

Working Memory Strategies

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

MONITOR THE STUDENT

- Ask the student to verbalize their steps in completing tasks they often struggle to complete. This can provide important information about where the breakdown is occurring and what supports are likely to work best.
- Evaluate the working memory demands of learning activities. A student with working memory difficulties will need more support as tasks get longer, become more complex, have unfamiliar content or demand more mental processing.

REDUCE THE MEMORY LOAD

- Break tasks into smaller chunks. One task at a time is best, if possible.
- Reduce the amount of material the student is expected to complete.
- Keep new information or instructions brief and to the point, and repeat in concise fashion for the student, as needed.
- Provide written directions for reference.
- Simplify the amount of mental processing required by providing several oral “clues” for a problem and writing key words for each clue on

- Provide opportunities to repeat the task.
- Encourage practice to increase the amount of information encoded into memory.
- Teach students to practice in short sessions, spaced throughout the day. Spaced practice is more effective than massed practice. Have students practice new skills or information in short sessions over the course of the day rather than in one long session. For example, give the student a set of key facts to review for a few minutes two or three times during the school day, and encourage them to review again at home both at night and in the morning.

COLOUR CODE

- Physical coding, such as consistent colours for different subject areas, can act as triggers to help students remember information.
 - o Try coding when teaching new concepts: when teaching sentence structure nouns are always red, verbs are always green etc.
 - o Spelling – highlight difficult parts of new words.
 - o Vocabulary – teach new words in categories or families and colour code the categories.
 - o Encourage the use of coloured pens or highlighters (remember, yellow is the LEAST effective).

MAKE OVERT LINKS

- Try to get the students to link new information to prior knowledge – encourage drawing, writing and verbal reflection. The use metaphors, analogies, imagery or induced imagery (where the image is generated by the individual, rather than given to them) can help.
- Start each lesson with a quick review of the previous lesson – always write down key words as the students recall information to model “trigger words”.
- End each lesson with a summary of what was learned.

KEY WORDS

- Teach students to listen for key words. Post the words in the classroom and frequently use them as cues while you teach.
- Often students with working memory difficulties also exhibit word and information retrieval difficulties.

They frequently experience the “tip of the tongue” phenomenon, or may produce the wrong details within the correct concept. The student may need additional time to retrieve details when answering a question. Cues may be necessary to help them focus on the correct bit of information or word.

TEST TAKING

- Allow extra time, or reduce the number of questions.

- Consider requiring recognition vs. recall.
- Teach students to scan the test and plan their time allocation.
- For essay tests, teach students to create a list, write key words in point form and then expand on the key words and ideas.
- Where possible, allow students to use reference sheets during tests (e.g., math formulae, chronologies of events), or encourage students to create reference sheets at home, to rehearse the information frequently and then to rewrite the information at the beginning of the exam before attempting