Chapter 1:
LANGUAGE LEARNING STRATEGIES

After reading this chapter you will be able to:

- Identify effective strategies for learning language and content
- Answer basic questions related to learning strategy instruction

Extensive research into learning strategies reveals the importance and relevance of this instruction for elementary immersion students. (For a review of the research, see Chapter 6.) However, as experienced teachers, we know that incorporating a new approach into our instruction is not an easy task. Chapter 1 focuses on describing language learning strategies. We begin by answering some of the most commonly asked questions about learning strategies.

Answers to some of the Most Commonly Asked Questions about Learning Strategies Instruction

At this point, you may be thinking, "Where do I begin? What learning strategies should I teach my students?" You might also be wondering, "How do I find the time to fit learning strategies instruction into my already full schedule of teaching grade-level content and language skills?" And even more importantly, you may be thinking about your students: "How receptive will they be to learning strategies? How do I prepare them for learning strategies instruction?" These are some of the questions most frequently asked by immersion teachers. They underscore the likelihood that explicit strategy instruction entails not only a new experience for you and your students, but also new roles in the learning process.

• What are Learning Strategies?

Learning strategies are the thoughts and/or actions that students use to complete learning tasks. All consciously used language learning strategies are used for problem-solving during language learning. This means that the learner, no matter how young, uses strategies when a task is challenging, or becomes challenging, and cannot simply be accomplished "without thinking," i.e. automatically. Learning strategies take different forms. Strategies like *Make Inferences*, in which students derive meaning from context, are mental processes that are difficult to observe. Other strategies, like *Use Graphic Organizers/Take Notes*, can be easily observed and measured.

We all know that good teachers use numerous teaching strategies to help students learn. We use visuals to introduce new ideas, we direct students' attention to important elements, and we activate students' background knowledge before introducing a new concept. Learning strategies, however, are the tools that *students themselves* can employ independently to complete a language task. For instance, a student who needs to learn a list of vocabulary words might decide, on his own, to draw a picture to

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remember each word, because he knows that this helps him remember. What is important for the purpose of this guide is that strategies can be learned (Weinstein & Mayer, 1986), and there is increasing evidence that using learning strategies improves language learning (see Chapter 6).

- **Why Teach Learning Strategies?**

Students who analyze and reflect on their learning are more effective learners; that is, they are better able to acquire, retain, and apply new information and skills. Yet students often use learning strategies in a sporadic manner, applying them inappropriately or overusing the limited number they know.

Learning strategies instruction is one means of improving students' acquisition of a foreign language. It gives them an explicit vocabulary to use in talking about their learning experiences so that they can build a repertoire of strategies. Students do not just acquire new strategies; they discover how and when to apply them. Their ability to use strategies effectively and to match them appropriately with tasks has broad implications for learning both content and language.

The goal of learning strategies instruction is for students to become independent learners with the ability to use strategies aptly in a variety of contexts. In the beginning, however, learning when and in what contexts to use particular strategies or groups of strategies requires direction and guidance from the teacher. Foreign language teachers may find it helpful to draw on the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) as a framework to explicitly teach learning strategies. CALLA is a language learning approach that applies to the elementary immersion setting and specifically incorporates learning strategies instruction. It is discussed in depth in Chapter Three: "Teaching Learning Strategies."

- **How Do We Name and Organize Language Learning Strategies for Instruction?**

There are a number of different names and classification systems for learning strategies (for a detailed review see Hsiao & Oxford, 2002). There are few "rights" and "wrongs" in learning strategies taxonomies, but specific ways of organizing the strategies can be useful for different teaching situations. Below, we have provided you a with list of 20 commonly used and effective language learning strategies that will help you seamlessly integrate strategies instruction into your FL classroom teaching. Students can use these strategies for reading, writing, speaking, listening, vocabulary retention, and content learning. In other words, the strategies are relevant to the immersion teacher's equal emphasis on content and language learning. In face, they facilitate the integration of content and language objectives.

Of the twenty learning strategies on our list, four are "Metacognitive" learning strategies and the rest are "Task-Based" learning strategies. The main difference between the two groups is that the metacognitive strategies are used for any task and are based on reflection on one's own thinking and learning. The use of task-based strategies is determined by the task, the student's metacognitive strategies, and the student's resources.

