12 Effective Teaching Strategies for Every Teacher

Teaching strategies are as varied as the classrooms they're used in. There's no "one size fits all" method for making learning happen.

But some teaching strategies reliably deliver the lightbulb moments.

We've compiled 12 of the most consistently effective teaching strategies here, so the next time you're stuck for lesson ideas you'll have a proven toolkit to turn to.

Station rotation

Station rotation gets your students out of their seats and moving between different learning activities. It's so much more engaging than an hour spent sitting down at the same desk, and it allows them to experience the learning content in more ways than one.

Separate your classroom into learning stations with a different activity at each, and then have students rotate through them in groups.

The activities could use different modes (e.g. visual, text-based, digital), or they might be built around different problems (hint: using varying levels of difficulty allows for differentiation). Just make sure they're all tied to the same learning goal.

Use station rotation for: differentiation, immersion in new content, cooperative learning.

Group work

Silent individual work has its place, but sometimes you want to hear excited, on-topic conversations instead. Use group work to get students talking, bouncing ideas off each other, and exploring new perspectives.

Here are a few models of group work:

Jigsaws: assign each group a different aspect of a common topic. Once they've researched it or completed the activity, they can share it with the rest of the class. Everyone ends up with a holistic understanding of the topic after hearing the findings of every group.

Pass-arounds: after an individual exercise, have students pass their work around the table to get feedback from multiple peers. Each group can then choose an exemplar to share with the whole class.

Group presentations: follow up a group exercise or discussion by getting groups to present their findings to the rest of the class. This encourages them to bring together their different perspectives, and it keeps them accountable during the task.

Use group work for: cooperative learning, projects, student-led inquiry.

Formative assessment

It's easy to become fixated on summative assessments when you've got grades to give, but don't forget about the formative ones, either. Formative assessments will clue you into student progress *before* the final test or assignment.

Formative assessment can be as simple or as detailed as you like — what matters is that they alert you to what has been understood, and what gaps need your attention.

Here are some potential strategies:

- low-stakes quizzes and questionnaires
- assignments via gamified learning programs
- asking open-ended questions in class to get a sense of student understanding
- self-assessment using a student-friendly rubric
- exit slips.

Use formative assessment for: diagnosing individual needs, assessing whole-class comprehension, checks for understanding.

Graphic organizers

Despite all the information we give in our lessons, it's easy for students to walk away with nothing committed to paper.

Graphic organizers solve this problem by providing clear, logically structured spaces for students to record their thinking. They give students a tangible record of a learning activity and an opportunity to practice independent note taking.

Use text boxes and headings so students can see what information goes where and how it all connects. We've got some downloadable examples for science here.

Use graphic organizers for: mind-mapping or brainstorming activities, assessment planning, student note taking.

Response to intervention

When a student is falling behind or they just don't "get it", response to intervention strategies are the answer. These are the techniques you use to get struggling students back on track.

Depending on the level of student difficulty, response to intervention strategies can range in intensity. Here are some examples:

- small group pull-outs for students who need extra help
- partnering students with a peer or "learning buddy" who can help during in-class activity
- altering your own instructional strategies to re-engage students who are falling behind
- interviews with students and/or parents to discuss one-on-one support.

Read more about response to intervention in our article [here](#).

Use RTI for: students needing extra support.

Modeling

When we want our students to understand or do something, we often show it to them first. This is where modeling comes into play. It's the process of demonstrating a skill or concept so learners can see it first-hand.

Sounds simple, but it's easy for modeling to leave students more confused than confident — particularly when you're demonstrating something you've done 1000 times without a second thought.

Effective modeling should be:

Appropriately paced: slow enough for learners to see in detail what you are doing, but not so slow that your students begin to tune out.

Broken down into steps: talk learners through the skill as a *process*. A good way to do this is by talking aloud ("now I've done x, I'm going to do y").

Visual: let students *see* how you demonstrate the skill. This might be in the form of a live demonstration, a step-by-step guide, or a diagram.

