Toolkit for inclusive teaching strategies

How to help learners engage with information better

Module 5
Module 5: How to help learners engage with information better

Start here!

You have six sections to complete in Module 5:
- Introduction
- Principle 1: Break down information
- Principle 2: Show the big picture of the lesson
- Principle 3: Activate the different senses
- Apply the strategies
- Put it into practice

Then we recommend you set up a group discussion to:
- Reflect on the module

Before you begin, we recommend that you get yourself a notebook for taking notes as you work through the toolkit.
Introduction

What’s Module 5 about?

Case study

Before we start, read the story from Claire, an ELT teacher. What does this example tell us about information processing and memory?

👤 Claire (EL teacher)

“I remember a class where I was having difficulty teaching my students a vocabulary list. During the break, I heard some students singing along to a popular song. It gave me a great idea! I found the instrumental version online, and for the rest of the lesson, the students made new lyrics to the song with the challenging vocabulary. Needless to say, the whole class did very well on the next module test!”

💭 Why do we need to help learners engage with information better?

As teachers, we want our learners to make connections, and more deeply understand information. But often the way material and information is presented (e.g. large blocks of text) can create barriers (e.g. processing difficulties) for our learners.

The online classroom can offer a rich variety of ways of helping learners to engage with new information, in ways that make sense for the diverse range of learners.

In this module, you’ll read about three principles to help learners better engage with information in your online classroom, and three takeaway strategies you can use in your upcoming classes.

Note: This module focuses on task design. Additional information on how to visually present information to make it more engaging can be found in Module 2.

✍ Are you ready to start?

Take out your notebook. As you go through this module, take notes on:

● What inclusive strategies you already use
● Anything you hadn’t considered before
● What other small improvements you can make to create a more inclusive practice in your classroom
Principles and strategies

Read about three principles that lead to your learners feeling more engaged and the strategies for using them in your classroom.

Principle 1: Break down information (‘chunking’)

Before you begin this section make a note on the following question:

Read this number and try to remember all the digits: 8467452.

Now read this number and do the same: 846-7452.

- Which option was easier to remember? Why?

What is this principle?

Breaking down (or ‘chunking’) information into smaller, more manageable, or meaningful pieces or groups makes it easier to process or hold in our working memory. The idea is that when information is delivered in chunks, we remember more.

Working memory is the small amount of information that can be held in our minds. It’s commonly said that we can only hold between 3 to 5 bits of information in our working memory at any given time.

You can think of chunking both in the way you present information to learners, for example breaking down lessons into bite size pieces, and also in how you design activities for learners.

How does this benefit our learners?

All learners (not only those with working memory difficulties!) benefit from chunking and creating groups to help processing information.

Chunking helps with comprehension of new information. Learners creating their own groups, or categories of information can extract their own meaning from the chunks of information.

How can you apply this in your online classroom?

- **Strategy 1:** For an online chunking activity, research and find a tool that works for your classroom to allow learners to break down and sort information digitally. For example, an online ‘whiteboard’ tool (like Google’s Jamboard or Miro), or a collaborative document like Google docs where learners can easily move information around.

  Give learners the opportunity to categorise the information themselves. Paste the information into the platform, and let learners edit it to create their own groups, or chunks. This could work with new vocabulary, or prefixes, suffixes, lexical chunks etc.
Prepare to discuss:

Working memory, emotions, noise and distractions can be barriers to our ability to engage with information effectively.

- Can you think of a time when your learners have experienced more than one barrier at the same time? What barriers were they?
- What was the impact of facing multiple barriers?

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Principle 2: Show the big picture of the lesson

Before you begin this section make a note on the following question:

- Think about a learner in a recent class who appeared lost, or confused… What are some reasons why they may have appeared that way?

What is this principle?

Even with well-chunked information, sometimes a lesson can feel like a jumble of unrelated parts to a learner. We benefit from seeing the 'big picture', or narrative of a lesson and how each chunk, or stage, of learning connects to the one before, and the one after.

By explicitly showing the building blocks, and how they are connected you’re helping to aid understanding by making your lessons build on each other. Support learners to know what is happening and to organise themselves.

How does this benefit our learners?

All learners learn better through forming connections as tying different things together builds understanding.

Learners with dyslexia especially benefit from seeing the 'big picture'. This can mean seeing how the information presented is cumulative (builds on each other), sequential (in a logical sequence) and the overall narrative.

How can you apply this in your online classroom?

- **Strategy 1**: Provide learners in advance with the aims and outcomes of the lessons and why (don't surprise learners!).
- **Strategy 2**: Provide digital course or lesson outlines with editable space for learners to add their own notes, reflections or ideas; to encourage them to make connections themselves. Guide learners to set personal learning goals which they can check at the end of the lesson, week or course.
• **Strategy 3:** Create a visual diagram of how the lesson fits together (e.g. an animated pyramid diagram or flowchart) which you complete as you work through the lesson to help show the cumulative nature of a lesson.

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**Prepare to discuss:**

- Have you ever felt lost, or confused while learning a new topic?
- What caused you to feel that way?