Summary of Foreign Language Learning Strategies

Metacognitive Strategies		
	Plan/Organize	
	Manage	
	Monitor	
	Evaluate	
Task-Based Strategies		
	Use What You Know	
		Use Background Knowledge
		Make Inferences
		Make Predictions
		Personalize
		Transfer/Use Cognates
		Substitute/Paraphrase
	Use Your Imagination	
		Use Imagery
		Use Real Objects/Role Play
	Use Your Organizational Skills	
		Find/Apply Patterns
		Group/Classify
		Use Graphic Organizers/Take Notes
		Summarize
		Use Selective Attention
	Use A Variety of Resources	
		Access Information Sources
		Cooperate
		Talk Yourself Through It

Metacognitive Learning Strategies

Metacognitive strategies are general learning strategies. Reflecting upon your own thinking and learning is <u>metacognitive</u> thinking. Once students begin to actively, consciously think about their own learning, they can then begin to notice *how* they learn, how others learn, and how they might adjust their behavior to learn more efficiently. We list four general metacognitive strategies:

-**Organize/Plan** Your Own Learning
-**Manage** Your Own Learning
-**Monitor** Your Own Learning
-**Evaluate** Your Own Learning

If you look at the definitions of these metacognitive strategies on page thirteen, you will see that they generally follow the sequential order of the processes a learner goes through in accomplishing any task, from setting goals and planning content, through evaluating how well the task was accomplished and how much was learned.

How am I going to accomplish this task? (*Organize/Plan*.)
How do I learn best, and how can I arrange conditions to learn most effectively? (*Manage*.)
Am I doing this task correctly as I work? (*Monitor*.)
How well have I done this task? (*Evaluate*.)

It is important to remember, however, that learners are not as linear as our models suggest. In reality, we go back and forth: planning, then monitoring, then planning again, managing, organizing, etc.

Task-Based Learning Strategies

The "Task-Based Learning Strategies" focus on how students can use their own resources to learn most effectively. There are 16 task-based strategies in the list. We have divided them into four categories that are grouped by the kinds of resources students already have, or can get, to help them complete specific tasks. By focusing students' attention on their resources, we emphasize their ability to take responsibility for their own learning.

-Strategies That **Use What You Know**
-Strategies That **Use Your Imagination**
-Strategies That **Use Your Organizational Skills**
-Strategies That **Use a Variety of Resources**

Within each of these four groups, you will find specific strategies that are examples of what the students can do with these resources to help them learn. So, in the group "Use What You Know" we included *Use Background Knowledge, Make Inferences, Make Predictions, Transfer/Use Cognates.*

Looking through this list, you might think that people use learning strategies one at a time, and that learning strategies are clearly delimited in function and in use. Reality, of course, is never that simple. Many learning tasks are accomplished using a number of different learning strategies, sometimes in sequence and sometimes at the same time. However, teaching learning strategies one-by-one, giving each one a name and a definition, and using examples, gives you a way to talk to your students about thinking and learning. It gives them a way to talk to themselves about their own thinking. You develop a common vocabulary that will allow you to talk about how to choose and integrate strategies for different kinds of language learning tasks.

