

Teaching Students About Planning

How Learning Depends on Planning Ability

The purpose of education is certainly to provide students with knowledge and skills, but researchers have found that children also need to learn how to learn. To achieve that goal, we must teach students to evaluate, apply solutions, self-monitor, and self-correct—in short, to plan their work and use plans to solve all types of problems. When we teach our students to become strategic, self-reliant, reflective, and flexible learners, we are teaching use of a method called *Cognitive Strategy Instruction* (Scheid, 1993), and this is an effective method.

When reading, and especially when obtaining meaning from text, the student must plan an approach to examining the information that is provided. This involves applying strategies to separate the important from the less important part of the text, concentrate on the details, self-monitor, and self-correct as needed. Students who are good at writing organize their goals before beginning and reflect and revise during and following production of the text. When doing math, students who are successful evaluate the problem, choose which method to use to solve it, evaluate the success of that method, change methods if necessary, and check the final answer carefully. This is also sometimes referred to as metacognition, problem solving, strategic behavior, or a self-reliant learning style. When we use cognitive strategy instruction, we are teaching students to think about what they are doing so that they can be more successful.

Importantly, these descriptions of how to learn, and the cognitive strategy instruction approach in general, are descriptions of the behaviors associated with the cognitive processing ability called *Planning* in this book (see the Planning Explained handout, p. 55). In order to help students be more successful, we must teach them to be more planful.

How to Teach Planning

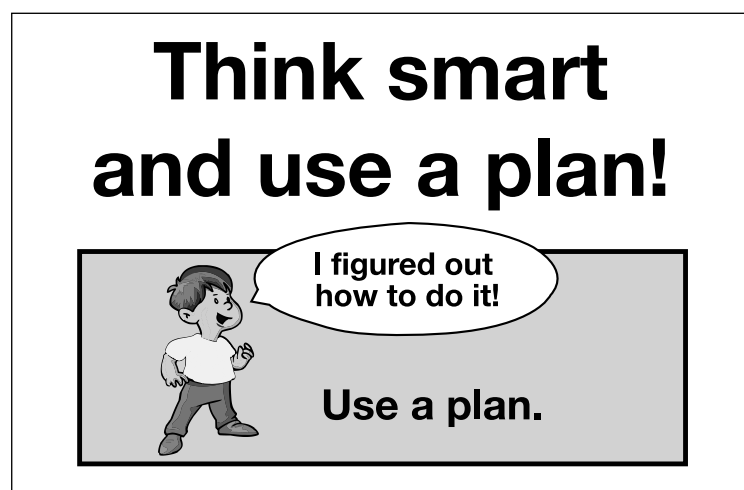


Figure 1. A drawing that helps students remember to use a plan.

The first step in teaching children to become strategic, self-reliant, reflective, and flexible learners is to tell them what a plan is and give them an easy way to remember to use a plan. In Figure 1 (which also appears in the PASS poster on the CD), we provide a fast and simple message: “Think smart and use a plan!” We should provide cognitive strategies in specific academic areas, such as decoding, reading comprehension, vocabulary, spelling, writing, math problem solving, science, and so forth, so that we

Teaching Students About Planning *(continued)*

teach children to approach *all* of their work with a plan (Pressley & Woloshyn, 1995). The parent or teacher should facilitate the use of strategies so that the student learns self-regulated strategy development and use.

Parents and teachers should only provide as much help to the child as needed and avoid teaching the child to rely on the adult for the solution. Because our goal is self-reliance, we have to carefully guide and encourage the child so that he or she can figure out how to solve problems without always depending on the teacher for the answers. Throughout the day, the teacher should

1. Teach children that a plan is a way to do something.
2. Encourage children by asking, “What is your plan?” or “Did you use a plan?”
3. Remind students to think of a strategy. If needed, provide one and explain when and where to use it.
4. Teach a limited number of strategies and encourage students to develop their own.
5. Teach strategy use in all areas of the curriculum.
6. Teach children that using a plan is also important in social situations, especially in sports, on the playground, and when playing many kinds of games.
7. Remind students that using a plan requires thoughtful examination of the problem, not rapid task completion.
8. Teach students to examine each problem carefully and always use a plan.

Resources

Pressley, M.P., & Woloshyn, V. (1995). *Cognitive strategy instruction that really improves children’s academic performance* (2nd ed.). Brookline, MA: Brookline Books.

Scheid, K. (1993). *Helping students become strategic learners*. Brookline, MA: Brookline Books.

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