

EF Basics

**A Series of 11 Mini-Lessons
to Build Whole-Class EF Literacy**

(Grades 2 and Up)

Includes

1 “Magic Words” teacher inspiration card

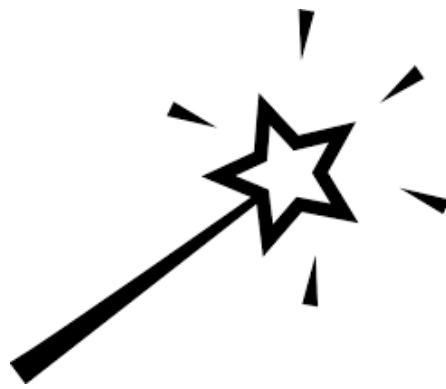
2 Classroom Posters

1 Teaching guide page

11 pages of Supplementary Notes

11 Student Worksheets

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Magic Words

Model self-understanding and self-compassion!
Teach students how to feel good
about EF strengths and challenges:

“That EF is so tricky for me too.”

“So many people struggle with that EF.”

“I have strategies to work around that.”

“That’s just like me!”

“We have THAT EF strength in common!”

“You know me... this EF is my superpower!”

“You know me... guess what EF I’ll struggle
with in THIS task.”

“We know each other so well. What EF will
we all struggle with in this task?”

“My goodness – I slept poorly and my EFs
are in rough shape!”

“I just had a rough conversation and I need
to calm down before we start...”

“I know myself so well!”

“You know yourself so well!”

“Something that helps ME with that is...”

“I completely understand. I GET it!”

“This task is hard for me. How can I be
strategic?”

What ARE Executive Functions?



EFs are the like the brain's conductor.
They help direct your
unique creativity and incredible smarts
so you can achieve your goals.



Everyone has different strengths and weaknesses, like a fingerprint.

EFs help you express your unique creativity and smarts.



Incredibly smart people, like teachers and parents, have EF challenges too.



EFs will slowly get better with age.



4 FACTS About Executive Functions

EF Basics: 11 Mini-Lessons for EF Literacy – Teaching Guide

(Grades 2 and Up)

<p>Purpose: This series of repeating lessons will build basic EF knowledge and skill for both teacher and students. They can be used alone or in combination with other lessons on EF.</p> <p>Timing: Any time, but particularly useful at the beginning of the year. Could be done daily, weekly, or monthly. Each lesson should take 30-40 minutes.</p> <p>Materials: “4 Facts” poster (attached), “What Are...” poster (attached), Foursquare EF worksheets for all students (attached), Supplementary Materials and Notes for Lessons (attached).</p> <p>A set of classroom EF posters will also be useful to have up as you present these lessons, and then to keep up for reference once your class has developed EF knowledge and skill (find plenty of poster options at activatedlearning.org).</p>	<p>Connection: Choose an EF to focus on for the lesson. Gather students. Engage students in a short activity to demonstrate how the EF feels (suggestions listed in chart below).</p> <p>Teach: Keep this clear, succinct, and direct. First, quickly review the “4 Facts” and “What Are...” posters. Then, display a copy of the Foursquare activity sheet for the EF you are covering. Model how students will fill it in. Write in the definition for the EF you are covering (see chart, below). Provide 2-3 examples of how the chosen EF impacts performance (see chart below for ideas or share your own). Show students how to draw a moment in which the EF is called upon.</p> <p>Active Engagement: Ask students to turn and talk with a partner. If you’re working on attention, for example, ask “Is attention challenging for you? Share one time that attention is hard for you.”</p> <p>Link: Provide students with a clean copy of the Foursquare worksheet and invite them to fill it in on their own or with a partner. “You can use some of the examples that we discussed together, or you can create a Foursquare that is personal to you. Your job is to reflect on your own experiences, search your memory for interesting ideas, and make your ideas very clear on your Foursquare.”</p> <p>Feedback to Students: “I see students thinking carefully. I see students coming up with original ideas and making clear notes and drawings. I see students reflecting thoughtfully on their executive functions”.</p>
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These lessons are based on an activity developed by @mswalker_201.

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WORKING MEMORY: EF Basics Mini-Lesson Series

Supplementary Materials and Notes for Lessons

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EF and Definition	Connection Activity Ideas	Examples from Daily Life	Strategy Examples
<p>Working Memory</p> <p>Holding information in memory while performing complex tasks.</p>	<p><i>What do you have time for? Mix and match, modify, or simplify. These ideas will get you thinking...</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Play a paired or group “memory” card game in which pairs of cards are arranged face down and must be found as pairs. Can you hold several different card locations in mind?</p> <p>See if students can remember the last word of three or four sentences you say: “Everyone loves chocolate cake. It is served at birthdays. I always hope to get a corner piece. Corner pieces have the most icing.” Can they tell you, “Cake, birthdays, piece, icing”? This tests their ability to hold the last word of each sentence in mind while continuing to listen.</p>	<p><i>Try to share examples from your own life, but don’t feel you have to exaggerate. Be honest and model self-compassion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Playing chess and holding a series of moves in mind.</p> <p>Remembering all items on a list or in a phone number.</p> <p>Remembering to add your “carries” when performing traditional addition.</p> <p>Copying information from one screen to another on a computer.</p>	<p><i>Keep an open mind and be creative. Students will come up with surprising and unusual strategies that might just work!</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Jot information down.</p> <p>Make a song out of a list of information.</p> <p>Reduce background noise, slow down, say it out loud.</p> <p>Visualize what you are hearing.</p> <p>Stay calm.</p>

