



How to Use Learning Progressions

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While the design of a learning progression can resemble a rubric, it serves a fundamentally different purpose. A rubric answers the question, "How good is this piece of work." A learning progression helps answer the question, "Where is this student developmentally, and what's the next step?"

Use learning progressions to

- **Make Instructional Decisions:** Identify a student's current developmental skill level. Then, ask, "What do they need to be able to do to move up to the next step of the learning progression?" Find a lilyPD student activity or strategy that helps the student practice that skill or design your own! After the student has had more practice, assess them using the learning progression again.
- **Track Progress Over a Year:** It's hard to see growth in a single assignment or even a single unit. Use a learning progression to track a student's progress with the same skill over the course of the semester or year!
- **Student Self-Assessment:** Learning progressions can help students be metacognitive about their own abilities and provide a visual for them to "see" their own learning. Allow students to use the learning progression to reflect on their own skill level at present. Repeat periodically so they can see their own growth!
- **Communicating Student Learning Outcomes:** Teachers frequently communicate student learning outcomes – to parents, in IEP/504 meetings, to school administrators, to members of their departments, to the colleagues who inherit these students next year. Learning progressions provide helpful language and a concrete way to articulate what students are able to do now and where they need to go next in their learning.
- **Create DIY Learning Progression:** In truth, there is no one, single perfectly straight line toward student mastery. It's possible you see a very different learning trajectory happening in your classroom. Sketch out a blank learning progression (It doesn't need to have five columns like ours! It could be simpler or more complex!) and use it as a tool to observe your students as they learn! What learning pathway are you seeing in real time



with your students?

- **Differentiate Small-Group Instruction:** Not every student needs the same thing on the same day, even in the same classroom. Use a learning progression to quickly sort students by where they are right now, then pull the ones on the same step together for practice aimed at exactly what they need next.
- **Diagnose the Real Problem:** When a student seems stuck, it's tempting to just reteach the same lesson again. Use the learning progression to look backward instead – is the gap actually a step or two earlier than where you're teaching? Find that step, and you may solve something reteaching alone never would have touched.
- **Set Goals With Students, Not For Them:** "Try harder" isn't something a student can actually act on. Sit down together with the learning progression during a conference, point to where they are now, and build the next step out loud so the goal is something they can picture reaching.
- **Create a Shared Language Across Your Team:** Use a learning progression as a shared reference across a department, a co-taught classroom, or with the paraprofessionals supporting a student, so everyone means the same thing.
- **Build a Portfolio Without Extra Work:** Every time you assess a student with a learning progression, save the work sample that goes with it. By the end of the year, you'll have a dated collection of evidence that tells the growth story for you – handy for that IEP meeting or parent conference already on the calendar.
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