



# 5 REASONS WHY YOU SHOULD PRESENT MATERIAL IN SMALL STEPS

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The way you present information to students makes a big difference in whether they'll learn it in the long term or forget it by the end of the week. So, it is important to guide them in the right direction.

In his second Principle of Instruction, Rosenshine suggests introducing new material in small steps to ensure that students make substantial progress in their learning without getting immediately overwhelmed.

So, why does this approach make a difference? Is presenting everything at once that bad? We've highlighted the five main benefits of presenting new material to your student in small steps...

## **1. SMALL STEPS LOWER COGNITIVE LOAD**

One of the main reasons why Rosenshine suggests breaking up information into small steps is because this reduces the cognitive load placed on students' working memory.

Before they can fully learn it, students need to process all new information. Unfortunately, working memory has a limited capacity. Therefore, when students are presented with too much content at once, their brains suffer from cognitive overload. When this happens, a large chunk of information doesn't get transferred into students' long-term memory – meaning that they easily forget it.

If you present information to students in small increments, this will reduce the likelihood that they will experience cognitive overload. This is because it is easier for their working memory to process,

helping the transfer of new material from working memory to long-term memory to take place successfully. As a result, students will show improvements in their ability to recall newly-learned material.

## **2. SMALL STEPS INCREASE MOTIVATION**

Complex information, at first glance, can deflate students' motivation if they feel that it will be too challenging for them to understand. However, slowly introducing this information makes it less daunting and therefore more manageable. As a result, students will feel more comfortable engaging with it and motivated to learn.

Furthermore, when information is broken down, it is simpler for students to get a grasp of it so they can perform well when they are assessed on it. As past successes predict student motivation, students can be reassured that they can handle complex material by reflecting on their prior achievements – if they did it once, they can do it again.

## **3. SMALL STEPS TARGET GAPS IN KNOWLEDGE**

Have you ever asked a student whether they understand a particular concept in a topic, and they respond with “I don't understand any of it” ?

This can be a frustrating response when trying to gauge where a student needs your help. However, breaking information into small steps makes it easier for students to ask questions about specific parts that they find confusing, as these will be easier to pinpoint.

Not only can your students ask you questions, but you can ask them questions to better target gaps in knowledge. This strategy is easier to use when new topics are broken down into small parts because you can question students throughout the lesson, and see where they need your help before moving on to the next concept.

#### **4. SMALL STEPS MAKE IT EASIER TO FADE SUPPORT**

Having an awareness of students' understanding of specific information means that you will know when it is the right time to fade support.

Rosenshine highlights the importance of scaffolding in his eighth Principle of Instruction, which is when a teacher gives more support when introducing a new topic to their students and then gradually reduces it as students become more confident with it. The aim is to equip students with helpful learning strategies which they can use on their own and become independent learners.

Furthermore, breaking topics down into manageable parts means that it is easier for students to master a concept before moving on, as they won't feel so overwhelmed. Then, you'll probably find that your students need less support from you and are able to handle new topics more confidently on their own.

#### **5. SMALL STEPS ALLOW FOR EFFECTIVE SELF-REFLECTION**

Self-reflection is an important part of the learning process. It is a metacognitive skill, meaning that it gets students to evaluate their own learning and decide what strategies they can use to improve their approach.

When information is presented in small steps, students can accurately reflect on topics that they are confident with because they will find it easy to distinguish between different concepts. Then, self-reflection will be more valuable, because students will have a better idea of what they are strong at and where they can improve.

#### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Rosenshine has given helpful insight into the importance of presenting information in small steps by bearing students in mind. Even though it may seem at first like your lessons are moving slowly, it is worth taking the time to apply this strategy so that students can have more productive outcomes.