

Chapter 2: Defining and Organizing Language Learning Strategies

In this chapter we will introduce you to 20 learning strategies that you can teach to your students to improve their learning of the foreign language.

As we emphasized in the preceding chapter, extensive research into learning strategies reveals the importance and relevance of this instruction for language students. However, as experienced teachers, we know that incorporating a new approach into our instruction is not an easy task. This chapter focuses on preparing both teachers and students for learning strategies instruction. We begin by answering some of the most commonly asked questions about learning strategies. We also share the techniques and explain the importance of establishing a learner-centered environment in the classroom before beginning strategies instruction.

I. Answers to Some of the Most Common Questions about Learning Strategies Instruction

At this point, you may be thinking, “Twenty learning strategies? How do I find the time to teach 20 learning strategies instruction in my already full schedule of teaching 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?” Explicit strategies instruction may entail not only a new experience for you and your students, but also new roles in the learning process. The purpose of this section is to respond to these important questions and provide suggestions for getting started with learning strategies instruction.

It is important to distinguish between teaching strategies and learning strategies. Think about yourself in two different roles - as a language teacher and as a language student. Look at Table 1 below for examples of strategies you might use as a teacher and those you might use as a student.

Table 1
A comparison of teaching strategies and learning strategies

Strategy	Teacher	Learner
Background Knowledge	Activate your students' prior knowledge in order to build new material on what they already know.	Think about what you already know about a topic to help you learn more about it.
Personalize	Link new material to your students' knowledge and experiences using guiding questions or other activities.	Think about how language constructions in the language you are studying compare with those of your native language and relate new information to your own ideas and experiences.
Use Imagery	Create a meaningful context for your students by accompanying new information with figures, illustrations, and photographs.	Associate new information with a mental or printed picture to help you learn it.

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. What is important for the purpose of this guide is that strategies can be learned.

II. 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 very good 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. Here, we have provided you with a list of 20 commonly used and effective language learning strategies grouped in a way that we think will help you seamlessly integrate strategies instruction into your FL classroom teaching. Students can use these strategies to improve their skills in reading, writing, speaking, listening, master grammatical features, increase their vocabulary, and learn content.

We have divided the 20 strategies into two categories: “Metacognitive” and “Task-Based.” The Metacognitive Strategies can be used for almost any task and are based on reflecting on one's own thinking while the Task-Based Learning Strategies are more determined by the specific nature of the task and the resources of the student.

A. Metacognitive Learning Strategies

Metacognitive learning strategies are general learning strategies. Reflecting upon your own thinking and learning is *metacognitive* thinking. Once students begin to think about their own learning, they can then begin to notice how they learn, how others learn, and how they might adjust how they learn 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*

These metacognitive strategies follow the sequential order of the process a learner generally goes through in accomplishing any task. What do I do before I start? (*Organize/Plan*) What do I do while I am working on the task? (*Manage*) How do I make sure I am doing the task correctly? (*Monitor*) What do I do after I have finished the 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.

