

# Strategies for Teaching Reading

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For more information about and resources from this project, visit [www.decoda.ca/practitioners/youth-literacy](http://www.decoda.ca/practitioners/youth-literacy)

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Balancing Instructional Elements .....	1
Brainstorming .....	3
Clarifying .....	5
Click, Clunk .....	7
Predicting .....	9
Problem-Solving Scenarios.....	11
Question Generating and Answering .....	13
Reciprocal Teaching (RT) – Peer to Peer Teaching .....	15
Role Plays .....	17
Summarizing .....	19
Teaching with PowerPoint or Overheads .....	21
Think-Pair-Share .....	23



# Balancing Instructional Elements

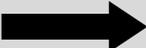
## Description

Most learners can cope with only a few challenges at a time. The chart below outlines key factors to consider when designing a learning activity. Limiting the number of factors that are challenging in any particular lesson allows students to focus on the knowledge and skills that are most critical. It's important to achieve a balance between low and high challenge characteristics in your lessons. Lessons that rely solely on activities with characteristics from the Low Challenge column may be too boring, while those that are in the High Challenge column will frustrate most students.

## Purpose

This structure is designed to help teachers plan instruction so that the information and the activities provided stay within the *Instructional Zone* of what students can handle. That is, students should be engaged in a level that is slightly above their current level of proficiency but should not be overwhelmed by both new information and new tasks.

## The Teaching Learning Continuum

Factor	From Low Challenge		To High Challenge
Context	Familiar		New
Task	Highly Structured		Minimally Defined
Process	Highly Facilitated		Independent
Content/Concepts	Concrete		Abstract
Prompts	Visual		Print-Based
Teacher Explanation	Hands-On Demonstration		Theoretical
Vocabulary	Common/Everyday		Somewhat Sophisticated
Sentence Structure	Simple		Complex

## What to Do

Use the chart below to plan or analyze a lesson to see where it fits on the teaching/learning continuum.

### Teaching/Learning Continuum Planning Analysis

Consider all elements of your lesson (see left hand column). Describe each element and rate it from low challenge (1) to high challenge (5). Make sure you have a balance of challenging and not so challenging activities and provide *Scaffolding* for tasks and activities that are important but may be difficult for students. If you have a multi-level class, you may need to increase the challenge level for a more proficient group and reduce it for less proficient learners (in which case you would fill out separate charts for each group).

Factor	Description	Low Challenge	Rate the Challenge Level	High Challenge
Context		Familiar	1 2 3 4 5	New
Task		Highly Structured	1 2 3 4 5	Minimally Defined
Process		Highly Facilitated	1 2 3 4 5	Independent
Content Concepts		Concrete	1 2 3 4 5	Abstract
Prompts		Visual	1 2 3 4 5	Print-Based
Teacher Explanation		Hands-On Demonstration	1 2 3 4 5	Theoretical
Vocabulary		Common Everyday	1 2 3 4 5	Somewhat Sophisticated
Sentence Structure		Simple	1 2 3 4 5	Complex
Total Rating				



Teaching Strategy: Oral Communication

# Brainstorming and Organizing Ideas

## Description

Brainstorming is a process for creating a list of ideas in response to an initial question or idea. Brainstorming emphasizes broad and creative thinking, inviting all participants' points of view in an effort to ensure that all relevant aspects of an issue or question are considered. Example: *If there is a hurricane or another natural disaster, what should everyone do to be safe?* It's usually a good idea to use graphic organizers such as "idea maps" or flow charts so students can see the relationship between various ideas. Brainstorming can be done with the whole class, in pairs or small groups, or individually. It also lends itself to using the Think-Pair-Share strategy.

## Purpose

Brainstorming provides an opportunity for students to generate ideas or solve a problem. In addition, the activity prepares students to use brainstorming as a tool for work and personal planning. It also teaches them to organize the ideas they have generated into logical sequences, into priority lists, or other meaningful units and evaluate which ideas pertain to a topic, problem or a situation, and which ideas are interesting but irrelevant to the topic at hand.

## What to Do

1. Introduce a topic, ask questions and ask students to write their ideas on the board (or give them to one person writing responses on the board), either as part of a list or in the form of a graphic organizer.
2. Keep asking for more ideas and offer some of your own.
3. Guide the brainstorm by scribing ideas as they come, stopping any comments that evaluate ideas, inviting new ideas, and encouraging the group to share their ideas freely. Help generate energy and free-thinking through encouragement.
4. Organize the ideas and make the organization explicit, saying something like *Ah, you said we needed emergency supplies, so let me put "water" and "flashlight" under emergency supplies.*
5. After a few simple brainstorms on topics that students are familiar with, demonstrate how brainstorming works and set some ground rules.
  - All ideas, however simple, creative, or off the wall are welcome.
  - No one will comment on the ideas during the brainstorm.
  - If you wish, offer a one minute "quiet period" before the brainstorm for people to reflect upon or start lists of ideas on their own.

