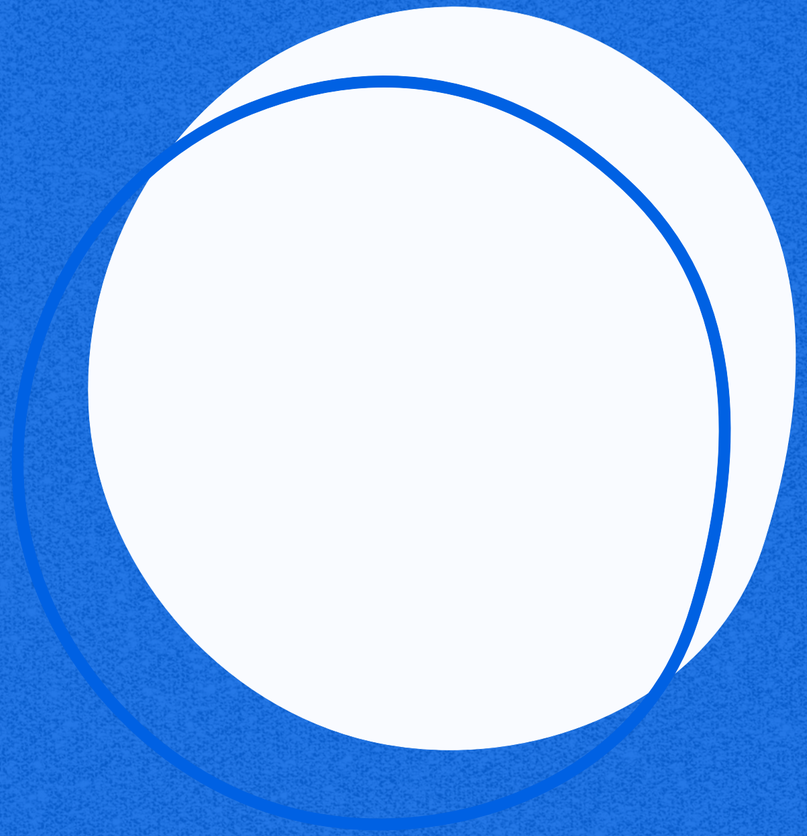
Visible Learning: student guidebook

2026

What is Visible Learning?



Visible Learning is a concept used by John Hattie to promote the idea that learning works best when both teachers and students can clearly see what is being learned, how well it's being learned, and what needs to happen next. Visible Learning means:

- Knowing what success looks like
- Understanding where you currently are
- Getting feedback that helps you improve
- Being able to judge your own progress

Based on Hattie's extensive research, this guidebook focuses on nine essential areas that play a critical role in making learning clear, measurable, and effective.

Key Components of Visible Learning

Mindsets

- Self-efficacy
- Challenge
- Risk-taking

Goal Setting & Self-Regulation

- Challenging goals
- Responding to feedback
- Learning strategies

Learning Behaviours

- Persistence
- Seeking feedback
- Self-assessment

Self-efficacy: What is it?

Self-efficacy refers to a person's belief in their ability to successfully carry out specific tasks or achieve particular goals. It reflects confidence in one's capacity to manage motivation, behaviour, and interactions within different situations. These beliefs influence the goals individuals choose, the effort they invest, how persistent they are when facing challenges, and ultimately their level of performance. People with higher self-efficacy are more likely to take on difficult tasks and remain committed when obstacles arise. Importantly, self-efficacy is not a fixed trait; it varies across different domains and contexts, depending on the specific task and circumstances involved.

Self-efficacy: How does it work?

1. Mastery Experiences
When you experience success you build confidence.

2. Vicarious Experiences
Seeing others succeed, particularly your peers, helps you believe success is possible for you as well.

