

Using 'Think Aloud'

Modelling cognition

In simple terms, cognition is the thinking you do when completing a task. Teachers can model their thinking about their knowledge to demonstrate how to draw on cognitive strategies when completing a task.

Below is an example of a teacher using 'Think Aloud' to model their cognitive process by engaging their prior knowledge when performing a forward roll safely in PE. It has been taken from the [Metacognition and Self-regulated Learning Guidance Report \(EEF, 2017\)](#):

Think Aloud - Example

Preparing for the roll: "I don't want to hurt my neck and want to do this neatly. So first, to protect my neck, I need to tuck my chin to my chest like this."

Starting the roll: "Then when I start to roll, I remember not to roll onto my head. Instead, look how I'm going to roll onto my back and shoulders."

Completing the roll: "This also means my back is round, so I can smoothly roll like this."

Checking pupils' understanding: "Now, who can remember what I did first to protect my neck?"

In this example, the teacher has broken down completing a forward roll into constituent components (outlined above) and is narrating the important points pupils need to consider at each stage. Without this narration, the pupils might not know how to break the task down or how to replicate the roll safely and successfully.

Modelling metacognition

Meta-cognition can be broken down into three different stages:

1. **planning** which cognitive strategies to use
2. **monitoring** how successful the strategy is and changing it if necessary
3. **evaluating** your overall approach to improve it next time.

Below is an example of a teacher using 'Think Aloud' to model their meta-cognitive processes when **planning** how to answer a History question:

'The main reason why the League of Nations could not stop aggression in the 1930s was because the USA was not a member. Do you agree?'

"How am I going to approach answering this? Well firstly, I must ensure I understand the question. To do that, I am first going to read it. (teacher models reading it). Then I am going to underline key words that help me understand how I should answer the question. I can see at the end, it asks, 'Do you agree?', so what does that mean? It means I am going to have to give an opinion."

"What information am I going to have to include? Well, it mentions the USA not being a member as one

reason for aggression, so I know I am going to have to talk about that. Would that be a good essay if I only wrote about one point? What do I know about other essays I have read or written? What makes them effective at demonstrating my opinion? Normally I have to discuss three points. I know I will talk about the USA not being a member as one point because it is cited in the question. Do I think that's the most important point? Or do I think there are other points? What information can help me? Well, if I think back to our other lessons on this, I can recall some other points that we have covered." Teacher asks pupils, "Which other points have we covered? Talk to your partner," and then discusses their ideas.

"So, I now have three points, I need to consider what information do I know about these. What can I do now to plan and ensure I have enough to write about? Perhaps I will write down some bullet points under each idea to prompt me to include key points in each paragraph." (Teacher models writing down bullet points of information to include).

"Now I need to consider how to structure them. Which order should I put them in? Well I know that to make my opinion clear, it would be helpful to put the strongest point at the beginning."

In this example, the teacher has broken down planning how to approach answering an essay question into constituent components and is narrating their meta-cognitive thoughts to make these explicit to pupils.

Later in this process, the teacher might model thought processes that demonstrate them monitoring how effective their strategy is and evaluating their strategy such as:

Monitoring:

- Has my plan enabled me to answer the question effectively?
- Is my opinion clear enough?
- Have I ensured I have included enough detail in each paragraph to clearly explain my point?
- Am I rereading what I have written to ensure the information makes sense and links back to the question?

Evaluating:

- Did my plan provide me with enough detail to include in my essay?
- How could I enhance my planning to ensure I include more detail next time?
- Would using my notes from previous lessons help me in the planning stage?
- How successful was I at staying focused on answering the question when writing my essay? What could I do next time to support me with this?