6. Explain what will be done with the brainstormed ideas.
7. Ask for clarification of any ideas that are not clear to you or others.

### **Keep in Mind**

Brainstorming relies on people thinking and sharing freely. Remind them of this as you enter the activity, and reinforce initial ideas and creative ideas to help everyone participate freely and fully.

- Be ready to stop the first effort at judging a suggested idea (as well as subsequent judging types of comments). Remind the group that brainstorming accepts all ideas without criticism or evaluation.
- Especially in groups where some individuals may be more reflective thinkers, give people a minute to start jotting down some thoughts on their own before starting the group brainstorm aloud. This will help those people get started with the whole group.
- Scribing technique: Use two different colored markers, alternating them with each idea. Make your letters 1.5 inches high or more so all can see (and work off of).
- With an active group, use two scribes so the writing doesn't slow down the idea generation.
- In cases where the items on the list should be prioritized, use "sticky dot" voting. Give each participant 1-3 sticky dots and ask them to put a dot next to the items they think is most important or most answer the original question. Identify those items that get the most votes and eliminate those items that have the fewest votes. This is not a mechanistic process. Leave room for discussion if someone feels strongly about an item.



Teaching Strategy

# Clarifying

## Description

Clarifying belongs to a set of reading strategies called *Collaborative Teaching*, but it can also stand on its own. Clarifying is an umbrella term for a set of cognitive strategies that students can use to identify where they have comprehension difficulties and how they can get at the meaning of a word, phrase, sentence or passage. Students are encouraged to identify problem areas and consider specific fix-up or repair strategies when understanding breaks down. Clarifying strategies need to be adjusted for different kinds of texts and need to take into account a variety of reasons for comprehension difficulties (insufficient background knowledge, weak decoding skills, unfamiliar vocabulary, or general problems with gaining meaning from print).

## Purpose

Clarifying strategies teach struggling readers to do what proficient readers do: They stop reading when a text no longer makes sense and implement various repair strategies. Engaging students in identifying unclear concepts, structures, and passages helps students to learn self-monitoring techniques.

Understanding and practicing repair strategies helps students to look for synonyms or other text clues. Rereading can help pick up information that may have been missed. In using various fix-up strategies students realize that the answer to a comprehension problem may be found in their mind (as they think about things more deeply), in the text itself (related words or other text clues), or in an outside source (another text, an expert, or a dictionary).

## What to Do

1. To introduce the point of the strategy, create a short text that contains nonsense words that need to be clarified and that eventually can be understood if fix-up strategies are used. Example: When presenting an oral text, you can mumble (say "mumble, mumble") at various points, encouraging students to stop you when they don't understand by raising their hand or holding up a red "STOP, I don't get it" card. If presenting a written text, you can start with a simple sentence like, "The fire fighters rushed to the blazing fire and when they got there, they pulled out the heavy houses." Ask students if the sentences make sense and if not why not. Invite them to use a fix up strategy, such as using their background knowledge about what equipment firefighters use and their knowledge of English spelling.
2. Select a text that contains several words or structures the students are not likely to know. Use the Think-Aloud strategy to illustrate clarifying and repairing comprehension difficulties.
3. Use a new passage to engage students in guided practice. Teach the Click - Clunk Strategy (students say click when they understand a word or passage, and clunk when the meaning is not clear). Consider sentences like *I was astounded by his nerve. How could he ask to borrow \$200 dollars when he had not repaired the money I had loaned him the previous month. The traffic was just awful.*

Help students to realize that sometimes errors occur in a text, and sometimes they are due to carelessness (like skipping a page). The point is for students to stop when the text no longer makes sense and think. Help students understand that sometimes lack of comprehension is because the writer is careless and sometimes because the reader does not pay close enough attention (such as skipping a page before reading the third sentences above).

4. Break students into small groups or pairs. Designate a team leader in each group who uses the Think-Aloud strategy to identify unknown words or unclear sentences or passages. The team leader works with the group to see if these difficulties can be addressed and meaning can be clarified. They then report to the rest of the class.
5. As you introduce new readings, show students how to annotate texts to indicate where they have difficulties (with markers or post-its) and highlight various fix-up strategies they should try, matching them to the nature of the difficulties. Periodically review the strategies.