3. Social Persuasion
Encouragement and feedback from teachers, peers, or family can strengthen self-belief.

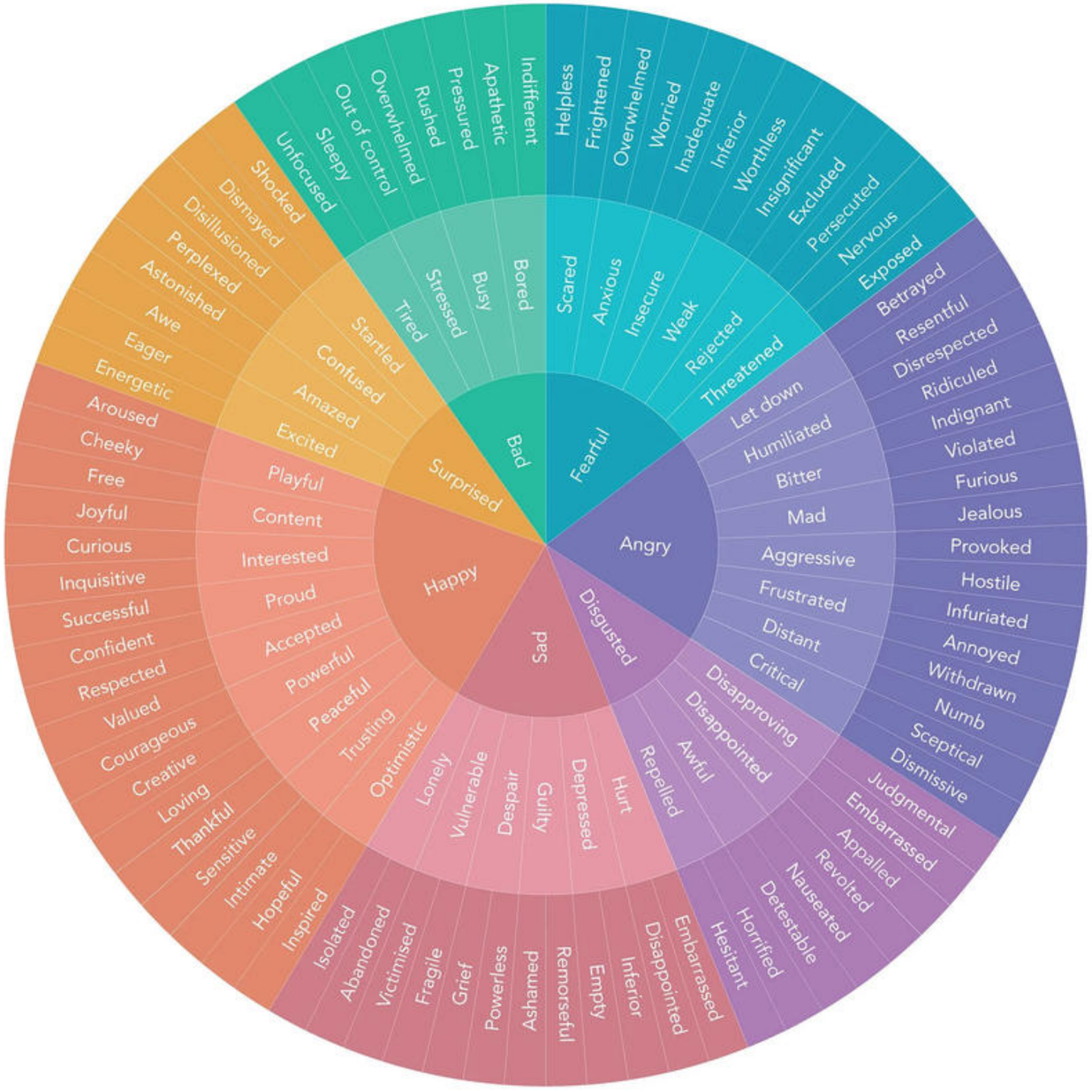
4. Physiological & Emotional States
Stress, anxiety, or excitement influence confidence. Learning how to interpret and manage these feelings helps you stay confident in challenging situations.

Self-efficacy activity

When faced with a task, identify how you feel (move from the inner to the outer circle to name the specific emotion). Then, be specific about what your next steps will be:

Because I feel __, my next step will be:

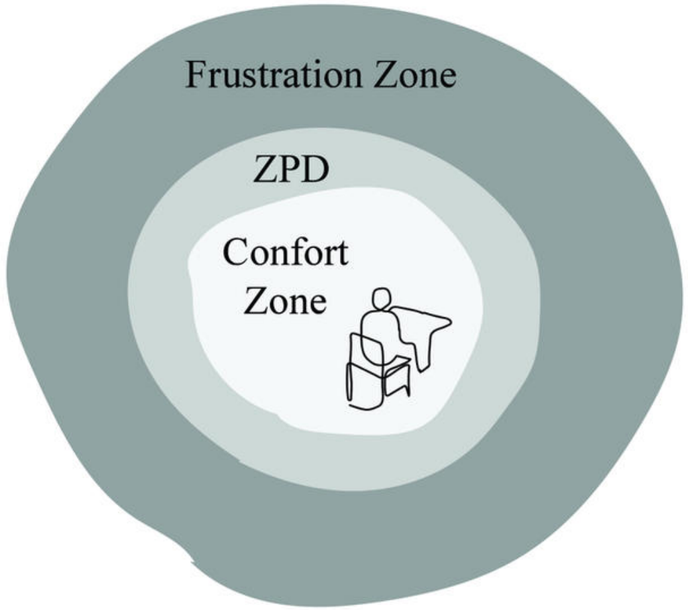
- ☐ Ask a question
- ☐ Practise a bit more
- ☐ Review feedback
- ☐ Teach it to someone
- ☐ Try a challenging problem
- ☐ Take a short break and return to the task