METACOGNITION: EF Basics Mini-Lesson Series

Supplementary Notes for Lessons

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EF and Definition	Connection Activity Ideas	Examples from Daily Life	Strategy Examples
<p>Metacognition</p> <p>Noticing how you're doing. Thinking about how you're thinking.</p>	<p><i>What do you have time for? Mix and match, modify, or simplify. These ideas will get you thinking...</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Display snapshots of people. These might be shots you already have of your class, or for fun you could use awkwardfamilyphotos.com. Draw thought bubbles over them and encourage students to complete the thought, "I just realized that I..."</p> <p>Give students a cue card and ask them to write advice to next year's students. "If I could do this grade / month / year / class over again, I would..."</p>	<p><i>Try to share examples from your own life, but don't feel you have to exaggerate. Be honest and model self-compassion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Noticing that you're making the same mistake over and over again.</p> <p>Realizing that you know the answer to a question but just can't remember it right now.</p> <p>Realizing that you've forgotten something important and should find a replacement.</p>	<p><i>Keep an open mind and be creative. Students will come up with surprising and unusual strategies that might just work!</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Use self-talk: "Okay. What might I be forgetting" or "How can I improve this?"</p> <p>Think of someone you admire and ask yourself, "How would they have done this differently?"</p>

SUSTAINED ATTENTION: EF Basics Mini-Lesson Series

Supplementary Notes for Lessons

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EF and Definition	Connection Activity Ideas	Examples from Daily Life	Strategy Examples
<p>Sustained Attention</p> <p>Paying attention even if you're tired, bored, or not interested.</p>	<p><i>What do you have time for? Mix and match, modify, or simplify. These ideas will get you thinking...</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Show students a shuffled deck of cards, one by one, about one per second. Ask students to clap their hands <i>unless</i> that see a king or queen. As their attention wanders, they will be more likely to clap at the wrong time!</p> <p>Go online and search for "change blindness" videos. Find one that is suitable for your group and see if they can pay enough attention to count all the changes.</p>	<p><i>Try to share examples from your own life, but don't feel you have to exaggerate. Be honest and model self-compassion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Listening to teachers' instructions when they are running long.</p> <p>Noticing small errors in written work.</p> <p>Driving past your destination because you stopped paying attention.</p>	<p><i>Keep an open mind and be creative. Students will come up with surprising and unusual strategies that might just work!</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Chew gum.</p> <p>Stay rested, fed, and watered.</p> <p>Run the stairs or find a way to move.</p> <p>Break tasks into smaller chunks.</p> <p>Remove clutter or distraction.</p> <p>Sit close to a teacher.</p> <p>Talk over your work with a friend or engage with your teacher.</p>

ORGANIZATION: EF Basics Mini-Lesson Series

Supplementary Notes for Lessons

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EF and Definition	Connection Activity Ideas	Examples from Daily Life	Strategy Examples
<p>Organization</p> <p>Creating and maintaining a system to keep track of information or materials.</p>	<p><i>What do you have time for? Mix and match, modify, or simplify. These ideas will get you thinking...</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Draw six simple pictures on the board: a house, a dog, a heart, a cookie, an explosion, and a dollar sign. Ask groups of students to create a story by organizing these details in a certain sequence. Notice how they can be organized differently.</p> <p>Teach students to play the card game, "Solitaire". Or, play FreeCell or Patience online. These games are almost entirely organizational tasks.</p>	<p><i>Try to share examples from your own life, but don't feel you have to exaggerate. Be honest and model self-compassion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Keeping a desk, locker, or closet tidy so you can find things when you need them.</p> <p>Making numbers and calculations orderly and easy to follow in written math work.</p> <p>Being able to write so that your ideas on one topic are all in one section or paragraph.</p>	<p><i>Keep an open mind and be creative. Students will come up with surprising and unusual strategies that might just work!</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Always find five things to put away, sort, or tidy up.</p> <p>Use baskets, binders, tabs, or sections to sort your materials.</p> <p>Remove unnecessary items or clutter.</p> <p>Watch what organized people do.</p> <p>Use a graphic organizer to pre-plan your writing.</p>

RESPONSE INHIBITION: EF Basics Mini-Lesson Series

Supplementary Notes for Lessons

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EF and Definition	Connection Activity Ideas	Examples from Daily Life	Strategy Examples
<p>Response Inhibition</p> <p>Thinking before you act – to resist the urge to say or do things.</p>	<p><i>What do you have time for? Mix and match, modify, or simplify. These ideas will get you thinking...</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>The Marshmallow Test! Will students agree to give up having one marshmallow now (or Smartie) if they are promised two later? This tests whether they can temporarily inhibit their desire for a treat. Look up “Stanford Marshmallow Experiment” to see cute videos.</p> <p>On six blank cards, write the names of six colors (eg. red, green, blue...) each in the wrong colored marker. So, you write the word “green” using red marker, “yellow” using green marker, etc. Flip through the cards and ask your class to read the names. Flip through again and challenge your students to say the color that each word is written in. Can they inhibit the impulse to simply read the word?</p>	<p><i>Try to share examples from your own life, but don’t feel you have to exaggerate. Be honest and model self-compassion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Blurting something out that you wish you hadn’t said.</p> <p>Asking for help before you really try something on your own.</p> <p>Giving help or advice when someone doesn’t really want it.</p> <p>Rushing to the next question before double checking what you’ve already done.</p> <p>Taking one more shot after the whistle blows in basketball.</p>	<p><i>Keep an open mind and be creative. Students will come up with surprising and unusual strategies that might just work!</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Apologize right away if you regret doing something impulsively.</p> <p>Take one deep breath before you speak when you’re upset.</p> <p>Keep your hands in your pockets.</p> <p>Write “DC” next to each question to show that you’ve double checked.</p> <p>Try to stay calm: talk about your concerns before they make you so stressed you can’t control your responses.</p>

