



Cognitive Shifts



Cognitive shifts involve changing the type of mental activity, such as switching from writing to drawing or solving a riddle. These shifts engage different areas of the brain, reduce mental fatigue, and support working memory and flexible thinking, which are key to support deep thinking and retention for long term academic success.

1

WOULD YOU RATHER?

Pose a playful choice (e.g., “Would you rather fly or be invisible?”) to spark decision-making and imaginative thinking. **PRO TIP-** Use AI to give a themed version.

2

CATEGORY

Ask students to name items that fit into a specific category (e.g., fruits, tools, emotions) to activate classification skills and semantic memory.

3

IMAGINE

Invite students to imagine being someone or something else (e.g., a bird, a scientist, a robot) to shift perspective and engage creative empathy.

4

WHAT'S MISSING

Describe a familiar scene or list with one item missing and ask students to identify it to engage attention, inference, and detail-oriented thinking.

5

WHAT IF...?

Ask students to imagine a scenario (shifting their thinking into creative or abstract modes) E.g. Live in any time period, meet any person, had a superpower, if animals could talk, if AI was your teacher, etc.

6

LAUGH LAUNCH

Invite students to share a school-appropriate joke—whether it's actually funny or just silly—to shift their mindset through laughter, social connection, and lighthearted thinking.

7

NAME 3 THINGS

Ask students to quickly name three items that meet a specific condition (e.g., things that bounce, things that smell good) to spark recall and flexible thinking.

8

SAME or DIFFERENT?

Present two objects, ideas, or words and ask students to identify one similarity and one difference to activate comparison skills and flexible thinking. (cat vs. dog, triangle vs. square, kindness vs. honesty)

9

WHAT'S the CONNECTION?

Give students two unrelated words or ideas and ask them to find a connection to activate abstract thinking and creative reasoning.

10

DRAW/ DOODLE

Invite students to draw or doodle freely for a few minutes to shift their thinking into a visual and creative mode, helping them process emotions, spark new ideas, and re-engage with learning through nonverbal expression.

11

LIST 5 PEOPLE

Ask students to list 5 people who and give them a category. (E.g. they love, the admire, wish they knew, etc.)

12

QUOTE/ MEME

Find a quote or meme that evokes laughter or allows students to think more deeply about its meaning.

13

GRATITUDE

Ask students to share 1-3 things they are grateful for and why. Expressing gratitude boosts mood, motivation, reduces stress, and strengthens relationships and improves attention!

14

LOVE YOURSELF & OTHERS

Tell students: Give yourself 3 meaningful compliments. Make sure it is about their character not their outside appearance if possible. OR give a compliment to _ people around you.

15

MEMORY MOMENT

Have students share a school appropriate memory of a time when: They were happy, proud, surprised, etc. Or they can share a moment that helped shape who they are today.

16

FAST FORWARD

Ask students- if they could...
Travel-where would they go and why?
Do any job- what would they do and why?
Invent something- what would it be and why?