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About this resource document

In this document, *literacy* refers to reading, writing and oral communication skills in all subject areas for the purpose of developing and applying critical thinking skills.

Literacy skills are at the heart of learning. You already know that. Successful students are able to read for meaning, to write with clarity and purpose, and to participate productively in classroom discussions. But many of your students may be struggling with these skills, and that makes it harder for you to teach the content of your subject area. What can you do to help struggling learners without sacrificing content and continuing to meet the needs of all students?

The key is teamwork – a whole-school, cross-curricular approach to literacy learning. When teachers of all subjects use the same proven strategies to help their students read and write in the language of their subject discipline, they build on the students' prior knowledge, and equip them to make connections that are essential for continued learning. When a math teacher demonstrates how to *skim and scan* for *signal words* to help students solve complex math problems, these skills also prepare them to read any subject text more effectively. When a drama teacher uses a *web* or *concept map* to generate ideas for a one-act play and the science teacher uses a concept map in the science lab to hypothesize about an ecosystem, they reinforce literacy strategies for students.

Students who are explicitly taught a repertoire of reading, writing and oral communication skills, and become adept at using them, are then able to apply those skills in other contexts. They become effective communicators in an idea-fuelled and information-driven world.

Scope
The scope of this resource document evolved. This initiative began with a focus on students at risk. As the project developed, it became clear that strategies helpful to students at risk would benefit all students. Research and classroom experience show that the most effective way to help struggling learners is to incorporate proven instructional strategies in every classroom.

Audience
Literacy learning is a life-long process that belongs to every teacher. This resource document is intended for teachers of all subject areas from Grades 7 to 12. Mastery of the basic skills of reading, writing and oral communication does not end in elementary school. Teachers from Grades 7 to 12 who have students who are struggling with literacy skills will find practical approaches to help these students in all subject areas.

Contributors
This resource document was developed by teachers for teachers. Before beginning the document, the writers met with a group of elementary and secondary teachers to determine the qualities of a document that would best support effective instructional practice across curriculum areas. The writing team included classroom teachers and literacy consultants with extensive classroom experience in Grades 7 to 12, from public and Catholic school boards across Ontario. Team members contributed their expertise in adolescent literacy, English as a Second Language/ English Language Development (ESL/ELD), and Special Education. This resource document accompanies a report by a province-wide Expert Panel on Students At Risk that focuses on literacy and numeracy needs for students in Grades 7 to 12.

Key Messages

... About What Struggling Students Need

- to believe they can read and write
- to experience success in the classroom
- to learn through meaningful and challenging experiences
- to have lots of opportunities for purposeful talk – before, during and after all activities
- to have structured opportunities to discuss content area topics
- to build mutually supportive relationships with other students and with teachers

The need to guide adolescents to advanced stages of literacy is not the result of any teaching or learning failure in the preschool or primary years: it is a necessary part of normal reading development. Guidance is needed so that reading and writing develop along with adolescents' ever increasing knowledge of oral language, thinking ability, and knowledge of the world.
(Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw, and Rycik, 2000)

... For Teachers

- Focus instruction on *before, during* and *after* phases of learning.
- Provide students with modelling, teaching, guided practice, and ongoing feedback.
- Explicitly teach literacy strategies, but gradually release responsibility to the learner.
- Encourage risk-taking and view errors as part of the learning process.
- Encourage students to set goals for their own learning.
- Provide accommodations to support the learning.

... For School Literacy Teams

- Work with subject area/departments to determine literacy skills required in each discipline.
- Teach the reading and writing *strategies* while teaching subject *content.*
- Know your student population - their prior knowledge, culture and individual differences.
- Use consistent terms and graphic organizers to reinforce literacy skills.
- Acknowledge the successes of students and teachers.