### **Keep in Mind**

Allow students to signal understanding or lack of understanding both verbally and non-verbally and focus on both listening comprehension and reading comprehension. Encourage students to use signal cards to let you know when you are speaking too fast or when they lose track of what's being said on an audio-tape or video so that they see that they can use similar strategies with written texts as with oral texts

Explain that when something needs to be clarified when someone speaks, we often use non-verbal communication to signal lack of understanding (e.g. leaning forward or frowning). And when a video stops making sense, we often hit the pause and replay button to see if we may have missed something. Sometimes we ask other people for help.

Explain to students that similar strategies can be used in reading: stopping to think when something doesn't make sense, identifying the unclear concepts or words and mentally rewinding and paying close attention are ways of catching on and not losing the thread of a story.



Teaching Strategy

# Click, Clunk

## Description

Click, Clunk is a teaching/learning strategy that students use to signal comprehension difficulties to themselves and the teacher. Students simply read silently and then say “click” for each word they understand (and again for each sentence or passage) and “clunk” whenever they encounter a word, phrase, sentence or passage that they don’t fully understand.

## Purpose

Research indicates that self-monitoring of comprehension and becoming aware of what it takes to make meaning can help students who have difficulty reading. Click, Clunk is a self-monitoring strategy that helps students pinpoint where comprehension breaks down so they can go back and try to “fix up” their lack of understanding. Used in a class with a group of students who quietly go click or clunk, the strategy signals teachers where students are getting stuck. Students can use the strategy on their own as well as they read silently – all they need to do is to mentally realize they have just run into a clunk. The strategy encourages students to think as they read. Combined with “fix up” strategies (rereading, using text aides such as graphics or pictures, drawing on your knowledge of the world or guessing meaning from context) gives them another tool to increase their reading comprehension.

## What to Do

Select a reading passage that students need to understand and are likely to find a bit challenging. Use this passage with the class after you have modeled the strategy with a number of sentences that help students understand how to use the strategy.

1. On the board, write a couple of sentences that contain foreign words or nonsense words so that no one has an advantage (Last night I had *Kohlrouladen* for dinner and they were scrumptious.). For more proficient classes, write a short passage that has several words that none of the students are likely to know (Example: “Everyone has a cell phone these days. They are ubiquitous. Their use in movie theatres and restaurants is disconcerting.”).
2. Do a quick think-aloud, saying something like “Mhmm, Let me read this. There are several words here I don’t recognize. Let me try a new strategy, called Click, Clunk.”
3. Go through the sentence, saying “click” at the familiar words, and “clunk” at the unfamiliar words. Later on, use the strategy with sentences and paragraphs as well. Write a sentence containing a nonsense word on the board and have students try the strategy as a group. (Example: *Street racing is lawunful and very dangerous.*) Tell students that “clunks” are important signals that tell them that a word or a sentence doesn’t make sense to them. “Clunks” tell us when we should reread a sentence and what we should pay attention to.

4. To demonstrate passage clunks, write a text on the board that contains words that students know but that don't make sense in the context of the passage (Example: *The firemen rushed to the scene in their tricycles. At the scene of the fire, they pulled out the big houses from the truck and painted the house in the direction of the fire.* Ask students to try the strategy, explaining what to do one more time, if necessary. Move your finger under the words and ask students to say "click" or "clunk" after each word. Then stop after each sentence and ask "Is this sentence a "click" or a "clunk"?" Ask students to identify why some sentences are clunks (they don't make sense) and highlight that sometimes we may know all the words in a text, and we still can't make sense out of what we read. Sometimes the difficulty is due to lack of clarity on the part of the writer and other times it is lack of knowledge on the part of the reader.
5. Highlight the point of the strategy: Click, Clunk allows us to identify where we are having difficulties and it allows us to pinpoint what we don't understand. It is a signal to reread and think about a sentence or a text a bit more to try to figure out what the writer may have meant. The strategy also serves as a signal to identify difficult words and to highlight them so they can be looked up and studied.
6. After a break of a day or two, return to the strategy, using a somewhat difficult text that is related to what students are working on. Ask students to read silently, but verbalize the click, click, clunks to themselves and mark the clunks with a pencil. Walk around and observe students as they mark their pages but don't intervene. Ask students to work in pairs to compare their clunks and see if they can help each other. Encourage more proficient readers to help low level readers by highlighting the fix-up strategies they know about – not just simply to explain an unknown word or clarify a passage.
7. Bring back the entire class and debrief the "clunks". Include words, sentences, and passages. Ask students to re-read sentences with clunks to see if meaning can be clarified. If you have covered "comprehension fix up" strategies, repeat and reinforce them at this point. If not, start introducing them so you can turn "clunks" into "clicks".

