



# Metacognitive Skills

## Seeking Clarity

Secondary



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## SEEKING CLARITY

Seeking clarity helps students identify points of confusion when they are learning new information. This allows them to independently seek a deeper understanding.

Introduce the skill of seeking clarity using the video lesson or an introduction of your own design that covers the same content. The text of the recording is below:

**Video script** -- Have you ever been reading something for class or listening to a lesson and suddenly thought, “I’m not sure I understand this.” Maybe a word didn’t make sense, a direction seemed confusing, or a concept wasn’t clear. Moments like these are common, and they are exactly when the skill of **Seeking Clarity** becomes important.

Seeking clarity means identifying when something is confusing and taking steps to understand it better. Instead of pretending you get it or hoping it will make sense later, you pause, figure out what you are unsure about, and work to clear it up. When you use this skill, you become more confident because you understand your learning more deeply and can move forward without guessing.

Here is a strategy that can help guide your thinking as you seek clarity.

1. Ask yourself if there’s something you don’t fully understand.
2. If there is, identify the question or questions you need answered to understand it better.
3. Determine if you can answer the question(s) yourself by seeking more information or if there’s someone else you can ask.
4. Get your question(s) answered.
5. Identify what you were right about, what you were wrong about, and what you have learned that is new.

Here’s an example of someone using this strategy:

Isaac’s history class is learning about early civilizations. His teacher is explaining how trade routes developed, and Isaac feels like he understands most of the information.



Then the teacher asks the class to write an essay describing how a city’s location helped determine whether it became wealthy or not. Isaac realizes he isn’t totally sure why location matters. He asks himself, “What part of this is unclear?” and “What question do I need answered?” He decides his question is, “How did the location of a city affect its success?”

Isaac decides to look for the answer to his questions by looking at the map in his textbook. The map explains that cities located along major trade routes grew and prospered because so many traders passed through to buy supplies and trade goods. He’s still not sure he understands fully, so he asks his teacher to give an example. She tells him about the connection between rivers, travel, and trade, and everything clicks. He can now see how geography gave certain cities an advantage, and he understands the lesson much better.

After getting his question answered, Isaac realizes he learned important information about ancient cities, but he also learned that if he is unsure about something, he can try to pinpoint what exactly he is unclear about and figure out how to get clarity.

Seeking clarity is useful outside of school, too. For example, Xavier is baking brownies. The recipe says to fold in the dry ingredients. He isn’t sure what it means to fold. He wants to just stir all the ingredients together quickly, but he really wants the brownies to be good. He decides to look up a video that explains what fold means. He’s glad he checked, because if he hadn’t combined the ingredients gently, as the recipe said, his brownies would have turned out tough and dense.

Whether you’re in school or not, when you seek clarity, you learn to notice exactly when you don’t fully understand something and take steps to clear it up. As you keep practicing this skill, you’ll get better at identifying your questions, using helpful resources to answer them, and explaining how this improved your work. This will guide you toward a deeper understanding of what you’re learning.



Once students have been introduced to the skill of seeking clarity, emphasize the following points with them:

- Seeking clarity means noticing when something does not fully make sense and choosing to address the confusion rather than ignoring it or guessing. Discuss with students using prompts like, “What thoughts usually tell you that you don’t fully understand something?”
- This skill is especially useful in situations where understanding is essential for what comes next, such as following directions, learning new concepts, or applying information to a task or assignment. Discuss with students using prompts like, “When does not understanding something make it harder to move forward?”
- Feeling unsure, confused, or hesitant may signal that it is time to seek clarity. Discuss with students using prompts like, “What does confusion feel like for you when you’re learning something new?”
- An important part of seeking clarity is identifying exactly what is unclear instead of saying, “I don’t get it” in general. Discuss with students using prompts like, “How can breaking confusion into a specific question help you understand better?”
- Seeking clarity involves deciding whether you can answer your question on your own by looking for more information or whether you need to ask someone else for help. Discuss with students using prompts like, “How do you decide whether to look it up yourself or ask someone for help?”
- Using resources such as textbooks, examples, videos, or knowledgeable people helps you get accurate and helpful answers to your questions. Discuss with students using prompts like, “What resources helped Isaac understand why location mattered for ancient cities?”
- Getting your questions answered allows you to correct misunderstandings and build a clearer understanding of the topic. Discuss with students using prompts like, “What did Isaac realize he was wrong or unsure about once he found the answer?”
- Reflection is an important part of this skill and helps you recognize what you learned and how seeking clarity improved your understanding. Discuss with students using prompts like, “What did Isaac learn about his own learning process after seeking clarity?”