How to use this resource

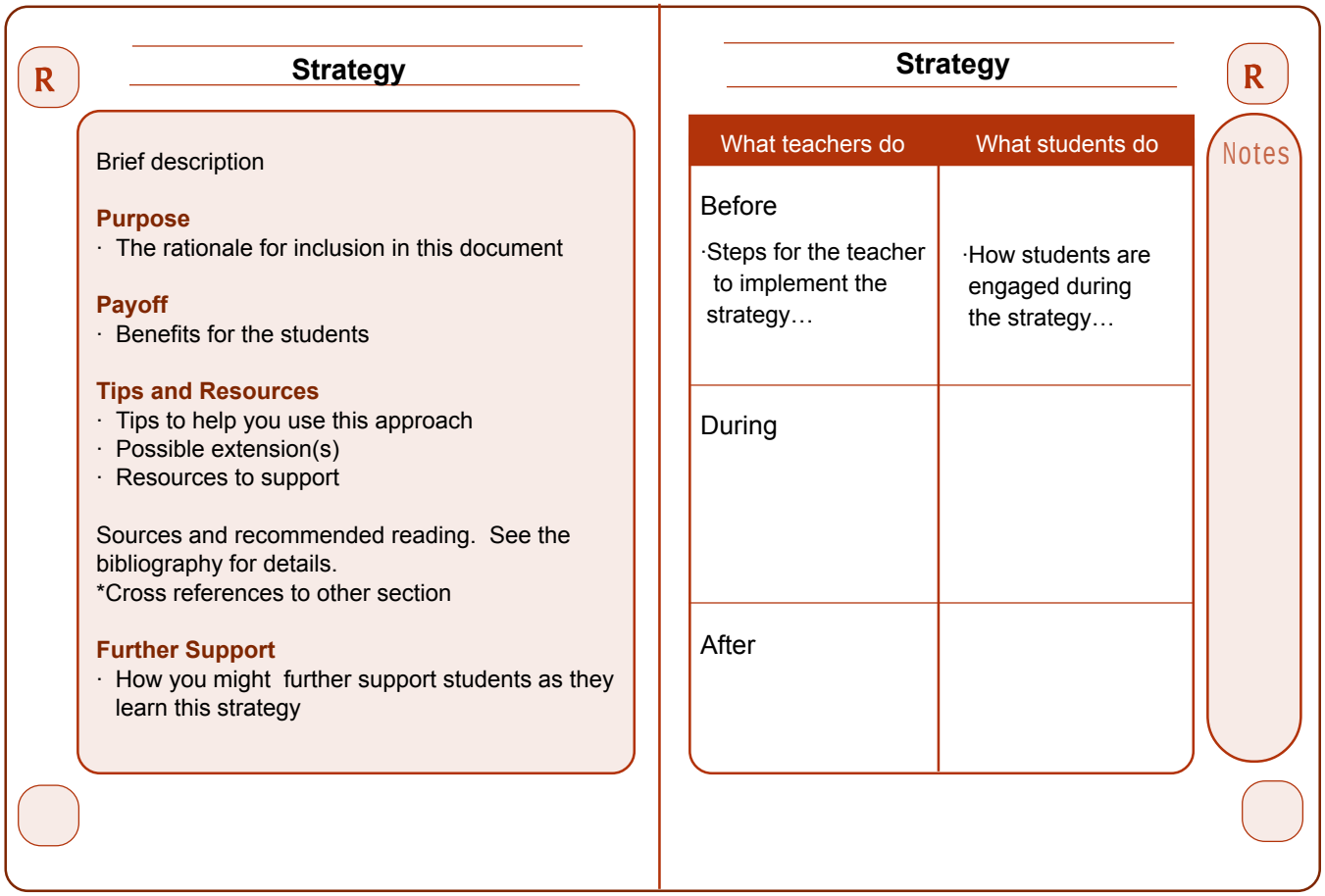
This document provides practical, hands-on, classroom-ready strategies and recommends related resources that apply across subject areas in Grades 7 to 12. Use it to expand your own instructional strategies and as a resource to promote school-wide professional talk.