Continue using the strategy anytime students indicate that a text is too difficult.

### **Keep in Mind**

It takes students a while to feel comfortable with a new strategy, so stick with it. Identifying what you can and cannot understand is a key skill in reading comprehension so it's worth the effort to help students self-monitor.

You can also try this strategy for *listening comprehension*. Simply create (or have students create "Signal Cards" that say **Click** or **Clunk**. Present information orally to your class (using the same approach as above) and ask students to hold up the cards to indicate they understand or don't understand what you say. Pause after each sentence as a cue for them to signal and purposefully speak fast or use new words to "force" the use of the cards.

To simplify things, you can also use red or green coloured paper, with red indicating clunk or *I don't have a clue as to what that means* and green signaling *I understand, no problem*.



Teaching Strategy

# Predicting

## Description

Predicting belongs to a set of strategies called *Reciprocal Teaching* or *Collaborative Teaching*. Predicting asks students to take in information (a headline or title, a picture, a summary, or a chart) and make an informed guess as to the ideas or concepts that might appear in a text. After making a prediction, students read or listen to a text and either confirm or revise their predictions.

## Purpose

The predicting strategy activates students' background knowledge and starts engagement with key concepts. It activates background knowledge and shows students that they are smart enough to figure things out even if they have trouble with with reading. Students learn to make connections between their own prior knowledge and the ideas in a text. It's helpful for students to see that sometimes their predictions are off and they have to stop and think and possibly revise their predictions. Predicting and revising also assist students in thinking while they listen or read, as they pay attention to see if they were right in their predictions. Having students revise their prediction supports "rereading", an important component of comprehension, especially for struggling readers.

## What to Do

1. Introduce the strategy and discuss why it is important. Explain to students that thinking about texts (visual, oral, written) engages the brain and helps greatly in understanding. Stress that students will comprehend more and remember more if they think while they watch, listen or read.
2. Explain to students that daily life is not possible without constant predictions (e.g., you may ask *How do you find things you always buy in a new store? You use your background knowledge. You predict that the milk and the butter will be close to each other or that the eggs will be in the refrigerated section.* This may not be true in other countries where eggs may not be refrigerated and can be sometimes be found next to the flour on a shelf. Use examples like this to lead students toward the need to revise their predictions and start thinking anew.
3. To illustrate how the mind makes predictions and then confirms or revises them, use an activity such as "*Thingamagigs*" to let students experience how their mind tries to make sense out of information that is presented bit by bit.
4. Select a text students might read in class. Choose a reading with titles, pictures, and graphs that make predictions and informed guessing worthwhile. Ask the class to generate ideas that they think they might find in the text using their background knowledge and other clues. Encourage thoughtful predictions (*Amazing Stories* or stories about accidents or natural disasters seem to work well.)

5. Create a few True/False statements to build suspense and ask students to make informed guesses as to which statements about the passage or story are right or wrong (informational texts work best). Include the main points of the text as well as details. Ask students to discuss their predictions in pairs or small groups. Explain that the answers will be found in the text (oral or written), but for now, you just want to see how good the class is at using their prior knowledge of the world to guess the right answer. Keep track on a flip chart.
6. Read the text with the class or ask students to read the text and then ask them to work individually or in small pairs. Ask them to highlight all the words and ideas they predicted and underline all the true statements that they had guessed right. Congratulate them when they are right.
7. Explain that sometimes we predict right and sometimes our guesses are wrong because everyone's brain works differently, and sometimes we don't have enough information to make thoughtful predications.
8. Ask students to circle the statements that are contrary to their guesses and discuss why there is a mismatch between what they expected to find and the content of the text. Bring the class together and reflect on the strategy (use and importance). Continue using the strategy with different kinds of text.



Teaching Strategy

## Problem-Solving Scenarios

### Description

Students work in small groups to analyze a problem and discuss possible solutions. Students may work from written scenarios, situation cards or cues, or they may create their own situations. Scenarios used in the classroom often use a problem related to a “hot topic”.

### Purpose

Scenarios are an excellent way to build problem solving skills and enhance literacy and communication skills. As students read a scenario, they are engaged in texts that require thinking. Students learn to use their thinking skills to analyze the situation, identify the problem, brainstorm ideas, and consider the consequences for each idea. Scenarios allow teachers to gain insights into what students are thinking about and how they interpret particular situations.

### What to Do

Select several scenarios, create your own, or work with the students to describe a hot situation in which they have found themselves. Choose one scenario to discuss with the entire group, modeling the steps you want students to take as they discuss the scenario in a group or in pairs.