COGNITIVE FLEXIBILITY: EF Basics Mini-Lesson Series

Supplementary Notes for Lessons

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EF and Definition	Connection Activity Ideas	Examples from Daily Life	Strategy Examples
<p>Cognitive Flexibility</p> <p>Seeing many sides of an idea or situation. Being able to change and adapt.</p>	<p><i>What do you have time for? Mix and match, modify, or simplify. These ideas will get you thinking...</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Students read the following two sentences: 1) <i>The old man the ships.</i> 2) <i>The man who hunts ducks out on weekends.</i> Did you notice that you have to shift the way you understand the sentence halfway through? For example, “Man” is not a noun... it’s a verb. You have to be flexible!</p> <p>Ask children, “Do you know what flexibility is? Is anyone very physically flexible? Can you show me?” Make the connection between changing positions and stretching physically and changing positions and stretching your ideas and thinking. Can you change your mind as easily as you can change your body?</p> <p>Hold up an everyday item, such as a stapler, power cord, binder, etc. and ask students to suggest all of the different, creative ways it could be used. Can they think flexibly?</p>	<p><i>Try to share examples from your own life, but don’t feel you have to exaggerate. Be honest and model self-compassion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Appreciating a different point of view in a debate or disagreement.</p> <p>Trying a different method to solve a problem.</p> <p>Being open to someone else’s choice of restaurant, project topic, solution, game, activity, etc.</p> <p>Learning a method in math class that is different from the first method that you learned.</p>	<p><i>Keep an open mind and be creative. Students will come up with surprising and unusual strategies that might just work!</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Come up with three good ideas and choose the best.</p> <p>Say, “I’m going to put myself in your shoes...”</p> <p>Make an effort to try new things once.</p>

EMOTIONAL CONTROL: EF Basics Mini-Lesson Series

Supplementary Notes for Lessons

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EF and Definition	Connection Activity Ideas	Examples from Daily Life	Strategy Examples
<p>Emotional Control</p> <p>Managing feelings so you can be productive and successful.</p>	<p><i>What do you have time for? Mix and match, modify, or simplify. These ideas will get you thinking...</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Remind students of your work on Zones of Regulation, if your school uses the program. Remind students that they can be more effective when they are calm and under emotional control.</p> <p>Teach “box breathing”. Draw a big box on the board and as students trace the sides with their eyes they breathe in, out, out, out. This is a strategy to promote a feeling of emotional control.</p> <p>Do some yoga, exercise, or mindful movement (eg. Brain Gym) if your class would enjoy it. These experiences may promote feelings of emotional control.</p>	<p><i>Try to share examples from your own life, but don’t feel you have to exaggerate. Be honest and model self-compassion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Feeling so worried about doing things perfectly that you can’t start your assignments.</p> <p>Getting stage fright under control.</p> <p>Being so excited and happy that you’re way too loud.</p> <p>Feeling like you can’t let go of frustration from recess.</p> <p>Staying calm and cool.</p>	<p><i>Keep an open mind and be creative. Students will come up with surprising and unusual strategies that might just work!</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Say exactly how you’re feeling out loud. “I’m feeling...”</p> <p>Make a “good enough” start, even if it is just to get you to your next idea.</p> <p>Try exercise, yoga, or deep breathing.</p> <p>Use self-talk, “I’m feeling a little X because X but I can handle it and I’m going to be okay”.</p>

TIME MANAGMENT: EF Basics Mini-Lesson Series

Supplementary Notes for Lessons

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EF and Definition	Connection Activity Ideas	Examples from Daily Life	Strategy Examples
<p>Time Management</p> <p>Estimating how much time you have and how to use it to stay within time limits and deadlines.</p>	<p><i>What do you have time for? Mix and match, modify, or simplify. These ideas will get you thinking...</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Cover all clocks and remove all watches/phones. Have everyone stand up and close their eyes. Tell them to sit down quietly and open their eyes after what they believe has been a minute. Everyone will sit down and open their eyes at different times.</p> <p>Ask students to estimate how many times they can do a small, token activity (walk the perimeter of the classroom or playground, write their signature, give handshakes) in one minute. Were estimates way off? Did the group tend to over or under estimate? Do we have a good sense of time?</p>	<p><i>Try to share examples from your own life, but don't feel you have to exaggerate. Be honest and model self-compassion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Knowing you have 45 minutes to complete 10 questions and focusing only on the first question for 20 minutes.</p> <p>Starting a big project on time, so you have enough time to finish.</p> <p>Taking too long to get ready to go outside.</p> <p>Having enough time to proofread.</p>	<p><i>Keep an open mind and be creative. Students will come up with surprising and unusual strategies that might just work!</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Set a timer bell.</p> <p>Ask a group member or teacher for reminders.</p> <p>Work in 5-minute bursts and keep track of what you get done.</p> <p>Wear a watch or sit where you can see a clock.</p> <p>Assign a group time manager.</p>

PLANNING AND PRIORITIZATION: EF Basics Mini-Lesson Series

Supplementary Notes for Lessons

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EF and Definition	Connection Activity Ideas	Examples from Daily Life	Strategy Examples
<p>Planning and Prioritizing</p> <p>Creating a roadmap to reach a goal or to complete a task. Deciding what is important to focus on and what's not.</p>	<p><i>What do you have time for? Mix and match, modify, or simplify. These ideas will get you thinking...</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>What is the most important thing to learn at school? With the class, write 10 ideas on 10 blank pieces of paper or cards. Give each student 10 pennies and ask them to vote for what they think is the highest priority learning goal by placing a penny on it. They can put all pennies on one, or distribute them as they like. After they are finished, count the pennies to discover the highest learning priority.</p> <p>Discuss with the class, "How do you make a peanut butter and jelly sandwich?" Make a list of steps and discuss the decisions you make about the order of those steps.</p>	<p><i>Try to share examples from your own life, but don't feel you have to exaggerate. Be honest and model self-compassion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Focusing on the most important tasks rather than the easiest or most fun ones.</p> <p>Being able to participate because you brought all the right equipment or materials.</p> <p>Getting ahead on homework on Monday night, because you're busy all the other nights.</p>	<p><i>Keep an open mind and be creative. Students will come up with surprising and unusual strategies that might just work!</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Say, "What's the most important part of this project? Where should I start?"</p> <p>Make a to-do list and then start the three most important jobs.</p> <p>When you get an assignment or worksheet, circle the part that will be most tricky and start there.</p>

