Metacognitive Skills

Staying Focused When Answers and Solutions are not Immediately Apparent

Secondary

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STAYING FOCUSED WHEN ANSWERS AND SOLUTIONS ARE NOT IMMEDIATELY APPARENT

Staying Focused When Answers and Solutions are not Immediately Apparent is a skill that helps students overcome obstacles and stay focused when challenges arise. It also helps students to recognize how much effort they are putting into accomplishing a specific task.

Introduce the skill of Staying Focused When Answers and Solutions are not Immediately Apparent 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 come up against a challenge that really tested your patience or focus? Maybe it was an essay that you couldn't get right, confusing results on a science lab, trying to fix a bike chain that kept falling off, or figuring out how to beat a challenging level in a game.

In moments like these, it's easy to get frustrated, lose focus, or want to give up. That's when the skill of Staying Focused When Answers and Solutions Are Not Immediately Apparent really matters.

This skill helps you keep trying when a task is complicated or the answer isn't clear. It involves noticing when you're starting to lose focus, identifying what's getting in your way, and using self-talk and reflection to get back on track. It also means recognizing the kinds of situations—in and out of school—where staying focused will help you meet your goals, and choosing to use these tools in those moments.

Here's a strategy you can use for staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent:

1. Ask yourself if you have stopped trying.
2. If yes, see if you can identify what is stopping you from trying harder.
3. Tell yourself that you are going to give it a few more tries.
4. When you've stopped trying, ask yourself what you've learned from the experience.

Here's an example of someone using this strategy.

Jordan is in science class, building a small robotic vehicle. Everyone else's vehicle is rolling across the table, but his won't move at all. He checks the instructions and makes sure the wires are connected correctly, but the wheels still won't turn. He even checks the switch and adjusts the motor, but nothing happens. With each failed attempt, his frustration grows. He starts thinking his car will never work. He's not sure what to do. He feels stuck and wants to stop.

Then Jordan remembers the strategy. He asks himself, "Have you stopped trying?" The answer is yes—he realizes he's about ready to give up.

Next, he identifies what's stopping him from trying harder. It's his frustration and the belief that his vehicle will never work. As he looks at it again, he wonders if the gear connecting the motor to the wheels is lined up correctly. He tells himself, "I'm going to give it a few more tries." He makes some adjustments, rechecks the wires, and flips the switch. This time, the wheels begin to turn, and the vehicle rolls forward. Jordan smiles proudly. Not only did he get his robotic vehicle working, but he also proved to himself that taking a moment to think, adjust, and keep trying can lead to success.

Finally, when he stops working, he thinks about what he learned. He learned more about robotic vehicles. Even when it wouldn't move, staying focused and trying different adjustments helped him understand what to do to make it work. He also learned something about himself. When he faces a challenge and wants to give up, he can use the strategy to stop, take a breath, and say, "Let me try that again."

Staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent is useful outside of school, too. For example, Camila's bike chain keeps slipping every time she shifts gears, and after fixing it twice, she feels so frustrated that she's ready to give up. But she catches herself and realizes she's stopped trying because she's tired of dealing with the same problem. She takes a deep breath and decides to look more carefully at what's actually causing the issue. When she checks the bike closely, she notices the chain isn't aligned with the gears. She resets it and slowly pedals to test it. This time, it stays in place.

When she reflects later, Camila realizes that the moment she paused, focused, and tried one more time made all the difference. Using this strategy helped Camila stay with the challenge and find a real solution- something she can do anytime the answer isn't immediately clear.

Whether you're in school or not, staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent is about more than just finishing a task. It's also about being persistent and noticing your own effort. The more you identify situations where staying focused matters—and set goals for how you'll keep trying—the stronger this skill becomes.

Once students have been introduced to the skill of staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent, emphasize the following points with them:

- Staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent means continuing to engage with a task even when it feels difficult, confusing, or frustrating. Discuss with students using prompts like, "What does it look like when you are still trying, even though the answer isn't clear yet?"
- This skill is especially useful in situations where progress takes time and solutions are not obvious right away, such as problem solving, building or fixing something, revising work, or learning a new skill. Discuss with students using prompts like, "What kinds of tasks make you most likely to feel stuck or want to give up?"
- Staying focused involves noticing when you have stopped trying or are about to give up, rather than pushing through on autopilot or shutting down. Discuss with students using prompts like, "How can you tell when you've stopped trying, even if you're still in the middle of the task?"
- Frustration, doubt, or negative self-talk can interfere with focus, and identifying these obstacles is an important part of staying engaged. Discuss with students using prompts like, "What thoughts or feelings usually get in the way when a task becomes hard?"
- Using self-talk can help you re-engage with a task by reminding yourself to try again or approach the problem differently. Discuss with students using prompts like, "What could you say to yourself to help you give it a few more tries?
- Staying focused often means deliberately choosing to keep working longer, even when motivation is low. Discuss with students using prompts like, "Why might deciding to try just a little longer make a difference?"
- Reflection helps you learn from moments when you were stuck by thinking about what worked, what didn't, and what you learned about yourself. Discuss with students using prompts like, "After Jordan's vehicle finally worked, what did he realize about how staying focused helped him?"
- Evaluating your effort during challenging moments helps you recognize persistence as part of success, not just the final outcome. Discuss with students using prompts like, "What can you learn from a task even if it didn't work right away?"

