

ATLs Teachers Playbook

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE



A Practical Guide to Teaching Thinking Across Subjects **2026**

What ATLs actually are

ATL = how students think, not what they know

→ Students succeed in IB when they can:

- *Analyse*
- *Evaluate*
- *Justify*
- *Communicate clearly*

Stage	What it looks like
PYP	I think... because...
MYP	Claim + evidence
DP	Evaluation + justification + counterargument

→ Reality check:

Students don't go beyond DP 5s because they lack knowledge, but because their **skills are underdeveloped.**

The Core Problem

WHY DP STUDENTS PLATEAU AT 4-5

→ What we often see in the DP:

- Students revise a lot
- Students know content
- Students still get 4-5

→ Why?

Because of:

- Weak argumentation
- Weak analysis
- Weak use of evidence

Knowledge > Description > plateau 4-5
Skills > Analysis > Evaluation > 6-7

→ Science:

- Weak: describes results
- *Strong: explains why results occurred*

Math:

- Weak: correct answer
- *Strong: justified method*

Humanities:

- Weak: narrates events
- *Strong: evaluates causes and perspectives*

What success looks like - DP 6/7:

- *Clear argument*
- *Relevant evidence*
- *Deep evaluation*
- *Precise communication*

The Golden Rule of ATLs

IF YOU DO NOT TEACH THEM EXPLICITLY,
STUDENTS WILL NOT LEARN THEM.

IF YOU DO NOT MODEL THEM,
STUDENTS WON'T INTERNALIZE THEM.



Teachers in action:

- Model thinking aloud
- Show examples
- Deconstruct answers

The Core ATL Skills

WHAT WE ALL TEACH

1 ARGUMENTATION - linked to all subjects

Good practice:

- *Make a claim, support it with evidence, and explain your reasoning.*

→ Common misinterpretation:

- Write everything you know about.

FINAL EXAMS IMPACT:

- 6-7 = evaluation and justification
- 4-5 = description & limited justification

CLAIM > EVIDENCE > REASONING > EVALUATION

→ Science example:

- *Claim:* "Light affects plant growth"
- *Evidence:* Experiment data
- *Reasoning:* Photosynthesis explanation
- *Evaluation:* *The evidence supports the claim, but reliability is limited and further testing is needed*

→ Progression:

Stage	Skill
PYP	Opinion + reason
MYP	Claim + evidence
DP	Evaluation + counterargument

2 DATA LITERACY

Not just Sciences & Maths.

Good practice:

- *What does the data show?*
- *What can we conclude?*

→ Common misalignment:

- Students create graphs but do not interpret them.

DATA > PATTERN > INTERPRETATION > CONCLUSIONS

→ Examples:

- *Science*: Interpreting experiment results
- *Math*: Explaining trends in graphs
- *Geography*: Population data interpretation

3 CRITICAL THINKING

Good practice:

- *Compare*
- *Evaluate*
- *Justify*

→ Common mistake:

- Students describe instead of analyse

COMPARE > ANALYSE > EVALUATE > JUSTIFY

→ Example:

- Weak: "The graph increases"
- Strong: "*The increase suggests... which implies... therefore...*"

4 COMMUNICATION

Good practice:

- *Structured, clear, and audience-aware*

→ Common mistake:

- Long answers as opposed to good answers

CLARITY > LENGTH

→ Example:

- *Weak: Long, unclear paragraphs*
- *Strong: Structured argument & clear topic sentences*

5 RESEARCH

Good practice:

- *Evaluate sources*
- *Justify reliability*

→ Common mistake:

- Copying information.

→ Strong research includes:

- *Source evaluation*
- *Cross-checking*
- *Justification of reliability*

→ Examples:

- *Science: evaluating sources for IA*
- *Humanities: identifying bias and perspective*
- *Language & Literature: selecting evidence that supports interpretation*
- *Business/Economics: assessing the reliability of market data*
- *Design: researching user needs and justifying choices*

6 SELF-MANAGEMENT

Good practice:

- *Planning*
- *Monitoring progress*
- *Reflecting*

→ Common misalignment:

- Treated as behaviour, not as a skill.

→ Progression:

Level	Skill
PYP	Follows routines
MYP	Plans tasks
DP	Independently manages workload

7 COLLABORATION

Good practice:

- *Shared thinking*
- *Decision-making*
- *Accountability*

→ Common mistake:

- Task division only

**COLLABORATION = THINKING TOGETHER,
NOT DIVIDING TASKS**

→ Examples:

- Weak: "You do slides, I do research"
- Strong: *Joint decision-making*

The Mutual Challenge

TRANSFER - THE MISSING SKILL IN LEARNING

→ Students must understand:

- *This is the SAME skill in different subjects.*

→ Example - ARGUMENTATION

- *English > essay*
- *Sciences > claim & evidence*
- *Economics > evaluation*

→ Explicit teaching:

- *"You used this skill in Science; how does it apply here?"*

SAME SKILL - DIFFERENT CONTEXT

ATLs Mapping

WHAT MUST BE ALIGNED AND TRACKED

Mapping is not optional—it ensures students are taught skills in the correct sequence



What should happen:

- *Skills progress mapping across year levels*
- *Subjects reinforce each other*



Misalignment example:

- Science requires data analysis
- Math hasn't taught graphing yet



Correct alignment:

- Math teaches graphs first
- Science applies them
- Subject teachers coordinate horizontal teaching
- Align unit timing
- Coordinate planning

ATLs Assessment

WHAT WE ACTUALLY MEASURE



Correct focus - we assess:

- *Quality of reasoning*
- *Use evidence*
- *Depth of analysis*
- *Analysis, Evaluation, Justification*



Wrong focus:

- Content only
- Final answer only



DP reality:

- Level 4-5, students describe, recall
- Level 6-7, students analyse, evaluate, and justify.

Effective Feedback

IT MUST TARGET THE SKILL, NOT THE TASK



Effective feedback includes:

1. *What works*
2. *What is missing*
3. *What mastery looks like*
4. *How to improve*



Examples of strong feedback:

- *“Your argument is clear, but your evaluation needs to be deeper”*
- *“You used evidence, but you didn’t explain how it supports your claim”*



Wrong focus:

- “Good effort”
- “Add more details”



Most common mistakes:

- ATL written in planners but not taught
- Different teachers using different language
- Skills assumed, not taught
- Assessment focused on content
- “Group work” without teaching collaboration

Must-do for Implementation

EVERY TEACHER MUST



In every lesson:

- *Use shared language*
- *Ask for reasoning, not just answers*



In every task:

- Make the skill explicit
- Show what success and mastery look like



In every assessment:

- Evaluate thinking, not just knowledge



Checklist:

- Skill is named
- Skill is modeled
- Skill is practised
- Skill is assessed

Bottom Line

**ATL IS NOT AN ADD-ON
IT IS THE CURRICULUM**

- **With alignment & teaching:**
 - *Students are equipped to score high*
- **Without alignment:**
 - Students plateau at average levels

**You are not just teaching your subject.
You are teaching students how to think
in your subject**

**Accountability: all expectations will be reflected in
lesson observations, student work, and appraisals**



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