

# 100 Thinking Access Points

## Simple Ways to Make Thinking More Accessible in Inclusive PreK–12 Classrooms

*Every learner deserves time and space to think.*

### Introduction

One of the simplest ways to make learning more accessible is to intentionally create space for thinking.

Too often, students are asked to answer before they have had time to process, write before they have organized their ideas, or move on before they have made sense of what they are learning. When that happens, some students may participate less, rely more heavily on adult prompting, or have difficulty showing what they know.

The problem is not necessarily that students are not thinking. They may need more time, different tools, or another way to develop and communicate their ideas.

Learning does not always happen at the speed of teaching. Students need opportunities to notice, wonder, connect, rehearse, reflect, and make meaning.

Creating space for thinking does not mean lowering expectations or slowing every lesson. It means removing unnecessary barriers so more students can access the learning, contribute meaningfully, and demonstrate their understanding.

Students do not all think or communicate in the same way. Some jot down ideas. Others sketch, talk with a partner, whisper to themselves, sign, use AAC, point to pictures, manipulate materials, move, or pause quietly before responding.

When we intentionally create space for thinking, more learners have meaningful opportunities to access, participate in, and make progress in learning.

# What's Included

This guide follows the natural rhythm of teaching and learning. Inside you will find:

- 100 Thinking Access Points organized around different parts of a lesson
- A Quick Planning and Reflection Tool to help you intentionally build thinking into instruction
- A One-Week Challenge to help you try one approach, notice its impact, and decide what to continue using

These ideas can be used across PreK–12 grade levels, content areas, and instructional settings. Whether you are teaching preschool, algebra, art, physical education, science, life skills, or a small-group lesson, the goal is the same:

**✓ Give every learner meaningful opportunities to think before they are expected to respond.**

## How to Use This Guide

Do not try to use all 100 strategies. Rather, choose one *Thinking Access Point* that fits the learning goal and a lesson you are already planning. Try it more than once and notice what changes.

### Ask yourself:

- Who participated in a new or different way?
- Who appeared more confident or willing to contribute?
- Who showed greater independence?
- Who demonstrated understanding in a way I had not previously noticed?
- Did the strategy make the learning more accessible without changing the learning goal?
- Is this a practice I could use regularly?

These are not extra activities to squeeze into an already full day. They are small shifts in how we teach.

Many take less than a minute, but they can create greater access, deeper understanding, increased independence, and a stronger sense of belonging.

# 100 Thinking Access Points

## Before Learning

Help students activate relevant knowledge, become curious, and prepare to engage with new learning.

1. Wonder about what you might learn today.
2. Make a prediction.
3. Take a picture walk or visual preview.
4. Recall something connected to yesterday's learning.
5. Notice before naming or explaining.
6. Take a quiet thinking pause.
7. Observe before discussing.
8. Think about the title, topic, or essential question.
9. Set a personal learning intention.
10. Record everything you already know about the topic.
11. Take a memory minute.
12. Share or select one word that comes to mind.
13. Connect the lesson to an experience, interest, or familiar idea.
14. Sketch what you already know.
15. Choose a thinking tool, such as paper, a whiteboard, manipulatives, pictures, AAC, or a digital tool.

## During Teaching

Pause strategically so students can process new information, make connections, and identify what they understand or still need.

1. Pause after an important idea.
2. Stop and sketch your understanding.
3. Stop and jot, type, or record a thought.
4. Pause after each paragraph, section, step, or example.
5. Identify something you understand now that you did not understand before.
6. Select the idea that seems most important.
7. Mark or indicate something you want explained differently.
8. Look for a pattern.
9. Compare two ideas, examples, or approaches.
10. Complete a sentence stem.
11. Finish or extend an example.
12. Create a mental image of what you are learning.
13. Connect the idea to a possible situation or experience.
14. Pause a video, demonstration, or read-aloud to process.
15. Predict what might happen or come next.
16. Study the visual, model, or object before discussing it.
17. Hold the question while you think.
18. Record one wonder or question.
19. Build, arrange, or model the idea before explaining it.
20. Think with a partner before returning to the whole group.

## Before Responding

Provide time and multiple ways for students to organize and communicate their thinking.

1. Take at least ten seconds to think.
2. Sketch before sharing.
3. Write, type, or select an idea before talking.
4. Rehearse by whispering, signing, using AAC, or communicating with a partner.
5. Practice your response in a way that works for you.
6. Explain the idea to yourself first.
7. Identify evidence that supports your thinking.
8. Add a reason, example, or detail to strengthen your response.
9. Choose one word, image, or symbol that captures your thinking.
10. Point to or select your response.
11. Hold up, display, or share your work.
12. Show your thinking using words, drawings, objects, movement, gestures, signs, or AAC.
13. Indicate how confident you feel about your response.
14. Choose the idea you most want to share.
15. Finish the thought using a sentence, image, symbol, or example.
16. Think before volunteering or being invited to respond.
17. Use a sentence starter, visual support, or communication frame.
18. Revise or add to your thinking.
19. Change your thinking when new evidence supports a different idea.
20. Ask a question that could deepen your understanding.

