

Planning to Introduce Think Aloud

Think Aloud refers to the practice of making one's thinking visible by making it audible; a reader literally speaks out thoughts as they occur in interaction with a text. Instructors strategically model Think Aloud to help students see, hear, and practice the mental activities engaged in by good readers. As a classroom routine, Think Aloud helps students focus on comprehension and helps the instructor know when and how students' comprehension goes awry, giving instructors the opportunity to consider when and how to intervene.

Engaging students in strategic metacognitive conversation serves several purposes:

- Engages all four dimensions of classroom life (personal, social, cognitive, and knowledge-building);
- Provides practice putting names to cognitive activities that help students figure out what they are thinking;
- Encourages students to notice and say when they are confused and use each other to brainstorm meaning through thinking aloud;
- Helps students notice text structures and how to navigate various genres, which builds confidence and stamina. Many instructors feel very comfortable with the theory of Think Aloud, but nervous about the process of "Making it Real"! Here are some guidelines to keep in mind as you scaffold the activity:
 - **Choose a relevant course text** that will engage students in predicting, visualizing, making connections, identifying problems, using fix-ups, and/or asking questions. Of course, students may not engage in all of these reading processes at any one time. The goal is to support students' development in knowing when, why, and how to engage a text.

- **Model for the students** how you, as an expert reader, would read the text, remembering that what you choose to model will depend on what you want students to glean from the text and activity.
- **Be authentic.** Even though you are choosing to model Think Aloud with a particular text for a particular purpose, you should still share the contents of your thinking in a spontaneous way. Do not turn your model Think Aloud into a lecture in disguise!
- **Keep it short.** When you model Think Aloud, cut yourself off after two minutes at the absolute most. When students work together in pairs, they might be able to sustain the Think Aloud for longer stretches. For example, a student might practice Thinking Aloud while reading one full paragraph while his or her partner takes notes, and then the pair will switch roles; this process could take more time, but it should still be focused and limited in scope.
- **Build the metacognitive conversation.** Be sure to provide students with thinking time, time to work with partners or small groups, and time to share out, and be sure to try Think Aloud with different texts and in different contexts. Model for your students your own faith that the metacognitive conversation will build and will become richer with time.