

Because

What is it?

A tool that teaches students to explain the thinking behind their ideas by training them to support their hypotheses, predictions, conclusions, and inferences with “because” (“I predict that the piece of wood will float in the water *because* ...”)*

What are the benefits of using this tool?

The authors of *Classroom Instruction That Works* (Second Edition) point out that asking students to explain their thinking as they generate and test hypotheses promotes deeper understanding (Dean et al., 2012). Therefore, we need to get students in the “explaining habit” when they use the various thinking practices that the authors of *Classroom Instruction That Works* (Second Edition) associate with generating and testing hypotheses. These thinking practices include hypothesizing, making predictions, drawing conclusions, making inferences, and formulating theses. The Because tool gives teachers a simple way to build and reinforce the explaining habit whenever students engage in these practices. Best of all, regular use of this tool helps create a classroom culture in which student behaviors such as elaborating on ideas, justifying conclusions, and clarifying one’s thinking become the norm.

What are the basic steps?

1. Tell students that you want them to get in the habit of supporting their ideas with “because.” (“Whenever you make a hypothesis, conclusion, inference, or prediction, I want you to give me a *because* that explains your reasoning.”)
2. Help students build this habit by writing the word *because* in an easily visible location (e.g., on the board or a piece of poster paper). If students forget to give you a “because,” prompt them to do so by pointing at the word. For example:
Teacher: So what do you predict will happen if we take two fractions that are less than one and multiply them together?
Student: I think the product will get smaller. [Teacher points at the word *because* to remind the student to keep talking.]
Student: *Because* you’d be taking a fraction of a fraction that’s already less than one.
3. Use students’ responses to gauge their understanding of the content and their ability to support their ideas with evidence, reasons, and/or examples. Respond accordingly.

*This tool is adapted from the work of Cathy Mitchell, a teacher at Robert Kerr Elementary School in Durand, MI.