## During Independent Work

Help students get started, make decisions, monitor progress, and use supports with increasing independence.

1. Pause and think about the task before beginning.
2. Reread the directions or key information.
3. Listen to the directions or information again.
4. Identify the first step.
5. Divide the task into manageable parts.
6. Make a quick plan using words, pictures, objects, or a checklist.
7. Revisit the learning goal or success criteria.
8. Choose a graphic organizer or planning tool.
9. Use manipulatives, models, visuals, or reference tools.
10. Look back at an example without copying it.
11. Take a purposeful movement, sensory, or regulation break when needed.
12. Add one detail that strengthens your work.
13. Create, find, or explain another example.
14. Check your work against the goal or criteria.
15. Reflect before deciding that your work is complete.

## During Collaboration

Ensure that each learner has time, access, and a meaningful role before and during group interaction.

1. Think independently before talking with a partner or group.
2. Generate ideas independently before the group begins.
3. Write, draw, type, build, or select an idea before sharing.
4. Add to, connect with, or respectfully challenge someone else's idea.
5. Listen or attend to the complete message before responding.
6. Pause before adding your response.
7. Ask a question that helps you understand another person's thinking.
8. Identify a point of agreement or connection.
9. Create space for someone who has not yet contributed.
10. End by identifying one idea you learned from the group.

## After Learning

Give students time to consolidate learning, recognize growth, and identify meaningful next steps.

1. Pause before reflecting.
2. Identify the learning that feels most important.
3. Revisit the learning goal and consider your progress.
4. Choose one idea you want to remember.
5. Identify something that surprised you or changed your thinking.
6. Make a connection to your life, interests, community, or previous learning.
7. Explain or demonstrate your learning to a partner.
8. Draw, build, or represent the part that made the most sense to you.
9. Create a headline, image, or short summary for the learning.
10. Indicate your current level of understanding before discussing it.
11. Complete a reflection prompt using your preferred communication method.
12. Identify something that is still challenging or unclear.
13. Recognize something you learned, attempted, contributed, or improved.
14. Choose one useful next step.
15. Leave yourself a reminder for the next time you return to the learning.
16. Explain the learning to your future self.
17. Connect the learning to a real situation, problem, or possibility.
18. Choose a tool or representation that will help you remember the learning.
19. Take one quiet moment to revisit your thinking before transitioning.
20. End by recognizing a person, idea, effort, or experience that supported your learning.

# Quick Planning and Reflection Tool

Use this tool before, during, or after a lesson to intentionally build more opportunities for thinking into your instruction. You do not need to use every option. Select one or two that fit the learning goal, the demands of the lesson, and the strengths and needs of your students.

## Before Learning

- ☐ Wonder
- ☐ Predict
- ☐ Recall
- ☐ Observe
- ☐ Connect
- ☐ Sketch
- ☐ Set an intention
- ☐ Choose a thinking tool

## During Learning

- ☐ Pause
- ☐ Notice
- ☐ Question
- ☐ Compare
- ☐ Visualize
- ☐ Build or model
- ☐ Connect ideas
- ☐ Identify what is unclear

## Before Responding

- ☐ Think
- ☐ Rehearse
- ☐ Write or type
- ☐ Draw
- ☐ Sign
- ☐ Use AAC
- ☐ Point or select
- ☐ Build or demonstrate
- ☐ Choose how to communicate

## During Independent Work

- ☐ Identify the first step
- ☐ Make a plan
- ☐ Use a model or example
- ☐ Choose a support
- ☐ Check progress
- ☐ Take a purposeful break
- ☐ Revise
- ☐ Reflect before finishing

## During Collaboration

- ☐ Think independently first
- ☐ Listen fully
- ☐ Ask a curious question
- ☐ Build on an idea
- ☐ Invite another perspective
- ☐ Share in more than one way
- ☐ Identify new learning

## After Learning

- ☐ Summarize
- ☐ Reflect
- ☐ Make a connection
- ☐ Recognize growth
- ☐ Self-assess
- ☐ Identify what is still unclear
- ☐ Choose a next step
- ☐ Ask a new question

# A One-Week Challenge

Choose one Thinking Access Point that fits the learning goal and a lesson you are already planning. Try it more than once and notice what changes.

|       |
|-------|
| Day 1 |
| Day 2 |
| Day 3 |

## Ask yourself:

- Who participated in a new or different way?
  - Who appeared more confident or willing to contribute?
  - Who showed greater independence?
  - Who demonstrated understanding in a way I had not previously noticed?
- Did the strategy make the learning more accessible without changing the learning goal?
- Is this a practice I could use regularly?