

Instructional Strategies Quick Reference

A practical printable list of 80+ ideas teachers can keep nearby when a lesson needs another approach.

How to use this: Start with what students need to do next - understand, remember, discuss, practice, apply, explain, create, or demonstrate learning. Then choose a strategy that fits that need. You do not need to use all of these.

This quick reference is adapted from the full **Instructional Strategies List for Teachers** at [InstructionalStrategies.org](https://www.instructionalstrategies.org). The full guide includes fuller explanations, examples, cautions, and related resources.

Assessment and Checking for Understanding

3-2-1	Students identify three things learned, two interests, and one remaining question.
Authentic Assessment	Have students demonstrate learning through meaningful tasks, products, performances, or real-world applications.
Benchmark Assessment	Check progress periodically with a common measure and use it as one piece of evidence.
Checking for Understanding	Look for evidence during the lesson instead of assuming silence means understanding.
Dynamic Assessment	Provide prompts or support and notice what kind of help moves a student forward.
Entrance Tickets	Use a short opening task to review, activate prior knowledge, or expose misconceptions.
Exit Tickets	End with one or two focused questions that reveal what students understood.
Formative Assessment	Gather information during learning so instruction can still be adjusted.
One-Minute Paper	Give students a minute to summarize, connect, or name what remains confusing.
Portfolio Assessment	Collect work over time so students and teachers can see growth and patterns.
Quick Writes	Give students a short burst of writing to organize thinking before discussion or instruction.
Self-Evaluation	Ask students to judge their work against clear criteria and reflect on progress.
Summative Assessment	Evaluate learning after instruction with tests, projects, essays, presentations, or performances.

Active and Experiential Learning

Active Learning	Have students do something intellectually meaningful with content: solve, discuss, predict, explain, create, or apply.
Active Participation	Build frequent opportunities for everyone to respond rather than relying on volunteers.
Brainstorming	Generate many ideas first; evaluate them later.
Experiential Learning	Learn through experience, then deliberately reflect on what the experience showed.
Conducting Experiments	Connect hands-on investigation to prediction, evidence, explanation, and the learning objective.
Four Corners	Students move to a position in the room that represents an answer, then explain or defend it.
Gamification	Use game elements such as challenges, progress, or points when they support the learning goal.
Give One/Get One	Students exchange ideas, facts, examples, or responses with classmates.
Grab Bag	Let students randomly select questions, vocabulary, problems, or prompts from a container.

Hands-On Learning	Students manipulate materials or objects while keeping the physical activity tied to the objective.
Problem-Based Learning	Use a complex problem as the vehicle through which students learn needed content and skills.
Project-Based Learning	Students investigate a meaningful question over time and produce a substantial final product or solution.
Service Learning	Connect academic goals to purposeful service in the community.
Snowball Fight	Students crumple written prompts into paper balls, exchange them, then respond to what they retrieve.
Stop and Go	Pause instruction periodically for thinking, discussion, summarizing, movement, or quick responses.
Think-Pair-Share	Students think independently, discuss with a partner, then share with the larger group.
Think-Pair-Write	Students think, discuss with a partner, and then turn the developed idea into writing.

Thinking and Cognitive Strategies

Advance Organizers	Provide a framework before new information so students know how the pieces will fit together.
Bloom's Taxonomy Activities	Vary tasks across remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.
Chunking	Break difficult information or complex tasks into smaller, manageable steps.
Compare and Contrast	Ask students to identify similarities, differences, and why those relationships matter.
Concept Mapping	Create a visual representation of how ideas and concepts connect.
Convergent Thinking	Use evidence and reasoning to narrow possibilities toward the best answer.
Critical Thinking	Analyze claims, evidence, assumptions, relationships, and conclusions.
Divergent Thinking	Generate multiple possible answers, explanations, designs, or solutions.
Metacognition	Have students reflect on how they thought, learned, struggled, and solved problems.
Questioning Techniques	Use purposeful questions, follow-ups, and wait time to move beyond simple recall.
Schema Building	Connect new learning to relevant prior knowledge while identifying misconceptions.
Socratic Seminar	Use structured, evidence-based discussion around a text, idea, issue, or question.
Visible Thinking Routines	Give students short structures that make their reasoning easier to see and discuss.

Collaborative Learning and Discussion

Collaborative Learning	Students work together toward a shared learning goal that benefits from multiple ideas.
Cooperative Learning	Use structured group roles, responsibilities, and shared goals to support productive teamwork.
Classroom Conversations	Guide purposeful whole-class talk so students build ideas with one another.
Discussion Groups	Give small groups a focused question, text, problem, or issue to discuss.
Group Work	Use groups when the task genuinely benefits from collaboration, not simply for variety.
Jigsaw	Students become experts on one piece of content and teach it to members of a new group.
Peer Discussion	Let students explain ideas and reasoning to one another before or during whole-class discussion.
Peer Teaching	Students teach a concept or skill to classmates after demonstrating adequate understanding.