Figure 1:
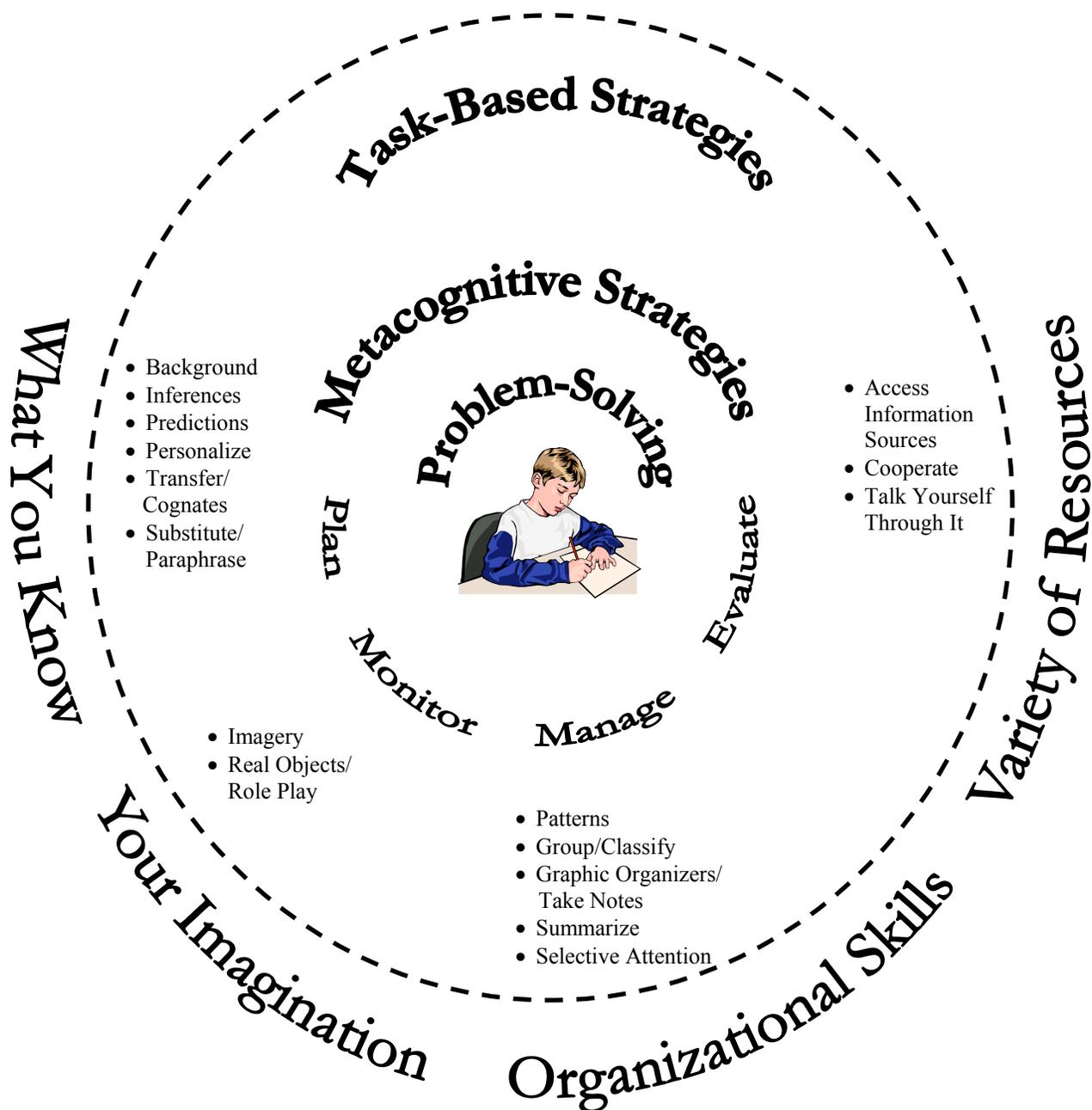# Applying Language Learning Strategies

Task-Based Strategies

Metacognitive Strategies

Problem-Solving

What You Know

Variety of Resources

Your Imagination

Organizational Skills

Plan

Monitor

Manage

Evaluate

- Background
- Inferences
- Predictions
- Personalize
- Transfer/
  Cognates
- Substitute/
  Paraphrase

- Access
  Information
  Sources
- Cooperate
- Talk Yourself
  Through It

- Imagery
- Real Objects/
  Role Play

- Patterns
- Group/Classify
- Graphic Organizers/
  Take Notes
- Summarize
- Selective Attention

Figure 1 demonstrates the relationship between problem solving and using learning strategies. Imagine that the student in the inner circle of Figure 1, George, is a fourth grader in a French immersion program. George has grown a bean plant from a seed in his science class. His task is to write a paragraph (in French) about the effects of sun and water on plant growth. George considers the task, his skills, his resources and how he can use them to problem-solve, i.e. to complete the assignment. This is metacognitive thinking. He plans to write an outline before he writes the paragraph (*Plan*). He writes the outline (*Use Graphic Organizer*). George focuses on the task *(Manage)*. He reads over his outline to see if it makes sense (*Monitor*). He finds that he needs more vocabulary words to express his ideas and looks up words in a dictionary (*Use Resources).* After using a variety of metacognitive and task-based strategies to accomplish the task, George evaluates his work (*Evaluate*). He either decides that the paragraph is not good enough, and continues to work – initiating another series of metacognitive and task-based strategies, or he decides that he is satisfied with his work, it meets his goals, and he stops.