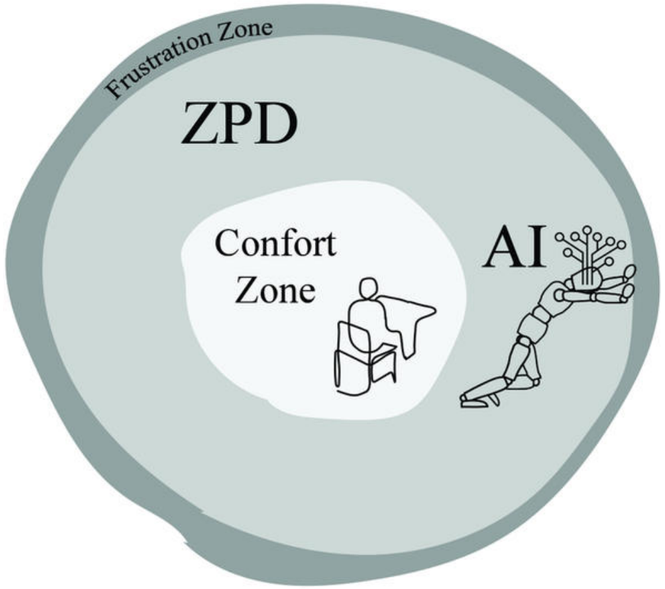


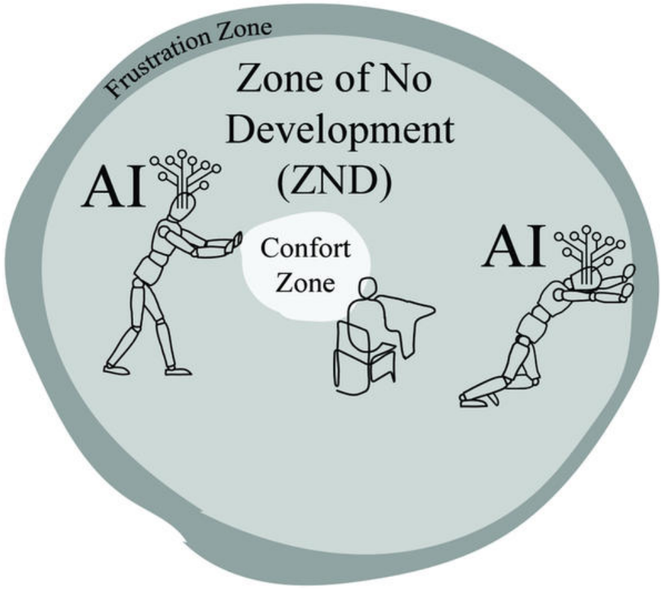
Embracing challenge

Productive struggle is the process of engaging with challenging tasks, making mistakes, and persisting until understanding develops. Rather than being a sign of failure, struggle is an important part of growth. By embracing challenge, you build confidence in your ability to learn, strengthen problem-solving skills, and develop the resilience needed for long-term academic and personal success.

Challenge activity







The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is the space where you can do things that are just beyond your current ability, but become achievable with some support. When tools like AI provide constant help, this zone can become artificial: it feels like you know and can do a lot, but true understanding, retention, and creativity don't develop. Continuous scaffolding removes the struggle, which is a core part of learning, and instead creates the illusion of learning rather than real cognitive growth.

Challenge activity

WHAT

- What skills are you not practising if AI does this part?

WHEN

- When is it appropriate to use AI in your studies, and when does it cross a line?

WHERE

- Where in the task should AI come in: start, middle, end, or not at all?

WHY

- Why do you choose to use AI: convenience, confidence, learning support, pressure, or something else?

WHO

- Who are you becoming as a learner when you rely on AI tools regularly?

