reasoned argument. <i>Activities will ask pupils to give arguments for and against, support opinions, rate, recommend, criticise, prioritise, etc.</i></p>	

Thinking skills are defined in the National Curriculum (*Handbook for secondary teachers in England*; available at [www.nc.uk.net](http://www.nc.uk.net)) by reference to a set of five skills.

**Information-processing skills:** These enable pupils to locate and collect relevant information, to sort, classify, sequence, compare and contrast, and to analyse part/whole relationships.

**Reasoning:** These enable pupils to give reasons for opinions and actions, to draw inferences and make decisions, to use precise language to explain what they think, and to make judgements and decisions informed by reasons or evidence.

**Enquiry:** These enable pupils to ask relevant questions, to pose and define problems, to plan what to do and how to research, to predict outcomes and anticipate consequences, and to test conclusions and improve ideas.

**Creative thinking:** These enable pupils to generate and extend ideas, to suggest hypotheses, to apply imagination, and to look for alternative innovative outcomes.

**Evaluation:** These enable pupils to evaluate information, to judge the value of what they read, hear and do, to develop criteria for judging the value of their own and others' work or ideas, and to have confidence in their judgements.

# Objectives

OHT 7.1

- To promote the use of a range of starter activities as a means to create purposeful beginnings to lessons
- To develop an understanding of the range of different starters available to introduce lessons

Starters:

- fulfil a wide range of purposes, in particular using prior knowledge to introduce new topics;
- develop early levels of engagement and motivation;
- help to get all pupils quickly on task and to inject a sense of pace and challenge;
- are an alternative to commencing with a whole-class question-and-answer routine;
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  - prior learning;
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  - management of pupil response;
- create an expectation that pupils will think and participate in the lesson;
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# Overcoming problems with starters

OHT 7.3

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- careful planning and preparation;
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- skilful teacher questioning, coupled with an insistence on thinking time;
- providing additional support for some individual pupils (for example, use of classroom support);
- adding extra challenge for some by, for example, increasing the complexity or sophistication of the activity.

## Some keys to successful starters

OHT 7.4

- Plan the starter as a discrete element of the lesson.
- Ensure that each element contributes directly to the overall lesson objectives.
- Choose a type of starter that best meets those lesson objectives.
- Take account of the range of learning needs of the group.
- Plan for the activity to be brief and keep to your planned timings.
- Make sure that your starters show progression over time.
- Keep instructions clear and concise.
- Deal with diversions and red herrings decisively.
- Use varied and unusual routines to create motivation.
- Plan for a brief conclusion at the end of the starter to consolidate the gains made.
- Talk to colleagues in other subjects to exchange ideas.

## Ready for more?

OHT 7.5

- Trial three different types of starter that you have not used before.
- Use your experience as a basis for a detailed departmental discussion about the possible inclusion of starters in the next unit of Year 7 work to be planned.
- Ensure that the discussion includes active sharing of strategies that teachers already use or that they have heard other teachers talk about. (Module 8 'Plenaries' also contains ideas that can be used as starter activities.)
- In a department meeting in about eight weeks' time, discuss the starters that team members have tried and the responses from pupils.
- Add a list of potential starters to your departmental planning documentation.

**High  
Challenge**

**Low  
Challenge**

<p><b>MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES</b> Pupils play 'word bingo'. Words in English are numbered on the board. Pupils have a grid of random numbers on paper. The teacher speaks the words in French and the pupils mark them off on their grids. The winner is the first with a 'full house'.</p>	<p><b>GEOGRAPHY</b> Ready, steady, teach. Provide groups with a shopping bag of ingredients (for example, modelling clay, string, lollypop sticks, etc.). Tell them they have 5 minutes to plan an activity in which they use the ingredients to 'teach' how the coastal features, arches, stacks and stumps are formed.</p>
<p><b>RELIGIOUS EDUCATION</b> As an introduction to a new topic pupils are asked to generate words they associate with the concept 'prayer'.</p>	<p><b>HISTORY</b> The class are shown a mystery object. They are asked to write down five questions that, if answered, might help them to suggest what the object is.</p>
<p><b>SCIENCE</b> Pupils are studying 'refraction and colour'. Each pupil sticks an unseen word onto their forehead, for example dispersion, spectrum, dye, filter, optical fibre. They have to ask a partner questions in order to work out what the word is.</p>	<p><b>ENGLISH</b> A bag of objects is given to small groups. Pupils have to come up with a list of five adjectives, which imaginatively describes each item.</p>
<p><b>FOOD TECHNOLOGY</b> Pupils are asked to match up cards carrying the name of a piece of equipment with the card containing its definition.</p>	<p><b>PHYSICAL EDUCATION</b> Following a warm-up, pupils form two teams. The first member of each group performs a move, on the trampoline. The next person repeats this move, then adds a second. The third pupil repeats the two moves and links in a third, and so on. Pupils need an awareness of the capabilities of others in their team who will follow on and types of move that link together. The winners will be the team that creates the longest sequence of moves.</p>

