

Six moves, the three-second rule, and what to say when it goes wrong. From the guide at ElevateTheNorm.com/cold-calling-in-the-classroom/ — no new claims, no email required.

Read this first. Every study behind this page was run on undergraduates. The mechanism transfers to grades 6–12; the numbers do not. And a student with a documented anxiety accommodation is handled through that plan, not through a classroom technique.

The six moves

#	Move	Why
1	Ask the question, <i>then</i> name	Naming first lets everyone else stop thinking.
2	Leave three seconds of silence	Baseline wait time is about one second. Three to five raises response length and cuts non-responses.
3	Let everyone rehearse first	Thirty seconds to write or tell a partner. This removes most of the fear without lowering the demand.
4	Make it visibly random	Cards, sticks, a list. If students suspect you are picking, they read it as targeting.
5	Keep a return path open	“I don’t know” gets a hint and a comeback, never an audience.
6	Never use it as a correction	The moment it punishes inattention it stops being a check and becomes a trap.

Say this out loud in week one, and mean it

“I will call on people who did not raise a hand. Nothing you say out loud is graded. If you don’t know, say so and I’ll give you a way in — and I’ll come back to you.”

Three situations, planned rather than improvised

Situation	What to do
A student flatly refuses	Take it at face value, move on, handle it privately. A standoff in front of thirty people is a fight you cannot win.
A student newer to English, or who stammers	The written rehearsal in move 3 covers most of it. A sentence frame covers the rest.
A 504 or IEP names anxiety	The plan governs. No research finding on this page overrides it.

The Participation Log

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Who is actually speaking in your room. One week, one class, five minutes a day.

Student	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Note

Mark V for volunteered and C for cold called. At the end of the week, look for the names with nothing next to them. That list — not the total count — is the reason to cold call at all. If the same four students carry every discussion, the room has a participation structure problem, and no amount of waiting for hands will fix it.

The honest caveat, printed here on purpose: cold calling raises participation and raises anxiety. Both findings are real. In one interview study, 31 of 52 students said it increased their anxiety and none said it decreased it — and what they named as the cause was fear of being evaluated badly in public, not being asked a question. Moves 3, 5 and 6 above exist to remove that while keeping the demand.