Patient: remember, no matter how second nature it might seem to you, it will be new to your students. Demonstrate the skill multiple times and in different ways if you're still getting confused looks.

High-order questioning

High-order questions are the ones that lead to whole class discussions, hands shooting up, debates, and digressions.

They get everyone participating — not just the usual suspects — and you'll probably learn a thing or two from your students' answers as well.

A high-order question should be:

Open-ended: avoid yes/no answers.

Authentic: ask because you want to know what your students think, not because you're fishing for a specific answer.

Followed up with meaningful discussion: even if a student misses the mark with their answer, acknowledge it and use it to redirect the discussion (e.g. "I like the way you're thinking, but there's one thing we're forgetting…"). Even better, try and join the dots between different students' thinking to build the sense of a broader discussion ("Interesting, that comes back to what Jack said, but Julia seems to think differently…").

Ask questions to: check for understanding, drive discussion, hook students with a new topic.

Scaffolding

A single, big learning goal can seem overwhelming for you as well as your students.

That's why scaffolding is such an important teaching strategy. It's the process of constructing learning bit by bit, as opposed to doing everything at once.

A good way to do this is via **backward mapping**: think of the final learning goal for a lesson and then work backwards through all the different steps learners will have to take to get there. Each one becomes a mini learning goal or "checkpoint" where you make sure students have understood everything so far.

Use scaffolding for overall lesson and activity design.

Inquiry-based learning

If you're running out of breath after taking charge of every learning activity, it might be time for some student inquiry. Your students will spend less time listening to you, and more time actively exploring worlds of knowledge on their own steam.

Inquiry-based learning starts with a question or problem students can investigate independently. For example:

- in science: "Why is soft drink fizzy?"
- in mathematics: "What can you buy for lunch with $10?"
- in English: "What makes a story?"

You might even instruct students to research a whole new subject independently before reporting back with their findings. In any case, the learning comes from student activity instead of teacher input.

Use inquiry-based learning for: new topics, projects, extension activities.

Direct instruction

If you're starting a complex or unfamiliar topic, your students might need a firm grounding from you before getting hands on. This is where the classic strategy of direct instruction comes in handy.

Direct instruction starts with explicit teaching (e.g. a lecture), progresses to group practice, and then independent student work. To do it effectively make sure you:

Assess prior knowledge: start by finding out how much your students already know about the topic. This will give you an indication of how much input they really need.

Engage students: the teacher-centric aspect of direct instruction can be a drag for students if you're not careful. Jazz up lectures and explanations with digital components, dynamic speaking, and strategies for student engagement.

Break it up: parcel your explicit instruction out bit by bit, instead of giving it all at once. This will make it much easier for students to digest, and they'll be less likely to disengage.

Use direct instruction for: introducing unfamiliar material, revisiting challenging concepts.

Project-based learning

Projects are one of the easiest ways to personalize learning in your classroom. Let students choose what they want to produce and they'll have the freedom to learn in a way that engages them and plays to their strengths.

Make this happen by loosening up your task briefs. Explain what you want to see in terms of criteria as opposed to a final product. For example, a research task on a given topic could take the form of an infographic pamphlet, podcast, or mini-documentary.

Use PBL for personalized learning, summative assessments

Gamification

Looking to boost student engagement? Try gamifying aspects of the learning process. You'll bring up the fun and energy levels while motivating students to try harder than ever before.

Take inspiration from the games that already have your students hooked. For example, you might create:

- a scoring system
- rewards for extrinsic motivation
- friendly competitions
- different "levels" for students to pass.

You could also trial a gamified learning program to make the experience even more engaging. In Mathletics, for example, students can compete in a live mathematics challenge against peers in class and around the world. The more points they score, the more in-game rewards they can purchase.

Whichever approach you choose, you can be confident that your students are getting more than just fun and games. There's a growing body of research linking games to improved educational outcomes and cognitive abilities, too. Read up on our full guide to gamification here.

Use gamification for: revision, drill and practice, homework.

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