- Seeking clarity outside of school helps improve real-world outcomes, such as following instructions correctly or making better decisions. Discuss with students using prompts like, “How did seeking clarity help Xavier avoid making a mistake while baking?” or “How might seeking clarity change the way you approach confusing situations in school or outside of school?”



## LEVELS OF COMPETENCE

There are specific levels of competence for this skill against which students can be evaluated (see **Table 1**). It is important to note that the levels of competence are articulated as a scale that can be used to make judgments about students' status and growth. That scale has score values that range from 0.0 to 4.0. At the 0.0 level, the student cannot demonstrate any part of the skill even with help. At the 1.0 level, the student can perform some of the foundational aspects of the skill with help but not independently. At the 2.0 level, the student can independently demonstrate the foundational aspects of the skill but not the behaviors described at the 3.0 level. The 3.0 level on the scale represents proficiency in the skill. When students can independently demonstrate these behaviors, they have reached the desired status for the skill. At the 4.0 level, the student demonstrates everything at the 3.0 level AND goes above and beyond expectations by adding useful adaptations to the skill. Finally, the scale describes half-point scores that indicate partial progress toward the next level of the scale.

Periodically evaluate students' status relative to these levels of competence using the assessment activities in **Table 4**.

It is also important to note that **Table 2** and **Table 3** contain versions of the scale that can be used by students to rate themselves. These scales are both stated in an "I CAN" format. Periodically, students evaluate themselves relative to the levels of competence using the Full-point or the Half-point self-evaluation scales.



**Table 1: Levels of Competence**

4.0	The student can articulate specific situations (in and out of school) in which they should seek clarity, set goals to do so, and evaluate progress.
3.5	In addition to score 3.0 performance, partial success at score 4.0 content.
3.0	The student will recognize when they are not seeking clarity and respond by executing a complex strategy involving self-analysis.
2.5	No major errors or omissions regarding score 2.0 content, and partial success at score 3.0 content.
2.0	<p>The student will recognize or recall vocabulary associated with self-analysis as it relates to seeking clarity (for example, <i>correction, reflection, revision</i>) and perform basic processes such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Describe a complex strategy involving self-analysis for seeking clarity (articulated by the class or the teacher in the form of a standard operating procedure [SOP]): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ask yourself if there’s something you don’t fully understand.</li> <li>○ If there is, identify the question or questions you need answered to understand it better.</li> <li>○ Determine if you can answer the question(s) yourself by seeking more information or if there’s someone else you can ask.</li> <li>○ Get your question(s) answered.</li> <li>○ Identify what you were right about, what you were wrong about, and what you have learned that is new.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Understand what an individual might think and feel while seeking clarity (for example, thinking “I’m not sure I understand this.” or “What resources are available to help me clarify this?”)</li> </ul>
1.5	Partial success at score 2.0 content, and major errors or omissions regarding score 3.0 content.
1.0	With help, partial success at score 2.0 content and score 3.0 content.
0.5	With help, partial success at score 2.0 content but not at score 3.0 content.