<p><b>MUSIC</b></p> <p>Each group of pupils is given a set of cards with the elements of music printed on them, e.g. pitch, tempo, duration, dynamic, timbre, texture, silence, attack and decay. They are asked to sequence them in order of importance to them for composing a short piece of music. Afterwards they have to justify their decisions.</p>	<p><b>DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY</b></p> <p>Sheets with signs, logos and everyday lettering (newspapers, adverts, etc.) are provided. Pupils have only 20 seconds to look at them. They then have to write them down in order of impact on their memories. Extend to discussion on why some signs work better than others or who the message is aimed at.</p>
<p><b>RELIGIOUS EDUCATION</b></p> <p>In their first lesson on Martin Luther King pupils are asked, in pairs, to consider the question 'What would you be prepared to die for?' and then share their reasoning with their group and the whole class.</p>	<p><b>MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES</b></p> <p>The teacher speaks simple addition and subtraction calculations in German. Pupils have to write down their answers in numerical form on whiteboards and then hold them up.</p>
<p><b>DRAMA</b></p> <p>In pairs, pupils are asked to agree on five things they learned during the last lesson, and the whole class agree the priorities.</p>	<p><b>SCIENCE</b></p> <p>Pupils complete a word search based on 'plant reproduction'. They have to circle words such as stamen, stigma, ovules, filament, anther.</p>
<p><b>ENGLISH</b></p> <p>The class uses whiteboards to identify and consolidate spellings of homophones spoken by the teacher, for example wait/weight, right/write.</p>	<p><b>MATHEMATICS</b></p> <p>Each pupil is given a piece of A4 paper and asked to write down a number between 3 and 4, being as 'creative' as they can (for example, <math>3\frac{7}{12}</math>). They then give the number to another pupil and all pupils are asked to 'peg' their numbers onto a washing line in the correct sequence.</p>

## Handout 7.3

Theme	Specific devices and strategies used
Engagement	
Pace	
Challenge	

## Handout 7.4

Theme	Specific devices and strategies used
Engagement	<p>Problem built into task</p> <p>Unusual routines</p> <p>Objectives and values made explicit</p> <p>Interesting activities (novelty, curiosity and relevance)</p> <p>Sensitivity to concentration levels</p> <p>Expectations made clear</p> <p>Use of 'conscripts' rather than volunteers</p>
Pace	<p>Pupils able to join in as they each arrive</p> <p>Very precise time targets</p> <p>Focus on pace of thinking and learning</p> <p>Time targets reaffirmed and pursued</p> <p>Competitive elements</p> <p>Modelling</p>
Challenge	<p>Absence of usual 'scaffolding'</p> <p>Open-ended questioning</p> <p>Speculative questioning</p> <p>Uses difficulty as motivation – 'this is going to be hard'</p> <p>Increasing levels of complexity</p>

## Handout 7.5

Strategy	Context on the video	Useful for (in my own subject)
<p><b>'Living photographs'</b> Pupils recreate photographic images.</p>	<p>Y9 boys' drama class of mixed abilities (Matthew Holland School, Nottinghamshire)</p>	
<p><b>'Analogies'</b> Pupils develop understanding by exploring relationships between words.</p>	<p>Y8 mixed-ability geography class (Minster School, Southwell, Nottinghamshire)</p>	
<p><b>'Taking sides'</b> Pupils argue a case for a point of view.</p>	<p>Y8 beginning Spanish class (Cheam High School, Sutton, South London)</p>	
<p><b>'Show me'</b> Pupils simultaneously reveal responses (in this case with whiteboards).</p>	<p>Mixed ability, Y8 French class (Whitefield Fishponds Community School, Bristol)</p>	
<p><b>'Visual stimuli'</b> Pupils take part in a compare-and-contrast competitive exercise.</p>	<p>Y9 mixed-ability geography class (Chilwell School, Nottinghamshire)</p>	
<p><b>'Visual stimuli'</b> Pupils take part in a conceal-and-describe paired exercise.</p>	<p>Y9 mixed-ability geography class (Chilwell School, Nottinghamshire)</p>	
<p><b>'Test me'</b> Homework is used to create a starter.</p>	<p>Y9 mixed-ability geography class (Minster School, Southwell, Nottinghamshire)</p>	
<p><b>Others</b></p>		