- Noticing that effort and adjustment can lead to progress supports persistence rather than discouragement. Discuss with students using prompts like, "How did Jordan's decision to pause, think, and try again change what happened next?" "Can you think of a time when trying one more time helped you solve a problem?" or "How might using this strategy change the way you handle difficult tasks in the future, in or out 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 school and outside of school) in which they should stay focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent, 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 staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent 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	The student will recognize or recall vocabulary associated with self-analysis as it relates to staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, *obstacle*, *reflection*, *self-talk*) and perform basic processes such as:
	● Describe a complex strategy involving self-analysis for staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (articulated by the class or the teacher in the form of a standard operating procedure [SOP]:
	  ○ Ask yourself if you have stopped trying.
	  ○ If yes, see if you can identify what is stopping you from trying harder.
	  ○ Tell yourself that you are going to give it a few more tries.
	  ○ When you've stopped trying, ask yourself what you've learned from the experience.
	● Understand what an individual might think and feel while staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, thinking "Let me try that again" or "Maybe there's a different way to do this").

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. |

Table 2: I CAN Student Assessment Form (Half-point scale)

4.0	I can articulate specific situations (in school and out of school) in which I should stay focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent, set goals to do so, and evaluate my 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 staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent, 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	I can recognize or recall vocabulary associated with self-analysis as it relates to staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, *obstacle*, *reflection*, *self-talk*), and perform basic processes such as:
	● Describe a complex strategy involving self-analysis for staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (articulated by the class or the teacher in the form of a standard operating procedure [SOP]:
	  ○ Ask yourself if you have stopped trying.
	  ○ If yes, see if you can identify what is stopping you from trying harder.
	  ○ Tell yourself that you are going to give it a few more tries.
	  ○ When you've stopped trying, ask yourself what you've learned from the experience.
	● I understand what an individual might think and feel while staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, thinking "Let me try that again" or "Maybe there's a different way to do this").

1.5	On my own, I can do some of the things at score 2.0 level.

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

4.0	I can articulate specific situations (in school and out of school) in which I should stay focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent, set goals to do so, and evaluate my progress.
3.0	I can recognize when I am not staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent and respond by executing a complex strategy involving self-analysis.

2.0	I can recognize or recall vocabulary associated with self-analysis as it relates to staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, *obstacle*, *reflection*, *self-talk*),, and perform basic processes such as:
	● Describe a complex strategy involving self-analysis for staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (articulated by the class or the teacher in the form of a standard operating procedure [SOP]:
	    ○ Ask yourself if you have stopped trying.
	    ○ If yes, see if you can identify what is stopping you from trying harder.
	    ○ Tell yourself that you are going to give it a few more tries.
	    ○ When you've stopped trying, ask yourself what you've learned from the experience.
	● I understand what an individual might think and feel while staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, thinking "Let me try that again" or "Maybe there's a different way to do this").

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 in and out of school when they've used the skill of staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent. 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 staying focused even when answers and solutions were not immediately apparent. They should be able to provide a detailed description of the event and a critique of their own behavior.
2.0	Ask students to explain the following terms: obstacle, reflection, self-talk. Their answers should be generally accurate but not necessarily detailed or complete. Ask students to describe a basic process that has been provided to them for staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent. Their descriptions should include explicit steps such as: [1] ask yourself if you have stopped trying, [2] if yes, see if you can identify what is stopping things like they are saying to themselves: "Let me try that again" or "Maybe there's a different way to do this". you from trying harder, [3] tell yourself that you are going to give it a few more tries, [4] when you've stopped trying, ask yourself what you've learned from the experience. Ask students to describe some of the self-talk and thinking that should occur when someone is staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent. Their answers should include things like they say to themselves, "Let me try that again." or "Maybe there's a different way to do this."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STAYING FOCUSED WHEN ANSWERS AND SOLUTIONS ARE NOT IMMEDIATELY APPARENT

Staying Focused When Answers and Solutions are not Immediately Apparent is a skill that helps students overcome obstacles and stay focused when challenges arise. It also helps students to recognize how much effort they are putting into accomplishing a specific task.

