



# Scaffold learning

Scaffolding supports learners as they move from guided instruction to independent, higher-order thinking

## Implementing this strategy

### Getting ready

- **Break down the task or concept into parts** - Identify all the key components of the concept and task. Start with the foundational knowledge, then outline the progressive steps students will take throughout the class, module, or unit.
- **Consider your scaffolds** - Plan how you will guide your students. You can create worked or partially completed examples, guided notes or structured templates that model how concepts or skills can be applied.
- **Differentiate your supports** - Provide layered scaffolds that students can opt in to. Design flexible structures that allow variation without needing individual lesson plans.

### With students

- **Check foundational knowledge** - Use formative assessment, such as questioning techniques or a quiz, to determine if your students have the essential knowledge and skills to engage with concepts or tasks.
- **Adjust teaching** - Based on the formative assessment, adjust your activities to revisit key concepts or provide additional guidance before advancing or, progress to higher-order, more complex thinking and application.
- **Apply the scaffolds** - Offer a range of scaffolded supports from high guidance to minimal prompts. Encourage students to transition between these supports based on their level of confidence and competence.
- **Model and gradually release responsibility** - Demonstrate the full process or skill using worked or completed examples.
- **Provide opportunities for feedback** - Feedback allows students to understand their progress and actively choose what scaffolds they feel they need.

## Spotlight on “I do, we do, you do”

The gradual release of responsibility framework (Wagner, 2025), or “I do, we do, you do” model, is an active approach that fosters participation, developing information and skill fluency when you are with students.

| I do                                                                                                                                                                                    | We do                                                                                                                                                                                   | You do                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Model each stage step by step</li><li>• Model how you organise messy thinking or starting</li><li>• Review success or quality of work</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have students do another task together to emulate the model</li><li>• As a group they explore further examples and guide the practice</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students complete their own task putting the ideas modelled into practice independently</li></ul> |

## Inclusive principles



### Universal design for learning

[Consideration 5.3](#) focuses on providing scaffolds to students as they learn and gradually reducing these as students become more confident and independent. Using formative assessment and differentiating approaches allows students flexibility in how they learn, and develop skills and knowledge in a way that suits their current understanding.



### Cognitive load theory

Scaffolded approaches such as the gradual release of responsibility reduce cognitive load by breaking complex skills into manageable stages and providing support that is intentionally withdrawn over time. This enables all learners, including those who require additional guidance or processing time, to build confidence, deepen understanding, and move toward independent thinking.

## References

- Bhatt, K. (2025, October). Leading Learning and Leading Change for Better Student Engagement and Performance. *In Abstract Book of the International Conference on Teaching and Education* (Vol. 2, No. 2).
- Clark, G., Murphy, L., & Goeppinger, M. *HLP 15: Scaffolding*.
- Morris, R., Perry, T., & Wardle, L. (2021). Formative assessment and feedback for learning in higher education: A systematic review. *Review of Education*, 9(3), e3292.
- Sherrington, T. (2022). *Teaching WalkThrus 3: Five-step guides to instructional coaching*. Hachette UK.
- Wagner, G. (2025) *Teaching to Remember: The ‘I Do, We Do, You Do’ Strategy for Improved Learning*.