



Learning in the 21st century cannot end at the classroom door.

With the amount of known information growing exponentially, students today must be self-directed learners. As a teacher, you can do some simple but powerful things to guide students to learning independence.

- 1 Share learning goals with students.** Students often ask “Why are we doing this?” Make the answer part of the daily routine. Sharing goals demystifies learning and helps students take ownership. Include the WHAT (the essential content questions or big ideas) and the HOW (the processes students use to help themselves learn). Including these also helps demonstrate that classroom activities have a point. For English language learners, include a language goal to guide their use of processes that will improve their academic language.
- 2 Share the assessment.** Students often fear the final unit test, and stress can impact their ability to learn. Showing students the nature and content of the summative assessment and explaining how the learning activities will prepare them for that assessment goes a long way in reducing stress.
- 3 Always connect new learning to students’ background knowledge.** The more foreign the topic is, the broader that connection needs to be. Eighth graders may not know much about taxation without representation, but they know all about being treated unfairly.
- 4 Provide a purpose.** Without a filter to focus their attention on content, students typically do one of two things: try to record or remember *everything* or give up and do nothing. Providing a purpose helps them reduce the learning to a manageable load.
- 5 Provide processing time.** As a general rule, for every grade level, students can retain information (and stay focused!) for one minute. This means that a seventh grader will stay tuned in for approximately seven minutes. Chunk new information into segments and then provide time for processing through discussion, writing, and other activities so new learning can move from short-term to long-term memory.
- 6 Help students learn to identify common stumbling blocks to learning.** These include difficult vocabulary, lack of concentration, or text that is confusing. Identifying what trips them up is the first step in correcting comprehension problems.
- 7 Teach strategies to address stumbling blocks.** Once students know how to identify what is stumping them, show them how to address the problem they’ve encountered. Struggling students may not think about rereading, asking questions (of themselves, their peers, and the teacher), or using reliable reference materials when they are frustrated by new content.
- 8 Help students find personally meaningful ways to reorganize information.** Graphic organizers, note-taking formats, and other organizational tools are great, but students need to choose which tools work best for them. Transforming information on their own helps students lock new learning into long-term, retrievable memory.
- 9 Give time for students to reflect on their learning.** What strategies and activities helped them learn? What did they do to obstruct or facilitate their own learning? What should they do next time? Examining the learning processes as they learn will help students become the lifelong learners we want them to be.

This issue was written by Debra Franciosi, associate director of Project CRISS (CREating Independence through Student-owned Strategies) in Kalispell, Montana.

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Association in
Education



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408 North Union Street • Bloomington, IN 47405-3800 USA
800-766-1156 • www.pdkintl.org