Students or the teacher:

1. Read the scenario and clarify key vocabulary.
2. Identify the problem and clearly state it or write it down.
3. Brainstorm possible solutions (without getting bogged down in what may or may not work).
4. Select reasonable solutions worth discussing and lay out the consequences for each.
5. Decide as a group on one solution that might work, and, if appropriate, also identify minority opinions if the group cannot agree.
6. Report the solution along with a rationale to the rest of the group.

The teacher then debriefs with the students, summarizing the problem, and highlighting the solutions that were offered along with the reasons behind each solution. The teacher links the discussion back to similar topics that have been studied and discussed in class and makes connections to students' lives.

### Keep in Mind:

- Make sure students are comfortable working in small groups or in pairs so that the activity doesn't not fall flat.

- Select situations that are likely to engage your students. For beginners, use problems that you have heard them discuss or that are part of their every day life. For more advanced students, connect the scenario to a topic that students have read about or that has been in the news.
- Introduce the scenario orally to make sure students are with you. Clarify vocabulary and allow students to work in pairs or small groups with the content of the scenario to ensure comprehension (e.g., question generating and answering; filling out an Event Map; T/F questions etc).
- Make sure scenarios allow for a variety of opinions even if discussions might get contentious.
- Walk around to keep students on track and clarify the problem (some students get off track quite easily).
- Avoid identifying one right solution since the point of the lesson is to help students think things through on their own. Discourage silly answers and highlight what consequences might be when questionable solutions are suggested.
- If there is an important point you want students to take away from the discussion highlight that point at the end of the lesson. Restate the points that students have made that are worth thinking about and remembering.



Teaching Strategy

## Question Generating and Answering

### Description

Question generating and answering is often taught as part of *Reciprocal Teaching*, a powerful set of techniques that also includes peer-to-peer strategies for summarizing, predicting, and clarifying. Students are invited to generate questions about a text (oral or written) and work with others to find the answers in the text. Students can work in pairs or in teams, with individual students leading the team and asking questions while the rest of the group finds and discusses the answers.

Question formation can be difficult for students who have not been actively engaged in learning for some time. The structure of questions may need to be pre-taught and may require practice before they can form questions easily and clearly focus on the content of the text. Informational texts work well, but for low level readers, personal narratives can be used. Some teachers use question generating to help students focus on literature concepts (character, plot, sequence, conflict, etc.).

### Purpose

Question generating (or asking) encourages students to engage the text and pay attention to key content information. It is part of a set of strategies found to be effective in increasing comprehension of texts. Asking and answering questions with a partner or as part of a group engages all students, and students get significantly more time on task and opportunities to grapple with the text. Shyer students are more likely to participate since their answers (and possible mistakes) are not made public. Using team leaders as “experts” who ask comprehension questions for others to answer provides more proficient students with a challenge and offers examples of “cognitive apprenticeship” to others as they listen to their peers formulate questions.

### What to Do

1. To introduce Question Generating and Answering, use a text that is slightly above the skill level of the students and contains interesting information.
2. Let students know that question asking and answering is a great way to help them understand and remember what they are reading.
3. Model the strategy first with the entire class asking questions about both literal content and information to be inferred. Use the *Think Aloud* technique to allow students to see how you select a question to be asked. Be sure to include both “yes/no” and open-ended questions. For example, when reading “The 7 Habits of Successful Readers”, you could begin with a warm-up question such as “Yes or No: The article discusses the habits of struggling readers.” or “How many habits are discussed in the article?” and move on to “What are 3 things that successful readers do?” Ask the class to answer either orally or in writing. Provide feedback.

4. Select another section of the text and ask a question (e.g., What do successful readers do before they start to read?). After students answer, invite a student to ask a question using the same or the next section of the text. Help the student formulate the question if necessary by gently rephrasing. Invite the class to answer. Emphasize that this is a comprehension activity and questions have to be such that the answers can be found in the text.
5. Introduce the text to be read. Break the class into pairs or teams and designate a student to ask questions for others to answer.
6. Debrief by asking selected teams to report out. Reemphasize both the structure and purpose of the activity and discuss with students the benefit of learning with this strategy.



Teaching Strategy

## Reciprocal Teaching (RT) – Peer to Peer Teaching

### Description

Reciprocal Teaching consists of a set of strategies that are first introduced and modeled by the teacher and then used by students in pairs or in small groups. The skills are (1) summarizing or retelling, (2) predicting, (3) clarifying, and (4) asking and answering questions (see other strategies for more detail about individual strategies). Strategies can be taught in any order but are most powerful if taught in combination. During the initial phase of instruction, the teacher assumes the primary responsibility for teaching and demonstrating the strategies. Students slowly take over and practice these strategies with each other until they can work independently in their groups. The strategy is best used with “informational” non-fiction texts but can be adapted for narratives.

