

# What Is Interactive Modeling?

Interactive Modeling is an effective technique for teaching procedures and routines (such as those for entering and exiting the room) and academic and social skills (such as engaging with a text or giving and accepting feedback).

## The Four Steps of Interactive Modeling

1. **Describe what you will model and why.**
2. **Model while students notice.**
3. **Give students the opportunity to collaborate and practice.**
4. **Reinforce their practice with immediate feedback.**

Interactive Modeling should be used to teach any routine or skill that needs to be done in one specific way (for safety, efficiency, accuracy, or other reasons). This technique eliminates the error of assuming that if students are told how to do something, they'll "get it." Instead of simply telling students what to do, Interactive Modeling shows them exactly how to meet the expectations. The built-in steps of modeling, noticing, and reinforcing are a powerful combination that enables students to engage with their learning more deeply and with greater clarity.

## *Why Interactive Modeling Works*

- ▶ **Students learn why the routine or skill is important.** Students need to know the "why" behind what they're doing as it provides a deeper understanding of using a specific skill or routine. When students have this depth of knowledge, it increases their motivation to properly execute the skill or routine being taught.
- ▶ **Students create a clear mental image of what's expected** based on what the teacher has modeled. This allows students to connect their prior knowledge to this newly acquired information.
- ▶ **Students are responsible for noticing the details** as they observe their teacher modeling the routine or skill. This also allows students a chance to ask questions to clarify any confusion about the expectations. Through Interactive Modeling, students can develop their observation skills, which can be advantageous in other content areas.
- ▶ **Students receive immediate feedback on their practice.** When students are given the opportunity to practice newly taught skills or procedures, they're able to do so in a safe environment with teacher guidance. Teachers can use reinforcing language to acknowledge students who are successful in the acquisition of the skill and reminding language to assist students who need a little more support.

# Teaching Perseverance?

## Try Interactive Modeling

We all know students who seem to give up quickly and appeal for our help, even when the task is appropriately challenging, or students who are reluctant to even start a task that seems challenging and instead opt to sit and wait until we check in with them. These behaviors can halt progress and feel frustrating for both students and teacher.

Clearly, students don't always come to school knowing how to move from "This is too hard" to "This may take some time and effort but I can do it." That means we need to teach them strategies such as positive self-talk, taking a couple of deep breaths to calm themselves and then returning to work, choosing a different approach, or asking a partner a clarifying question.

Interactive Modeling is a powerful *Responsive Classroom* practice used to teach students the skills, strategies, and procedures they need for success in school. You can use Interactive Modeling to show students how to use a paintbrush, sound out words, or take care of the class pet. And you can also use it to teach them higher level academic skills and behaviors, such as how to persevere through challenging academic work.

### Modeling Perseverance Strategies

As the following examples for primary and upper elementary grades show, Interactive Modeling is a good way to teach students how to persevere because it shows them what perseverance looks and sounds like and gives them immediate opportunities for supported practice.

#### Primary Grades Example

- 1. Say what you will model and why.** "Remember when we played 'Rumpelstiltskin' at Morning Meeting today? That's a fun game, but it's also kind of hard. And you figured out how to help yourselves through the hard parts. Sometimes our schoolwork is challenging, too. And just as you figured out how to help yourself during 'Rumpelstiltskin,' it's important to learn how to help yourself when you feel frustrated with your work. I'm going to show you one way to help yourself when your work feels hard."
- 2. Model the behavior.** "Watch what I do and say as I try to figure out how to understand this math problem." The teacher models reading a short problem and beginning to draw a picture to visualize it. Then he gives the sign (a finger pointing to his head) that he's going to do a think-aloud: "This is that kind of problem we've been doing where a number is missing. I don't know how to draw this and I'm frustrated." He takes a few deep breaths. "OK. I feel calmer. I can figure this out. Maybe I can use cubes instead of drawing."

