

Self-Regulated Strategy Development

Self-regulated strategy development (SRSD) is an instructional approach designed to help students learn, use, and adopt the strategies used by skilled writers. It is an approach that adds the element of self-regulation to strategy instruction for writing. It encourages students to monitor, evaluate, and revise their writing, which in turn reinforces self-regulation skills and independent learning.

What Is Self-Regulated Strategy Development?

One of the greatest challenges for instructors in adult education programs is to help students acquire the basic cognitive skills and habits needed to be self-directed learners. A large body of research from both secondary and postsecondary settings suggests that *strategy instruction* strengthens students' abilities to engage with learning, benefit from instruction, and succeed.

Strategy instruction is an approach that teaches the tools and techniques necessary for understanding, learning, and retaining new content and skills. It involves teaching strategies that are both **effective** in assisting learners with acquiring, retaining, and generalizing information, and **efficient**, helping them acquire the information in the least amount of time (Lenz, Ellis, & Scanlon, 1996). There is a range of approaches and a range of uses for strategy instruction in all content areas for learners of all ages.

Strategy Instruction for Writing

Writing researchers identified what good writers do: **plan, monitor, evaluate, revise, and manage the writing process**. They also observed struggling writers who do not perform these same steps when writing and produce lower-quality writing. For example, proficient writers engage in extensive planning, in which they set goals about their topic and audience, generate ideas, and use their knowledge of genres or text structure to organize ideas. When they revise, they think about their audience and the substance of what they have written. They apply evaluation criteria to identify problems and opportunities for improvement.

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As with other types of strategy instruction, *SRSD* is explicit, direct, and guided so that strategies become integrated into the overall learning process. Instruction begins as teacher-directed but with a goal of empowering students to be self-directed. The self-regulation element addresses negative self-talk or perceptions of self-as-learner through replacement with positive self-talk, self-instructions, and new habits with which to approach learning tasks.

Why Teach SRSD to Adult Learners?

Strategies can be used to teach learners how to learn and study, how to accomplish specific cognitive tasks, or how to apply and communicate their knowledge in a variety of contexts. The goal is for learners to internalize the process and strategies and to select and use them independently and with confidence. Strategies are tools in the learner's toolbox. Knowing which tool to choose for a given task is a closely related challenge, one discussed in the TEAL Center Fact Sheet No. 4 on Metacognitive Processes. Monitoring whether the task is done fully is the reflective element discussed in the TEAL Center Fact Sheet No. 3 on Self-Regulated Learning. Both are available at <https://TEAL.ed.gov>.

What's the Research?

A large body of research demonstrates that strategy instruction can be effective for improving writing and for boosting learners' planning, editing, and overall written product quality (De la Paz, 2007; De la Paz & Graham, 2002; Englert, 2009; Graham, 2006; Graham & Perin, 2007; Perin, 2007). Moreover, when taught systematically, strategy use by learners can be retained and applied beyond the immediate instructional setting (De la Paz & Graham, 2002; Graham & Perin, 2007). Strategy instruction has been found to be particularly supportive of adults with learning disabilities (Berry & Mason, 2010; Ellis & Scanlon, 1996; McArthur & Lembo, 2009; Mellard & Scanlon, 2006).

A meta-analysis of *strategy instruction* research conducted with students in first grade through postsecondary grades identified elements of the approach that had the greatest impact for learners (De la Paz, 2007). Twelve studies were combined and their effects analyzed. The most powerful elements of strategy instruction were found to be **self-regulation, motivation, and peer support**.

Elements of SRSD Instruction

Instructor modeling of strategies is essential to SRSD and must explicitly show learners how to create meaning. Graham and Harris (2005) describe a five-step process. By completing the following scaffolded instructional sequence, teachers can help learners gain confidence in the strategy and learn to use it automatically for more independent learning.

