

A Comprehensible-Input Classroom Guide

drawn from 14 years of
classroom teaching.

The Core Shift

CI instruction treats language as something acquired through understanding real messages — not a code students decode using memorized rules. The teacher's central job each day is to keep input comprehensible: pitched just past what students already understand, never so far ahead that meaning is lost.

A Typical 55-Minute Lesson

0:00 – Daily warm-up. A short spoken-language exchange so students' ears tune in before reading begins.

0:05 – Read together. Read a story aloud, ask questions about it, act parts out. Comprehension checks happen through questions, not translation drills.

0:35 – Free reading. Silent reading time with texts at each student's level. Rereading an easy book is not wasted time — it builds fluency.

0:50 – Low-stakes check. A quick, low-pressure check for understanding tells you what to reteach next, rather than testing memorized forms.

Core Techniques

Storytelling & drama. Students act out myths and events instead of translating them line by line — a story felt sticks; a sentence parsed is forgotten.

TPR & movement. Physical response to language builds comprehension for learners who struggle with purely verbal input.

Free Voluntary Reading (FVR). Regular, unpressured reading time at each student's level, with real choice over what they read.

Movie Talks & picture talks. Narrating a shared visual in the target language, at the group's comprehension level, before introducing text.

Assessment That Fits

Frequent, low-stakes checks for understanding replace high-pressure tests on memorized forms. The goal is steady comprehension, not perfection under time pressure — assessment should tell you what to teach next, not sort students by who crammed the hardest.

Making It Neuroinclusive

Movement, games, and multiple entry points welcome every kind of learner. Build in several ways for a student to demonstrate understanding — gesture, drawing, single words, full sentences — so no one is filtered out by a single expected response format.

When Something Goes Wrong Mid-Story

- Watch for signals that meaning was lost, not just silence.
- Repeat key words and lean on gestures before switching to English.
- Return to a familiar story afterward to rebuild confidence.

This guide reflects 14 years of classroom teaching and ongoing professional learning through the American Classical League, NECTFL, and ACTFL.

happy to talk through adapting it further.

'm

See also: Professional Development page at magistradougherty.com/professional-development