3. **Ask students what they noticed.** “What did you notice me do when I got stuck on my work?” The students name what they saw and heard. The teacher prompts them if they missed anything important.
4. **Invite one or more students to model.** “Jocelyn, can you model taking a couple of deep breaths and talking to yourself in a calm way? Watch Jocelyn and notice what she does.”
5. **Again, ask students what they noticed.** “What did you notice Jocelyn do when she got stuck?” Students name what they heard and saw.
6. **Have all students practice.** “As you work on your math tasks, pay attention to any times that the work feels hard. Then think about what you saw and heard when Jocelyn and I got stuck. After math, we’ll talk about how you helped yourself. Sometimes, you’ll still need my help, and that’s OK too.”
7. **Provide feedback.** As students work on their math, the teacher checks in with them. When he sees them using a calming strategy, he reinforces their behavior: “Amir, it looks like you took a deep breath and tried the problem a different way. You’re remembering what we practiced!” And if he sees a student struggling, he reminds them what to try if they’re stuck.

At the end of math class, he asks reflection questions: “Did any parts of math feel hard today?” “What did you try when math felt hard?” “How did that feel?”

## Upper Elementary Grades Example

1. **Say what you will model and why.** “Challenging work can be exciting and can help us learn, but it can also feel frustrating. I’m going to show you a strategy to use when you get stuck on a problem so that you can keep going and feel successful, even if it’s hard.”
2. **Model the behavior.** “Watch what I do and say as I work on this math problem.” The teacher models beginning a math problem and then gives the sign (a finger pointing to her head) that she’s going to do a think-aloud. “Hmmm, this doesn’t seem to make sense. Ugh, I get so frustrated when stuff doesn’t make sense.” She takes a couple of deep breaths. “This feels hard but that’s OK. I’ll reread it slowly out loud this time.” She then returns to the problem.
3. **Ask students what they noticed.** “What did you notice about how I worked on that problem?” The teacher listens as students name what they saw and heard. She prompts them if they missed the self-talk she used to get through the tough part.
4. **Invite one or more students to model.** “Who would like to demonstrate taking a couple of calming breaths and using positive self-talk, just as I did?”
5. **Ask students what they noticed.** “What did you notice Marcus do as he worked on the problem?” The teacher takes a few observations then digs deeper: “How will doing this help Marcus?” she asks.
6. **Have all students practice.** “Now we’re going to continue working on math problems. As you work, pay attention to any time that you struggle and remember what you

saw and heard. During our reflection later, you'll have a chance to share what you did to work through the challenging parts."

- 7. Provide feedback.** The teacher checks in with students as they work and reinforces their positive efforts; when they seem stuck, she reminds them what to try. At the end of class, she asks a few reflection questions: "What helped you today when you were stuck?" "What will you try tomorrow if something is challenging?"

## Supporting Students as They Use the New Strategies

Once you've done the initial teaching through Interactive Modeling, students will need continuing opportunities to practice using perseverance strategies. Here are some ways you can support them.

**Display the strategies.** Try creating anchor charts listing the strategies you've modeled. One chart might list all the strategies; another might list a few key details about one of the strategies, such as phrases students could use in their self-talk.

**Use positive teacher language.** Reinforcing language lets students know what they're doing well so they can continue to make improvements. And before students begin challenging work, reminding language helps them remember what they can do to help themselves. Here are some examples to get you started:

### Reinforcing Language

"You kept going even though the problem is new and you said it was hard."

"After your first idea didn't work, you tried another strategy. That shows perseverance."

"You've read and understood a lot of pages, even though this book has many new words. What helped you get to this point?"

"Look at all of the math thinking we did as a class today! What's one thing that helped you persevere?"

### Reminding Language

"Before we get started, what are some ideas you have for what to do if you get stuck?"

"How can you help a classmate today if they get stuck on the task?"

"That's a tricky word. What do you already know about that word?"

"Remember what you know about this already? How might that help you?"