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**Principle 3: Activate the different senses**

**Before you begin this section make a note on the following question:**

What are your favourite smells, or scents? Why do you like these smells? What memories do they evoke?

How can you relate this to the classroom?

**What is this principle?**

We often present information with one modality (e.g., written or verbal) but the brain makes more connections (and therefore retains information better!) when more parts of the brain are activated.

Using the different senses in our lessons means that more parts of the brain are activated at a time. This is called multisensory learning.

Multisensory techniques help to convey information through the different senses like touch, smell, taste and movement. This can make it easier for learners to make new connections, collect information or retain information.

**How does this benefit our learners?**

Multisensory learning is great for all learners as using multiple senses can help information to stick, but it can be especially useful for learners who struggle with visual or auditory processing and find reading or listening particularly challenging. Many learners, especially learners with dyslexia, need to feel and see what they are learning in order to understand.

Using the senses is important, but we also need to manage how we use them. To avoid overloading students, make sure you scaffold and monitor the lesson. Some SEN learners can become overwhelmed by too much environmental stimuli (e.g. loud background noise, more than one person talking at a time, reading and listening at the same time).
How can you apply this in the online classroom?

When presenting new information, think about ways learners can explore this information using different senses.

- **Strategy 1:** Give learners a task that requires them to move around their remote environments and present ideas back to the class. If possible, ask learners to use their smartphones to take pictures or videos.

- **Strategy 2:** Combine reading with another sense. For example, reading and body movements (e.g. percussion or clapping), or reading and sound (e.g. music or melodies).

- **Strategy 3:** Assign homework with real life tasks. For example, instruct learners to eat a meal and then write about it.

- **Strategy 4:** Experiment with using scents to promote memory (scent, memory and learning have been found to be closely linked in the brain). For example, during a task ask learners to name a scent they can smell in their environment. Then, one week later, ask learners to reflect if associating the smell with the task helped their recall.

💡 Prepare to discuss:

- What are some challenges to activating the different senses in your learning context?
- What are some benefits?
Check your understanding

Draw a line between the principle, strategy and benefits to make groups. Include one principle, one strategy, and one benefit for each group.

Then make a note for each group with an idea of which learners in your class would benefit from this, or a challenge you see with using this strategy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle</th>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Benefit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Break down information</td>
<td>a. Provide learners with a visual outline of the course or lesson with space to record their own notes</td>
<td>a. Improve memory by making information easier to digest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Show the big picture</td>
<td>b. Ask learners to use real life objects and examples from their environment in tasks</td>
<td>b. Support students to form connections between information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Activate the different senses</td>
<td>c. Present content in small pieces that are organised in a logical way</td>
<td>c. Activate more parts of the brain to support memory</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Answers: 1.c,a. 2.a,b. 3.b,c.
Apply to your classroom

✍️ Think about an activity that you are planning to do with your class in the next week. Make notes about:

What changes can you make to:
- break down information
- show the big picture of the lesson
- activate the different senses

Make some notes to share with in your group discussion on:
- the changes you will make
- the benefits for your learners
- any challenges you see with using this strategy.

👏 Nice work. You’re done for today! Your next task is to meet your group to discuss your ideas from the module.
Reflect on the module as a group

Welcome to your group discussion for Module 5 on helping learners to engage with information better. This is a self-facilitated peer-learning session. Please follow the guide to go through the activities. Nominate a person for each letter A, B or C.

When it is your turn, lead the activity by reading the instructions aloud to the group and ask any questions. See below for details of each activity.

Note: The group discussion is a powerful way to share ideas and build a sense of community and accountability around inclusivity at your school. However if you're not able to join a group discussion in your context, the activities can also be completed alone as reflection and review tasks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity leader</th>
<th>Activity name</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher A</td>
<td>Check in and introductions</td>
<td>Five minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher B</td>
<td>Group review</td>
<td>Ten minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher C</td>
<td>Group reflection</td>
<td>15 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Check in and introduction - led by Teacher ‘A’

Before you begin, prepare for the session with a ‘check in’. A check in is a short pause at the beginning of a meeting to reflect on how you feel at this moment.

It might be that you have just had a very stressful class, or maybe you were running late today and feel in a rush. Sharing with the group helps to build empathy. When we have shared we are ready to begin the discussion.

Take a moment to look at the fruit. Which fruit are you today, and why? Then introduce yourself: tell the group your name and which fruit you feel like and why.

Spend about five minutes on this section.

Review - led by Teacher ‘B’

Choose a strategy and take turns and tell each other one or two things about this strategy.

Spend about ten minutes on this section.
1. Break down information
2. Show the big picture of the lesson
3. Activate the different senses

**Reflect - led by Teacher ‘C’**

Discuss the following reflection questions from the module as a group. Spend about 15 minutes on this section.

1. Working memory, emotions, noise and distractions can be barriers to our ability to engage with information effectively.
   
   Can you think of a time when your learners have experienced more than one barrier at the same time? What barriers were they? What was the impact of the multiple barriers?

2. Have you ever felt lost, or confused while learning a new topic? What caused you to feel that way?

3. What are some challenges to activating the different senses in your learning context? What are some benefits?

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**If you’re interested in this topic check out the links for further reading:**