

How to Teach Learning Strategies to English Language Learners



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*English language learning (ELL) students face many challenges to academic achievement. Not only must they learn academic English, but they must also learn content subject matter and skills. In addition, ELL students are now expected to meet many of the same national and state standards and assessments as native English speakers. **Shining Star** provides challenging content-based language development and learning strategies that help students achieve these goals.*

About the Author

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Why teach learning strategies?

One way to accelerate the academic language learning of ELL students is to teach them how to learn more effectively and efficiently. Learning strategies are techniques for understanding, remembering, and using information and skills. Learning strategies are particularly important for ELL students as they seek to master both language and academic content simultaneously, as they do in *Shining Star*.

Strategy instruction, incorporated throughout *Shining Star*, can help students by:

- showing them techniques for “how to learn”
- developing their independence and confidence as learners
- increasing their academic motivation as they become more successful in school
- developing their awareness of their own thinking and learning processes

When students develop metacognition, the awareness of the learning processes and strategies that lead to success, they are more likely to plan how to proceed with a learning task, monitor their own performance on an ongoing basis, find solutions to problems encountered, and evaluate themselves upon task completion.

Shining Star incorporates learning strategies into student activities. The chart on the next page identifies the strategies taught and provides brief definitions. Strategies with an asterisk are presented explicitly in the student textbook in strategy boxes for reading and writing. The strategies without asterisks are presented implicitly in a wide range of language development activities.

Learning Strategies for ELL Students

STRATEGY NAMES	DESCRIPTION AND EXAMPLES
Organizational Planning	Setting a learning goal; planning how to carry out a project, write a story, or solve a problem
*Predicting	Using parts of a text (such as illustrations, titles, headings, organization) or a real life situation and your own background knowledge to anticipate what is likely to occur next
Self-management	Seeking or arranging the conditions that help you learn
*Using Your Knowledge and Experience	Using your knowledge and experience to understand and learn something new, brainstorming relevant words and ideas, making associations and analogies; writing or telling what you know
*Monitoring Comprehension	Being aware of how well a task is going, how well you understand a topic while listening or reading, or how well you are expressing your ideas when writing or speaking
*Skimming for Main Ideas	Focusing on specific aspects of a task, such as identifying key words or ideas or scanning a text for particular information
Using/Making Rules	Applying a rule (phonics, decoding, grammar, linguistic, mathematical, scientific, and so on) to understand a text or complete a task; figuring out rules or patterns from examples
*Taking Notes	Writing down key information in verbal, graphic, or numerical form, often as concept maps, word webs, timelines, or other types of graphic organizers
*Visualizing	Creating mental pictures and using them to understand and appreciate descriptive writing
Cooperation	Working with classmates to complete a task or project, demonstrate a process or product, share knowledge, solve problems, give and receive feedback, and develop social skills
*Making Inferences	Using the context of an oral or written text and your own knowledge to guess meanings of unfamiliar words or ideas
Substitution	Using a synonym, paraphrase, or circumlocution when you want to express an idea and do not know the exact word(s) you need
*Using Resources	Using reference materials (books, dictionaries, encyclopedias, videos, performances, computer programs and databases, the Internet) to find information or complete a task
Classification	Grouping words, concepts, physical objects, numbers, or quantities according to their attributes; constructing graphic organizers to show classifications
*Asking Questions	Negotiating meaning by asking for clarification, explanation, confirmation, rephrasing, or examples
*Summarizing	Making a mental, oral, or written summary of something you listened to or read; retelling a story or other text in your own words
*Self-evaluation	After completing a task, judging how well you did, whether you reached your goal, and how effective your learning strategies or problem-solving procedures were

How can learning strategies be taught?

Since learning strategies are mental processes with few observable manifestations, teachers often cannot tell whether a student is learning how to use them. Strategies such as applying one's prior knowledge or making inferences during reading cannot be observed at all, and students may encounter some difficulty in understanding and using them. *Shining Star* offers these suggestions to help teachers make strategies instruction more tangible:

- Model the strategy by “thinking aloud” as you perform a task similar to the one students will perform.
- Use the strategy names and refer to them consistently by name.
- Tell students why the strategy is important and how it can help them.
- List strategies with brief definitions on a poster or write individual strategies on laminated cards that can be posted on a bulletin board. Refer to the posted strategies when they are taught and practiced.
- Remind students to use strategies as they read, brainstorm, write, focus on grammar, learn vocabulary, and work on projects.
- Provide opportunities for students to discuss strategies—how they use them, additional strategies they use, and which strategies they prefer.

The instructional sequence developed for the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) has provided a useful framework for teaching language learning strategies and for the development of *Shining Star*.