On the following pages you will find a chart, "Learning Strategies for Elementary Immersion Students." This chart outlines the language learning strategies discussed above: it provides names for the strategies, descriptions of strategies appropriate to share with most elementary immersion students, a picture of a key concept related to the meaning of each learning strategy, and a keyword that might be used with students to help them remember the strategy. When discussing strategies with your students, you may decide to change the names or explanations to meet their specific needs. You will probably want to teach the names of the strategies in the target language. See Appendix I for Learning Strategies Inventories in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish.
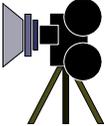
NATIONAL CAPITAL LANGUAGE RESOURCE CENTER
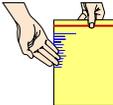
LEARNING STRATEGIES

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES

Strategy		Description
Organize / Plan	Calendar	-Plan the task or content sequence. -Set goals. -Plan how to accomplish the task.
Manage Your Own Learning	Pace Yourself	-Determine how you learn best. -Arrange conditions that help you learn. -Seek opportunities for practice. -Focus your attention on the task.
Monitor	Check	While working on a task: -Check your progress on the task. -Check your comprehension as you use the language. Are you understanding? -Check your production as you use the language. Are you making sense?
Evaluate	I did it!	After completing a task: -Assess how well you have accomplished the learning task. -Assess how well you have applied the strategies. -Decide how effective the strategies were in helping you accomplish the task.

TASK BASED STRATEGIES: USE WHAT YOU KNOW

Strategy		Description
Use Background Knowledge	I know.	-Think about and use what you already know to help you do the task. - Make associations.
Make Inferences	Use Clues	-Use context and what you know to figure out meaning. -Read and listen between the lines.
Make Predictions	Crystal Ball	-Anticipate information to come. -Make logical guesses about what will happen.
Personalize	Me	-Relate new concepts to your own life, that is, to your experiences, knowledge, beliefs and feelings.
Transfer / Use Cognates	telephone/teléfono/ Telefon/téléfon	-Apply your linguistic knowledge of other languages (including your native language) to the target language. -Recognize cognates.
Substitute / Paraphrase	Spare Tire	-Think of a similar word or descriptive phrase for words you do not know in the target language.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES: USE YOUR IMAGINATION	
Strategy	**Description**
Use Imagery Mirror, Mirror	-Use or create an image to understand and/or represent information.
Use Real Objects / Role Play Lights, Camera, Action!	-Act out and/or imagine yourself in different roles in the target language. -Manipulate real objects as you use the target language.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES: USE YOUR ORGANIZATIONAL SKILLS

Strategy		Description
Find/Apply Patterns	⬤▲⬤▲ Pattern	-Apply a rule. -Make a rule. -Sound out and apply letter/sound rules.
Group/Classify	Sort Suits	-Relate or categorize words or ideas according to attributes.
Use Graphic Organizers/ Take Notes	Notepad	-Use or create visual representations (such as Venn diagrams, timelines, and charts) of important relationships between concepts. -Write down important words and ideas.
Summarize	Main Idea	-Create a mental, oral, or written summary of information.
Use Selective Attention	Look for It	-Focus on specific information, structures, key words, phrases, or ideas.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES: USE A VARIETY OF RESOURCES

Strategy		Description
Access Information Sources	Read all about it!	-Use the dictionary, the internet, and other reference materials. -Seek out and use sources of information. -Follow a model -Ask questions
Cooperate	Together	-Work with others to complete tasks, build confidence, and give and receive feedback.
Talk Yourself Through It (Self-Talk)	I can do it!	- Use your inner resources. Reduce your anxiety by reminding yourself of your progress, the resources you have available, and your goals.

INTRODUCTION:

LEARNING STRATEGIES – DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES

The "Learning Strategies for Elementary Immersion Students" chart gave you an outline of language learning strategies for children. Now you have a general idea of what learning strategies are and how they are organized. It is still difficult, however, to imagine how learning strategies fit into the context of teaching content in a language immersion program.