TASK INITIATION: EF Basics Mini-Lesson Series

Supplementary Notes for Lessons

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EF and Definition	Connection Activity Ideas	Examples from Daily Life	Strategy Examples
<p>Task Initiation</p> <p>The ability to begin projects in a timely fashion.</p>	<p><i>What do you have time for? Mix and match, modify, or simplify. These ideas will get you thinking...</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Arrange students in a circle and ask one student to cover their eyes so they can be the detective. Pick a student to be the “starter” and instruct the others to silently follow all actions of the starter. See if the detective can figure out who is the starter. Switch roles. Ask students how it feels to be responsible for starting an action.</p> <p>Give students a fun 3-question quiz. “You don’t have to share your answers – you can keep score in your head!” Use questions that your students can relate to, such as, “Who here brushes their teeth without being reminded? Who here is an early riser or who needs to be hassled to get up? Who here charges devices BEFORE they run out of batteries? Who here starts homework as soon as they get home and who here leaves it until 5 minutes before bedtime.” Enjoy getting to know your students and sharing your own strengths and weakness with task initiation.</p>	<p><i>Try to share examples from your own life, but don’t feel you have to exaggerate. Be honest and model self-compassion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Getting going with work after you’re given an assignment.</p> <p>Deciding on the right way to start and feeling confident enough to get going.</p> <p>Starting big projects early.</p>	<p><i>Keep an open mind and be creative. Students will come up with surprising and unusual strategies that might just work!</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Try to write the first sentence, or answer, in the first minute.</p> <p>Use self-talk, “Okay. What do I have to do first to get going?”</p> <p>Watch a friend who has already started to see how she began.</p> <p>Decide you will make a “good enough” start, even if it can’t be perfect.</p> <p>Get started on work with a partner.</p>

GOAL DIRECTED PERSISTENCE: EF Basics Mini-Lesson Series

Supplementary Notes for Lessons

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EF and Definition	Connection Activity Ideas	Examples from Daily Life	Strategy Examples
<p>Goal-Directed Persistence</p> <p>Following through to the completion of your goal without being distracted by competing interests.</p>	<p><i>What do you have time for? Mix and match, modify, or simplify. These ideas will get you thinking...</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Give students a yardstick or a ruler and challenge them to learn to balance it on one finger, straight up and down. This will take multiple tries and plenty of persistence.</p> <p>Teach students how to make a “house of cards” by leaning cards against each other to make structures. Invite them to persevere through 10 attempts in a row.</p>	<p><i>Try to share examples from your own life, but don't feel you have to exaggerate. Be honest and model self-compassion, self-understanding, and self-acceptance.</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Trying to figure out how to use new technology by patiently exploring menus, features, and YouTube videos.</p> <p>Making multiple drafts of an essay.</p> <p>Proofreading or double-checking work.</p> <p>Trying once and then giving up.</p>	<p><i>Keep an open mind and be creative. Students will come up with surprising and unusual strategies that might just work!</i></p> <p>.....</p> <p>Do big assignments in “pomodoros” (or chunks) with short breaks in between.</p> <p>Break your job into steps and check each one as you go along.</p> <p>Work with a partner and encourage each other.</p> <p>Make a goal and see if you can achieve it.</p>

