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## SECTION ONE: 14 Skills

### Skill #1 – Circling

Students become strongly engaged when you get enough *repetitions in context* on the words you are trying to teach them, because then they understand. There is a strong link between student engagement and good circling. In the early stages of learning this skill, you will probably refer frequently to your circling poster, which you can put up in the back of your room until you are ready to circle on your own, first in the following mechanical way:

*Statement*

*Question*

*Either/or*

*Negative*

Optional are:

*Throw In*

*Ask a detail*

*Who*

*What*

*When*

*Where*

*Why*

A sample of circling:

- Statement, “Class, there is a boy!” (Ohh!)
- Question, “Class, is there a boy?” (Yes.) You add, “That’s correct, class, there is a boy.”
- Either/Or, “Class, is there a boy or a girl?” (boy) You add, “That’s correct, class, there is a boy.”

- Negative, “Is there a girl?” (No.) You add, “That’s correct, class, there is not a girl. There is a boy.”
- Throw In, “Is there a monkey?” (No.) You add, “That’s correct, class, there is not a monkey. There is a boy.”
- What, “Class, what is there?” (boy) You add, “That’s correct, class, there is a boy.”
- Who, Class, what is the boy’s name? (David) You add, “That’s correct, class, the boy’s name is David.”

If it is true that listening to comprehensible input is the pre-eminent focus of all foreign language instruction, then *circling is the pre-eminent feature of comprehensible input*. The astounding results gained by students trained with comprehensible input would be impossible without some form of circling, or repetition in context. The focus of circling in each sentence is on the part of the sentence that is new to the students. When you say the part of the sentence that is new to them, you can even highlight it with an increase in sound and change of inflection in your voice.

A single thought must be in the forefront of the instructor’s mind when circling: the word or structure that you want the students to know must be repeated and repeated again *in each successive utterance*. If you leave the targeted structure out of the sentence, you are not circling. Some instructors focus more on the circling than on the structure, thinking that there must be a “right” way to circle. Circling is not a formula to be blindly followed. Rather, general repetitive questioning that accentuates and repeats the structure to be learned is proper circling. The quickest way to lose a class is to circle mechanically. By focusing less on the circling itself as a formula and more on the structure being circled, the structure quickly becomes comprehensible to the students. It then becomes instantly recognizable to the students when it occurs later in more complicated language settings.

## Check for Understanding When Circling

Always check students' eyes for what they *are understanding*. If your students look as if they do not understand, it is because they do not. Go back to the beginning of the pattern, slow down, circle more deliberately, and stay in touch with what is happening with all of your students.

## Circling All Three Parts of the Sentence

It is possible to get ten or more questions from one sentence by circling all three parts of the sentence. If the structure that I want to teach is, *avait l'intention de* (intended to), I might ask Jesse if he intended to drink some milk yesterday. I could care less if he intended to do that or not, but I want to teach the structure, so I act interested. If he nods his head yes, I have the green light to go ahead and start circling, so I first make the statement,

- “Class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday!” (Ohh!)

Then I ask the question,

- “Class, did Jesse intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (Yes.)

And then I continue on as per the pattern above. I have the option of circling either the subject, the verb, or the object. Most teachers for some reason only circle the object. They should focus their circling on the subject and verb as well, to keep things mixed up and therefore unpredictable and therefore more interesting.

A template for circling the subject:

- Statement, “Class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday!” (Ohh!)
- Question, “Class, did Jesse intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (Yes.) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

- Either/Or, “Did Jesse or Eric intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (Jesse.) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday
- Negative, “Did Eric intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (No.) “That’s right, class, that’s absurd. Eric did not intend to drink some milk yesterday. Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”
- Question Word, “Class, who intended to drink some milk yesterday?” (Jesse.) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

A template for circling the verb:

- Statement, “Class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday!” (Ohh!)
- Question, “Class, did Jesse intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (Yes.) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”
- Either/Or, “Did Jesse intend to drink or eat some milk yesterday?” (Drink.) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”
- Negative, “Did Jesse intend to eat some milk yesterday?” (No.) “That’s right, class, that’s absurd. Jesse did not intend to eat some milk yesterday. He intended to drink some milk yesterday.”
- Question Word, “Class, what did Jesse intend to drink yesterday?” (Drink some milk.) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

A template for circling the object:

- Statement, “Class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday!” (Ohh!)
- Question, “Class, did Jesse intend to drink some milk yesterday?” (Yes.) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

- Either/Or, “Did Jesse intend to drink some milk or some tea yesterday?” (Milk.) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”
- Negative, “Did Jesse intend to drink some tea yesterday?” (No.) “That’s right, class, that’s absurd. Jesse did not intend to drink some tea yesterday. He intended to drink some milk yesterday.”
- Question Word, “Class, what did Jesse intend to drink yesterday?” (Milk.) “That’s right, class, Jesse intended to drink some milk yesterday.”

It is not intended that you circle all the possibilities above in the order given above. That is mechanical circling, and is given above as merely a set of circling training wheels, to be discarded when the time is right. Practice with the training wheels on first, so you don’t get bruised. Know that when the wheels are off (when you can circle randomly and not lose your students), your overall instruction will take off in the real way, just as riding a bicycle with the training wheels off allows you enjoy the ride much more. You have mastered this aspect of the skill when you can mix up your questions and circle at will in random order without glancing at the chart.

