

Rosenshine's principles in action

by Tom Sherrington · Language: EN

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Overview

Rosenshine's Principles in Action by Tom Sherrington is a practical guide for teachers and school leaders that translates Barak Rosenshine's seminal 2012 paper, 'Principles of Instruction,' into actionable classroom strategies. The book is structured around ten research-based principles that describe the most effective teaching practices, such as daily review, presenting new material in small steps, guiding student practice, checking for understanding, and providing scaffolds for difficult tasks. Sherrington's main argument is that these principles are not a rigid checklist but a flexible framework that can be adapted to any subject, age group, or teaching style. He emphasizes that effective teaching is a craft that combines clear explanations, active student engagement, and continuous assessment, all grounded in cognitive science about how students learn.

The book is organized into two main parts. The first part explains each of the ten principles in detail, offering concrete examples of what they look like in practice across different subjects, from primary to secondary education. The second part addresses the practicalities of implementation, discussing how teachers can integrate the principles into their lesson planning, how school leaders can support professional development, and how to avoid common pitfalls. Sherrington also introduces the concept of 'stage not age,' arguing that teachers should adapt the principles to the readiness of their students rather than following a one-size-fits-all approach. The book is deliberately concise and accessible, designed to be read in a single sitting or used as a reference guide.

Why this book matters is its bridge between educational research and classroom practice. It offers a clear, evidence-based answer to the perennial question of what makes great teaching. By distilling complex cognitive psychology into ten digestible principles, Sherrington empowers teachers to make deliberate, informed choices in their instruction. The book has become a cornerstone of professional development in schools, particularly in the UK, and has sparked widespread discussion about how to improve teaching quality. It is a must-read for educators who want to move beyond fads and focus on what actually works in the classroom.

Key Takeaways

- Start every lesson with a short review of previous learning to strengthen memory and build fluency.

- Present new material in small, manageable steps, and model each step explicitly before asking students to practice.
- Ask a large number of questions and check for understanding from all students, not just those who raise their hands.
- Guide student practice by working through problems together, providing prompts and feedback until students are ready to work independently.
- Use scaffolds, such as checklists, templates, and sentence starters, to support students on difficult tasks, and gradually remove them as competence grows.
- Require and monitor independent practice to ensure students are applying new knowledge on their own, and provide immediate feedback to correct errors.
- Plan for weekly and monthly reviews to help students retain information and make connections between topics.
- Adapt the principles to the stage of your students, not their age, and use professional judgment to decide which principle to emphasize at any given moment.

Chapter Summaries

Introduction: The Principles in Action

Sherrington introduces the ten principles from Rosenshine's 2012 paper and explains the purpose of the book: to make these research-based principles practical and accessible for teachers. He emphasizes that the principles are not a checklist but a framework for thinking about teaching. He also outlines the structure of the book, which includes a detailed explanation of each principle and a section on implementation. The introduction sets the tone for a pragmatic, evidence-informed approach to teaching, encouraging teachers to use the principles as a lens to reflect on their own practice.

Principle 1: Daily Review

This chapter explains the first principle: begin each lesson with a review of previous learning. Sherrington argues that daily review helps students retrieve information from long-term memory, which strengthens neural pathways and increases fluency. He provides examples of quick review activities, such as quizzes, 'brain dumps,' and paired discussions. He also discusses the importance of spacing reviews over time, not just at the start of every lesson, and suggests that teachers should use review to identify gaps in understanding before moving on to new material.

Principle 2: New Material in Small Steps

The second principle is to present new material in small steps, with each step followed by student practice. Sherrington explains that working memory has a limited capacity, so breaking content into manageable chunks prevents cognitive overload. He illustrates this with examples

from different subjects, such as teaching a math formula step-by-step or introducing a historical event in phases. He also emphasizes the importance of modeling each step and checking for understanding before proceeding, ensuring that students have a solid foundation before moving forward.

Principle 3: Ask Questions

This chapter focuses on the power of questioning to check for understanding and engage all students. Sherrington discusses various questioning techniques, such as cold calling, think-pair-share, and using mini-whiteboards. He emphasizes that questions should be planned and purposeful, targeting both factual recall and deeper understanding. He also addresses the common pitfall of only asking a few volunteers and suggests strategies to ensure every student is thinking and responding. The goal is to create a classroom culture where questioning is a routine part of learning.

Principle 4: Provide Models

The fourth principle is to provide models and worked examples to help students understand what success looks like. Sherrington explains that modeling can take many forms, such as demonstrating a process, showing a finished product, or using exemplars. He stresses the importance of narrating your thinking as you model, so students can see the metacognitive processes involved. He also discusses the gradual release of responsibility, where models are used heavily at first and then faded as students become more independent. This chapter includes practical tips for creating effective models.

Principle 5: Guide Student Practice

This chapter covers the principle of guiding student practice, where teachers work through problems with students before they attempt independent work. Sherrington describes how guided practice involves the teacher and students working together, with the teacher providing prompts, feedback, and corrections. He emphasizes that this phase is critical for building confidence and competence, and that it should be extensive enough to ensure students are ready for independent practice. He also discusses the importance of monitoring student responses and adjusting instruction based on errors.

