7 Steps to Providing Models

PROVIDING MODELS IS SIMPLE, AND IMPORTANT.

Throughout our lives we depend upon observation of models to help us learn efficiently and effectively. Any adult who has attempted to master a new skill – knitting, pottery, boatbuilding or scuba diving, for example – knows the importance of having a patient and encouraging teacher as a guide. They provide step-by-step models and guide us as we fumble to master each challenge along the way. Great teachers and coaches are not only knowledgeable and skilled, they are also very good at chunking complex processes into doable tasks that help their students succeed.

So, how can we get better at using models in our classrooms? **Try the following 7 steps**, and pay attention to the differences in students' attitudes and performance.

	Planning steps
STEP 1	**IDENTIFY** a skill you expect students to demonstrate. Example Skill: Summarize the main ideas of an expository reading selection.
STEP 2	**ANALYZE** the components or steps of the skill, list them in sequence for yourself, and **PLAN** a way to model each step. Note that once you begin this process, you'll often identify pre-requisite sub-skills that will impact a student's ability to be successful. For instance, in the example that follows, the ability to identify main ideas is essential to successful summary-writing. Often it's necessary to backpedal and teach each sub-skill thoroughly prior to teaching a more complex skill such as summary writing.
STEP 3	**FIND OR CREATE MODELS** of each of the components identified in step 2 and a model of what the end–product should look like. In the example that follows, each step should have a model. For the "preview the reading selection" step, students might first look at and discuss a completed questionnaire about a given selection, then complete one of their own about a different selection. Additionally, there should be a model of the end-product, such as an example of a written summary of a text students have read.
	Instructional Steps
STEP 4	**INTRODUCE THE SKILL AND THE MODEL OF THE END-PRODUCT** to students, letting them know they will be learning the steps to master the skill.
STEP 5	**INTRODUCE THE MODEL OF THE FIRST STEP, SHOW STUDENTS HOW TO DO IT, AND WORK WITH THEM AS THEY PRACTICE**. Follow this process for each succeeding step (adding additional practice in each as needed) until all of the steps are complete.
STEP 6	**DISCUSS** with students the difficulties and successes they experienced along the way, and work with them to set goals for the next activity in which they'll use the skill.
STEP 7	**REPEAT** steps 1-6 for the next activity, and note that students gain skill as they practice.

Example: Steps & Strategies for Summarizing

Steps	Strategies
Preview the reading selection	Examine the selection's length, structure, related illustrations, images, callout boxes, highlighted vocabulary, etc. Consider having students fill out a preview questionnaire.
Identify the topic	Look at the title and subtitles, and read a sentence or two at the beginning and end of the selection. Note the topic on the preview questionnaire.
Access prior knowledge about the topic	Identify any information about the topic or how it connects with other things learned in or outside of class. Brainstorm as a class, or have students brainstorm on their preview questionnaires.
Make predictions about the content's purpose	Consider the context for the selection and predict its purpose – e.g., a newspaper selection has a different purpose depending upon what section of the paper it's in; a textbook selection has a different purpose than a blog post. Note the purpose on the preview questionnaire.
Set a purpose for reading	For this activity, the purpose is to identify the main ideas in order to summarize the selection. The teacher can set a purpose for reading (e.g., You are to read this selection to find out about the process of photosynthesis), or the students can determine the purpose as a group.
Read the selection	Decode each word and sentence of the selection in order, from beginning to end. Read aloud or listen to it being read. (Students often skip the actual reading of the material, forging ahead instead to answer questions or complete the assignment.)
Identify the main ideas and their supporting evidence/examples	Generally, each paragraph or section of a text has a main idea that is explained or supported further with specific examples, facts, or other evidence. Underline or highlight each main idea.
Take two-column/Cornell notes	Write the topic of the reading selection at the top of the page, then write the main ideas in the left column, and supporting evidence/examples in the right column.
Write a topic sentence for the summary.	Write a sentence that gives the title, author, and topic of the selection.
Write a sentence about each main idea in the selection.	In the sequence in which they appear in the two-column/Cornell notes, paraphrase each main idea and write it in a sentence.