

# Explicit instruction

## Know how to teach your students

Australian Professional Standards for Teachers | Focus Area 3.3: Use teaching strategies



This guide is one in the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO)'s Tried and Tested series on evidence-informed teaching practices that make a difference. Teachers can use these guides to reflect on their classroom practice and inform their planning for future instruction.

For this guide, AERO has synthesised the most rigorous and relevant evidence-based practices from meta-analyses, systematic reviews and literature reviews. AERO has rated these sources of information against its [Standards of Evidence](#), focusing on evidence generated in an Australian context where possible.

Instruction that is explicit involves fully explaining and effectively demonstrating what students need to learn. This approach to instruction accords with what we know about how the human brain works (i.e., that learning happens most efficiently when teaching is clear, systematic and does not leave students to construct or discover information without any guidance).

This guide lists evidence-based practices for implementing explicit instruction. Note that some of the examples offered may not apply in all contexts, may be more suitable for primary students than secondary students (and vice versa), and/or may look different in different content areas. Reasonable adjustments must be made where necessary to ensure full access and participation for students with disability.

- 1. Break down complex skills and knowledge into smaller instructional tasks.** Sequence these tasks so that students can learn step by step.
  - Chunk learning into small, manageable tasks. By breaking down the curriculum into smaller tasks, you reduce memory overload. This means students can focus on what needs to be learned now rather than trying to learn everything all at once.<sup>1</sup>
  - Sequence tasks to meet students where they are at in their learning. Take care to ensure that the tasks build on students' existing knowledge and are neither too easy nor too challenging.<sup>2</sup> For example, when teaching a geography class about Australia's neighbours, your students may first need to learn which countries are Australia's neighbours (so the task is not too challenging), though if your students already know Australia's neighbours, they could instead learn about some of the characteristics of these countries (so that the task is not too easy).
  - Make sure your students master each task before moving on to the next one. You can assess a student's mastery of a topic by formatively assessing students after each task to see what they have and have not learned.
- 2. Use worked examples to demonstrate what your students need to learn.** As students become more proficient, gradually remove scaffolding to allow for more independent problem-solving.
  - Begin with a 'worked example' that clearly and concisely demonstrates how to complete the task. A worked example shows (or 'models') all the steps required to complete a task or solve a problem – for example, a fully solved algebraic equation or a step-by-step guide outlining each component required for an essay. Make sure that every step needed to complete the task is fully explained and clearly shown.<sup>3</sup>

- Supplement this first worked example with others that gradually introduce different elements of the task or alternative ways of completing it. Ensure that each new worked example presents only one new point at a time.
- Remove scaffolding as students become more proficient at a task. This means removing steps from worked examples and replacing worked examples with independent problem-solving or decision-making as your students become more expert.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Provide opportunities for students to practise what they have already learned. Students retain knowledge and skills when practice is deliberate and purposeful.

- Make sure your students practise more than once. Provide your students with multiple opportunities to practise their skills and deepen their understanding – this also helps to retain learning in long-term memory, so your students will find it is easy to retrieve it in the future.<sup>5</sup>
- Get students to use what they have learned when practising. Ask questions that call for specific answers and then require your students to explain how their answers were determined.<sup>6</sup>
- Actively supervise and interact with your students as they practise. Provide immediate elaboration and explanations as needed.<sup>7</sup> This does not mean telling your students the answer, but providing prompts and scaffolds as required.<sup>8</sup>

### 4. Organise lessons to keep students focused on the learning objective. Make learning more efficient by reducing memory overload.

- Begin lessons by explaining to your students what they will be learning. Your students should know how each lesson links to prior learning and why it is important for them to learn it.<sup>9</sup>
- Present all the information required to complete a task together (i.e., in one place and at one time). For example, present a diagram and any necessary explanation in one slide instead of two. This way your students do not have to struggle to 'hold' information in their heads while simultaneously learning new information.<sup>10</sup>
- Remove information that your students already know or is not directly relevant to the task. This will help your students to manage the memory overload of learning something new.<sup>11</sup>

The evidence-based practices outlined in this guide are proven to provide the greatest chance of success for addressing learning gaps and disruptions to student learning. These practices make a difference when implemented in conjunction with [formative assessment](#) (know where your students are), [focused classrooms](#) (manage the classroom to maximise learning) and [mastery learning](#) (know how to make sure your students learn).



Provide your students with multiple opportunities to practise their skills and deepen their understanding ...

To provide feedback on this guide or view further information, including full references and additional resources, visit [AERO's website](#).

- 1 Hughes et al., 2017
- 2 Swellet et al., 1998
- 3 Kirschner et al., 2006
- 4 Martin & Evans, 2018
- 5 Sweller et al., 1998
- 6 Martin & Evans, 2018
- 7 Martin & Evans, 2018
- 8 Archer & Hughes, 2011
- 9 Ellis & Worthington, 1994
- 10 Sweller et al., 1998
- 11 Sweller et al., 1998



CC BY 4.0, excluding image p1: iStock.com/monkeybusinessimages and image p2: courtesy of the Department of Education Tasmania. AERO's work is made possible by the joint funding it receives from Commonwealth, state and territory governments. February 2021 | 180624.CH.AAV2