

Teaching in the age of AI.

The STAR framework for planning with AI without losing the learning.

José Picardo · Azimuth





1 A simple compass for a noisy moment.

The STAR framework

STAR keeps four things human while AI helps with the rest. The question in each lesson is less about what AI can do and more about what should stay with you and your pupils: let it help with the marking, planning and reporting, and protect the relational, responsive knowing of children that makes a lesson succeed.



S Spark

Ignite curiosity

Learning begins with a spark that lights curiosity. AI can widen the stimuli teachers draw on, but it is human wonder and skilful curation that turn a spark into shared inquiry.

Using AI as you plan

- **Contrasting provocations.** Generate opposing viewpoints to spark debate.
- **Differentiated hooks.** Adapt a prompt for different ages without losing its core.
- **Immersive scenarios.** Create images or scenarios that make the concept itself tangible, not just decorative.
- **Persona dialogues.** Script a Q&A with a historical or literary figure for pupils to question and correct.
- **Talk scaffolds.** Generate sentence stems to structure discussion.



T Think

Shape meaning

Thinking is where learners wrestle with ideas, and the effort matters. It is the productive struggle of working something out, with one eye on their own thinking, that builds understanding. AI can prompt and explain, but it risks doing the thinking for them.

Using AI as you plan

- **Multiple explanations.** Generate analogies; students judge which works best.
- **Retrieval quizzes.** Questions at several levels, so recall stays effortful but successful.
- **Source interrogation.** Compare an AI summary you prepared with the text to spot gaps or bias.
- **Misconception analysis.** Surface common errors for students to correct.
- **Reasoning critique.** Dissect AI examples to expose flaws and alternatives.



A Act

Apply knowledge

Understanding becomes durable through practice, problem-solving and the productive struggle of grappling with hard ideas. AI can widen the chances to apply learning, but meaning is secured only when learners do the effortful work themselves.

Using AI as you plan

- **Experiment write-ups.** Results from complex or unsafe experiments for pupils to analyse.
- **Feedback banks.** Draft comments on common strengths and errors, so marking is quicker and the judgement stays yours.
- **Dialogue scripts.** Model conversations at different levels for pupils to rehearse in pairs.
- **Graded problem sets.** Questions that build in small steps, so the challenge stays effortful.
- **Role-play scenarios.** Branching tasks where pupils' choices shape the outcome.



R Reflect

Make connections

Reflection is a metacognitive act: revisiting ideas, noticing how you learned, and making the connections that prepare you to transfer them. In an age of AI summaries, the human task is to interpret, critique and converse.

Using AI as you plan

- **Personalised prompts.** Tailored questions to deepen reflection.
- **Compare summaries.** Students summarise the discussion, then compare with one you prepared to see what they missed.
- **Talk criteria.** Clear success criteria for clarity, fluency and vocabulary, for pupils to judge each other's talk.
- **Interpretive critique.** Compare student reflections with an AI reflection you prepared, to debate meaning.
- **Model concept maps.** A map with deliberate gaps or wrong links for pupils to fix.



2 Try one this week

One example for each stage, to use as you plan



Spark

Two sides of a question

Ask for two opposing 80-word arguments a Year 9 class could debate: “Was the Industrial Revolution good for ordinary workers?” Check the two arguments, then print them. Pupils choose the stronger one and say why before you teach a word.



Think

Three explanations, one mistake

“Explain photosynthesis three ways: with an analogy, step by step, and as a short story. Put one common misconception into one of them.” Check the explanations and use them in the lesson. Pupils decide which works best and find the mistake.



Act

Practice that builds

“Write five questions on simultaneous equations about planning a school trip, each a little harder than the last, with the answers listed separately.” Check the questions, then set them. Pupils work through them unaided.



Reflect

Their summary first

Before the lesson, ask for a five-point summary of the question you will discuss, such as “Is Macbeth responsible for his own downfall?” After the discussion, pupils write their own summary first, then compare it with yours.

Using AI safely

Check everything AI gives you before it reaches pupils: it can be wrong, biased or unsuitable, and it sounds just as sure of itself when it is. Use your school account, and never paste in pupils’ names or personal details.

A note of caution

Cognitive offloading hands the machine the mechanical work, the storage, the formatting, the first draft, and can free a learner to think harder. Outsourcing the thinking is the opposite: when AI does the weighing, reasoning and struggling, the learning leaves with it. The test is simple. Did the tool clear space for thought, or take its place?



3 When pupils use AI

The same four stages, with the thinking kept theirs

Some schools approve AI tools for pupils to use. STAR works for them too, with one rule underneath it: pupils try first, and AI comes second.



Spark

Test the first idea

Pupils test their first idea against the opposite view.

“Give me the strongest argument against what I think about [question].”



Think

Explain, then check

Pupils explain first, then ask AI what is missing.

“Here is my explanation of [topic]. What have I missed or got wrong?”



Act

Practice, answers held back

Pupils practise with questions that get harder, answers held back.

“Give me five questions on [topic], one at a time, getting harder. Don’t show the answer until I’ve tried.”



Reflect

Check it is real

Pupils check that their understanding is real.

