

# Scaffolding Academic Language for English Learners: What, Why, How?

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## What is scaffolding?

Scaffolding is when teachers (or other learners) support learners to enable them to do what they cannot yet do unsupported. When they achieve independence, the scaffolding is removed, and a higher goal is set.

## Effective approaches for scaffolding a reading text with English language learners

### 1. Choose accessible texts that students can connect to and that provide important content.

*Criteria for selection: Selection should be:*

- Accessible – *students can read the text with support. Choose texts that are accessible re grammar, vocabulary, rhetorical structures, background knowledge expectations.*
- Culturally relevant and affirming – *choices should include texts that represent the cultures of students in the class as well as important US cultural groups, and that view these cultures positively.*
- Important – *ELLs cannot read as quickly and therefore as much as native speakers. When you can, select works that will make a difference in their education.*
- Well illustrated – *look for illustrations that contribute meaning to the text.*

### 2. Identify prerequisite background information that ELLs may not have.

Students may lack essential background knowledge to understand the text. Scaffolding strategies may help to pre-assess learners' knowledge and provide focus for teaching needed background. Students might, for example, complete a *survey* a few days before the lesson.

### 3. Analyze vocabulary to determine important terms that ELLs may not know.

A free online tool developed by (Paul Nation, using Averil Coxhead's Academic Word List and maintained by Tom Cobb) (Nation 2005) might be used to identify key academic words that a) may be challenging for learners of English, and b) are useful academic terms, likely to be used across various content areas.

## Framer Vocabulary Card

Term:	
Definition	Characteristics:
Examples:	Non-Examples:

## Vocabulary Web Resources

- Word lists for teachers [http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/r21270/freq\\_lists/](http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/r21270/freq_lists/)
- The Compleat Lexical Tutor <http://132.208.224.131/>
- Vocabulary Profiler, by Paul Nation, maintained by Tom Cobb [http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/r21270/texttools/web\\_vp.html](http://www.er.uqam.ca/nobel/r21270/texttools/web_vp.html)
- Wordsift.com <http://www.wordsift.com/>

### 4. Plan ways for learners to interact with you, one another, and the text, e.g., *Anticipation Guide, Read & Retell, Shared Sentences, and 3-2-1 Summary.*

## Anticipation Guide

An Anticipation Guide is a way for learners to prepare for reading by making predictions about a reading based on their current knowledge. After reading, they use the text to check their predictions (Green, 1995). Teachers write a set of true/false statements about the text. Before reading, students agree or disagree with the statements. After reading, they answer the statements again, basing their answers on the reading and comparing their answers before and after reading.

**Target learning strategies:** making predictions; distinguishing fact and opinion

**Lesson Stages:** Into, Through, Beyond

**Language Levels:** All

### Procedure:

1. Prepare an anticipation guide by writing about 6 statements about the text to be read that learners can agree or disagree with. Use two basic types of statements: first, list the “big ideas” found in the text; second, state opinions or predictions about important supporting ideas, concepts, or events in the selection.
2. Before reading the selection, ask learners to copy the chart and complete the “before reading” column of the anticipation guide individually by writing “T” if they think the statement is true or “F” if they think the statement is false.
3. Learners find a partner and compare and discuss their answers. They should be ready to explain why they answered as they did.
4. After reading the story, learners respond to the statements again in the “text” column. This time they base their answer on information found in the text, noting the pages in the text where the question is answered.
5. Teacher and learners discuss the answers, using the text to support what they decide.

Example from the poem “Red Brocade” by Naomi Shihab Nye

Anticipation Guide			
“Red Brocade” from <i>19 Varieties of Gazelle</i> , (p.40-1) by Naomi Shihab Nye			
Before reading	Statement	Line number(s)	After reading
	This poem describes hospitality customs of Eastern Europeans.		
	The poet suggests that when someone comes to your door, you don’t ask their name because you don’t know them.		
	The poet implies that people become friends when they take time to get to know one another.		
	“Take the red brocade pillow” means to make sure a guest is given the best you have.		
	By, “The armor people wear,” the poet means that people should protect themselves from strangers.		

## Read, Retell and Summarize

The Read, Retell and Summarize strategy is a way for learners to test their comprehension of text and process what they read. After reading the text aloud to the students, the teacher asks students to underline key words from the text. Using the key words they have underlined as a guide, students retell the reading to a partner. (Duff & Maley, 2007). Next, students write a summary of the reading based on their retelling and the key words.

**Target learning strategies:** retelling, summarizing, reviewing, sequencing

**Lesson Stages:** Through, Beyond

**Language Levels:** Intermediate and Advanced

**Procedure:**

1. Select a passage for students to read to students.
2. Read the passage aloud to the students as they follow along.
3. Select key words in the passage and ask students to underline these words.
4. Ask students to copy the key words into the right –hand column or onto another piece of paper.
5. After folding the paper and using the key words as guides, students retell the reading to a partner
6. Using the key words, students write a summary of the reading.

