

COLD-CALLING: A DEEP DIVE INTERVIEW WITH DOUG LEMOV BY BRADLEY BUSCH

By teacherCPDacademy.com

In recent years, Cold-Calling has become one of the most prominent questioning strategies used in classrooms. It sounds like a simple and straightforward strategy at first, but dig a little deeper and a world of nuance, subtlety and skill in applying it exists.

Keen to explore this further, InnerDrive's lead psychologist Bradley Busch interviewed Doug Lemov to ask him the sort of questions that everyone interested in Cold-Calling wants to know the answers to. We hope you enjoy this deep dive into Cold-Calling...

LET'S START AT THE BEGINNING...

Bradley Busch: What is Cold-Calling?

Doug Lemov: There are two ways to think of Cold-Calling:

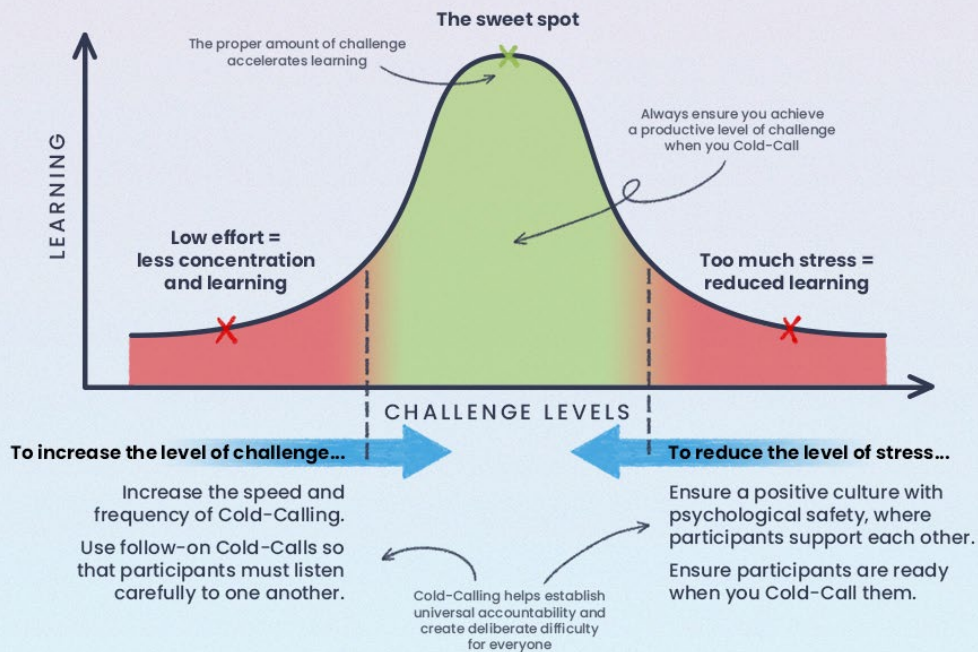
- The first is practical: calling on a student regardless of whether they have offered to participate.
- The second is more nuanced: an invitation for students to join the conversation.

Both of these definitions are important. While the first one ensures students are socialised to feel accountable to and engaged in class discussions, the second one establishes that every student's voice is heard and important to the conversation.



Using Cold-Calling to manage challenge levels

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Bradley Busch: You say Cold-Calling is an invitation to join the conversation. But can Cold-Calling really be considered an invitation to the discussion if students aren't allowed to refuse? So, how do we address this, and how does this balance with ensuring they have accountability to participate?

Doug Lemov: The accountability aspect of Cold-Calling is flexible and should be adapted based on your teaching context. For example, you can allow students to pass a Cold-Call question if they are caught off-guard at that moment. However, you don't want passing to become the norm. There are three strategies you can adopt to reduce student stress levels from not being able to opt out of a Cold-Call:

1. Give student the opportunity to prepare – Present your questions to the whole class and give them 30 seconds to jot down their thoughts before you call on a student to answer the question.

2. Ask them to talk to their partner – Give your students some time to discuss the target question with a partner before asking one to share their answer with the rest of the class.

3. Give a roll-out speech – At the start of the academic year, inform your students that you will use Cold-Calling frequently in class. Tell them you are doing this because you want everyone to feel like they are part of the conversation. Making it known that you are doing this in their best interest ensures a positive classroom culture with psychological safety.

Bradley Busch: Any advice on how to make Cold-Calling most effective?

Doug Lemov: Cold-Calling works best when it's predictable (i.e., students have a pretty good idea that it's coming) and universal (i.e., students are aware that many of their peers will be Cold-Called so they don't feel picked on). I therefore recommend Cold-Calling frequently, in batches, and starting early at each class period.

I'd also advise the use of follow-on Cold-Calls, which means asking a student what the previous speaker said. An example may be asking student B to expand on what student A said. Using this increases rigor and challenge for students, as they cannot successfully answer the question if they have not been listening carefully.

As a bonus, using follow-on Cold-Calls builds a listening culture in the classroom, which boosts critical thinking and learning.

Bradley Busch: How can we avoid putting a student on the spot when Cold-Calling?

Doug Lemov: Cold-Calling is a team sport, which therefore should include many students.

A great tip is to use the phrase "Sofia, can you get us started please?" when Cold-Calling. This signals to Sofia that her answer does not have to be perfect, which gives her psychological safety and reduces threat levels. Using the phrase also signals that

the rest of the class will have to build off Sofia's answer, further promoting the listening culture in the classroom.

Bradley Busch: Any thoughts on how to deal with wrong answers when Cold-Calling students?

Doug Lemov: I like the "turn and talk to your partner" strategy. It is a very effective way to tackle incorrect answers. For example, try responding to a student's wrong answer with "Hmm, that's not correct even though there's some good thinking there. Let's all take 30 seconds to talk it out with a partner. Why is AD NOT a chord?"


Not only does this diffuse the awkwardness by drawing attention away from the student who got it incorrect, but it also presumes that the other students have the same misconceptions. This ensures that the student who made a mistake does not feel too embarrassed, so they don't lose their will to participate in the future.

Bradley Busch: Final question. Generally speaking, how long in advance should you prepare your Cold-Call questions as opposed to being spontaneous and reacting to what is happening in the classroom?

Doug Lemov: This probably depends on where you are in your craft of teaching, career, and confidence. However, a spur-of-the-moment question will likely be one that is not very well curated, potentially leading to a poor student response. So, it may be helpful to adopt the following two strategies, especially if you are just starting off with Cold-Calling:

1. Write out your Cold-Call questions in advance – This will help make sure they are good questions, which means they have no ambiguity so that students can give a clear and specific answer.

2. Clarify your means of participation – Think about what you want to do before and after the Cold-Call. For example, you might want your students to talk to their partners before



turning it into a Cold-Call or choose to Cold-Call first and then give the student 30 seconds for note taking before asking for their answer.

Putting these strategies into practice allows teachers to focus on their working memory to create a positive atmosphere where students feel safe and supported, ultimately reducing the stress and worry that comes with Cold-Calling.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Cold-Calling can be a great way to spark discussion and foster an inclusive environment. Adapting this strategy based on your teaching context so that your students receive a good level of challenge without being overwhelmed with stress should lead to high-quality level discussions. We hope the above recommendations can help you accomplish this to create meaningful class interactions.

Thank you to Doug Lemov for his time and expertise in helping us co-create this graphic and answer our questions. Make sure to follow Doug at [@Doug_Lemov](https://twitter.com/Doug_Lemov), order his book Teach Like A Champion and check out his work at teachlikeachampion.org.