### An Empowering Message

Teaching students how to persevere when they feel stuck sends them an empowering message: that they can grow to be independent and confident learners. Using Interactive Modeling to teach perseverance strategies lets students observe exactly how to use the strategies, practice right away, and receive immediate feedback on their efforts. That clarity and immediacy will help ensure their success in learning how to work through difficulties not just in their schoolwork but in other challenging classroom situations as well.

# Interactive Modeling for Academic Success

Interactive Modeling is a simple, quickly paced way of teaching that can lead students to a stronger mastery of skills than traditional modeling. It's effective for teaching any skill or procedure that students need to do in a specific way, such as filling out an answer sheet or talking with a partner about a reading selection. Interactive Modeling works because, in contrast to lecturing or traditional modeling, it creates a clear mental image of the expected behavior for students, fully engages them in noticing details about it, and immediately gives them a chance to practice and receive teacher feedback.

## For All Grades and Subjects

Responsive Classroom Interactive Modeling works for younger and older students—and for all academic subjects. For example, with younger students, you could use the structure to teach skills ranging from how to sort objects and record the sorting, to how to sound out words. For older students, math skills such as how to interpret a graph and how to use a formula, science skills such as how to record observations or use a microscope, and language arts skills such as how to complete a story map or use editing marks are just a few things you could teach using Interactive Modeling.

## Sample Lesson – Interactive Modeling in Action: Paraphrasing a Research Source (see pages 3 and 4)

In the sample lesson, Ms. Evans, a third grade teacher, uses Interactive Modeling to introduce an academic skill her students will need for an upcoming research project: paraphrasing when taking notes on a source text. As you read this example of Interactive Modeling in action, notice how the seven-step structure of Interactive Modeling helps Ms. Evans to create an optimal learning environment for her students, and consider the advantages this way of teaching had compared to other ways Ms. Evans might have taught this particular skill.

## Tips for Success

**Have a clear learning goal.** Decide what you expect students to be able to do at the end of your lesson. For example, if you're teaching how to use an index in a book, think through what you want students to do with the index. For example, "Children will be able to locate several topics in the index, go to the referenced pages, and discover basic information about those topics." Think about the words you'll use to state the learning goal to your students in Step 1 of the lesson.

**Use "Think-Alouds."** Make your thinking visible. Be brief and focused, rather than giving a lengthy explanation.

**Break complex processes into bite-sized chunks.** For instance, in teaching students how to record a series of observations for a science workshop, you could model making one

observation and recording it, ask students what they noticed, then make another observation and record it, and again ask students what they noticed, and so on—that is, repeat Steps 2 and 3 for each observation—before moving to Step 4, inviting a student to model.

**Choose engaging tasks for Step 6.** For example, when students are practicing how to use editing marks, let them do so on a funny or especially relevant piece of text.

**Adapt the steps to fit students' needs.** For example, students who find a skill particularly challenging may need you to more actively coach them through their practice (Step 6). Or you may need to remodel for a small group or an individual.

**Repeat Interactive Modeling lessons as needed.** Many academic skills take time to master, and students may need to have a lesson repeated over the course of days or weeks. Vary the lesson to keep students engaged.

**Decide if Interactive Modeling is the best way to teach the skill.** Use Interactive Modeling to teach skills and procedures that students will need to do in a particular way. For instance, if your math curriculum calls upon students to develop their own strategies for double-digit addition before being taught a formal method, Interactive Modeling could be used to teach the formal method, but it would not be suitable for the part of the lesson where students develop their own strategies. Use your knowledge of the curriculum and students' needs and abilities to decide how best to teach a given skill.

**Remember to reinforce success often.** As students practice in Step 6, point out exactly what they are doing well. Doing so will help cement their learning.

