NOWAY ACADEMY MINI CPD

# Working Memory Without the Jargon

A practical classroom guide for reducing memory load without reducing challenge.

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| **FOR** | Staff, trainees and teaching assistants |
| **TIME** | 12-minute read + classroom checklist |
| **FOCUS** | Dyslexia, inclusion and everyday teaching |

**If a pupil cannot hold all the instructions in mind, the problem is not effort. The task may be asking their memory to carry too much at once.**

Created for inclusive British classrooms by Diamond Education Hub

# 1. What working memory actually does

Working memory is the small mental workspace we use to hold and work with information for a short time. A pupil uses it when they remember a three-part instruction, keep a sentence in mind while writing it, calculate mentally, or connect the beginning of a paragraph to the end.

| Working memory is... | Working memory is not... |
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| Limited and easily overloaded | A measure of intelligence |
| Affected by anxiety, fatigue and distraction | Proof that a pupil was not listening |
| Supported by clear teaching routines | Something pupils must manage alone |

## What overload can look like

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| Starts, then stops<br>The pupil begins correctly but loses the next step. | Asks again<br>They repeatedly check instructions they appeared to understand. |
| Copies slowly<br>Moving between the board and page breaks the information chain. | Loses the sentence<br>Ideas disappear before they can be written down. |
| Looks off-task<br>Avoidance may begin when the mental load feels unmanageable. | Makes uneven errors<br>Performance changes as tiredness or task complexity increases. |

**Pause before interpreting these behaviours as carelessness. Ask: what must the pupil hold, process and produce at the same time?**

# 2. Six changes you can use tomorrow

**1** Say less, show more
Give the first essential instruction aloud and keep the steps visible on the board or task card.

**2** Chunk the task
Present one meaningful stage at a time. Completion of each stage creates a clear restart point.

**3** Reduce copying
Provide key vocabulary, sentence openings or printed information when copying is not the learning objective.

**4** Build in retrieval pauses
After explaining, pause and ask pupils to state the first step to a partner before beginning.

**5** Make routines predictable
Keep equipment, lesson structures and response formats consistent so memory is available for learning.

**6** Offer a memory bridge
Allow a checklist, model, word bank, number line or worked example to remain visible during independent work.

| Instead of | Try |
| --- | --- |
| "Get your book, write the date and title, underline it, copy the question and answer in full sentences." | "Open your book and write today's date. The next step is on the board." |

**The aim is not to make the curriculum easier. It is to remove avoidable memory demands so pupils can use their thinking for the learning that matters.**

# 3. One-minute classroom check

Use this before a lesson, task or explanation. Tick the changes already in place and circle one adjustment to make next.

| CHECK | BEFORE PUPILS BEGIN |
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| [ ] | The first step is short, specific and visible. |
| [ ] | Instructions are broken into manageable stages. |
| [ ] | Key vocabulary is available throughout the task. |
| [ ] | Pupils do not have to copy large amounts unnecessarily. |
| [ ] | A model or worked example remains visible. |
| [ ] | Pupils can check what to do without asking publicly. |
| [ ] | The layout is uncluttered and important information stands out. |
| [ ] | There is time to process before pupils are expected to respond. |

## My next classroom adjustment

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| **REFLECTION PROMPT** | What changed for the pupil when the memory load was reduced? Look for greater independence, longer task engagement, clearer written responses or fewer repeated questions. |

**Keep the challenge. Change the route into it.**

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