On the next few pages, you will find more detailed descriptions of each strategy. They include a definition of the purpose of each strategy, a more in-depth description of the contexts in which they can be used, and an example of how an elementary immersion student might use the learning strategy to complete an academic task.

These descriptions will be particularly useful as you prepare to teach your students how to use a specific learning strategy, or when you seek strategies to help them with a particular task.

LEARNING STRATEGIES: DEFINITIONS AND EXAMPLES

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES

1. ORGANIZE / PLAN
Purpose: Students make a plan of what they need to do and organize their thoughts and activities in order to tackle a complex task step-by-step. This preparation helps them complete more intricate tasks than would otherwise be possible.
Context: *Organize/Plan* is used before starting any task. It is an especially important strategy for target language writing tasks.
Example: A student wants to write a thank you letter to his teacher for tutoring him after school. He has lots of ideas about what to write, but he is not sure how to put them in order. He jots the ideas down on some index cards and organizes them (trying out different orders, eliminating less important ideas, etc.) before copying them onto clean paper.

2. MANAGE YOUR OWN LEARNING
Purpose: This strategy is central to problem solving. Students reflect on their own learning styles and strategies. They regulate their own learning conditions to maximize achieving their goals. Students determine how they learn best, they arrange conditions to help themselves learn, they focus attention on the task, and they seek opportunities for practice in the target language. Manage also refers to the self-regulation of feelings and motivation. Independent learners must have a sense of how to manage their own learning.
Context: *Manage Your Own Learning* is an important part of problem solving on any task.
Example: A Grade Six immersion French student is writing a science report for homework on the effects of pollution in the U.S. She decides that she will do her paper in her room where it is quiet because otherwise she could be distracted. She is not very interested in the topic, but her goal is to do well in science this year, so she motivates herself to do the task by reminding herself that she has done well so far, and that this topic is really very important. She does her research on the Web, and makes sure to do a search in French as well as English so that she will have exposure to the vocabulary and concepts she needs to write her paper in the target language. After working hard on the paper and doing a good job, she rewards herself with a break to call friends.

3. MONITOR
Purpose: Students question whether an idea makes sense in order to check the clarity of their understanding or expression in the target language. Students are aware of how well a task is progressing and notice when comprehension breaks down.
Context: *Monitor* is important for any task.
Example: If a student asks how to divide three in half and the teacher tells her, "Yes, you may get a drink from the water fountain," the student who is monitoring would realize that her question did not communicate her intended meaning!

4. EVALUATE
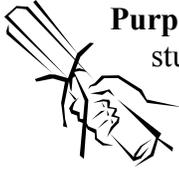
Purpose: Judging for themselves how well they learned material or performed on a task helps students identify their strengths and weaknesses so they can do even better the next time. Assessing how well a strategy works for them helps students decide which strategies they prefer to use on particular tasks.

Context: *Evaluate* can help students after completing a task.

Example: A student who finds writing in the target language difficult thinks about what makes it hard for her. She knows she is good at communication but makes a lot of mistakes in grammar. She decides to pay more attention to grammar in the future. In art class, a student uses *Use Selective Attention* to listen closely to directions while the teacher explains how to make a paper boat. She tries to do it herself but does not succeed. She decides to look at the teacher's book which has illustrations of the process. She tells her teacher that *Access Information Sources* worked better for her on this task than *Use Selective Attention.*

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES: Use What You Know

5. USE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Purpose: Students reflect on what they already know about a task or topic so that it is easier to learn and understand new information. The strategy helps them see the connection between what they know and what they are learning.

Context: Students can *Use Background Knowledge* whenever they know anything related to a task or topic.

Example: When beginning a Health lesson about public safety, students can tell each other what they already know about protecting themselves from strangers. They can describe how they recognize police officers and what they have been taught to do if they get lost.

6. MAKE INFERENCES

Purpose: Using context clues, students manage to decipher new vocabulary or figure out the meaning of a text or speech. They make logical guesses based on pictures, headlines, surrounding text, gestures and body language, or other information related to the task. At a more advanced level, students "read (or listen) between the lines" to infer meaning that is not stated in the text.

Context: Guess! That's right: it's a problem solving technique that works at any stage of the learning process and is useful in numerous contexts.