## The Power of Interactive Modeling

Interactive Modeling incorporates key elements of effective teaching: modeling the skill or procedure, engaging students in active learning, and immediately assessing their understanding. When we teach in this way, children achieve greater, faster, and longer-lasting success in meeting expectations and mastering skills. Once you try this technique, you'll find that it can set your students up for success across the curriculum, helping them build the academic skills that are essential to high achievement.

# Sample Lesson – Interactive Modeling in Action: Paraphrasing a Research Source

From *Interactive Modeling: A Powerful Technique for Teaching Children*, by Margaret Berry Wilson. © 2012 Center for Responsive Schools, Inc.

## 1. Say what you will model and why:

**Ms. Evans:** “When authors write books, their words are protected by copyright laws. Those laws say that we can use facts we learn from these authors, but we can’t just take what they’ve written word for word. We have to write in our own words. I’m going to show you what it looks like to record some facts you learn from a research source in your own words, not the author’s words. I want you to follow my thoughts as I work, so I’ll be thinking aloud some of the time.”

## 2. Model the behavior:

On the electronic whiteboard, Ms. Evans displays and reads aloud a paragraph about the artist Frida Kahlo and then switches to a “note-card” screen with the word Childhood at the top. Showing her Think-Aloud sign, she records the key things she remembers from the paragraph.

**Ms. Evans:** “Let’s see, she was born in Mexico in—I’d better check the year.” [*She goes back to the first screen briefly and finds the date.*] “1907. OK, her parents had an unhappy marriage. She had two sisters. She was sick as a girl.”

## 3. Ask students what they noticed:

**Ms. Evans:** “What did you notice about how I recorded what I read?”

**Omar:** “You wrote it your own way.”

**Ms. Evans:** [*following up*] “What do you mean?”

**Omar:** “Your sentences don’t sound like the ones you read out loud. You didn’t copy them.”

**Ms. Evans:** [*prompting for deeper thinking*] “What did I do to make sure that I didn’t copy exactly what the book said?” [*seeing students’ perplexed looks, she gives them think time*]

**Gianna:** [*tentatively*] “You didn’t look at the paragraph?”

**Ms. Evans:** “That’s right. Why might that matter?”

**Edgar:** “Well, unless you have a photographic memory, if you don’t look, you can’t copy.”

**Ms. Evans:** “That’s true. What else did I do to make sure I didn’t copy?”

**London:** “Your sentences were much shorter. They just had the facts.”

**Ms. Evans:** “Yes, I tried to write down just the key ideas—not everything. And what did I do when I couldn’t remember something specific—like that birth date?”

**Axel:** “You went back to the paragraph, but you just looked quickly.”

**Ms. Evans:** “Yes, I wanted to make sure I was accurate, but I tried to be fast so I wouldn’t copy.”

**4. Invite one or more students to model:**

Ms. Evans chooses Julian to model. She then displays the next paragraph and has the children read it silently. When Julian is ready, she switches to the “notecard” screen.

**Ms. Evans:** “Now watch while Julian records key ideas from the paragraph in his own words.”

**5. Again, ask students what they noticed:**

After Julian writes a few notes, Ms. Evans invites student comments.

**Ms. Evans:** “What did you notice about how Julian recorded what he discovered?”

**Ani:** “He looked away from the paragraph while he was writing.”

**Jerome:** “He wrote short sentences with just facts in them.”

**6. Provide feedback:**

Ms. Evans circulates, listening carefully. She then calls the class together, records key facts from a few pairs, and displays the original text.

**Ms. Evans:** [*reinforcing successes*] “I noticed that lots of you chose only important facts, not all the details in the original text. I also noticed that you put those facts into your own words.”

After another round of practice, she sends the students off to practice independently with their own source text. She has one small group of students who were struggling work closer to her so that she can continue to support their growth.

**To adapt this lesson for younger children:**

Use a similar structure to teach a lesson on deciding between what is important and what is just interesting in a text.

**To adapt this lesson for older children:**

Teach a similar lesson focused on more complex strategies for paraphrasing.