[**Metacognitive learning strategies article**](https://blackboard.wayne.edu/bbcswebdav/xid-14962072_2)

**WHAT ARE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND METACOGNITION?**

**Learning strategies** are those procedures that a student uses to succeed with a task that would be difficult without special effort. Strategies can be external aids, like a calculator to help with difficult math problems, a clock and a calendar to help keep track of time, lists to remember things to do, a graphic organizer for complex tasks like writing a story, and the like. Or they can be communication strategies, like asking for help. Or they can be internal mental procedures, like repeating information in one’s head or creating associations in order to make the information more memorable. Simple school examples include taking notes during a lecture, asking for clarification of complex material in a text, highlighting important information in a text as one reads, and creating an outline before beginning to write an essay.

**Metacognition** is an important supporting enabler of learning strategies and can be simplified as “thinking about thinking”. The concept is tied to self-awareness. The more we employ metacognition, the better we perform at learning activities. An example of metacognition is thinking of a pattern to associate key chapter concepts and how they relate to each other.

Everybody uses learning strategies when learning tasks are important and/or become difficult. For example, many readers, not just those with poor reading comprehension, acquire habits of doing something strategic before, during and after reading a text such as:

• Before reading a text: Previewing the text for orientation to its content; presetting with questions that need to be answered; calling to mind what one already knows about the topic.

• During reading: Periodically trying to summarize; highlighting important parts of the text; dealing with comprehension breakdowns; taking notes; looking up new words

• After reading: Summarizing the text, reacting to the content, taking notes

Most competent readers engage in some such activities without thinking about it on those occasions when comprehension is important. These procedures become habitual, based on years of personal experience that have convinced readers that if they do not do something special when reading lengthy texts, they will probably not understand or remember much of what they read.

**WHAT ARE THE MAIN THEMES FOR STUDENTS WHO WANT TO USE LEARNING STRATEGIES AND METACOGNITION?**

Students becoming more strategic thinkers and effective learners covers a great deal of territory and requires commitment to thinking and acting. To focus their thinking, students should be aware of all of the characteristics of effective learning strategy users. Each of these characteristics then becomes a goal for the student.

1. Learning Goals: Effective learning strategies require learning goals to which strategies are relevant.

2. Self-Knowledge: Effective learning strategy users know that their performance needs to be enhanced (in certain areas), that strategies enhance performance, and that they are capable of using learning strategies.

3. Awareness of Task Difficulty: Effective learning strategy users are capable of perceiving the difficulty level of tasks and the consequent need for special effort.

4. Strategy Specific Knowledge: Effective learning strategy users know when, where, how, and why to use specific strategies.

5. Initiation/Responsibility: Effective learning strategy users take responsibility for their successes and failures, and initiate strategic behavior when it is necessary.

6. Self-Monitoring: Effective learning strategy users can monitor the effectiveness of their performance with strategies so that improved performance can be its own reward and ineffective performance can be changed.

7. Flexibility: Effective learning strategy users know several strategic procedures and can select the procedure that is useful for a specific problem.

8. Automaticity: Effective learning strategy users eventually use strategies as a matter of routine so that many strategic procedures become automatic and require little effort or planning.

9. Planning Orientation: Effective learning strategy users think about the task at hand and strategic procedures at the same time.

10. Impulse Control: Effective learning strategy users are not so impulsive that they act before taking critical information into account and considering strategies.

11. Anxiety Control: Effective learning strategy users are not so anxious about performance that they neglect using learning strategies due to their distraction by an overriding fear of failure.

12. Content Knowledge: Effective learning strategy users know enough about the subject that they can meaningfully apply strategies within that domain of content.

**What about teachers and parents**? Implicit in this list of characteristics of effective learning strategies is the fundamental idea that teachers and parents cannot take over executive functions/selfregulation for students. It is tempting for teachers and parents to unconsciously do exactly that: “I, the teacher, will take responsibility for (1) knowing what you are good at and what you need help with, (2) setting your goals, (3) planning how to achieve the goals, (4) ensuring that you start your work, (5) ensuring that you are not distracted, (6) monitoring and evaluating your performance, and (7) trying new strategies in the event of failure.” If this is how teachers and parents behave, they will give themselves great practice in strategic behavior, but **deny the student the practice that they need**: the teacher improves; the student doesn’t. This is not to say that students should be left to their own devices. Rather, teachers and parents provide the support necessary for the student to experience success, but then pull back on those supports as it becomes possible to do so – Fthe entire time holding in mind the model of what it is to be a strategic thinker and learner.