Example: To find the word for *clean* in German, a student reads the back of his German classroom soap bottle instead of looking it up in the dictionary. He figures it will probably be on the "How to use this product" part of the label. Knowing it can be a verb, he finds *clean* easily. The time-honored traditions of "figuring it out from context" and "making educated guesses" are both examples of *Make Inferences.*

7. MAKE PREDICTIONS

Purpose: Students figure out what they can expect in a task based on their background knowledge and information about the task at hand. They prepare for the rest of the task and direct their efforts to completing it based on their predictions.

Context: *Make Predictions* can be used whenever students have enough relevant background knowledge to be able to make reasonable predictions about the task. As they learn new information, they may refine or modify previous predictions.

Example: A student chooses a book to read during silent reading time. The cover of the book shows a picture of a barn and some animals. Based on this picture, the student predicts that the story will take place on a farm.
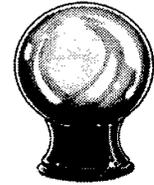
8. PERSONALIZE

Purpose: Students relate information to their feelings, opinions or personal experiences in order to remember and understand it better. They may associate it with someone or something in their personal lives.

Context: This strategy is useful whenever a word or idea can be related to something personally important to students.

Example: A student's parents take her to an Italian restaurant for dinner. Later, when she is learning vocabulary items in Italian, she remembers many of the words from the menu at the restaurant.

9. TRANSFER /USE COGNATES

Purpose: By recognizing similarities between words or grammar in the target language and their native language, students can easily and quickly increase their vocabulary and construct sentences.

Context: *Transfer / Cognates* can be used when words look or sound similar in the two languages or when knowledge of a language system, such as grammar, can aid in the understanding of the new language.

Example: A student reading a worksheet encounters the Spanish word *teléfono* for the first time. She recognizes that it looks like the English word *telephone* and thinks it probably means that same thing. In context, it makes sense. The two words sound alike, too. She decides *teléfono* and *telephone* are probably cognates.

10. SUBSTITUTE/PARAPHRASE

Purpose: Rather than stopping at a dead end, students find different ways to say the same thoughts. Beginners may use simple words or structures instead of more complex ones they do not know yet. More advanced learners may replace a term with its description or by explaining it in the target language.

Context: *Substitute/Paraphrase* helps at those otherwise awkward moments when students realize they do not know how to say exactly what they would like to say. It can also prove useful when writing as an alternative to constant reference to the dictionary.

Example: A student cannot think of the word *la dinde* (turkey) while he is speaking, so he says in French, "the big bird that Americans eat."

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES: Use Your Imagination

11. USE IMAGERY

Purpose: Students use or create an image that helps them remember information. It can be as simple as a pencil drawing, or as complex as a "mental movie." An image also helps students recall vocabulary without translating from their native language. Complex images can help students check their comprehension; if there are inconsistencies, then they may need to review the information.

Context: *Use Imagery* is well suited to any task that involves images or where it is useful to put abstract ideas into concrete form.

Example: To remember idiomatic expressions, students create funny pictures that illustrate them.

12. USE REAL OBJECTS/ROLE PLAY

Purpose: By acting out a concept with props or role-playing with a partner, or even in their imagination, students can get a better feel for the situational uses of language. Associating words and expressions with an object, a context and/or an experience helps students recall them - what's more, they have fun!

Context: This strategy can be used with concrete concepts or with abstract concepts to make them more concrete. It can evoke daily situations and show the practical side of language learning.
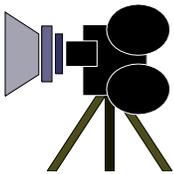
Example 1: A student has been studying environmental conservation at school and notices that his parents recycle many items, including plastic containers. He explains to his teacher how to decide what to recycle by showing her some sample containers that can be recycled.

Example 2: After learning food and restaurant vocabulary, students take turns playing the parts of customer and waiter at a restaurant in the target culture.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES: Use Your Organizational Skills

13. FIND/APPLY PATTERNS

Purpose: Students either use a rule they already know or create a new rule that helps them learn new information.

Context: *Find/Apply Patterns* is useful in situations where students can generalize about a language structure, procedure or concept.

Example: A student who knows how to conjugate the verb *mettre* in French wants to conjugate *permettre.* Since these verbs have the same ending, she decides that they are conjugated the same way.