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Definition

Drawing



Task Initiation



Examples

Strategies

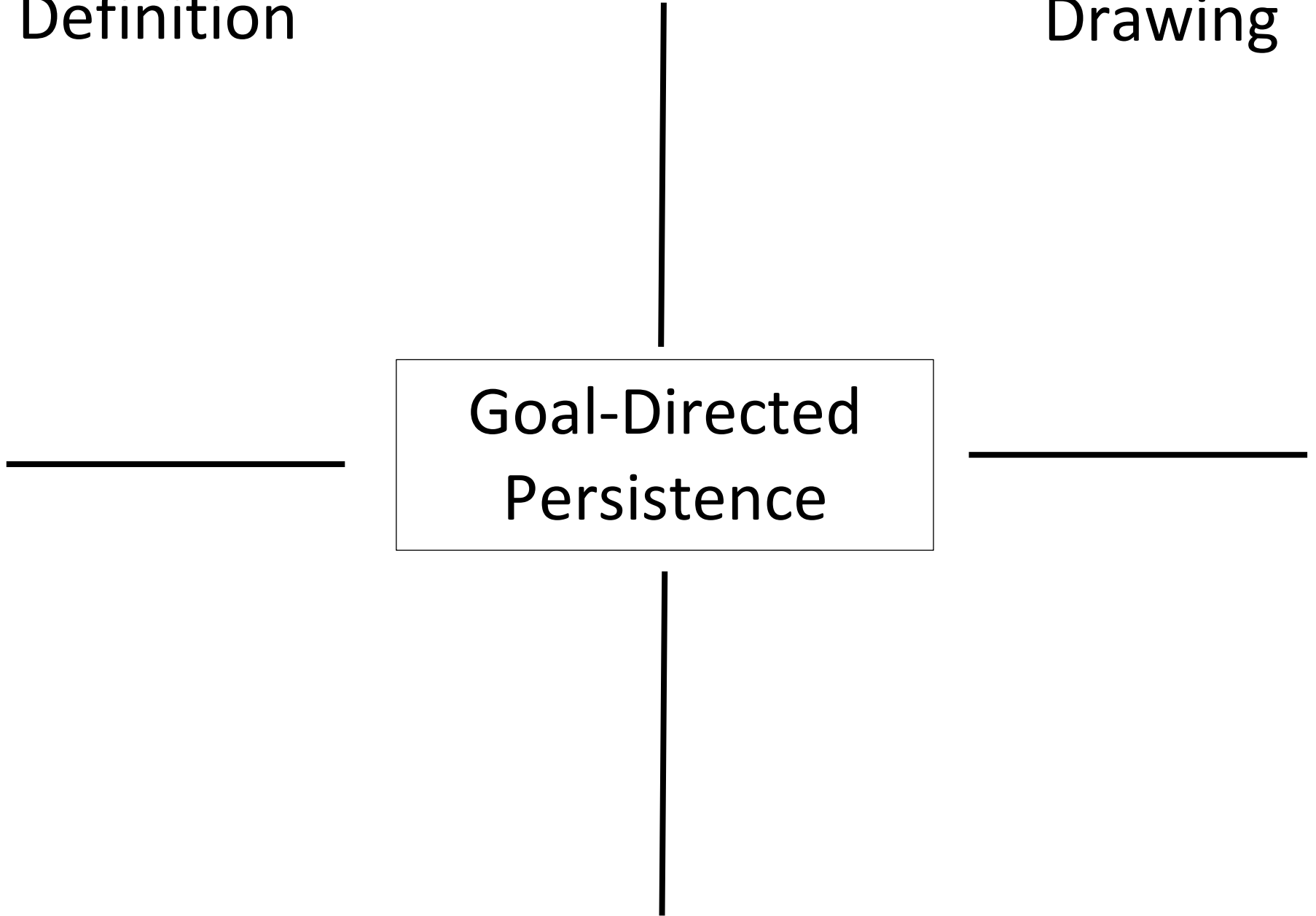
Definition

Drawing

Goal-Directed
Persistence

Examples

Strategies



Definition

Drawing

