

Guide to Explicit Strategy Instruction in Reading & Listening Activities

Explicit Strategy Instruction is the practice of clearly explaining and demonstrating to students the ways they learn and complete tasks. It focuses on how to know rather than what is known. This tutor tip contains suggestions for implementing explicit strategy instruction in reading and listening activities. The word text is used here to refer to reading and/or listening materials.

The important first step:

Preview: predict and activate background knowledge

Previewing is like warming up the brain. It gets the learner thinking and helps them to apply their background knowledge to what they read/listen to.

Show the learner the title and any visuals that accompany the text.

Ask questions:

What do you think this reading/listening will be about?

How do you know? Or Why do you think that?

What vocabulary do you think you might see/hear?



©Penguin Readers

If the learner is reading a novel or listening to a series, specific predictions can be made for each chapter/episode. It should be explicitly stated to the learner that this is something they should do ALL the time, it is not only a tutor session or classroom activity.

When the learning activity allows for three reads/listens:

1st Read/Listen:

During: Read or listen to the text from beginning to end. No writing.

After: Discuss predictions, possibly modify predictions. Learner tells what they understand to the tutor or partner.



2nd Read/Listen:

Before: learner reads over any assigned questions.

During: Listen and note key words.

After: Learner tells the tutor or a partner about any further understanding gained from the 2nd reading. Learner can write known answers to the questions. The learner should also make note of specific information they still need to answer the questions.



3rd Read/Listen:

Before: Discuss what specific information the learner is now reading/listening for. See information in the next section on scanning.

During: Learner writes key words to aid memory with answers to the questions.

After: Learner re-tells the information or story to the tutor or partner and completes the questions.



©Microsoft Clip Art

Important Reading/Listening Comprehension Strategies

Ignore Unknown Vocabulary:

As a tutor, coach your learner(s) to skip over unknown vocabulary. This will allow them to stay focused on the meaning of the text rather than getting stuck on individual unknown words that distract them from the text that follows.

Visualize:

As a tutor, coach your learner(s) to make a picture in their head as they read or listen. This keeps the learner focused on meaning rather than vocabulary or grammatical structures.

Use Context to Understand:

When a learner encounters vocabulary or ideas that are unknown to them, context can be used to understand. The first step to explaining this explicitly is to coach the learner(s) to search for hints in the text around the unknown factor. For example, in the sentence “*the hobo stood on the corner asking for money*”, the underlined textual hints combined with the learners’ background knowledge can tell the learner the meaning of ‘hobo’.

Scan: Look/listen for specific information. A tutor can:

1. Explain to the learner(s) what scanning is (looking/listening for key words/information) and what it is not (listening to/reading every word for the information sought).
2. Ask the learner specifically what to look/listen for. For example, if they need the answer to a when question what kinds of words should be scanned for? The answer to a when question could involve words for times, days of the week, months, years, or eras. This gets tricky for more advanced texts that require learners to infer the answer to when? For instance, if a text refers to the use of a horse and buggy the learner may need to infer that when is a long time ago.



Scanning Practice

Phone books, newspapers, and news broadcasts are great materials for practicing scanning. This is an important skill for students as it is often necessary to scan in order to be able to complete tests in the allowed time.

©Microsoft Clip Art

Make Tracks: write key words while reading/listening

Individuals fluent and literate in a language mentally track what is read/heard. Language learners can benefit from a little help with this strategy. As learner(s) read/listen, they write down key words that will help them track the story or information in the text. It is a good idea to use small size post-it notes for this as it deters the learner from trying to write whole ideas rather than key words. After reading/hearing the text, the learner uses only the post-it notes to guide them in re-telling the text. Note that re-telling is saying the same information in one's own words.



©Microsoft Clip Art

Re-tell:

Learners will find that their understanding of a text grows as they tell another person about it or engage in a discussion about the content.

Making Tracks is adapted from the article [Scaffolds to Help ELL Readers](#) written by Barbara Fagan, published in *Voices from the Middle*, Volume 11 Number 1, September 2003 ©The National Council of Teachers of English.