

The “I See You / I See Myself” Protocol

A Quick Reference for Teachers and Practitioners

The Protocol Is Three Lines

Who speaks	What they say	What it does in the brain
Teacher	<i>“I see you sitting in your chair.”</i>	Names the action in present tense. Encodes the action as observable fact. Lowers anxiety — no question yet, no demand yet.
Teacher asks	<i>“What do you see yourself doing?”</i>	Shifts encoding from passive hearing to active verbal production. The learner must now retrieve, organize, and produce the information.
Student	<i>“I see myself sitting in my chair.”</i>	First-person self-referential encoding. The learner is now the agent of the action, not just the observer. The instruction is held in memory because the learner said it themselves.

Why It Works — The Read-Back Principle

This is not a therapeutic invention or an educational novelty. **It is the standard operating procedure of every high-stakes training environment in the world where performance under cognitive load is non-negotiable.**

Environment	What They Call It	How It Works
Aviation	Mandatory Read-Back	A pilot who does not read back an air traffic control clearance has not legally received it. Read-back is required, not optional.
Surgery	WHO Surgical Safety Checklist	Every team member verbally confirms each critical step before execution. The team lead says it. The team says it back.
Military	Repeat-Back Protocol	A soldier receives an order and repeats it verbatim before acting. Dual purpose: confirms accurate receipt and encodes through active verbal reproduction.
Emergency Services	Echo / Confirmation Technique	Firefighters, hazmat responders, and medical teams: instructor gives command, trainee repeats it, then executes. Used in every high-angle rescue and critical incident protocol.
EMCDC	“I See You / I See Myself”	Teacher names the action. Student repeats it in first person. Student is now the agent of the action, not just the observer. The same read-back principle used by every profession where failure to encode correctly has consequences.

The cognitive stakes for a struggling learner are just as non-negotiable as a surgical checklist.

Using It in the Classroom — Four Contexts

Context	Teacher says	Student says back
During card sorting	“I see you sorting the cards by color.” “What do you see yourself doing?”	“I see myself sorting the by color.”
Following a multi-step direction	“I see you putting the red cube on the 3 and the black cube on the 5.” “What do you see yourself doing?”	“I see myself putting the red card on 3 and the black cube on the 5.”
Academic transition	“I see you opening your reading book to page 12.” “What do you see yourself doing?”	“I see myself opening my reading book to page 12.”
Behavior / routine	“I see you walking to the door and lining up.” “What do you see yourself doing?”	“I see myself walking to the door and lining up.”

What to Watch For

If the student...	It means...	Try...
Cannot repeat it back at all	The instruction exceeded working memory capacity. Too many words, too many steps.	Shorten to one action. “I see you picking up the card.” One object, one verb.
Repeats your words (“I see you” instead of “I see myself”)	Echolalia pattern — reproducing the auditory input without switching the pronoun.	Pause. Point to student. “Now you — I see my...” Let them complete it. Repeat slowly.
Repeats accurately but doesn’t execute	Verbal encoding is happening but the motor planning step is not yet connected.	Immediately after the student says it, begin the action together. “Let’s do it — I see myself...” with movement.
Resists or is silent	High affective filter — anxiety about performing. The demand feels like a test.	Lower the stakes. State it yourself first three times with no expectation of response. Then: “Now say it with me.”
Starts self-initiating the protocol	The learner has internalized the read-back. They are beginning to narrate their own actions without being prompted.	This is the target. Reinforce it. “I noticed you told yourself what to do. That’s exactly right.”

Adapting for Non-Vocal Learner The protocol does not require spoken language. For learners who are non-vocal or minimally verbal, the same read-back principle applies through any available output channel:

Output channel	How the protocol works
AAC device	Teacher names the action. Student selects the symbols that represent “I see myself” + the action on their device.
Pointing / eye gaze	Teacher names the action while pointing to a visual representation. Student points to the matching card or picture. The selection IS the read-back.
Gesture	Teacher names and demonstrates the action. Student mirrors the gesture. Physical imitation encodes through motor memory — the same mechanism as verbal read-back.
Written / drawn response	Teacher names the action. Student writes or draws it. Production through any channel activates self-referential encoding.

*The military uses it. Surgeons use it. Pilots use it. **EMCDC uses it with a seven-year-old learning to draw a circle around a bear — because the cognitive stakes for that child are just as non-negotiable.***