

Scaffolding Complex Text: Features of Text Structure

Why use scaffolds?

Scaffolds allow all students to access grade-level content. At UnboundEd, we empower educators to address the predictability of student outcomes through evidence-informed, engaging, affirming, and meaningful grade-level — GLEAM® instruction — so all students succeed academically. GLEAM instruction provides all students access to texts, tasks, and materials aligned with grade-appropriate college and career standards. For more information on GLEAM, see [What is GLEAM® Instruction?](#)

What are scaffolds?

Scaffolds are evidence-based practices that provide students support for unfamiliar or challenging aspects of a lesson. Effective scaffolds:

- Help students manage cognitive load by freeing up working memory for new learning
- Preserve grade-level rigor
- Are gradually removed as students build proficiency

Analyzing a text to determine the complexity factors is a way to decide if and what scaffolds are needed. Qualitative text complexity analysis helps identify where some students may need additional support to read and work at grade-level. Qualitative text complexity is determined by analyzing Text Structure, Language and Vocabulary, Meaning and Purpose, and Knowledge Demands. This document focuses on scaffolding to make the Text Structure visible and clear.

How do you plan scaffolds?

This three-step process for planning scaffolds aligns with the characteristics of effective scaffolds.

Step 1 Determine if and how text structure may challenge your students' comprehension.

Step 2 Choose scaffolds to support understanding of text structure and adapt your task.

Step 3 Review the impact of scaffolds.

Step 1 Determine if and how text structure may challenge your students' comprehension.

Text Structure refers to how authors organize text. They do so by using cause-effect, problem-solution, and chronological order. They also use combinations of these structures. Text structure includes features or graphics such as illustrations, tables, glossaries, headings, etc.

Use the checklist below to review your text and determine the elements of text structure that contribute to its complexity. Use grade-level standards to choose an appropriate text structure focus for your students.

Exceedingly Complex or Unconventional	Very to Moderately Complex	Slightly Complex to Simple and Conventional
<input type="checkbox"/> Informational Text or Literature: The text contains deep, intricate, discipline-specific, or implicit connections between ideas, processes, or events.	<input type="checkbox"/> Informational Text or Literature: The text makes implicit or subtle connections between ideas, processes, or events. <input type="checkbox"/> There is clear and evident organization of the text.	<input type="checkbox"/> Informational Text or Literature: The text makes explicit or clear connections between ideas, processes, or events. <input type="checkbox"/> There is chronological, sequential, or easy-to-predict organization of the text.
<input type="checkbox"/> Literature: The text contains intricate concerning elements, such as point of view, time, characterization, story, and details.	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature: The text may include subplots, time shifts, more complex characters, multiple storylines, or may be unpredictable.	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature: The organization is transparent, chronological, or predictable.
<input type="checkbox"/> Use of Graphics: Features or graphics are essential to understanding content and making meaning.	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of Graphics: Features or graphics enhance understanding of content and meaning-making, and they may be supplemental.	<input type="checkbox"/> Use of Graphics: Features or graphics are simple or unnecessary but may help with understanding the content.

Based on your evaluation, for which element(s) of text structure might your students need scaffolding?

Step 2 Choose scaffolds to support understanding of text structure and adapt your task.

Based on the areas of complexity for text structure and your understanding of student needs, decide where, when, and how you will insert scaffolds for text structure to assist students in comprehending the text and task.

Scaffolds for Understanding Text Structure and its Impact on Comprehension	
Before Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Identify or co-identify words in the text that signal transitions. Discuss what kind of transitions they signal and how students may have to adjust their reading.<input type="checkbox"/> Divide the text into chunks that align with structural shifts, and plan questions to check student comprehension.<input type="checkbox"/> With the students, practice examining the features/discipline-specific elements of the text to familiarize them with the importance of the process and the information that it provides.
During Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Conduct multiple reads, including one to identify how the text is structured and why an author may choose that structure. Attend to words that signal transitions.<input type="checkbox"/> Chunk the text into sections demonstrating specific structures or parts of a larger structure. Co-identify the structure in each section.<input type="checkbox"/> Provide graphic organizers that reflect the structure of the text.<input type="checkbox"/> Summarize the purpose of each paragraph or section and review after reading.
After Reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Co-examine how the overall text structure impacts the reader's comprehension or the author's messaging.<input type="checkbox"/> Use student paragraphs summarizing each section's purpose to determine the text structure and how that structure impacts the reader.<input type="checkbox"/> Lead text deconstruction exercises to focus on the impact of structure on messaging and meaning.

How do your scaffolds build toward grade-level proficiency without reducing the rigor of the lesson?

Step 3 Review the impact of scaffolds.

Determine whether the implementation of your scaffold moved students toward grade-level objectives or reduced the rigor of the task. Consider:

How did you ensure students did the major thinking required of the text and task?

What is your plan to gradually remove this scaffold?