Introduce the skill of Staying Focused When Answers and Solutions are not Immediately Apparent 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 come up against a challenge that really tested your patience or focus? Maybe it was an essay that you couldn't get right, confusing results on a science lab, trying to fix a bike chain that kept falling off, or figuring out how to beat a challenging level in a game.
>
> In moments like these, it's easy to get frustrated, lose focus, or want to give up. That's when the skill of Staying Focused When Answers and Solutions Are Not Immediately Apparent really matters.
>
> This skill helps you keep trying when a task is complicated or the answer isn't clear. It involves noticing when you're starting to lose focus, identifying what's getting in your way, and using self-talk and reflection to get back on track. It also means recognizing the kinds of situations—in and out of school—where staying focused will help you meet your goals, and choosing to use these tools in those moments.
>
> Here's a strategy you can use for staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent:

1. Ask yourself if you have stopped trying.
2. If yes, see if you can identify what is stopping you from trying harder.
3. Tell yourself that you are going to give it a few more tries.
4. When you've stopped trying, ask yourself what you've learned from the experience.

Here's an example of someone using this strategy.

Jordan is in science class, building a small robotic vehicle. Everyone else's vehicle is rolling across the table, but his won't move at all. He checks the instructions and makes sure the wires are connected correctly, but the wheels still won't turn. He even checks the switch and adjusts the motor, but nothing happens. With each failed attempt, his frustration grows. He starts thinking his car will never work. He's not sure what to do. He feels stuck and wants to stop.

Then Jordan remembers the strategy. He asks himself, "Have you stopped trying?" The answer is yes—he realizes he's about ready to give up.

Next, he identifies what's stopping him from trying harder. It's his frustration and the belief that his vehicle will never work. As he looks at it again, he wonders if the gear connecting the motor to the wheels is lined up correctly. He tells himself, "I'm going to give it a few more tries." He makes some adjustments, rechecks the wires, and flips the switch. This time, the wheels begin to turn, and the vehicle rolls forward. Jordan smiles proudly. Not only did he get his robotic vehicle working, but he also proved to himself that taking a moment to think, adjust, and keep trying can lead to success.

Finally, when he stops working, he thinks about what he learned. He learned more about robotic vehicles. Even when it wouldn't move, staying focused and trying different adjustments helped him understand what to do to make it work. He also learned something about himself. When he faces a challenge and wants to give up, he can use the strategy to stop, take a breath, and say, "Let me try that again."

Staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent is useful outside of school, too. For example, Camila's bike chain keeps slipping every time she shifts gears, and after fixing it twice, she feels so frustrated that she's ready to give up. But she catches herself and realizes she's stopped trying because she's tired of dealing with the same problem. She takes a deep breath and decides to look more carefully at what's actually causing the issue. When she checks the bike closely, she notices the chain isn't aligned with the gears. She resets it and slowly pedals to test it. This time, it stays in place.

When she reflects later, Camila realizes that the moment she paused, focused, and tried one more time made all the difference. Using this strategy helped Camila stay with the challenge and find a real solution- something she can do anytime the answer isn't immediately clear.

Whether you're in school or not, staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent is about more than just finishing a task. It's also about being persistent and noticing your own effort. The more you identify situations where staying focused matters—and set goals for how you'll keep trying—the stronger this skill becomes.

Once students have been introduced to the skill of staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent, emphasize the following points with them:

- Staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent means continuing to engage with a task even when it feels difficult, confusing, or frustrating. Discuss with students using prompts like, "What does it look like when you are still trying, even though the answer isn't clear yet?"
- This skill is especially useful in situations where progress takes time and solutions are not obvious right away, such as problem solving, building or fixing something, revising work, or learning a new skill. Discuss with students using prompts like, "What kinds of tasks make you most likely to feel stuck or want to give up?"
- Staying focused involves noticing when you have stopped trying or are about to give up, rather than pushing through on autopilot or shutting down. Discuss with students using prompts like, "How can you tell when you've stopped trying, even if you're still in the middle of the task?"
- Frustration, doubt, or negative self-talk can interfere with focus, and identifying these obstacles is an important part of staying engaged. Discuss with students using prompts like, "What thoughts or feelings usually get in the way when a task becomes hard?"
- Using self-talk can help you re-engage with a task by reminding yourself to try again or approach the problem differently. Discuss with students using prompts like, "What could you say to yourself to help you give it a few more tries?
- Staying focused often means deliberately choosing to keep working longer, even when motivation is low. Discuss with students using prompts like, "Why might deciding to try just a little longer make a difference?"
- Reflection helps you learn from moments when you were stuck by thinking about what worked, what didn't, and what you learned about yourself. Discuss with students using prompts like, "After Jordan's vehicle finally worked, what did he realize about how staying focused helped him?"
- Evaluating your effort during challenging moments helps you recognize persistence as part of success, not just the final outcome. Discuss with students using prompts like, "What can you learn from a task even if it didn't work right away?"

