



Metacognitive Skills

Introduction to Metacognitive Skills

This section outlines some of the metacognitive skills that are essential for lifelong learning. Its purpose is to guide instructors in incorporating activities and discussions that will help learners understand how they learn, their strengths and their needs, and to better understand the learning process.

Metacognition is the process of thinking about thinking. It is the process of developing self-awareness and the ability to self-assess. It is contemplation about one's education and learning -- past, present, and future. Since adults are largely self-determining, helping them develop metacognitive skills is an essential element in any program intended to increase their autonomy.

The metacognitive skills are presented as a list without reference to level of language skills. Like technology skills, learners' metacognitive abilities are rarely aligned exactly with their language skills levels. The ability to understand and analyze one's own learning is especially influenced by educational background and previous experience.

The arena of metacognition presents a special challenge to instructors at the lowest levels, where learners have higher-order thinking skills in place but lack the communication skills to relay them. It may also be difficult to convey some of the more abstract or complex ideas like goals, strengths, and learning styles without translation. Instructors at the lowest levels often use visual representations of simplified concepts and translation.

It's important to note, too, that some of the concepts in this section may be decidedly "foreign" to learners in ESL/ESOL classes. For example, the concepts of goal setting and evaluating one's class (i.e., "evaluating the teacher") may be unfamiliar to learners, and they may actually be very uncomfortable providing meaningful critiques. Learners may not feel it appropriate to share "personal" thoughts and reflective insights. Therefore, teaching and incorporating metacognitive skill development is an ongoing process.

Some questions that teachers might ask to activate metacognitive skills include the following:

- What did we learn today?
- How will you use what we are learning outside of class?
- Why are we practicing "X"? How will it help you?
- When you are about to try something new, how do you feel?
- When you are doing something and you get stuck, what do you do?
- Do you (cook, drive, relax) the same way in every situation? Why do we shift how we do things?

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1. Learners will set *Learning Goals*

- Understand “goals” and illustrate and/or describe their own personal goals for participation in English classes.
- Set goals related to working, parenting, and/or participating in their community.
- Differentiate between long and short-term goals.
- Outline activities that will help them achieve their goals.
- Identify obstacles to meeting their goals.
- Identify community resources and sources of support for meeting their goals.
- Develop and practice skills necessary to achieving their personal goals. (i.e. problem-solving skills).
- Report any progress toward meeting their goals (e.g., received driver’s license, etc.).
- Review and update learning goals throughout the program.
- Revise course of action for meeting goals.
- Identify and develop new strategies to achieve learning goals.
- Explore additional educational opportunities.
- Plan a career path and develop a resume appropriate for use in the U.S.

2. Learners will understand their own *Learning Styles*

- Identify their previous learning experiences.
- Express likes and dislikes about learning activities.
- Understand “strengths” and “weaknesses.”
- Recognize learning modalities/preferences in simple terms (e.g., see, hear, feel, do).
- Self assess (using instructor-provided tool) learning styles and preferences, strengths and weaknesses
- Share and explain their own learning preferences and learning strategies to others.
- Describe how one’s learning preference affects how one learns.
- Recognize learning modalities/preferences in more complex terms (e.g., visual, auditory, oral, kinesthetic).
- Identify learning styles in terms of preferred way to take in information (concretely or abstractly) and in terms of preferred way to process information (through observation/reflection or through experience/action).

3. Learners will *Evaluate their own Learning*

- Express feelings about class in simple terms: I like...
- Illustrate/describe progress toward their goals.
- Monitor and assess their progress (with, and later without, instructor guidance).
- Provide feedback to instructor about needs/preferences.
- Identify achieved goals.
- Determine next steps/changes to plans and activities.
- Report new needs (goals) as they arise.
- Demonstrate an understanding of evaluations and surveys (e.g., on-the-job, in school, customer service, etc.).
- Seek additional/supplemental learning opportunities.
- Learn independently of group activities/instructor input.