**How does scaffolding learning support student learning? [PATHS Transcript Video]**

Scaffolding learning refers to a course design and instructional approach that is used to help students progressively move forward in their learning as they build up their competencies and gain a deeper understanding of concepts, or acquisition of increasing complexity of skills.

Scaffolded approach to teaching, learning, and assessment creates supportive environments that can positively impact students’ ability to engage in self-regulated learning and achieve academic success.

The ultimate academic goal is to support student transition and for students to develop the skills to learn on their own with limited resources and support, known as scaffolds, provided by the instructor.

In the process of scaffolding, instructors support students through content, processes, and learning strategies to help students understand a concept or complete a task that they cannot yet do independently. With the right interventions, students will eventually be able to master the task and instructors may gradually remove scaffolding.

Scaffolding requires careful planning, including pre-assessment of a student’s prior knowledge and an assessment of the learner’s context, including complexity of course content, to determine appropriate supports and when supports can be removed.

The goals of scaffolding are to increase student proficiency and develop their skills as self-regulated learners. This can be achieved by providing an appropriate amount of instructional support based on student needs and context complexity.

As students grow as learners, scaffolding can be changed, reduced or removed over time. Scaffolding can be embedded in course assessments. For example, an instructor may help students develop their research skills through lower stakes assignments, for example having them complete an annotated bibliography, before assigning a research report.

Instructors can provide formative feedback to the student on the annotated bibliography to support them as they develop a new skill. Scaffolding can be done in the delivery of content as well. Perhaps an instructor wants students to label and describe the different functions of the brain; the instructor may choose to “chunk”, or divide, this information into several, smaller lessons focused on various parts of the brain before asking students to take on this task.

Instructors can also use rubrics to help guide students toward a more structured approach to completing a task and provide feedback that students can incorporate. Setting low-stakes formative assessments, like asking students to complete a [“1 minute paper”](https://blogs.kcl.ac.uk/aflkings/opportunities-for-low-stakes-practice/minute-paper/), where students summarize their learning during or immediately following a lesson, is another example of scaffolding learning. This helps instructors quickly gauge the extent of a student’s knowledge about a topic or concept and provide learners with important feedback that they can meaningfully apply later to a higher-stakes task.

A good place for instructors to start is to first determine what students already know about the subject. For example, at the start each course it may be helpful to begin with a brief questionnaire to gauge students’ level of prior knowledge. Based on the findings, the instructor may need to assess their course teaching objectives and learning outcomes to identify where scaffolding exists and consider areas where additional scaffolding can be introduced. Next, instructors can explore the different ways they may want to include scaffolding, for example, chunking lessons, building on an existing activity, incorporating low-stakes assessments, providing feedback or opportunities for peer feedback, and leveraging PATHS tools.

***Sources:***

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<https://www.buffalo.edu/catt/develop/build/scaffolding.html>