Principle 6: Check for Understanding

The sixth principle is to check for understanding frequently and systematically. Sherrington argues that teachers should not assume students understand just because they nod or say yes. He provides a range of strategies for checking understanding, including questioning, quizzes, exit tickets, and observing student work. He also discusses the importance of acting on the information gathered, such as reteaching a concept if many students are struggling. This chapter emphasizes that checking for understanding is not an add-on but an integral part of effective teaching.

Principle 7: Obtain a High Success Rate

This chapter explains the principle of obtaining a high success rate, meaning that students should be successful in their learning tasks most of the time. Sherrington cites research suggesting that an optimal success rate is around 80%, as it indicates that students are challenged but not overwhelmed. He discusses how to achieve this by adjusting the difficulty of tasks, providing scaffolds, and offering support. He also warns against making tasks too easy, which can lead to boredom, and too hard, which can lead to frustration. The goal is to build confidence and momentum.

Principle 8: Provide Scaffolds for Difficult Tasks

The eighth principle is to provide scaffolds for difficult tasks, such as checklists, templates, and sentence starters. Sherrington explains that scaffolds are temporary supports that help students complete tasks they could not do independently. He emphasizes that scaffolds should be gradually removed as students become more proficient, a process known as fading. He provides examples of scaffolds in different subjects and discusses the importance of not making scaffolds permanent, as they can become a crutch. This chapter also addresses the role of peer support as a form of scaffolding.

Principle 9: Independent Practice

This chapter covers the principle of requiring and monitoring independent practice. Sherrington argues that independent practice is essential for students to consolidate their learning and develop fluency. He discusses the importance of setting clear expectations and providing immediate feedback during independent work. He also addresses the common issue of students practicing errors, which can be counterproductive. He suggests strategies such as circulating the room, using exit tickets, and having students self-assess. The goal is to ensure that independent practice is purposeful and effective.

Principle 10: Weekly and Monthly Review

The final principle is to engage in weekly and monthly reviews to help students retain information and make connections. Sherrington explains that spaced retrieval practice is one of the most effective ways to improve long-term memory. He provides examples of review activities, such as cumulative quizzes, concept maps, and revisiting prior topics. He also discusses the importance of reviewing not just facts but also skills and processes. This chapter emphasizes that review should be planned and systematic, not just an afterthought.

Implementation: Making the Principles Work in Your School

In the final section, Sherrington discusses how to implement the principles across a school. He addresses common challenges, such as resistance from staff and the difficulty of changing habits. He suggests a phased approach, starting with a few principles and gradually expanding. He also emphasizes the importance of professional development, coaching, and collaborative

planning. He encourages school leaders to create a culture of evidence-informed practice, where teachers feel supported to experiment and reflect. The book ends with a call to action for teachers to embrace these principles as a foundation for continuous improvement.

Themes

- Evidence-based teaching
- Cognitive load theory
- Active student engagement
- Formative assessment
- Professional development

Notable Quotes

- "The principles are not a checklist to be followed mechanically; they are a set of ideas to be interpreted and applied in the context of your own classroom." — From the introduction, where Sherrington clarifies the purpose of the book and how to use the principles.
- "Effective teaching is not about being flashy or entertaining; it is about ensuring that students learn." — From the introduction, setting the tone for a pragmatic, evidence-based approach.
- "If you want to improve your teaching, start by asking more questions." — From the chapter on Principle 3, emphasizing the importance of questioning.
- "The best teachers are those who are constantly checking for understanding and adjusting their teaching accordingly." — From the chapter on Principle 6, highlighting the need for ongoing assessment.
- "Scaffolds are temporary; they should be removed as students become more competent." — From the chapter on Principle 8, discussing the fading of scaffolds.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Rosenshine's principles in action about?

It's a practical guide for teachers that translates Barak Rosenshine's ten research-based principles of instruction into concrete classroom strategies. The book explains each principle with examples and offers advice on how to implement them in any subject or age group, aiming to improve teaching effectiveness and student learning.

Is Rosenshine's principles in action worth reading?

Yes, for educators and school leaders. It's concise, evidence-based, and highly actionable. It distills complex cognitive psychology into ten clear principles with practical examples. Many

teachers find it immediately useful for refining their practice. It's a quick read but has lasting value as a reference.

How does Rosenshine's principles in action end?

Spoiler: The book concludes with a section on implementation, urging teachers to adopt the principles gradually and collaboratively. It emphasizes that the principles are a framework, not a rigid checklist, and encourages a culture of continuous improvement. The final message is that great teaching is a craft that can be developed through deliberate practice.

Who should read Rosenshine's principles in action?

Classroom teachers of all subjects and grade levels, especially those in K-12 education. It's also valuable for school leaders, instructional coaches, and teacher trainers. New teachers will find it a solid foundation, while experienced teachers can use it to refine their practice. It's also useful for anyone interested in evidence-based education.

How long does it take to read Rosenshine's principles in action?

The book is around 100 pages, so it can be read in about 2 to 3 hours at a comfortable pace. Many teachers read it in one sitting. However, its real value comes from revisiting sections and applying the principles, so you might spend more time reflecting and planning.