Response Inhibition

Examples

Strategies

Examples

Strategies

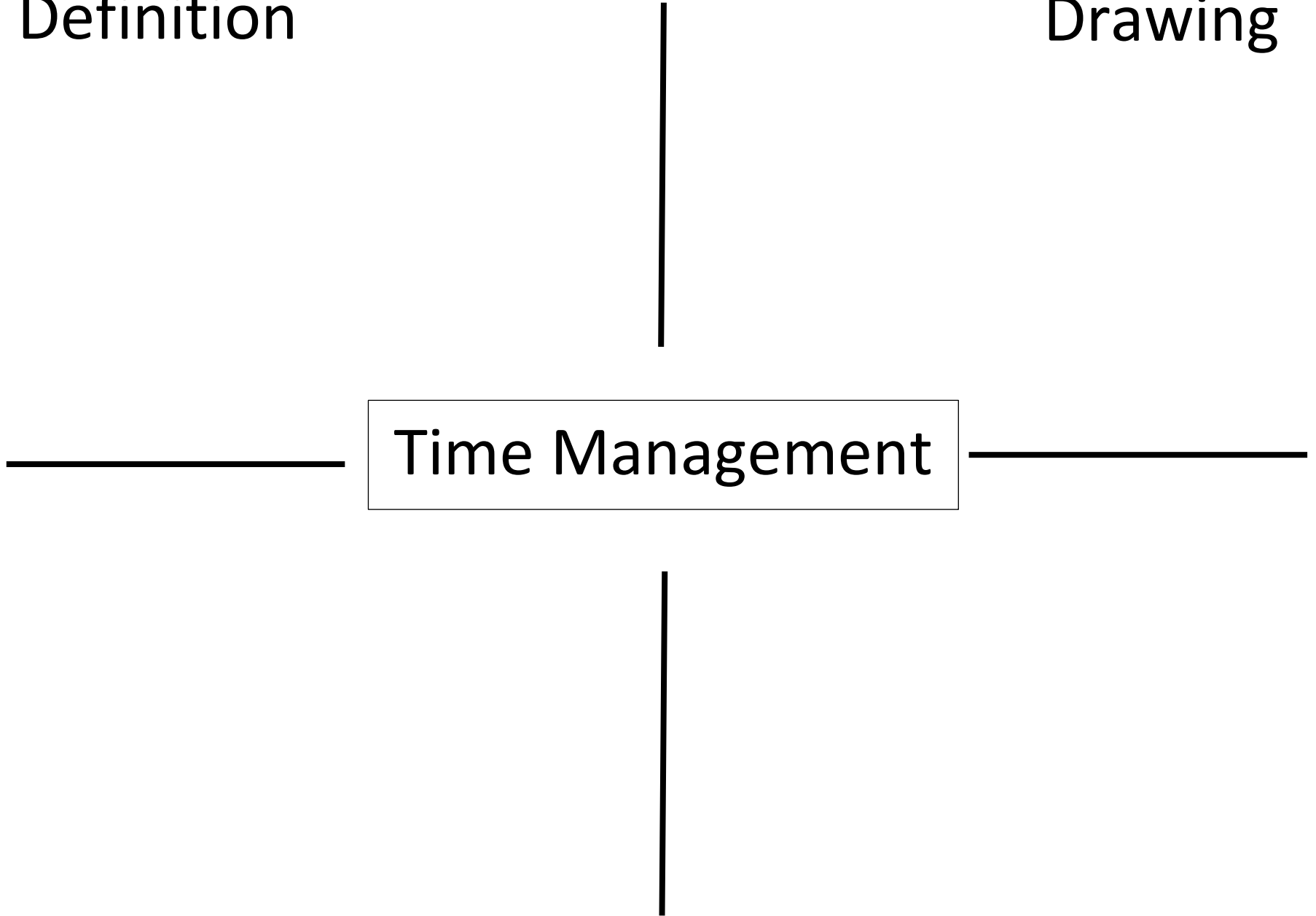
Definition

Drawing

Time Management

Examples

Strategies



Definition

Drawing



Examples

Strategies

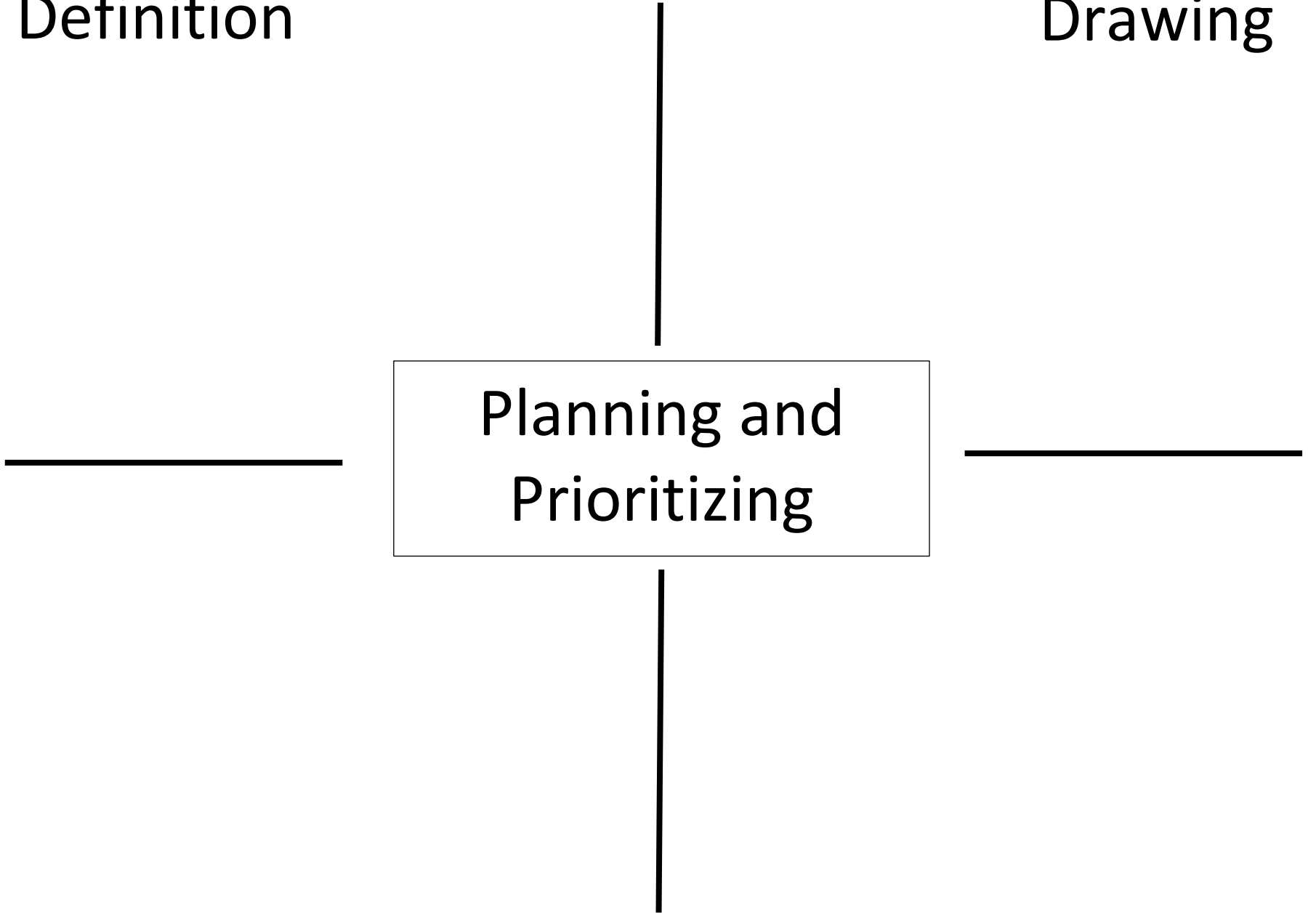
Definition