Risk taking

Learning and creativity grow when you are willing to take academic risks by trying new ideas, exploring unfamiliar approaches, and engaging with challenges even when success is not guaranteed. This kind of risk-taking is not about reckless behaviour, but about being open to learning through mistakes, feedback, and persistence. By embracing risks, you can strengthen your resilience, deepen understanding, and develop confidence in your ability to learn from experience.

Risk taking activity

Musharaf's Speech Educating Yorkshire | Educating | Our Stories

Risk taking activity

Watch the video about Musharaf giving a speech in front of his classmates.

- What challenges did he face before giving his talk, and why was it a risk for him?
- How do you think he might have felt while speaking, and what helped him push through?
- Can you think of a time when you took a personal or academic risk? What did you learn?
- Why is taking risks, even when you might fail or feel nervous, important for growth?
- What is one small risk you could take this week that could help you learn or build confidence?

Why you should set challenging goals

Although any imagined end state can technically be defined as a goal, in everyday use goals typically involve outcomes that are desired yet difficult to achieve. We set goals precisely because success is not automatic and requires behavior change—engaging in new or challenging actions rather than routine behavior. This struggle is central to goal pursuit and aligns with achievement motivation, which reflects a desire to demonstrate competence on novel or demanding tasks. Difficulty arises because behavior depends on two dimensions: the *way*—the skills, knowledge, and cognitive capacities required to act—and the *will*—the motivation, intention, and prioritization needed to sustain effort.

Goals activity

The Goal Ladder

Step 1: Write your top goal. Choose one clear improvement you want to achieve.
Example: Improve my essay writing to reach the top level of the mark scheme.

Step 2: Identify one key academic skill you need to develop. Think about what someone at that level can do that you cannot yet do confidently.
Example: Analyse evidence instead of just describing it.

Step 3: Turn that skill into a practical step. Make it something you can do in your next piece of work.
Example: Add one sentence after each quotation analysing what it suggests.

Step 4: Decide who or what can support you.
Example: Ask my teacher to check one paragraph for depth of analysis.

Step 5: Take the first small action. Start with something you can do today.
Example: Rewrite one paragraph using the new structure.

Step 6: Review and adjust. After trying the step, reflect and decide what the next rung should be.
Example: Next time, include two layers of analysis instead of one.

Acting on feedback

Feedback plays a crucial role in your learning, but it is more than just comments written on your work. It can come from many sources, including your teachers, your peers, and even your own reflections. What really matters, though, is how you use this information. Rather than simply reading feedback and moving on, effective learning happens when you actively make sense of what is said and apply it to improve future work or develop better study strategies. When you take action on feedback, whether to improve an assignment or change how you approach learning, you close the feedback loop and make feedback meaningful.

Acting on feedack activity

Part 1: Understanding the feedback

Tick each statement once completed:

- ☐ I have read the feedback carefully (not just the grade).
- ☐ I can summarise the main message in one sentence.
- ☐ I can identify at least one strength mentioned.
- ☐ I can identify the main area for improvement.
- ☐ I understand what the feedback means.

Write some notes on the above:

Acting on feedack activity

Part 2: Taking action

□ I have made at least one concrete change to my work.
□ I can explain why this change improves the work.
□ I have checked that the change meets the marking criteria.
□ I know how this feedback applies to future tasks.
□ I can describe how I will avoid this issue next time.

Write some notes on the above:

Learning Strategies

Learning strategies work best when you use the right strategy at the right time, rather than relying on generic study tips. When you are first learning something (surface learning), strategies like summarising key ideas, practising recall, or checking your understanding help you build basic knowledge. When you move to deep learning, strategies such as explaining ideas in your own words, comparing concepts, or asking “why” questions help you understand how ideas connect. For transfer, applying what you know to new problems or real-world situations is most effective. Learning depends on skill (your prior achievement), will (your confidence and persistence), and thrill (your motivation and interest). You can build will by setting clear goals, reflecting on feedback, and persisting through challenges. Thrill develops when learning feels meaningful, achievable, and connected to your interests.

Learning strategies activity

There are three key psychological needs which support motivation (thrill):

1. Autonomy: feeling in control of choices
2. Competence: feeling capable and successful
3. Relatedness: feeling connected and supported by others

Create a motivation map:

A. **Autonomy** – What I choose

- What part of my learning feels most mine?
- Where could I take more ownership this week?

B. **Competence** – What I feel good at

- What tasks make me feel skilled or confident?
- Where do I feel stuck and why?