### Purpose

Reciprocal teaching consists of a set of strategies that are used to increase comprehension, promote collaboration, and foster meta-cognitive skills. Teachers and students take turns interacting with the text and leading various activities. The technique not only supports improved listening skills and greater understanding of written texts, but also helps students monitor their own learning and thinking. Low level readers can greatly benefit from the opportunities to practice communication skills in a supportive setting (pairs or small groups) where they can interact with authentic or adapted materials and practice their communication skills while completing a meaningful task.

### What to Do

1. Prepare students to use *Reciprocal Teaching* strategies by explaining that you will teach them how to improve their comprehension skills (listening and reading).
2. Introduce the *Retell* or *Summarize* strategy by reviewing a text (oral or written) that students are familiar with. That way, students can focus on the strategy without getting frustrated by too difficult content or new vocabulary.
3. Start by using the *Think Aloud* strategy as you model how you would retell or summarize the section. Say something like, “OK, this text is about Multiple Intelligences; let me see if I remember all the important points. I remember that there is not just one type of intelligence but there are many and that people are smart in different ways. So that can be my first sentence of my summary. ‘There are many ways of being smart.’ So now I need to explain what I mean by that.”
4. Demonstrate the *Clarification Strategy* and continue to use the *Think Aloud* process. Say something like, “I don’t remember the difference between ‘interpersonal’ and ‘intrapersonal,’ so let me write this down as a question so I can double-check and clarify this point.” Then write down

the clarification question, “What is the difference between ...?” Use the same procedure to identify a part of a sentence or passage that might be confusing.

5. As the week progresses, introduce the other RT strategies by modeling them. Select texts that easily let you demonstrate a particular strategy (e.g., texts that have multiple headings, pictures, or graphs that allow students to practice “predicting”).
6. Set up pairs or teams and clarify roles. Ask a team leader to model use of the strategy or lead the task while other students respond. Circle the room and observe but don’t intervene unless invited to do so.
7. Ask students to report back on their discussion and highlight interesting ideas from the group.

### **Keep in Mind**

It may take students a while to become comfortable as peer teachers but it is a set of strategies worth sticking with because of its many benefits. Highlight how much communication skills practice students are getting when they work in small groups or pairs where everyone is involved.

Focus on one strategy at a time, model it, and give students content materials that are easy to understand for the most part. (The exception is practicing *clarifying* where the focus needs to be on sorting out unfamiliar information or understanding new vocabulary).



Teaching Strategy

## Role Plays

### Description

Students work in pairs or small groups to act out a situation. Each student has a role. Students may work from cards or cues, or they may create their own situations. Role plays may be used in conjunction with other strategies and activities such as *Working with Scenarios* and *Reader's Theatre*. Role plays can be simple (*You lost your wallet on the bus and need to talk to Lost and Found.*) or complex (*You are a supervisor and need to tell an employee who is always late that she needs to shape up. She has sick kids at home and needs the money.*)

### Purpose

The purpose of a role play is to give students an opportunity to work with others to act out a situation and explore how others may think, feel or respond in a situation. Role plays are meant to build communication skills as well as problem solving skills. They help students think on their toes because they need to listen carefully and respond to what they hear. They can't simply recite a memorized dialog. By putting themselves in real situations, students learn to think about what they might say and gain practice expressing thoughts and ideas in response to others. Role plays can be created from current events, short stories, novels, and screenplays to help students understand dramatic structure in texts. They also are useful in having students act out sticky or stressful situations that are part of their daily lives (your boss wants you to work late but you have a test the next day; some girls in your class are telling lies about you on My Space).

### What to Do

1. Prepare students by presenting a situation or a problem and discussing the people involved. Highlight the different perspectives that each person might bring to the situation.
2. Select a situation and brainstorm what each person might think and feel. Use dramatization, chalk talk, or puppets to illustrate how an interaction might flow or role play the situation with one of the more mature students.
3. Use retelling or an event map to make sure that all students are clear on the situation or the problem and the various actors involved.
4. Delineate roles and discuss what each person is trying to accomplish in this situation. Assign roles and make sure students are clear on their "motivation" as actors in the role play.
5. Depending on the size of the role play, have students work in teams or in pairs and give them their own space to practice. Encourage them to be articulate, convincing and dramatic.
6. Circulate and observe but do not intervene. Then ask a few of the students to demonstrate their role plays.