Drawing

Planning and
Prioritizing

Examples

Strategies



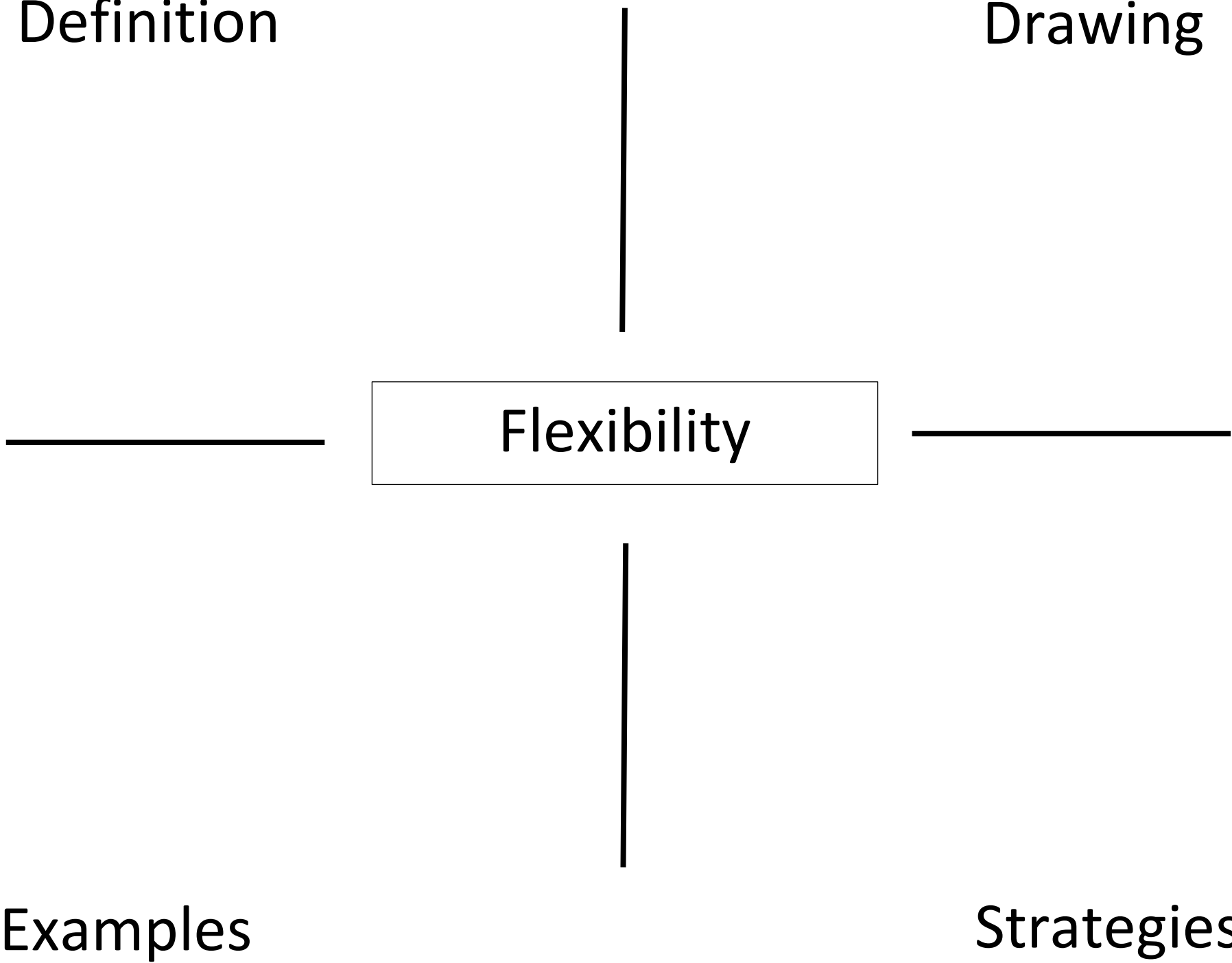
Definition

Drawing

Flexibility

Examples

Strategies



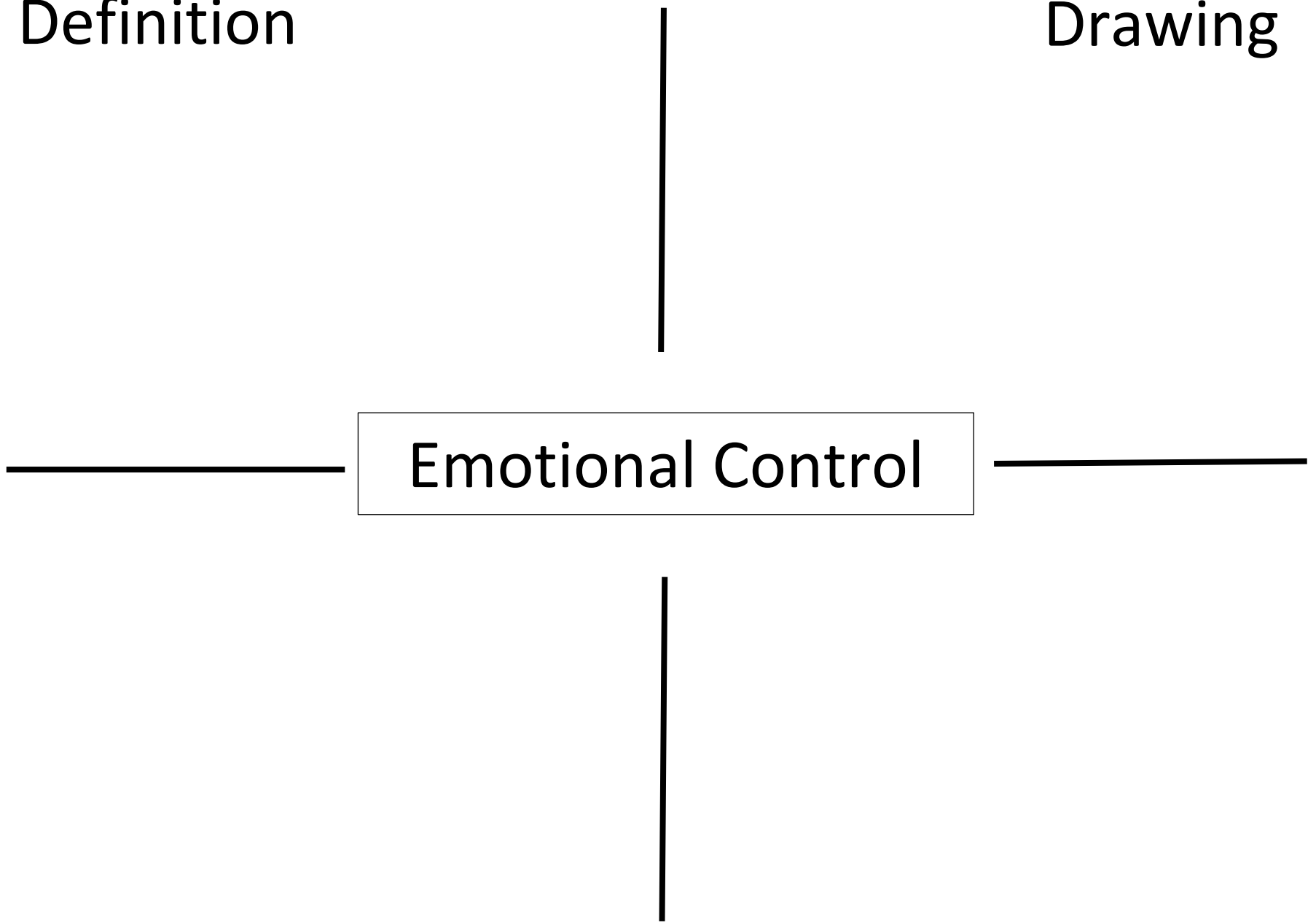
Definition

Drawing

Emotional Control

Examples

Strategies