The sequence provides a five-phase recursive cycle for introducing, teaching, practicing, evaluating, and applying learning strategies. In this approach, highly explicit instruction in applying strategies to learning tasks is gradually faded so that students can begin to assume greater responsibility in selecting and applying appropriate learning strategies. The cycle repeats as new strategies or new applications are added to students' strategic repertoires. The five phases of the CALLA instructional sequence are as follows:

● **Preparation (Preteach in *Shining Star*)**

The purpose of this phase is to help students identify the strategies they are already using and to develop their metacognitive awareness of the relationship between their own mental processes and effective

learning. By identifying students' prior knowledge of a topic and evaluating their current use of learning strategies, teachers can diagnose the needs of their students for learning strategies instruction. Activities in the Preparation stage can include class discussions about strategies used for recent learning tasks, group or individual interviews about strategies used for particular tasks, think-aloud sessions in which students describe their thought processes while they work on a task, questionnaires or checklists about strategies used, and diary entries about individual approaches to language learning.

● **Presentation (Teach in *Shining Star*)**

This phase focuses on explaining and modeling the learning strategy or strategies. The teacher conveys information about the characteristics, usefulness, and applications of a particular strategy. Perhaps the most powerful way in which to accomplish this purpose is for the teacher to model his or her own personal use of the strategy. For example, the teacher might think aloud while reading a text displayed on the overhead projector. Strategies the teacher might demonstrate while reading could include making predictions based on the title, using illustrations to recall prior knowledge of the topic, selectively attending to headings and bold-faced text, monitoring comprehension and making decisions about how unfamiliar words, structures, or ideas should be treated, and, finally, evaluating how successful he or she has been in learning from the text. The teacher can ask students to recall the strategies they observed and then further describe the strategies, provide a specific name for each strategy, and explain when the strategy can be used most effectively. This modeling helps students visualize themselves working successfully on a similar task.

● **Practice (Connect in *Shining Star*)**

In this phase, students have the opportunity to practice the learning strategy with an authentic learning task, such as those presented in *Shining Star*. The practice will frequently take place during collaborative work with classmates. For example, a group of students might read a story, then describe the images the story evoked, discuss unfamiliar words encountered and infer meanings through context clues, and take turns summarizing the main points of the story. Strategies

can be practiced with any content or language task and can involve any combination of language modalities. In a content-based ESL program such as *Shining Star*, strategies can be used to understand and remember concepts and skills from curriculum areas such as science, mathematics, social studies, and literature.

- **Self-Evaluation (Assess in *Shining Star*)**

The main purpose of this phase is to provide students with opportunities to evaluate their own success in using learning strategies, thus developing metacognitive awareness of their own learning processes. Activities that develop students' self-evaluation insights include debriefing discussions after strategies practice, learning logs in which students record the results of their learning strategies applications, checklists of strategies used, and open-ended questionnaires in which students can express their opinions about the usefulness of particular strategies.

- **Expansion (Extend in *Shining Star*)**

In this phase students make personal decisions about the strategies that they find most effective, apply these strategies to new contexts in other classes as well as in the ESL class, and devise their own individual combinations and interpretations of learning strategies. By this stage, the goal of learning strategies instruction has been achieved, for students have become independently strategic and are able to reflect on and regulate their own learning. An important feature of the CALLA instructional sequence is that the needs and thoughts of students are central to all instruction. The sequence guides students towards increasing levels of independence, thus fostering attitudes of academic self-efficacy.

Ongoing monitoring of students' use of both instructed and individually developed strategies is essential if teachers are to scaffold their instruction successfully. In scaffolded instruction, teachers begin with explicit instruction and gradually reduce prompts and cues to students. In this way students begin to assume responsibility for and regulation of their own learning. Individual students may need greater or lesser amounts of explicit strategies instruction, depending on the degree to which they have developed strategies independently of instruction. This is why teachers must continually assess their students' ability to use the strategies independently and transfer them to new tasks. When students are able to use instructed

strategies without prompting, they need to explore new strategies, new applications, and new opportunities for self-regulated learning. The quest for self-regulated learning is—as with all aspects of self-knowledge—a life-long endeavor, and even high-achieving adults can continue to develop their repertoire of effective learning strategies.

Suggested Reading

- Chamot, A. U., Barnhardt, S., El-Dinary, P. B. & Robbins, J. (1999). *The learning strategies handbook*. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.
- Chamot, A. U. (1996). *Accelerating achievement with learning strategies*. Glenview, IL: Scott Foresman Addison Wesley.
- Chamot, A. U. & O'Malley, J. M. (1994). *The CALLA handbook: Implementing the cognitive academic language learning approach*. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.
- National Capital Language Resource Center (2002). *The elementary immersion learning strategies resource guide*. Washington, DC: NCLRC.

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ISBN: 0-13-118108-4