C. **Relatedness** – Who supports me

- Who in class motivates me or helps me learn?
- How do my peers or teachers make school feel meaningful?

Persistence

Research shows that persistence is not just about trying harder, but about continuing to work on a task while learning from feedback and adjusting your approach. However, persistence can take different forms. Productive persistence happens when you respond to mistakes by changing strategies, asking questions, or using feedback to improve. Wheel-spinning occurs when you keep working but do not make progress, often because the task is too difficult, key concepts are missing, feedback is unclear, or you rely on guessing instead of understanding. This kind of persistence can feel effortful but lead to little learning. Non-persistence happens when you stop engaging before reaching mastery. Recognising these patterns helps you decide when to persist, adapt, or seek support.

Persistence activity

Alex has a 1,000-word assignment due in two days.

She has already spent an hour on it, but:

- the introduction feels weak
- her argument keeps repeating
- feedback from last time said “needs clearer structure”

Alex wants to “be persistent” and keeps going.

Persistence activity

What does Alex do next?

1. Keeps writing until the word count is finished
2. Re-reads the task instructions three times
3. Uses AI to rewrite the introduction again without changing the argument
4. Stops to map the argument in bullet points before writing more
5. Asks AI or a teacher a specific question about structure
6. Edits sentences to sound more sophisticated
7. Compares the assignment to the marking criteria
8. Works longer because “quitting would be lazy”

Persistence activity

What should Alex do next?

1. ~~Keeps writing until the word count is finished~~
2. ~~Re-reads the task instructions three times~~
3. ~~Uses AI to rewrite the introduction again without changing the argument~~
4. Stop to map the argument in bullet points before writing more
5. Ask AI or a teacher a specific question about structure
6. ~~Edits sentences to sound more sophisticated~~
7. Compare the assignment to the marking criteria
8. ~~Works longer because “quitting would be lazy”~~

Persistence does not always mean progress.

Seeking feedback

Feedback-seeking behaviour (FSB) is an important part of learning because it helps you understand what you are doing well and how you can improve. A key part of effective FSB is **monitoring how others perform well** by studying strong exemplars, noticing successful approaches used by peers, and comparing your work with clear success criteria. This helps you develop a clearer picture of quality before seeking feedback. FSB also requires you to **actively ask for specific and detailed feedback**, rather than relying on brief or unclear comments. Although FSB can feel challenging, especially when rubrics are difficult to interpret, deadlines create pressure, or asking for feedback feels uncomfortable, engaging fully in this behaviour supports improvement and builds confidence in your ability to learn.

Seeking feedback activity

Part 1: Looking at Others & Comparing

□I have looked at at least one strong exemplar.
□I can point to two specific features that make it successful.
□I can link those features to the marking criteria.
□I can name one strategy or approach the exemplar uses.
□I have identified one clear difference between the exemplar and my work.
□I have identified at least one thing I can take from this exemplar.

Seeking feedback activity

Part 2: Asking Precise Feedback

□My question focuses on one specific part of my work.
□My question uses key words from the marking criteria.
□My question would still make sense without reading my whole work.
□My question is about something I can change.
□I would know when I've successfully improved.
□The feedback would help me next time, not just for this task.

Self-assessment

Self-assessment means reflecting on and judging your own learning and work, not just by guessing a grade but by thinking about how well you meet standards, using feedback, and deciding how to improve. It can involve setting criteria, checking your work, reflecting on performance, and adjusting your judgements based on evidence. Self-assessment can be done explicitly (e.g. classroom tasks) or implicitly (e.g. self-questioning while studying). Research shows several factors affect how well self-assessment works. Your beliefs about its usefulness, confidence in doing it (self-efficacy), and whether you feel safe to be honest with yourself influence your engagement. Supportive teachers, clear feedback, practice and training, and tools like rubrics also make self-assessment more effective.

Self-assessment activity

Rate each statement:
1 = Rarely true
2 = Sometimes true
3 = Usually true
4 = Almost always true

1. I use the marking criteria or a rubric when assessing my work.
2. I can usually explain why my work meets (or doesn't meet) a standard.
3. I can identify both strengths and specific areas to improve.
4. I make time to review and evaluate my work before submitting it.
5. I compare my work to exemplars or model answers.
6. I consistently reflect on my progress, not just at the end but during the process.
7. I believe self-assessment genuinely helps me improve.
8. I feel confident judging the quality of my own work.
9. I feel safe being honest about weaknesses in my work.
10. I know what to do next after self-assessing.

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