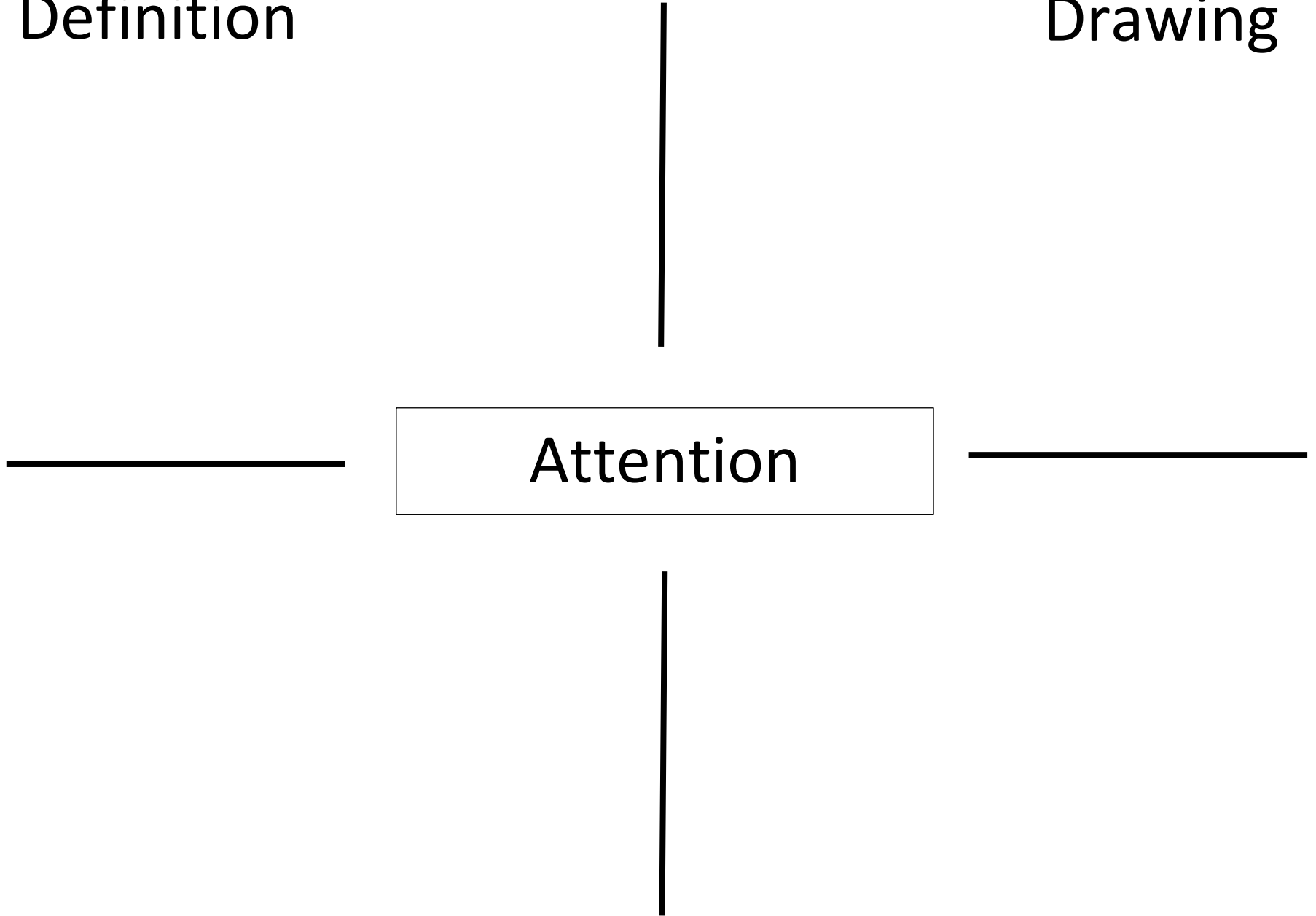
Definition

Drawing

Attention

Examples

Strategies



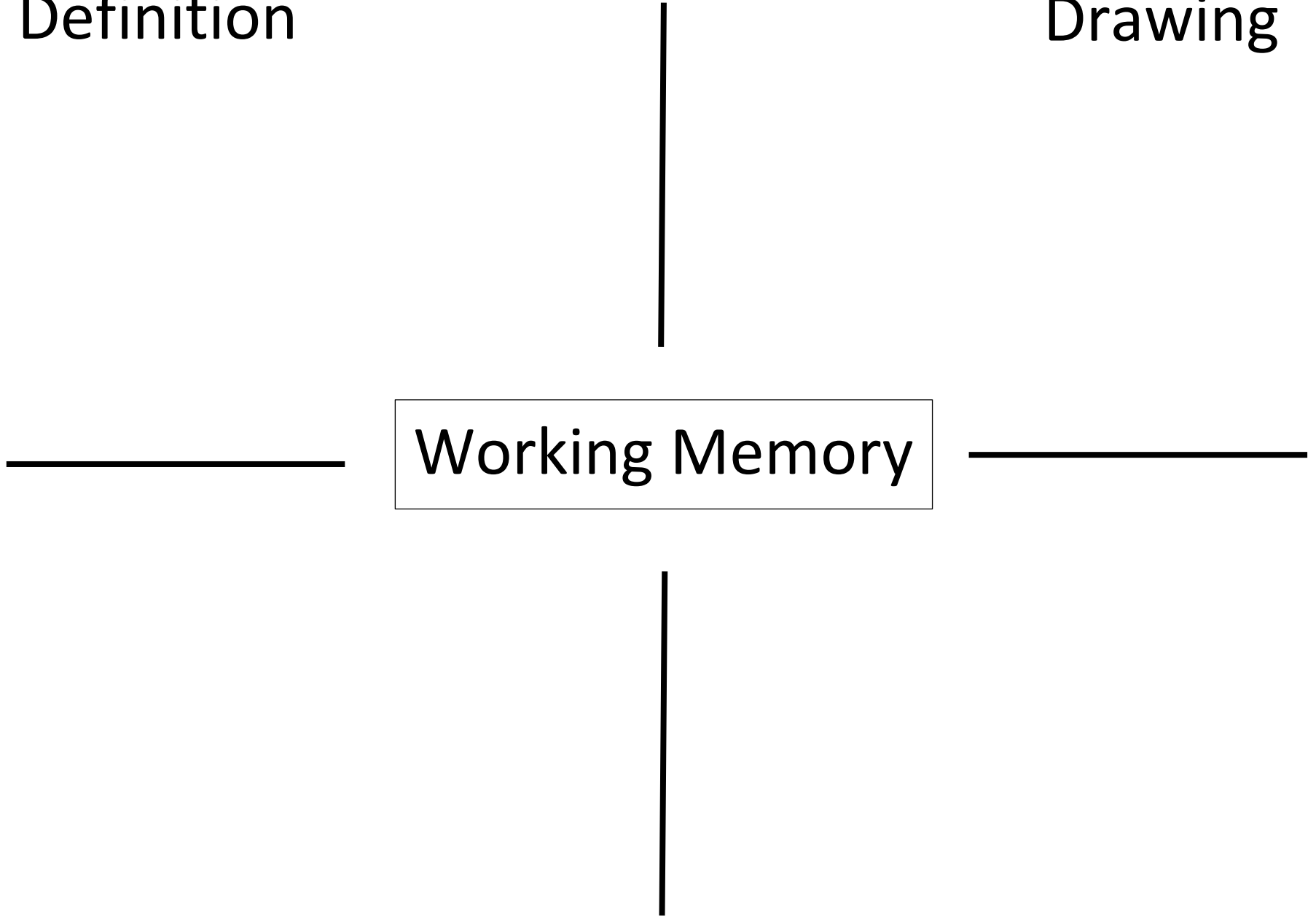
Definition

Drawing

Working Memory

Examples

Strategies



Definition

Drawing

Metacognition

Examples

Strategies