## Adding in Details

Let’s review the steps of circling, because they are so important: *Statement, Question, Either/or, Negative*.

Optional are: *Throw In, Ask a detail, Who, What, When, Where, Why*.

If Mark ran, the instructor can ask the class,

- Statement: Mark ran! (Ohh!)
- Question: Class, did Mark run? (Yes.) That’s correct class. Mark ran.
- Either/Or: Did Mark or Ryan run? (Mark.) That’s correct class. Mark ran.

- Negative: Did Ryan run? (No.) Correct class, Ryan did not run. Mark ran.
- Throw In: Did Eric run? (No.) Correct class, Ryan did not run. Mark ran.

Now here we can add in a detail. You could tell the class the “secret” that Mark ran *quickly*:

- Class, did Mark run quickly?

You can see how your adding just this one simple detail *greatly increases the number of questions* you can now ask. With this addition of a single word into the circling, you can use Point and Pause (explained later) to ask if Mark ran quickly or slowly or to the left or to the right or up the hill or down the hill, etc. But be very careful when you add in such details at the very beginning of the year. Make sure that the students are ready for new sounds that are unfamiliar to them. Wait to add new language in. Asking if Mark ran quickly, for you as a speaker of the language, is only a simple detail, but to the average student it is a detail of immense auditory complexity.

## Circling Vortex Image

Here is one way to look at circling. Imagine a vortex/funnel cloud to which, with each next completed circle of the vortex, you can add a detail. You start at the top with the simple original sentence and then begin circling down through the statement, the question, the either/or question and the negative question, and then start adding in details. Soon, you reach a point where the details become too numerous. There is no room in the sentence for any more details. Arriving at this point of saturation signals the end of the circling possibilities for that particular sentence and you now know that it’s time to move on to another set of questions. In this way stories are built. Blaine Ray is the inventor of this vortex/funnel cloud image. Blaine explained to me that this is how he conceives of circling in a story. Later, when you are doing stories, you will learn that the vortex

image applies as well to groups of sentences. They, too, can get saturated. When that happens, you just *add in a new character or event* to the growing and expanding discussion you are having with your students. With that new character or event, whatever you are talking about will go off in a different direction. It is the job of the teacher to allow the story to develop in this way, but to never stop using the original two or three structures associated with the story. Those structures, and nothing else, are what you are trying to teach via all your circling in any particular lesson. Don't forget that in this vortex work you always have options about what part of the sentence to circle, as explained earlier. If you are trying to teach the verb "sketches" (the purpose of circling is to teach targeted vocabulary), then, as long as you include the target structure in each sentence, you may wish to start by circling the subject of your sentence:

- Statement, "Class, Jerome sketches!" (Ohh!)
- Question, "Class, does Jerome sketch?" (Yes.)
- Either/Or, "Class, does Jerome or Micky Mouse sketch?" (Jerome.)  
"That's correct, class, Jerome sketches."
- Negative, "Class, does Mickey Mouse sketch? (No.) "Correct, class, Mickey Mouse doesn't sketch, Jerome sketches." (Ohh!)
- Question Word, "Class, who sketches?" (Jerome.) etc.

Or you may wish to circle the verb:

- Statement, "Class, Jerome sketches!" (Ohh!)
- Question, "Does Jerome sketch?" (Yes.)
- Either/Or, "Does Jerome sketch or sleep?" (Sketch.)
- Negative, "Does Jerome sleep?" (No.)
- "That's right, class, Jerome doesn't sleep. Jerome sketches!" (Ohh!)
- Throw In, "Class, does Jerome vomit?" (No.) "No, class! Jerome doesn't vomit! He sketches!"

- Question Word, “Class, what does Jerome sketch?”

Etcetera. Since there is no object in this sentence, we would leave our third option out. In this example, the last sentence invites a detail from the class: “What does Jerome sketch?” At this point, you can encourage cute answers in the target language from the class. In doing this, you are not committing yourself to anything more than adding one detail to your original sentence, but you can add more if there is room in the vortex (i.e. if the students aren’t saturated with the circling yet). It is a good idea at this point to make sure that your students are comfortable with and like that detail before accepting it. Once you accept it, keep circling it until you are sure that the students understand it. Don’t add, in rapid fire, another and yet another detail. Unlike real funnel clouds, circling vortexes are slow moving to allow for full comprehension by your students! Don’t forget that you can bail out at any time. Sense what is happening. If you sense that your students are tuning out, go to something else: another student, another sentence, a brain break, one of the bail out moves listed in this book, etc. Learn to follow and bolster the flow of a discussion without knowing where it may be going. Keep repeating your target structures while doing so. Let chance into the equation. Learn to respond intuitively and fluidly to what is happening in your classroom. Always stay on your target structures.

Even after circling and adding details to even just one sentence, you will have shared a lot of *understandable* language with your kids. They will have understood and responded with one word answers to lots of sentences, which will all have been generated down through the vortex from just a single sentence. In time, you will find more and more cute little details merging into and transforming the sentences you started working with. This will signal a gain in the confidence of your students that they are getting better and better at playing what Blaine calls the “game” of adding cute answers into the conversation. Circling and adding in details is an organic process, and takes different forms in each class you teach. The sentences will become cute and personalized and funny if the students have been trained in what it means to provide cute answers into the classroom process as per the Classroom Rules. This way of teaching