- Noticing that effort and adjustment can lead to progress supports persistence rather than discouragement. Discuss with students using prompts like, "How did Jordan's decision to pause, think, and try again change what happened next?" "Can you think of a time when trying one more time helped you solve a problem?" or "How might using this strategy change the way you handle difficult tasks in the future, in or out 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 school and outside of school) in which they should stay focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent, 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 staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent 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	The student will recognize or recall vocabulary associated with self-analysis as it relates to staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, *obstacle*, *reflection*, *self-talk*) and perform basic processes such as:
	● Describe a complex strategy involving self-analysis for staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (articulated by the class or the teacher in the form of a standard operating procedure [SOP]:
	   ○ Ask yourself if you have stopped trying.
	   ○ If yes, see if you can identify what is stopping you from trying harder.
	   ○ Tell yourself that you are going to give it a few more tries.
	   ○ When you've stopped trying, ask yourself what you've learned from the experience.
	● Understand what an individual might think and feel while staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, thinking "Let me try that again" or "Maybe there's a different way to do this").

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.

Table 2: I CAN Student Assessment Form (Half-point scale)

4.0	I can articulate specific situations (in school and out of school) in which I should stay focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent, set goals to do so, and evaluate my 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 staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent, 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	I can recognize or recall vocabulary associated with self-analysis as it relates to staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, *obstacle*, *reflection*, *self-talk*), and perform basic processes such as:
	● Describe a complex strategy involving self-analysis for staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (articulated by the class or the teacher in the form of a standard operating procedure [SOP]:
	  ○ Ask yourself if you have stopped trying.
	  ○ If yes, see if you can identify what is stopping you from trying harder.
	  ○ Tell yourself that you are going to give it a few more tries.
	  ○ When you've stopped trying, ask yourself what you've learned from the experience.
	● I understand what an individual might think and feel while staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, thinking "Let me try that again" or "Maybe there's a different way to do this").

1.5	On my own, I can do some of the things at score 2.0 level.

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

4.0	I can articulate specific situations (in school and out of school) in which I should stay focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent, set goals to do so, and evaluate my progress.
3.0	I can recognize when I am not staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent and respond by executing a complex strategy involving self-analysis.

2.0	I can recognize or recall vocabulary associated with self-analysis as it relates to staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, *obstacle*, *reflection*, *self-talk*),, and perform basic processes such as:
	● Describe a complex strategy involving self-analysis for staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (articulated by the class or the teacher in the form of a standard operating procedure [SOP]:
	  ○ Ask yourself if you have stopped trying.
	  ○ If yes, see if you can identify what is stopping you from trying harder.
	  ○ Tell yourself that you are going to give it a few more tries.
	  ○ When you've stopped trying, ask yourself what you've learned from the experience.
	● I understand what an individual might think and feel while staying focused when answers or solutions are not immediately apparent (for example, thinking "Let me try that again" or "Maybe there's a different way to do this").

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 in and out of school when they've used the skill of staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent. 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 staying focused even when answers and solutions were not immediately apparent. They should be able to provide a detailed description of the event and a critique of their own behavior.
2.0	Ask students to explain the following terms: obstacle, reflection, self-talk. Their answers should be generally accurate but not necessarily detailed or complete. Ask students to describe a basic process that has been provided to them for staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent. Their descriptions should include explicit steps such as: [1] ask yourself if you have stopped trying, [2] if yes, see if you can identify what is stopping things like they are saying to themselves: "Let me try that again" or "Maybe there's a different way to do this". you from trying harder, [3] tell yourself that you are going to give it a few more tries, [4] when you've stopped trying, ask yourself what you've learned from the experience. Ask students to describe some of the self-talk and thinking that should occur when someone is staying focused when answers and solutions are not immediately apparent. Their answers should include things like they say to themselves, "Let me try that again." or "Maybe there's a different way to do this."