0.0	Even with help, the student demonstrates no success.
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**Table 2: I CAN Student Assessment Form (Half-point scale)**

4.0	I can articulate specific situations (in and out of school) in which I should seek clarity, set goals to do so, and evaluate progress.
3.5	In addition to score 3.0, I can do some of what is required at the score 4.0 level.
3.0	I can recognize when I am not seeking clarity and respond by executing a complex strategy involving self-analysis.
2.5	In addition to score 2.0, I can do some of what is required at the score 3.0 level.
2.0	<p>I can recognize or recall vocabulary associated with self-analysis as it relates to seeking clarity (for example, <i>correction, reflection, revision</i>) and perform basic processes such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Describe a complex strategy involving self-analysis for seeking clarity (articulated by the class or the teacher in the form of a standard operating procedure [SOP]): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ask yourself if there’s something you don’t fully understand.</li> <li>○ If there is, identify the question or questions you need answered to understand it better.</li> <li>○ Determine if you can answer the question(s) yourself by seeking more information or if there’s someone else you can ask.</li> <li>○ Get your question(s) answered.</li> <li>○ Identify what you were right about, what you were wrong about, and what you have learned that is new.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Understand what an individual might think and feel while seeking clarity (for example, thinking “I’m not sure I understand this.” or “What resources are available to help me clarify this?”)</li> </ul>
1.5	On my own, I can do some of the things at score 2.0 level.
1.0	With help, I can do some of the things at score 2.0 level and 3.0 level.



0.5	With help, I can do some of the score 2.0 level things but not the score 3.0 level things.
0.0	Even with help, I cannot do any of the score levels.



**Table 3: I CAN Student Assessment Form (Full-point scale)**

4.0	I can articulate specific situations (in and out of school) in which I should seek clarity, set goals to do so, and evaluate progress.
3.0	I can recognize when I am not seeking clarity and respond by executing a complex strategy involving self-analysis.
2.0	<p>I can recognize or recall vocabulary associated with self-analysis as it relates to seeking clarity (for example, <i>correction, reflection, revision</i>) and perform basic processes such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Describe a complex strategy involving self-analysis for seeking clarity (articulated by the class or the teacher in the form of a standard operating procedure [SOP]): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Ask yourself if there’s something you don’t fully understand.</li> <li>○ If there is, identify the question or questions you need answered to understand it better.</li> <li>○ Determine if you can answer the question(s) yourself by seeking more information or if there’s someone else you can ask.</li> <li>○ Get your question(s) answered.</li> <li>○ Identify what you were right about, what you were wrong about, and what you have learned that is new.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Understand what an individual might think and feel while seeking clarity (for example, thinking “I’m not sure I understand this.” or “What resources are available to help me clarify this?”)</li> </ul>
1.0	With help, I can do some of the things at score 2.0 level and score 3.0 level.
0.0	Even with help, I cannot do any of the score levels.



**Table 4: Assessment Activities**

4.0	Ask students to document specific situations, both in and out of school, in which they've used the skill of seeking clarity. They should be able to describe the goals they set for themselves, what they did, and how well they performed.
3.0	Have students document a time they used the skill of seeking clarity. They should be able to provide a detailed description of the event and a critique of their own behavior.
2.0	<p>Ask students to explain the following terms: <i>correction</i>, <i>reflection</i>, <i>revision</i>. Their answers should be generally accurate but not necessarily detailed or complete.</p> <p>Ask students to describe a basic process that has been provided to them for seeking clarity. Their descriptions should include explicit steps such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Ask yourself if there's something you don't fully understand.</li><li>● If there is, identify the question or questions you need answered to understand it better.</li><li>● Determine if you can answer the question(s) yourself by seeking more information or if there's someone else you can ask.</li><li>● Get your question(s) answered.</li><li>● Identify what you were right about, what you were wrong about, and what you have learned that is new.</li></ul> <p>Ask students to describe some of the self-talk and thinking that should occur when someone is seeking clarity. Their answers should include things like they are thinking, "I'm not sure I understand this." or "What resources are available to help me clarify this?"</p>