14. GROUP / CLASSIFY

Purpose: Grouping or classifying items according to their attributes helps students organize their thoughts and/or remember the items.

Context: *Group / Classify* applies any time that a number of items share the same attributes and can be put into meaningful groups. It can serve to organize students' thoughts as they begin a writing or speaking task.

Example: A student has a hard time remembering the names of furniture in Spanish, so she groups them according to where each item belongs in a house.

15. USE GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS/TAKE NOTES

Purpose: By writing down important words, or creating a graphic organizer such as a Venn diagram or a timeline, students can remember key concepts and note their own ideas about information in a lesson alongside its new information.

Context: *Use Graphic Organizers/Take Notes* is especially useful for tasks that involve listening since, without notes, students would not be able to keep a record of what they hear. It can also help students while they read and before they write.

Example 1: After watching a video on the history of Germany, students take time to draw a timeline listing all the events they can remember, including pictures, people, places, and dates they associate with the events.

Example 2: An astronomer from Argentina comes to talk to a class about constellations in the Southern Hemisphere. She describes what types of stars make up the constellations and tells Argentine folktales about them. Students take notes while she speaks so that they can remember the important points after her presentation.

16. SUMMARIZE

Purpose: Making a mental, oral or written summary guarantees that students understand the gist of a task. It not only helps them judge how well they have understood and completed the task, but also helps them learn more from it.
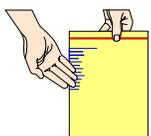
Context: *Summarize* is helpful periodically throughout a task or upon its completion.

Example: When a student listens to a song in the target language, she pauses her CD before each chorus so she can think about and summarize in her head the main point of the stanza she just heard.

17. USE SELECTIVE ATTENTION

Purpose: Concentrating on specific aspects of language or content makes it easier for students to find the information that is important to complete their task. They may concentrate on information they already know in order to understand or communicate better, or they may concentrate on key information such as times or dates.

Context: *Use Selective Attention* proves particularly useful when the task requires students to sift through large quantities of information. It can also help when students need to give or acquire precise details to complete a task.

Example: It is a classic technique for students to underline words they do not know in a text so they can look them up or ask the teacher about them later. For a new twist on this technique, students can underline sentences in challenging documents that they are sure they understand.

TASK-BASED STRATEGIES: Use a Variety of Resources

18. ACCESS INFORMATION SOURCES

Purpose: Using reference materials such as dictionaries, textbooks, periodicals and the Internet, students can solve complex problems and complete difficult tasks independently. Students can look up words or expressions they do not know, as well as find target language cultural information.

Context: *Access Information Sources* is especially handy when crucial information does not make sense to the student. However, it can be helpful any time students encounter questions, large or small, whose answers can be found in reference materials.

Example: A fifth grade student in a Spanish immersion school loves popular music and wants to learn more about popular music in Latin America. He listens to music broadcasts on Latino radio stations in the U.S., looks up information on the Web, and, in a letter to his Mexican pen pal, asks about what music is popular with young students in Mexico.


19. COOPERATE

Purpose: By working together, students gain confidence, share their strengths and complete tasks more easily. Most students enjoy the chance to work with a partner or in a group, and friendly competition between groups often brings out top-notch work.

Context: *Cooperate* can be used while students work on a specific task or during part of a larger task where students work separately. It allows students to give each other feedback on their individual work and complete new tasks together.

Example: Two students decide to work together to create a poster of zoo animals. They make a joint list and decide which ones to include. They then agree on the materials to use and collaborate on the artwork. They take turns drawing the animals and writing the names.

20. TALK YOURSELF THROUGH IT
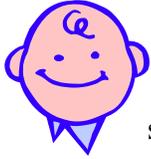
Purpose: Students tell themselves they are doing a good job and that they are capable of completing a task. This self-encouragement helps keep them motivated even when facing obstacles. While they work, students may explain to themselves, silently or out loud, exactly what steps they are taking to achieve their goals.

Context: This strategy can help throughout any tricky or daunting task. It is especially useful on tasks that can be divided into parts tackled one at a time.

Example: When reading an entire book in the target language for the first time, students can reassure themselves that they are good readers. Though a bit intimidated, they may tell themselves, "It's just like reading three short stories in a row," or, simply, "I know I can do it!"