

Teacher's Guide

Supporting the wellbeing of primary school children

Chunking and scaffolding



A single large task may be overwhelming for many students. Breaking down a task into manageable steps or chunks can provide clarity around instructions, enhance task completion and improve compliance. Chunking can help students who have difficulty completing school or homework in a timely manner. Chunking can also be used to teach students a skill that is too challenging to teach all at once.

A student may find it difficult to complete tasks due to a tendency to worry about the details of the task, due to a need to re-check their work or being easily distracted.

Chunking

- Conduct a task analysis and divide the large task into chunks, by completing the skill yourself or watching someone else complete the skill. It is important not to create chunks based on memory. Even simple tasks, can have small steps that may be skipped. If each step is not taught, the student will not master the skill. If it is not possible to break a large task down into smaller components, teachers can chunk the task into a series of blocks of time for students to complete.
- Provide simple instructions to help a student complete each task, along with an estimated time limit to keep the student on track.
- Check comprehension of the task prior to setting the student to work by asking the student to repeat the directions in their own words. To aid completion provide support as necessary by repeating directions when required and / or providing visual cues.
- Regularly check in with the student to ensure they are on task and not becoming distracted.
- Provide positive feedback for the completion of each chunk. Students perform better when chunks are brief and feedback regarding accuracy is immediate.
- Regular positive feedback and encouragement can provide the student with a sense of accomplishment and build self-efficacy, improving their sense of self-worth, reducing the impact of distraction and improving short term memory capacity.

Scaffolding

- Where chunking involves the size of the bites of new content, scaffolding involves the content of the bites and their logical order. Scaffolding assists a student to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal through a gradual shedding of outside assistance.
- Scaffolding should be matched to the needs of the student so they can achieve success in an activity that they would have otherwise not been able to perform by themselves. For example, if a student is on the right track to completing the task, support should be less specific and more encouraging.
- Should the student start to struggle, more specific instructions or demonstration should be introduced so the student can again make progress towards the goal.

If the behaviour persists despite trying a number of interventions, discuss the student's situation with a supervisor or member of the learning and wellbeing support staff at your school.

<https://www.islhd.health.nsw.gov.au/services-clinics/school-link-teachers-guide>