## **Keep in Mind**

Allow your role plays to emerge from themes or topics the students find engaging or show interest in. (applying for a job, reenacting an historic event, dealing with a tricky social situation with friends, an interaction with police).

Have students generate possible language they might use in a situation and demonstrate how differences in tone can signal differences in attitude (*Excuuuuuse me*) and serve to irritate or antagonize others.

Consider using Role Play Cards to assign roles to students. Spell out what each actor is trying to accomplish as part of the role (*You are a landlord and your young tenant has not paid rent in two months, and besides you think he smokes dope in his apartment and you don't like it. Tell the person he has to move by the end of the month*).



Teaching Strategy

# Summarizing

## Description

Summarizing is part of a set of strategies called *Reciprocal Teaching* that involves peer interactions. Reciprocal teaching also includes predicting, question generating, and clarifying. Summarizing is a challenging task for most struggling readers, and is often preceded by practice in retelling and note taking. Summarizing requires that students first get the gist of a reading and then distill key points in the reading. Summarizing requires that students develop a shorter version of a longer piece that includes both the main points and essential details.

Most struggling readers have difficulty with summaries, since they may not have the literacy skills required to distill and restate ideas. To start, they may need a chance to practice paraphrasing and retelling a short text in their own words. Even at low-literacy levels, students should get the idea that just copying sentences is not an acceptable way to retell or summarize.

## Purpose

Summarizing builds comprehension skills in reading and listening by focusing students' attention on essential points. It is often used in academic work, both as a way to engage students in texts and to capture their understanding of key ideas. Although mostly used in writing, it also serves students well in team interaction in school and at work as they present the main points of a discussion to others or report an event or incident.

## What to Do

1. Introduce the importance of being able to summarize by using examples from students' lives, from work, newspapers, and from academic subjects. Show students models of summaries for films or books. Show headlines from newspapers that are a one-line summary of the story. To further build familiarity with the concept, start by summarizing an event or incident that students know about. Explain that you could go on and on retelling every detail of the event but that your audience might get impatient. Highlight that a summary saves time for listeners and readers.
2. To focus students' attention to the point of the strategy, select a text that contains familiar content, possibly a news story or a previously discussed reading. Present the information orally to make it easier for students to paraphrase and not copy.
3. Model your own summary of the text you just presented by doing a Think-Aloud. Use guiding questions (who, what, when, where, why, and how) to present key points on the board. Include a title, and a strong first sentence in your summary. Invite students to help you with this task.
4. Select a new high interest text. Ask students to read the text with you or have them listen as you present the text orally. Ask students to take notes or highlight key ideas in the text.

5. Pair up students and ask them to discuss what they've heard using their notes. Then invite them to represent the information in visual form using a graphic organizer, such as an Event Map or a Flow Chart. Circle the room and guide students if they ask for help, but don't interfere otherwise.
6. Bring the class together and work with the class as a whole to create an oral summary, guiding the group by saying something like, *What do we want to say about this topic (e.g., a short biography of Leonardo de Vinci)? What's an important point that we want to make? (e.g., Leonardo was a genius) We should probably explain that point a bit. What is our evidence that he was a genius (e.g., He was the best in his field in science, art, and inventions). What question might people have about this statement (e.g., how do you know, what are examples of what he did?)*
7. Ask students to work individually and create a summary, rephrasing the first sentence (e.g., *Leonardo may have been the smartest person ever*) and using different examples .
8. Continue the summarizing process with different kinds of texts (descriptive, sequencing, cause and effect, narratives). Keep breaking the process down into structures the students can work with and keep pushing students to focus on key information, not trivial details. Use graphic organizers to help them see relationships between details and global ideas.

### **Keep in Mind**

Summarizing is a task that is cognitively challenging. It may be best to start having students retell a multi-step event and practice telling it in its long form and then in its short form.

Students will need practice summarizing what they hear as well as summarizing what they read. News stories that grab students might be a good way to build listening skills that then get reinforced when they read about the same event and are asked to present the gist of the story. They could create a headline, for example.

Use video clips from TV or the internet that have students talking and use those as prompts for retelling and summarizing. Invite students to send an e-mail to a friend summarizing a YouTube video that they think is worth watching.



## Teaching Strategy

# Teaching with PowerPoint or Overheads

### Description

The teacher creates a presentation or a mini-lesson that focuses on either content knowledge (e.g., electricity, multiple intelligences), a theme designed to build vocabulary, a reading strategy. Slides containing visual information are created and supplemented with slides that contain visual information plus text and eventually just text alone. This process is an effective way of teaching content and also an ideal medium for introducing strategies as words can be highlighted and sentences deleted or added to make a point.