Example from the poem “Red Brocade” by Naomi Shihab Nye

The Arabs used to say,	
When a stranger appears at your door,	
feed him for three days	
before asking who he is,	
where he's come from,	
where he's headed.	
That way, he'll have strength	
enough to answer.	
Or, by then you'll be	
such good friends	
you don't care.	
Let's go back to that.	
Rice? Pine nuts?	
Here, take the red brocade pillow.	
My child will serve water	
to your horse.	
No, I was not busy when you came!	
I was not preparing to be busy.	
That's the armor everyone put on	
to pretend they had a purpose	
in the world.	

## Cooperative Sentences

This cooperative learning strategy is an entertaining way for learners to review and analyze a text while they learn to construct good sentences to ask and answer questions (Stack & McCloskey, 2008). Learners answer questions about a text with sentences – but each learner speaks only one word of the answer at a time. As a result, learners have to think “on their feet” about the answers, but also about many aspects of language – including grammar, collocation (what words “go together”), and word choice.

**Target learning strategies:** summarizing; synthesizing; reviewing; retelling; using physical action to remember language; word order

**Lesson Stage:** Beyond

**Language Levels:** Intermediate to Advanced

### Procedure:

1. Ask students to work in groups of four. Have each group write three questions about the text they have read. Questions may be general or may be directed to a particular character in a story. (Note: some characters can be imaginary -- even inanimate objects.)
2. Each group then sends one representative to stand in the front of the room.
3. Have the students in the front of the class stand in a line facing the class.
4. Have them practice the process of answering questions with sentences, each person speaking one word at a time (when an unfinished sentence gets to the end of a line, it “wraps” around back to the first). Use general questions to help students get started. For example, ask, “What is your name?” Students answer the question in a complete sentence, one word at a time, e.g., student #1 says “My”, student #2 says “name”, student #3 says “is”, student #4 says “(her first name), student #5 says “(his last name) .”
5. Invite a student from one of the groups to ask one of that group’s questions. If the question is addressed to a character, remind the student to name the character.
6. Students in the front of the class answer the question in complete sentences, one word at a time. (Especially at first, the group will need considerable modeling and prompting from the teacher and other group members. Note issues of grammar, word choice, word endings that students need help with and that will be valuable “mini-lessons” for the future.)
7. Continue until all questions are asked and answered.

Sample questions for shared sentences after reading “The Red Brocade” by Naomi Shihab Nye:

- What is the poem about?
- Whose hospitality customs does the poet tell about?
- What are the hospitality customs?
- Why does the poet say you should wait three days before asking guests their name, where they came from, and where they’re going?
- What do you think the poet means by the line, “Let’s go back to that”?
- What is important for good hospitality in your culture?

## 3-2-1 Summary

As the name suggests, this is a strategy that allows learners to create a brief, 3-part summary of a text/reading material. The three levels of the task represent three levels of comprehending and conceptualizing the story (remembering facts, connecting events, and determining theme/main idea), and help learners to develop the key academic skill of summarizing.

**Target learning strategies:** directed attention, analyzing, focus on main ideas, using background knowledge, summarizing, taking notes

**Lesson Stages:** Into, Through, Beyond

**Language Levels:** All

**Procedure:**

1. Before learners read a text, introduce the 3-2-1 summary on the form below that they will complete afterwards.
2. As they read, remind learners to keep the summary in mind.
3. After learners have finished the text, have them work alone or with a partner to return to the text to find the information to create the summary. Once the charts are completed, guide students to share their observations with one another in small groups. Have groups select favorite responses that they will share with the large group
4. Elicit sample answers from the whole class to conclude the activity. For a future lesson, make a list of the questions they ask about the text and of the things students would like to learn more about.

Example from the poem “Red Brocade” by Naomi Shihab Nye

3-2-1- Summary	
3. Write three important details in the story.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Give food to strangers</li> <li>2. Invite them to your house</li> <li>3. Take care of them</li> </ol>
2. Write two events in the story that are connected to one another (e.g., hint at the beginning points to the ending, how a character changes from the beginning to the end.)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Strangers come to your house</li> <li>2. You stop taking care of your business , welcome and provide for them</li> </ol>
1. Write one statement or question about the meaning or main idea of the text; or one thing you would like to learn more about after reading the text.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Is the red brocade pillow symbolic in an Arab home?</li> </ol>

## Sample Text

**Red Brocade** by Naomi Shihab Nye  
*19 Varieties of Gazelle: Poems from the Middle East*,  
pp. 40-41

The Arabs used to say,  
When a stranger appears at your door,  
feed him for three days  
before asking who he is,  
where he's come from,  
where he's headed.  
That way, he'll have strength  
enough to answer.  
Or, by then you'll be  
such good friends  
you don't care.

Let's go back to that.  
Rice? Pine nuts?  
Here, take the red brocade pillow.  
My child will serve water  
to your horse.



No, I was not busy when you came!  
I was not preparing to be busy.  
That's the armor everyone put on  
to pretend they had a purpose  
in the world

I refuse to be claimed.  
Your plate is waiting.  
We will snip fresh mint  
into your tea.

## References & Resources

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