

Scaffolding Strategies

A key recommendation from our research findings is to give all students greater access to grade-level assignments. While this is critical to improving academic outcomes for all students, it’s much easier said than done. Assigning rigorous content poses a significant instructional challenge for teachers who are faced with the reality of students who are behind grade level and need varying types and levels of support to be successful academically.

We observed teachers addressing this reality in many ways: reteaching content from previous grades, assigning students texts at their current reading levels, and providing worksheets with tasks broken down into discrete steps, to name a few. While these strategies did help students complete their assignments more successfully, they often focused on remedial content and did not help students meet the demands of grade-level standards. This speaks to a real and widespread need in the field of education that collectively we haven’t yet figured out: How do we support *all* students to be successful with the rigorous grade-appropriate content that we know is so important for their academic outcomes?

What we’re calling “scaffolding up” attempts to address that need. Instead of simplifying activities and bringing content down to what students can currently do, scaffolding up focuses on getting students to master the key practices and concepts in grade-level content, with students able to do so increasingly independently over time. We’ve combed the field for best practices and resources to support teachers in implementing scaffolding up strategies in their classrooms. As you’ll see below, this is a modest collection and the resources are specific to a content area or population of students. As the field expands its expertise in this area, we will continue to share learnings and resources.

General Best Practices

Best Practice	Details
Keep equity and rigorous content at the forefront of all decisions on what and how to teach students who are behind grade level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always use the relevant grade-level college and career ready standards as your baseline for planning content. Ensure you are deeply familiar with the standards for your grade level and/or content area, as well as how they connect to students’ previous and future learning. • Any other standards you may be using, such as English language development standards, should work in tandem with—not supplant—grade-level college and career ready standards. • Provide all students with the opportunity to work with the same grade-appropriate texts and/or tasks in whole-group instruction.
Set aside time, both when initially creating unit/lesson plans and on an ongoing basis, to plan when and how you’ll incorporate specific scaffolds to support students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactively plan scaffolding in each lesson according to the learning objective, target standard(s), and your students’ needs. Regularly revisit the scaffolds you’ve planned to gauge whether they are meeting students’ needs and adapt your plans as needed. • If using a curriculum that includes scaffolds, evaluate their appropriateness for your content and population of students and adapt as needed. • Co-plan with other staff members who work with your students (such as intervention specialists) to ensure students consistently receive appropriate scaffolds that support them in accessing grade-level content. • When possible, build time in your unit plans for regular progress checks to remediate specific content as needed (versus doing a broader review of multiple standards on a less regular basis).
Tailor scaffolds to the specific content you’re teaching, the demands of grade-level standards, and the needs of your students.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regularly assess where your students are currently performing to understand their academic progress and identify the most effective scaffolds to address their evolving needs.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When students need more support, provide repeated and varied opportunities to engage with grade-level content (for example, having students read the same text multiple times with different purposes and supports). When students need less support, resist the urge to over-scaffold; use scaffolds only when necessary and only for the students who need them. • For groups of students with different needs, consider how best to address them with targeted scaffolds or small-group instruction. • If working with the same group of students over an extended period of time, gradually decrease the frequency or level of scaffolding over time to promote students' increasing independence.
Continuously build your expertise in scaffolding best practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considering the population of students you work with and the content you teach, seek out corresponding development opportunities and resources about the most effective support strategies. • If you are a content area teacher (for example, science or social studies), familiarize yourself with literacy scaffolding best practices.

Literacy Best Practices and Resources

Best Practice	Resources
Use text sets and systematically order them from less to more complex, by topic, to build students' background knowledge.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Achievement Partners Text Set Project • Newsela Featured Text Sets • UnboundEd Text Set Library • CommonLit Text Set Library
Use varying strategies before reading a text, during the initial reading and subsequent readings, and after reading to support all students in comprehending a complex text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Achievement Partners Before/During/After Reading Strategies • EL Education Front-End and Back-End Scaffolding • 8th grade ELA video and 8th grade science video with examples of appropriate scaffolds for English language learners • UnboundEd ELA Curriculum describes the linguistic demands of ELA standards and includes standard-specific scaffolds at multiple levels of language acquisition for all lessons (for example, see sample 3rd grade lesson plan)
Build students' vocabulary with a focus on words that are key to text comprehension.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Achievement Partners Academic Word Finder and Vocabulary Activities • Wordsmyth Widget • Institute of Education Science Educator's Practice Guide Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School (pp. 13-30)
In addition to having all students work with grade-appropriate texts, include time in your literacy block for differentiated support for individual and/or small groups of students depending on their needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Achievement Partners Fluency Resources • UnboundEd Building Fluency • Institute of Education Science Educator's Practice Guide Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School (pp. 59-68) • English Learners Success Forum Guidelines for Improving English Language Arts Materials for English Learners

Mathematics Best Practices and Resources

Best Practice	Resources
<p>Continuously plan how best to support students following the <i>Understand-Diagnose-Take Action</i> cycle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Understand</i>: Study the focus standards for upcoming instruction and identify the critical prerequisite skills students need to access grade-level content. • <i>Diagnose</i>: Determine student understanding of prerequisites based on diagnostic or formative data, considering if gaps exist for your whole class or a small group. • <i>Take Action</i>: Build needed scaffolds into upcoming lessons for whole class needs and plan differentiated instruction or coordinate with intervention to address small group needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Achievement Partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Addressing Unfinished Learning in the Context of Grade-Level Work (overview of Understand-Diagnose-Take Action cycle) ◦ Coherence Map (to identify prerequisite skills in current or previous grades for any given standard) ◦ How to Select Math Intervention Content
<p>Strategically prioritize remediation of the content that matters most for success in later mathematics (versus attempting to address all gaps students have or spending the most time on areas where student performance is weakest).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Achievement Partners: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Designing Shifts-Aligned Interventions in the Math Classroom ◦ Mathematics Focus by Grade Level (K-8)
<p>When students' unfinished learning does not prevent them from engaging with grade-level content, integrate remediation support into regular instruction.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Achievement Partners Strategies to Support Learners Who Are Below Grade Level (see math strategies 1-2) • Inquire and Inspire placemat templates to support heterogeneous grouping and student collaboration
<p>Differentiate math content and scaffolds for students based on individual or small group remediation needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Achievement Partners Strategies to Support Learners Who Are Below Grade Level (see math strategy 3) • English Learners Success Forum Guidelines for Improving Math Materials for English Learners • Zearn K-5 math curriculum including personalized lessons for individual students, small group lessons, and whole group activities
<p>Provide new experiences for students to re-engage with previously taught content (versus reteaching using methods and strategies students were not successful with before).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Achievement Partners Re-Teaching Doesn't Always Mean Repeating