Language, Reading, and Writing

Acrostics	Use first letters to create a memorable word or phrase.
Book Talks	Students briefly recommend books and explain what makes them worth reading.
Choral Reading	Students read a passage aloud together for supported practice with fluency and phrasing.
Critical Reading	Examine purpose, evidence, assumptions, omissions, and how a text makes its case.
Reciprocal Teaching	Students predict, question, clarify, and summarize while increasingly leading the reading process.
Sentence Starters and Stems	Provide temporary language frames that help students begin academic responses.
Sheltered Instruction	Use visuals, modeling, language supports, and background knowledge to make grade-level content more accessible.
Total Physical Response	Students physically respond to spoken language with movements or actions.
Word Splash	Preview important words, predict relationships among them, then revisit after learning.
Writer's Workshop	Provide structured time for drafting, feedback, revising, editing, and sharing.
Writing Prompts	Use focused, interesting prompts that give students a meaningful place to begin.

Differentiation and Individual Support

Ability Grouping	Use temporary, flexible groups based on current needs or skills rather than permanent labels.
Adapted Assessments	Remove unrelated barriers so an assessment measures the intended learning.
Differentiated Instruction	Adjust support, complexity, pacing, practice, or products based on student need.
Personalized Learning	Provide more individualized pathways, pacing, practice, or goals when appropriate.
Response to Intervention	Identify difficulty early, provide increasingly targeted support, and adjust based on response.
Scaffolding	Give temporary support that enables success, then remove it as students become more independent.
Student Choice	Offer meaningful choices while keeping the learning objective clear.

Classroom Organization and Visual Supports

Activity Centers and Learning Stations	Students rotate among purposeful tasks with clear routines and directions.
Classroom Procedures	Explicitly teach how routine tasks such as materials, transitions, and turning in work should happen.
Classroom Routines	Use predictable patterns to reduce wasted time and unnecessary explanation.
Flexible Seating	Allow appropriate choice in where or how students work when it supports the task.
Fraye Model	Explore a concept through its definition, characteristics, examples, and non-examples.
Graphic Organizers	Use visual structures such as timelines, Venn diagrams, and flowcharts to clarify relationships.
KWL Charts	Identify what students Know, Want to know, and later what they Learned.
Learning Logs	Students periodically record learning, questions, problems, and connections.

Math Journals	Have students explain mathematical reasoning, choices, and methods instead of recording only answers.
Sticky Notes	Use simple movable notes for questions, sorting, voting, annotation, exit responses, and idea organization.

Technology-Based Strategies

Blended Learning	Combine face-to-face instruction with online learning when the digital component adds real value.
Collaborative Digital Boards	Students post and respond to ideas, examples, questions, or media in a shared digital space.
Digital Storytelling	Combine writing, images, narration, audio, or video to communicate an idea or story.
Flipped Classroom	Move selected content outside class so class time can be used for practice, problem solving, and support.
Interactive Simulations	Let students manipulate variables and explore systems that are difficult to reproduce physically.
Podcasts and Audio	Use or create audio to explain, review, interview, narrate, or demonstrate understanding.
Video Mini-Lessons	Use short, focused videos to introduce, review, or reteach one concept.
Virtual Classrooms	Support interaction and instruction when teacher and students are not physically together.
Virtual Field Trips	Use video, interactive resources, maps, collections, or webcams to explore places beyond the classroom.

Choose the strategy by the problem in front of you

Classroom situation	Possible starting points
Students are not participating	Think-Pair-Share, quick writes, Four Corners, peer discussion, active participation.
Students are not understanding	Checking for understanding, chunking, scaffolding, concept maps, graphic organizers, peer teaching.
Students know facts but cannot apply them	Problem-based learning, authentic assessment, hands-on learning, experiments, project-based learning.
Students need deeper thinking	Questioning, Socratic seminar, critical reading, compare and contrast, divergent thinking, metacognition.
Students need help remembering	Advance organizers, schema building, retrieval opportunities, acrostics, visual organizers, spaced review.
Students need to talk through ideas	Classroom conversations, discussion groups, reciprocal teaching, cooperative learning, jigsaw.
The lesson feels stale	Change the response mode, add movement, use a problem first, switch between writing and talking, or introduce a concrete object or example.

Three questions that cut through the jargon

- What are students actually doing?
- What are they supposed to learn from doing it?
- How will I know whether it worked?

Full guide: <https://instructionalstrategies.org/instructional-strategies-list-teachers/>