

## How A Simple Checklist Can Improve Learning

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From reminding us of what to pack for a trip to helping doctors perform surgery, checklists are crucial for projects that require sequential steps or a series of tasks. As Atul Gawande points out in his book "Checklist Manifesto," checklists break down complex tasks and also ensure consistency and efficiency if more than one person is working on a project. If checklists are so effective for airline pilots, skyscraper construction teams, and heart surgeons, why shouldn't students use them as well?

Checklists can benefit students in the following ways:

1. For younger students, simple, task-based checklists can help them become accustomed to following steps, adding order to the relative chaos of learning, and offering a pathway to accomplishing complex tasks. For older students, they can do all of the above, and also serve as memory aids as they work on unfamiliar or complicated tasks.
2. Checklists help students feel in control and hold them accountable by removing obstacles to success such as "I didn't know we were supposed to do that," or "I forgot to do that part."
3. Checklists keep students on task. Rather than losing focus and forgetting where they left off or abandoning the task all together, they always know where they are in a task or project. (Or should know.)
4. Checklists can help communicate the details or goals of an assignment or project to other teachers, parents, or relevant community members.

### Improving Metacognition

Education specialist Dr. Kathleen Dudden Rowlands believes checklists are more than just a way for students to stay organized and on-task. As she [explains](#) in "Check It Out! Using Checklists to Support Student Learning," checklists can aid students in developing metacognitive awareness of their own learning process.

"Used effectively, checklists can help students develop metacognitive awareness of their intellectual processes," Rowlands explained. Metacognitive awareness is essentially people's understanding of both the process of learning and how they can optimize their learning of certain knowledge or skills.

"Metacognitive research consistently suggests that students who know how to learn, know which strategies are most effective when faced with a problem or a task, and have accurate methods of assessing their progress, are better learners than those who don't," Rowlands noted. She also discussed checklists' role in the process of fostering strong metacognitive awareness: "By articulating and labeling operational steps, checklists scaffold students' metacognitive development."

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## 5 Resources To Use Checklists In Your Classroom

### Wunderlist

This turbo-charged mobile app checklist allows users to collaborate on shared lists, turning it into a project management tool. You can create simple “to do” lists or different lists (subtasks) based on more complicated tasks. It syncs across iPhone, iPad, Mac, Android, Windows and the Web. You can leave notes, set recurring tasks, share your lists and set alarms. The app lets you break big projects or tasks into manageable smaller goals. Of special benefit to the classroom is the fact that Wunderlist lists can be printed. It is also free, with an option for Wunderlist pro at \$4.99 a month.

### List Weaver

List Weaver’s strength lies in the simplicity of the app and the fact that checklists can be shared among users. If team members are completing tasks at the same time, the shared checklist ensures they don’t duplicate efforts. When someone has completed a task on the list, others on the team receive push notification letting them know it’s been done. If you are looking to foster collaboration among your students, a shared checklist could help you achieve this. The app is free and offers in-app purchases.

### Pinterest

You can do a search on Pinterest and find a variety of checklist resources. Search on “checklist classroom” and find simple, pre-made checklists such as the “Dismissal Checklist,” a list of tasks to help young students prepare for leaving school at the end of the day. A writing checklist for older students helps them make sure they are taking the necessary steps to successfully write essays and compositions. Other checklists include “end of the year,” “field trip,” and “active listening.”

### TeacherVision.com

From the simple “Homework Checklist” for young students to more in-depth rubrics for older students, TeacherVision offers dozens of checklists for both teacher and student. All you need to do is search using the term “checklist.” Even if you don’t find quite what you need here, you’ll discover plenty of ideas that you can incorporate into your own custom checklists.

There are several templates available from [Microsoft](#) and [Adobe](#).

### ReadWriteThink.org

This site, a collaboration between the International Reading Association, The National Council of Teachers of English and Verizon’s Thinkfinity program, offers several in-depth and useful lesson plans that are accompanied by comprehensive checklists.

The “Editing Checklist for Self and Peer Editing” offers a step-by-step guide for students to edit their own work as well as their classmates’ work. A quick web search on any school subject will yield checklist ideas as well.

## Conclusion

Any checklist you use in the classroom should be a flexible document that adapts to the needs of your students. Remember to visit your checklist with a critical eye frequently to make sure it’s still working for you and your class. As you work through your checklist and realize ways to make it better, take the time to do so.

Ask for feedback from your students as you implement new checklists to ensure that they are working as effective learning tools. They might surprise you.

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