1. **Discuss It.** Set the stage. Discuss when and how learners might use a strategy to accomplish specific writing tasks and goals. Talk about the benefits of becoming a more proficient and flexible writer. Address any negative self-talk or negative beliefs the learner holds, and ask the learner for a commitment to try to learn and use the strategy. Discuss how the learner should track progress to document the use and impact of the strategy.
2. **Model It.** Model the strategy using think-alouds, self-talk, and self-instruction as you walk through the steps. Discuss afterwards how it might be made more effective and efficient for each individual, and have learners customize the strategy with personal self-statements. Ask students to set specific writing goals. Model the strategy more than once with various sample texts; for example, use a graphic organizer to demonstrate how to comprehend various texts of a similar genre (persuasive arguments or editorials).
3. **Make It Your Own.** Strategies are composed of multiple steps, similar to a checklist. When steps are captured in a *mnemonic* or acrostic sentence, they are easier to remember. Paraphrasing or re-naming the steps in a mnemonic or creating a new mnemonic is fine, provided that the learner is able to remember the steps that the names represent. Customizing the checklist or mnemonic helps learners make it their own.

4. **Support It.** Use the strategy as often as possible, in as many ways as possible. Instructors and other students can be supports, offering direct assistance, prompts, constructive feedback, and encouragement. When you introduce a new type of application (a new genre or writing frame, for example), it may be appropriate to model the strategy again. Learners can rely on charts and checklists too, as they learn the strategy and make it their own, but all of this should fade as learners become familiar enough with the strategy to set their goals, monitor their use of the strategy, and use self-statements independently.
5. **Independent Performance.** Learners come to use the strategy independently across a variety of tasks. For example, learners may begin to draw graphic organizers without being prompted as a means to help them comprehend and plan.

Recommended SRSD Strategies

The strategies here may be helpful for adult education students to improve their literacy skills. All strategies must be taught explicitly for learners to generalize and apply them when faced with a new task. Teach each step through the sequence described in the previous section.

- **RAP.** Active comprehension requires self-monitoring and self-regulation. This strategy, researched with adolescents (Hagaman, Luschen & Reid, 2010; Schumaker, Denton, & Deschler, 1984), supports learners in monitoring their reading and comprehension. Explain to students that *RAP* means Read, Ask, and Paraphrase, as in the following: *Read* a paragraph or passage. Ask yourself, “What is the topic?” “What is the most important thing it tells me about that topic?” “What are the most important details?” *Paraphrase*, or put it in your own words. Now start by introducing a paragraph. After students have mastered identifying the main idea and important details at the paragraph level, you can increase the amount of text. Students will vary in how much practice they need. All students should practice with a variety of types of text, increasing in challenge, to identify topics in passages where main ideas are not explicitly stated. In the Ask step, the student first identifies the topic. Prompt students to check their thinking by asking whether they think that

the whole paragraph is about the topic they have chosen. After they have identified the topic, ask them to determine the main idea—that is, what the author wanted to say about the topic. Finally, ask them to determine details that are essential to capture important information. Then, ask students to describe their understanding of the passage in their own words. Set the text aside and explain. When students are comfortable using the **RAP** strategy for comprehension, you can extend it to helping them write summaries.

- **POW+TREE.** The **POW+TREE** strategy helps writers approach an essay-writing task and check their work as they become more independent (Harris, Graham, Mason, & Friedlander, 2008). It was found to be effective with adult education students (Berry & Mason, 2010). The first part, **POW**, represents and emphasizes the importance of the planning process: **P**ick my idea and pay attention to prompt; **O**rganize; **W**rite and say more. The **TREE** acronym is a memory and visualization tool that helps writers structure their essays: the **T**opic sentence is like the trunk of the tree that supports the whole argument; **R**easons (at least three) are like the roots of the argument; **E**xplain is a reminder to tell more about each reason; and finally, **E**nding is like the earth that wraps up the whole argument. Think sheets or graphic organizers shaped like stylized trees that learners write in as they brainstorm and plan can prompt the internalization of this strategy.

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