Using the practice
Mastery learning

Knowing when students have mastered the content

To work towards mastery learning, students need to know what is expected of them and what success will look like – in other words, they need to have a clear learning outcome and success criteria. These will often come from your curriculum guidance.

Once you know what the learning outcomes and success criteria are, identify realistic goals for your students in your day-to-day lessons (that is, what is appropriate given what your students already know and can do). Consulting school and classroom data is the best way to help identify where your students are at in their learning. You may also want to use a diagnostic task at the beginning of an instructional unit to gain specific insights for the learning about to happen.

Using formative assessment will help you to gather evidence about how your students are progressing towards their learning goals. You can then use these insights to reflect on and amend your learning sequence to best cater to your class (see explicit instruction planning tool for more insight).

Differentiating instruction

When some students start to master content ahead of other students, it is important to provide opportunities for extension and revision. You may wish to:

- allow for group work and small group instruction where students can collaborate with peers at their level for different activities; those who have moved on may do an enrichment project where they apply the skills to a different context, while students who need some correction may work through another set of guided instruction

- allow those who are ready for enrichment the opportunity to apply the skills within a context of something they enjoy, or applying them to real world problems

  - If you are focusing on a measurement skill, perhaps they could be tasked with redesigning an area of their house.

  - Writing tasks can be adapted for students to write about something they are passionate about.

- use various levels of scaffolding support to aid those who need more practice. Students who require more support may be working on the same task at the same time as other students, however with more structured guided examples.

All students need ongoing practice to maintain mastery, so ongoing review of learning will help all students continue to demonstrate their skills and understanding as they move onto new units of work (see spacing and retrieval practice).