B. Task-Based Strategies for Learning

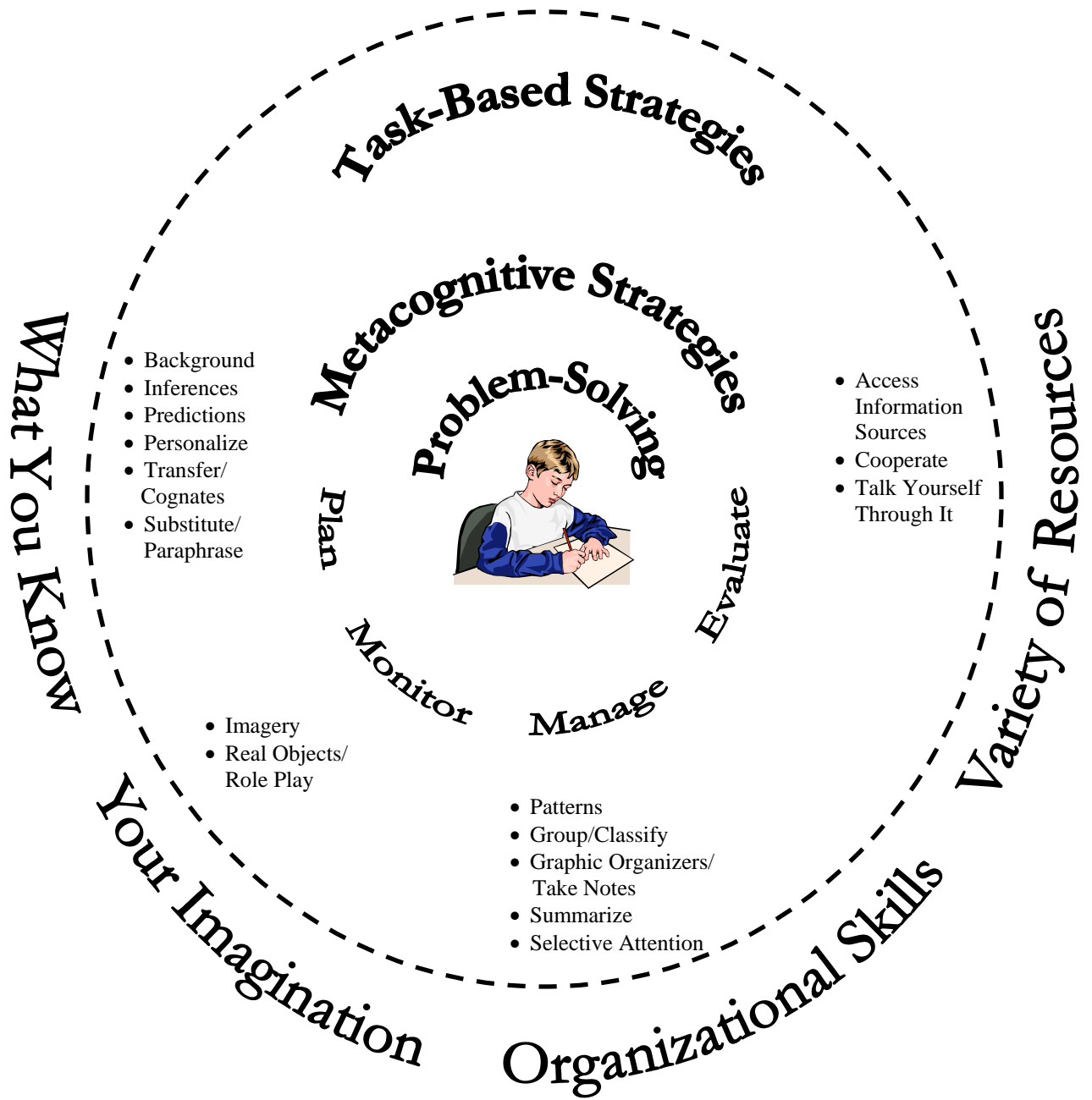
The “Task-Based Learning Strategies” focus on how students can use their own resources to learn most effectively. There are 16 task-based strategies in the list. We have divided them into four categories that are grouped by the kinds of resources students already have, or can get, to help them complete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

Use What You Know
Use Your Imagination
Use Your Organizational Skills
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. For example, in the group “Use What You Know” we include *Use Background Knowledge*, *Make Inferences*, *Make Predictions*, and *Transfer/Use Cognates*.

A diagram follows that puts the relationship between the Metacognitive and the Task-Based Learning Strategies in graphic form.





Applying Language Learning Strategies









Looking through the list of strategies, 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 simultaneously and sometimes in sequence. 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 the students a way to talk to themselves about their own thinking. You develop a common vocabulary that will then allow you and your students to talk about how to choose and integrate strategies for different kinds of language learning tasks.

Below you will find the “Learning Strategies List for Students.” This list outlines the language learning strategies discussed above; it provides names for the strategies, descriptions of strategies, 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. You will probably want to teach the names of the strategies in the target language. Learning Strategies Lists in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Swedish can be found in the Appendices. You can copy the list in English and/or in the target language to distribute to your students.


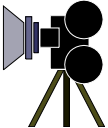
LEARNING STRATEGIES LIST FOR STUDENTS

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGIES		
Strategy	Description	
Organize / Plan	 Calendar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Plan the task or content sequence. -Set goals. -Plan how to accomplish the task.
Manage Your Own Learning	 Pace Yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -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: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -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.



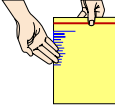

TASK BASED STRATEGIES: USE WHAT YOU KNOW

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	 Sound Out	-Apply a rule. -Make a rule. -Sound out and apply letter/sound rules.
Use Graphic Organizers/ Take Notes	 Notepad	-Use or create visual representations (such as Venn diagrams, time lines, 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.