There are three main sections in this document: Reading (R), Writing (W) and Oral Communication (O). Because literacy skills are interconnected, they enhance each other - awareness of reading strategies helps students become more effective writers; use of the writing process helps them become more critical readers. And for many students, especially those who struggle with reading and writing and with the curriculum content, speaking and listening skills can be the doorway to reading, writing and critical thinking.

Each strategy begins with a two-page spread containing all the information needed to use the approach in your classroom. Additional resources may be included after the two-page spread. The *Teacher Resource* is a starting point for thinking about your subject content. The *Student Resources* can be modified and used as handouts.

The left-facing page describes the strategy and its benefits, and offers tips and resources.

The right-facing page describes what teachers and students do before, during, and after the strategy.



Considerations when using this resource

- The division of this document into three separate sections is for purposes of organization and clarity. However, student literacy learning is enhanced when reading, writing, and oral communication skills and strategies are explicitly taught through an integrated program.
- To foster integrative cross-curricular programming, intermediate and secondary teachers can use this document to promote school and/or cross-panel discussions and reach agreement on when an approach will be taught, who will use the samples, and how the learning of the approach will be assessed.

> *We will improve learning when we collectively, intelligently and creatively focus our efforts on improving the teaching and learning process. The more we understand about the learner, the more we understand about meaningful and responsible assessment and evaluation, the more we understand about what is to be learned, the more we understand about instructional processes, and the more we understand about collectively acting on what we understand, then the more likely we are to make a difference*. (Bennett and Rolheiser, 2001)

- On the inside front and back covers, cross-curricular approaches are grouped by student/teacher needs in a visual organizer. These charts provide a quick and handy reference for locating information about and samples of classroom strategies.
- The strategies described in the document are not sequential or interdependent. Select the approaches that best meet the needs of your students and your subject area/discipline.
- Timelines for teaching and learning an approach may vary. For example, teachers may use an approach to get a concept across to students quickly or they may want to spend longer in teaching students how to use a particular approach.
- For some students, instructional and/or environmental accommodations are necessary to ensure learning. A list of potential accommodations that may be required follows.
- The specific and generic samples given in this document should serve as a springboard for designing your own classroom samples. Keep the samples that you develop and use with your students for sharing with other teachers and for contributing to future initiatives in writing cross-curricular resources for teachers.
- An annotated bibliography of relevant professional resources summarizes key messages, classroom strategies, and insights related to literacy learning.

> *Literacy floats on a sea of talk.* (James Britton, 1970)

Accommodating Learning Needs

Accommodations refer to the teaching strategies, supports, and/or services that are required in order for a student to access the curriculum and demonstrate learning. Instructional accommodations are changes in teaching strategies; environmental accommodations are changes to the classroom and/or school environment. These accommodations provide greater opportunity for students to be successful learners.

Instructional Accommodations	Environmental Accommodations
• Ability groupings • Assistive technology, such as text-to-speech software • Augmentative and alternative communications systems • Buddy/peer tutoring • Colour cues • Concrete/hands-on materials • Computer options • Contracts • Dramatizing information • Duplicated notes • Gesture cues • Graphic organizers • High structure • Increased breaks • Large-size fonts • Manipulatives • Mind maps • Non-verbal signals • Note-taking assistance • Organization coaching • Partnering • Reduced/uncluttered formats • Reinforcement incentives • Repeating information • Rewording/rephrasing information • Spatially-cued formats • Tactile tracing strategies • Taped texts • Time allowance for processing • Time-management aids • Tracking sheets • Visual cueing • Word retrieval prompts	• Alternative workspaces • Assistive devices or adaptive equipment • Background noise minimized • Headphone use • Instructor proximity • Quiet settings • Reduced audio/visual stimuli • Special lighting • Strategic seating • Study carrels

(Adapted from Course Profile; Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course)