“Ask me three questions that would show whether I really understood [topic].”

Other ways pupils can use it

- Persona dialogues with a historical or literary figure, checked against sources.
- A language partner for speaking practice.
- Feedback on the clarity of their own draft, without rewriting it.
- Feedback on the fluency and vocabulary of their speech.
- Quizzes that adapt to keep recall effortful but successful.
- Gaps and missing links in a concept map they built themselves.



Before pupils use AI

Use only tools your school has approved. Many set a minimum age of 13, some 18, and since September 2026 Keeping Children Safe in Education has expected filtering and monitoring to cover them. Set the task so the thinking comes first, and ask pupils to hand in their exchange with the AI alongside their work. Pupils should never put in their own or anyone else’s personal details.

If you use AI live in the classroom, try the prompt beforehand, read each answer before pupils do, and be ready to switch the screen off. AI can answer differently each time, and some of what it says may be wrong or unsuitable.

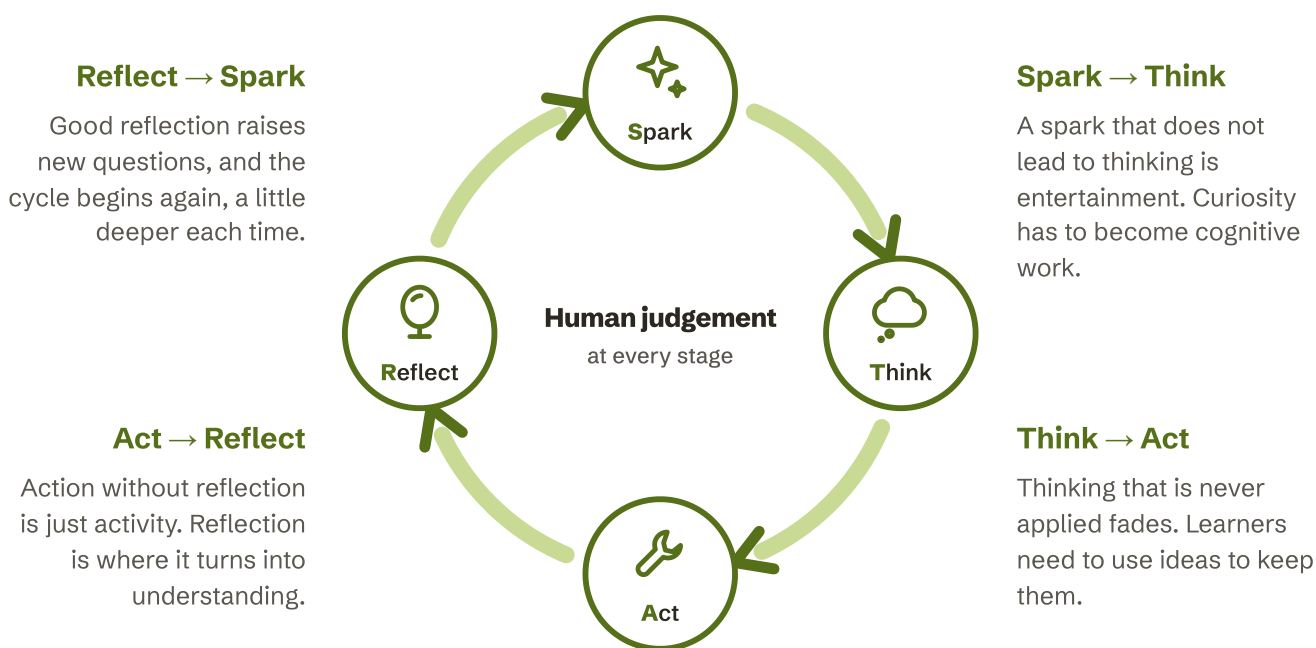


4 A continuous loop, not a checklist.

The STAR cycle

A spark ignites curiosity, which leads to thinking, acting and reflecting, before fresh questions spark the next turn. AI can enrich every stage. Only human judgement secures depth, meaning and purpose.

Think and Reflect are where metacognition happens: the planning, monitoring and evaluating that the Education Endowment Foundation values at around seven months' additional progress a year.



🔗 What to hand over, what to keep

Hand to AI. The routine parts of marking and planning, such as first drafts of resources and feedback, along with summarising, reporting and surfacing patterns in pupil data. AI does this work well, and it frees time for what only a teacher can do.

Keep human. The judgements at the heart of marking and planning: what a lesson is for, and what each pupil needs next. Also the relationships, encouragement and challenge, and the responsive knowing of children built up over months. It does not show on a spreadsheet, and it is the part most worth protecting.

Source: Education Endowment Foundation (2025) Metacognition and self-regulated learning: guidance report. 2nd edn. London: EEF.

This is a question of value, not efficiency.

S

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T

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About José Picardo

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Bring STAR to your school.

For INSET, keynotes, workshops or consultancy on AI in schools, visit azimuth.org.uk or email hello@azimuth.org.uk.

Leading this across a school? Who is doing the thinking?, a free briefing for senior leaders, is at azimuth.org.uk/tools.

For pupils, the free card Five ways to make AI make you think harder is there too.