

# Making 'Think Aloud' successful

When using 'Think Aloud', there are some key principles you can follow to ensure it's successful:

## 1) Start narration at the point of pupil understanding

When talking through your thinking, it is important that you consider what the pupils' prior knowledge is. For example, if pupils have never seen a forward roll before, the teacher would need to demonstrate this first so pupils could attach the teacher's narrated cognition to something concrete. If they don't know what a forward roll is, the rest of the narration is less meaningful.

## 2) Focus the narration around key teaching points

What you say is very important and should be carefully planned out. The narration should focus on the objectives or key teaching points that you want pupils to focus on. If you narrate everything you are thinking, this could cognitively overload pupils, preventing them from following the key features you want them to learn or consider themselves.

## Which narration is most effective?

Look at the following scripts of a teacher using 'Think Aloud' to model using adjectives in a sentence and identify which one you think is most effective and why. Then click on the link to the quiz in the box below to check your answer.

### Example A:

"I want to describe what the emperor penguin looks like. How will I start my sentence? Hmm, I'll start with 'The' – as it's the beginning of a sentence I must use a capital letter" (teacher scribes as they speak)  
"emperor penguin – now I am going to describe its colour – has black feathers down his back. Hold on; I can make that better by using two adjectives to describe the feathers – has glossy, black feathers down his back – I must remember to separate two adjectives in a list with a comma" (teacher inserts comma). "Now, I might extend the sentence using the conjunction 'and' – and snowy, white feathers covering its front. Let's check. Have I used two adjectives together to improve my description?" (Teacher models re-reading sentence to check it makes sense and check for the use of adjectives).

### Example B:

"I want to describe what the emperor penguin looks like. How will I start my sentence? Hmm, I'll start with 'The'" (teacher scribes as they speak) – "The emperor penguin has black feathers down his back. Hold on, I can make that better – has glossy, black feathers down his back – I must remember to use a comma," (teacher inserts comma). "Now I might extend the sentence - and snowy, white feathers covering its front. Let's check, my work." (Teacher models re-reading sentence to check it makes sense and to check for the use of adjectives).

## Over to you!

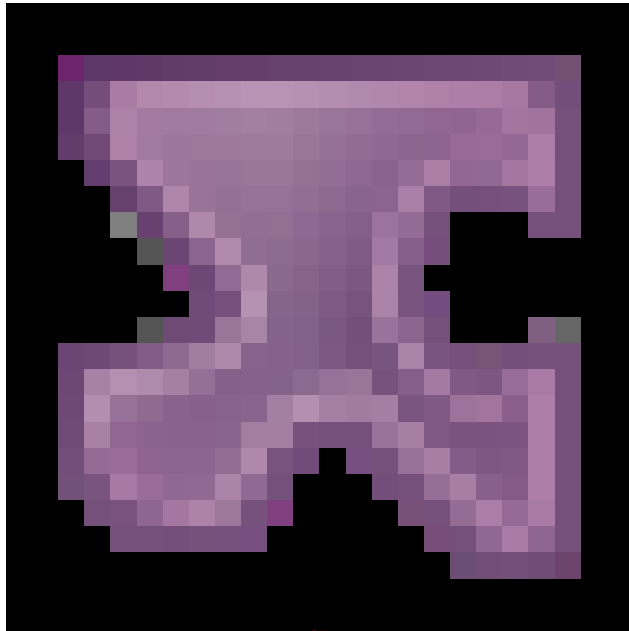
Complete the [short quiz](#) here to submit and check your answer. Once you've submitted your answer, you can view instant feedback by selecting 'View Feedback' underneath your response.

## Think Aloud in action

Watch the video below and answer the following questions in the [notes tab](#) (or your own notebook):

- What did the teacher focus their narration on, and why do you think this was?
- How might this impact pupils' learning?

## Early years

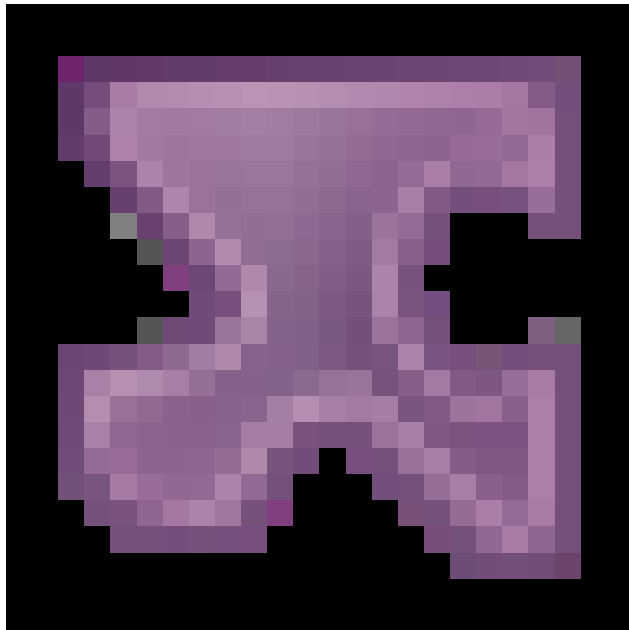


Direct Link: [Think Aloud - Early Years](#)

Direct Link to an audio described version of this video: [Think Aloud - Early Years](#)

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## Primary



Direct Link: [Think Aloud - Primary](#)

Direct Link to an audio described version of this video: [Think Aloud - Primary](#)

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## **Why is using 'Think Aloud' so important?**

The EEF (2017) highlights that modelling of this type is often not planned into explanations because the thinking processes occur 'naturally' to the expert (teacher), which is a risk because such thought processes are vital for breaking down a task so that it can be better understood or completed successfully.

To move from novice to expert, pupils need to know how an expert habitually thinks and acts (EEF, 2017). By modelling these thought processes, you make the implicit or hidden parts of a process explicit and exposed, helping to build the novices mental model of what they should be doing in similar situations.

## **Summary**

Explanations and modelling are vital for building a strong foundational understanding of key knowledge or procedures in pupils. However, merely showing pupils new information or processes is not enough. Pupils need to be given the opportunity to practise new material in order to store it in their long-term memory (Rosenshine, 2012). When introducing material in small steps, pupils need to practise after each step. Providing opportunities for practise is something that will be explored in the next session.