

Scaffolding Instructions (Primary)

Donna Lee Fields, Ph.D.



theory behind the scaffold...

'I knew I was going to fail when I didn't even understand the instructions on the exam', sobbed a student after failing an exam that she had studied diligently for.

Instructions on exams, worksheets, laboratory reports, etc., are more confusing and intimidating for our students than we might recognise, and so it's something we rarely address when helping our students to prepare for any type of evaluation.*

Exams are often frightening for our students and there is a lot of pressure – from themselves, from their parents, from their peers – to focus on marks and not necessarily to learn the material.

Yet we often forget that even if they have managed to learn the information, the instructions used on virtually any type of evaluation, is almost always very different from the words, phrases, terms and the structure of the sentences we use day-to-day.

In our pursuit to help our students become effective learners, we need to address not just content, but the instructions that proceed that content: in exercise books, in laboratory reports, in essay prompts, in computer programming, in construction procedures, in exams, etc. Many times, the difference between passing a failing a course is the knowledge (or lack thereof) of the language used in the instructions during the learning process.

This scaffolding activity not only aids students in breaking down challenging vocabulary and structure, but it is also a perfect way of helping to balance diversity; those students who need to move to be able to assimilate information, to speak, to use interpersonal skills, to touch and manipulate information, will enjoy participating. The scaffold promotes collaboration, critical thinking, and inferencing, many other essential 21st century skills.

The example used here is for a Maths exam, but you will see how easy it is to adapt to any subject or evaluation.

* Academic success 'is intricately linked to higher-order thinking processes developed by extensive modeling and scaffolding of classroom talk and accelerated by weaving direct teaching of its features *while* teaching content concepts.' ([Zwiers, 2008](#)).

Scaffolding activity...

Identify the instructions that students will see on their next Maths exam:

Write your answers for questions 1 -30 in the spaces provided on page 39, session 1 answer sheet. Write only one answer for each question. You may work problems in your test booklet or on scratch paper, but you must mark your answer on the answer sheet. You may review your work in this session, but do not work on any other session.

You may NOT use a calculator for this session.

Because of how familiar *we* are with the language, we don't realise that the above instructions may cause students to become immediately confused as to what is expected of them:

- Lack of pronouns: 'Write your answers...', 'Write only one answer...'
- Academic language and grammar that has different meanings in other content areas: 'spaces', 'provided', 'session', 'may', 'must', 'booklet', 'scratch', etc.
- Academic language that is structured different from colloquial use: 'work problems', 'mark your answers', 'may not', '1 through 30'

Step by Step:

1. Copy and paste the instructions to the exam your students are about to take on a separate piece of paper. (You can use this [template](#).)
2. Enlarge the sentences, put ample space between each line, and print them out (as in the [template](#)).
3. Cut the instructions by lines (*not* sentences); in this way, the sentences themselves are broken up randomly, requiring more critical thinking on the part of your students. (See example below.)

Write your answers for

questions 1 -30 in the

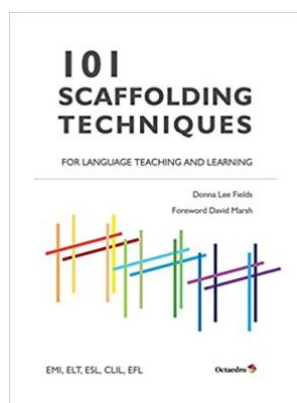
spaces provided on page

38, session 1 answer sheet

4. Cut up the lines and make sets for each group of students.
5. Give each group a set and begin by putting the first line of the original on the wall or the floor where everyone can see. Each group finds that line and places it on their desks.
6. As a chorus, you all verbalise the first line aloud.
7. Groups negotiate which line comes next, they hold the one they believe is appropriate over their heads, and you confirm (or not) their choice by putting the next line under the first.
8. The groups find that line, put it under the first and as a chorus, you all repeat the first two lines.
9. You continue this dynamic until all the instructions are placed down and you have all (as a chorus) repeated the instructions many times. (The students will have read and/or heard them many times and will begin to feel familiar with the language and structure in a way they probably did not before.)
10. Clarify any doubts students may have about the academic language/structure of the instructions.
11. *Formative evaluation:* Ask pairs of students to rewrite the instructions in their own words. They read these to their classmates and receive respectful comments on whether they have faithfully re-written the intentions of the instructions.
12. *Reflection:* Pairs join with another pair and spend 2-3 minutes discussing whether they would have understood the instructions without having participated in the scaffold, and whether this has helped them feel more confident (or not) about sitting for an exam in the future.
13. *Formative evaluation:* Ask pairs of students to rewrite the instructions in their own words. They read these to their classmates and [receive respectful comments](#) on whether they have re-written the instructions with the same meaning as the original.
14. *Reflection:* Pairs join with another pair and spend 2-3 minutes discussing whether they would have understood the instructions without having participated in the scaffold, and whether this has helped them feel more confident (or not) about sitting for an exam in the future.

* By the time the entire instructions have been mounted, the students will have read and/or heard them many times and will begin to feel familiar with the language and structure in a way they did not before.

[amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)



video explanation of scaffolding activity...



Scaffolding Video 15

Scaffolding Instructions

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Write your answers for questions 1 through 30 in the spaces provided on page 38. session 1 answer sheet. Write

scaffoldingmagic.com

The image shows a yellow banner for a video. On the left, it says 'Scaffolding Video 15' and 'Scaffolding Instructions' in bold black text. Below that is 'Donna Lee Fields, Ph.D.' and a small icon of two hands. On the right, there is a small video thumbnail of Donna Lee Fields smiling. Below the thumbnail, there is a white box with yellow text: 'Write your answers for questions 1 through 30 in the spaces provided on page 38. session 1 answer sheet. Write'. At the bottom left of the banner is the website 'scaffoldingmagic.com'.

transcript of video...

Hi, I'm Donna Fields and welcome to CLIL Scaffolding 15. It's a series of webinars designed to help give you support for using scaffolding in your lessons. Today we're going to use scaffolding technique #157.

One hundred and one more of these technique can be found in my book: [101 Scaffolding Techniques for Language Teaching and Learning](#) that has also been translated into Spanish.

More times than we may realise, our students' assessments are affected by their ability to read the instructions. No matter how much they may have studied, they are often thwarted by the unfamiliar language and structure used in exams. Here are examples of this phenomenon: 'I knew I was going to fail when I didn't even understand the instructions to the exam questions.' The language we use every day in the classroom is more often than not very different from the written language we use or what is found in instructions given on exams, in lab reports, on assignments and so on.

We need to help our students become familiar with this language. So how do we help them?

It's easy.

Let's take an example from a Secondary History exam. This is what students might see before they even begin reading the actual question on the exam.

Let's take the instructions, enlarge them so that there is part of sentence on each line, cut them up, divide the slips of paper between pairs or groups of students, put the first one on the board to help start them off, and then all the students have to read their slips and figure out which comes next. Each time they put one on the board, they read what's already been put up before. By the time they've finished putting up all the instructions, they've read them many times. You can question them on certain words to make sure they've understood everything.

You use this same dynamic for any Primary exam. Again, it may seem simple to you, but these instructions take time for students whether their home language is different than the classroom language or not.

And that's it! Another simple scaffolding technique that I hope you can use in your classes. And you've helped your students to focus on important words and structures so that they are more comfortable taking an exam.

So all you SUPER TEACHERS out there, I look forward to seeing you next time and have fun in your classes! Bye!

You can find me at:

<https://scaffoldingmagic.com/>