Most Difficult First: How To

1. Begin by determining which items represent the most difficult section of the entire task. (5 is a reasonable number, but you can choose more or less.)

2. Write the assignment on the board and explain the procedure to the class.

Procedure points: first one done brings assignment to teacher; they become the checker if they want to be. They check work of others and collect assignment for the teacher. Once assignment is collected by checker, students work on extension activity.

3 Magic Rules for Extension time:

- don’t bother anyone else while working

- don’t make a big deal about doing something else (don’t be rude or rub it in to others)

- work on a chosen extension activity

3. Walk around the classroom and offer help to students who need it. Let those working on Most Difficult First come to you. Once you have a checker, he or she uses his sheet as the key. He or she collects the papers of others who completed MDF.

4. When the checker gives you the small stack of MDF papers at the end of the period, hold them till you collect the rest of the papers. Then do a spot check as you are checking homework and entering a grade. If you find an error that was missed by the checker, that student loses the option of MDF for the next assignment. Also, note the checker and ask them to improve their accuracy.

5. If the beginning of the next period is a homework check activity, the MDF students can do extension work.

Guidelines for success:

- Limit practice time to 20 minutes.

- Check papers until there is a checker. Don’t let students self-check their own work.

- Don’t allow students to correct errors the checker discovers. If they get one wrong, they must do the entire assignment (even for a careless mistake).

- No student should be the checker more than once a week. (This way they work on extension activities, which some might avoid.)

- Don’t be overly concerned if a student is “vegging out” or “wasting time during an extension activity.” If the student needs or wants 10 minutes of unwind time, and they have mastery of the content, they can occasionally just take a break and read or journal, or go on line to research a personal topic.