The slides are used to set the context, focus students' attention and pace the class. Students are encouraged to work individually or in teams to create their own PowerPoint presentations to teach others. PowerPoint lessons allow teachers to create and store images and text permanently, allowing for easy retrieval, modification, and update. (If computers and digital projectors are not available, projection transparencies can be created from drawings or collages.)

Compelling images help create a picture in students' minds. They connect visual information with text and activate prior knowledge. Images enrich background knowledge in ways that are not dependent on print. Students are asked to respond to visuals with a series of question prompts, memory pegs, or the use of diagrams to show relationships between ideas.

### Purpose

Low literate students have difficulty understanding information provided primarily in print and they have difficulty taking notes from a lecture. PowerPoint presentations, however, allow students to access information or concepts without getting mired in print. Images and graphs represent ideas that the teacher can make accessible to students through interactive discussions or a mini-lesson. Images allow struggling readers to access information without having to read text and help to both activate and enrich background knowledge. When images are connected to concepts or to text, they act as "memory pegs," and become anchored in the brain.

### What to Do

1. Show a PowerPoint (or overhead projection) presentation using only visual information. Keep your slides simple and related to one another.
2. Describe the ideas represented by each slide, reinforcing key concepts and introducing new vocabulary as needed.
3. Repeat images on subsequent slides to reinforce key vocabulary on subsequent slides.
4. Ask the students to respond to key words and concepts on the slides from time to time and keep the presentation interactive.

5. After working with students using only pictures and oral input, show the same or similar slides but this time include written text or use text only.

### **Keep in Mind**

As you go through the presentation, ask questions periodically to check for comprehension.

Create your slides in such a way that the first run through consists of students hearing the information presented and ideas reinforced by visuals. On the second and third presentation, written text is introduced and visual information serves merely as a prompt to help students remember the key ideas.

You can use text only slides to engage students in various forms of interactive reading (echo reading, shared reading).

Consider printing out the PowerPoint slides as hand-outs so that students can make notes or highlight key ideas as they review the materials after the initial presentation.

If you don't have PowerPoint capabilities in your classroom, use overheads and a projector to similar effects.

Involve students in various forms of retelling (putting prints of PP slides in order; using Event Maps to talk about *Who, what where and why* or *Story Boards* to show sequencing).

Ask students to create their own presentations using either PowerPoints or Posters with graphics and pictures to provide information. Encourage team and pair work and offer opportunities for students to present their projects to a wider audience (other classes, program staff; the wider community).



Teaching Strategy

## Think-Pair-Share

### Description

*Think-Pair-Share* is designed to have students think about a topic, then pair with another student and share their thoughts. It allows students time to formulate their thoughts and involves all students, not just the few who volunteer or whom the teacher calls on. *Think-Pair-Share* works well in all classes and can be adapted for all levels. It can easily be implemented in large classes.

### Purpose

*Think-Pair-Share* allows students to think about a response before sharing their ideas with another student or the class. Students are often more willing to share an idea with a partner than speaking up in class. This strategy allows them to try out their ideas in, one hopes, a supportive dialog with a partner. Thinking and talking about an idea also helps students to formulate sentences in their minds and sharpens their ideas as they listen to others. If students are asked to report out to the whole class, more confident students get a chance to volunteer the answer for their pair, while less confident students hear their ideas presented by a team member. Think-Pair-Share is an excellent way to build workplace communication skills, since even low skilled employees are often expected to work in teams.

### What to Do

1. Think about how you want to pair up students, either informally, or by pre-assigning pairs within or across proficiency levels. You can also organize the class by numbering students 1 to 4 and asking 1s and 2s and 3s and 4s to work together as teams.
2. Introduce your prompt – a question, a picture, a situation, a problem, a reading, or a PowerPoint - that you present orally and ask students to respond. Be sure to ask questions that require some thinking and where students are likely to diverge in their answers. You can also make statements and ask students to think about whether a statement is True or False and give a reason.
3. Ask students to work individually first for a minute or so. Encourage them to think about the answer. Students may write down their answer, but shouldn't always be required to do so.
4. Announce partners and ask students to pair up and share their ideas. If they have written lists, they should combine their lists (leaving out redundant ideas. If they are to give an opinion, they should compare and discuss their opinions. Remind students of the social language that makes interactions work more smoothly.
5. Finally, call on pairs to share their ideas with the entire class. To help ensure that students listen, ask other students to repeat what's been said and ask if they agree or disagree or would like to add some of their ideas.

6. There is no need to have every group talk (in fact, that slows down the class). But come back to hear other people's ideas as you review the lesson.