

Lesson Planning, Part I: Standard Lesson Structure

Chapter Five

- I. The Opening – What Students Will Learn and Why It Is Important
- II. Introduction to New Material – The Explicit Explanation
- III. Guided Practice
- IV. Independent Practice
- V. The Closing – Stressing Connections and Checking for Understanding

Lesson Planning Overview – Chapters Five, Six, Seven, and Eight

The last two chapters of this course introduced you to the bigger-picture maps that teachers make of their year (the long-term plan) and of discrete pieces of their year (the unit plan). This chapter will take your planning skills to a more detailed level, focusing on the day-to-day planning that teachers use to move as efficiently and effectively as possible, on a daily basis, toward the goals laid out in their long-term and unit plans.

The next four chapters all concern day-to-day planning and implementation of instruction. Chapter Five gives an overview of the Five-Step Lesson Plan, one of the most effective lesson structures. Chapter Six explores the instructional tools at your disposal for delivering and meeting your objectives with your students. Chapter Seven equips you with information about key factors that will help you make strategic choices about instructional methods. Chapter Eight considers the difficult – but fundamentally important – questions surrounding differentiation of your instruction to meet students’ varied ability levels; in later chapters, we will also focus in particular on supporting English language learners and students with special needs.

Introduction – The Components of the Five-Step Lesson Plan

While schools often require teachers to turn in their lesson plans and to complete them in a certain format, it is important not to fall into the trap of completing lesson plans simply to meet the principal’s requirement. Rather, you need to plan your lessons in order to ensure that you are taking the most thoughtful approach possible to get your students where you want them to be. Regardless of the particular format your district might require, you will need to be sure that you are making the format work for you, and that you are writing the plan not in order to meet a particular requirement but rather to ensure that your students actually accomplish the objective.

Do not be confused by the numerous lesson plan formats that are accepted and used; variations among them can often be reduced to different terminology and presentation styles. Regardless of format, **every effective lesson plan should build toward the achievement of the objective and connect to long-term instructional goals.** It is imperative that all parts of your lesson plan align to the objective, the lesson assessment used to measure student mastery of this objective, and, ultimately, your big goal. This alignment focuses your instruction, ensuring that your planning is strategically leading students toward success. The importance of alignment was first introduced in the chapter on long-term and unit plans, and it holds the same value for your lesson plans as well.

Students often acquire knowledge and skills most effectively through the “I do, we do, you do” approach. This means that teachers first show or model for students what they need to know or be able to do (“I do”). Then students are given adequate time to practice together with assistance of their teacher and peers (“We do”), followed by a period where they attempt to demonstrate mastery of the knowledge and

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skills on their own (“You do”). This “I do, we do, you do” framework serves as the basis for one of the most common lesson structures - **the Five-Step Lesson Plan**. Let’s look at some of its features.

In implementing the Five-Step Lesson Plan you first should ensure your students know what they are about to learn and how that relates to what they know and where they are heading. (We’ll call this the “Lesson Opening.”) Then you’ll want to coach students through the material by drawing on what they already know, presenting them with concise key points and engaging them in activities with varying levels of support to provide greater clarity around the main concept or skill. After providing students with multiple opportunities to practice, you will also measure student understanding of the objective through a formative lesson assessment. (This is the real “heart” of the lesson. We’ll call this “Introduction to New Material,” “Guided Practice,” and “Independent Practice.”) At the end of the lesson, you should pull everything together and summarize what was learned, so that students leave with a clear understanding of the main concept of the lesson and how they can apply the concept to future situations. (This we’ll call the “Lesson Closing.”) Checks for student understanding, a very important piece of each lesson component, should be woven into each stage. To get started using this format, refer to the **Instructional Planning & Delivery Toolkit** (p. 51: “Five-Step Lesson Plan Framework Worksheet”), which can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖

Beginning	(i) Lesson Opening
Middle (The heart of the lesson)	(ii) Introduction to New Material
	(iii) Guided Practice
	(iv) Independent Practice
End	(v) Lesson Closing

This summer we will look at lesson planning through a generic lens of a clear beginning, middle and end. The titles in this chart will serve as our common language for the duration of the institute.

The Five-Step Lesson Plan is effective because it has many of the features common to all effective lesson formats. It is important to note that this is only *one* model that aligns with the qualities of effective lesson planning and serves the principles of effective learning. Other lesson models, such as the balanced literacy block (often used in elementary language arts lessons) and the

5-E Lesson Cycle, may also effectively lead students to mastery of your objectives. In the fall, you may need to adapt your lesson-planning format to reflect the language of your district or principal. For examples of Read Aloud (part of the balanced literacy block) and 5-E lesson templates, see the **Instructional Planning & Delivery Toolkit** (pp. 52-58: “Alternative Lesson Plan Formats”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✖ You should familiarize yourself with the language they use, so that you will be better able to adapt to any specific expectations for lesson planning this fall. No matter what format you end up using, you should always ensure that it serves the purpose of a quality lesson by effectively leading students to reach your instructional goals.

Backwards-Plan Your Lesson

To create your lesson plan, you should backwards plan in the same way you design your assessments, long-term plan, and unit plans. Under this approach, you start planning your lesson with the *end* in mind *first* – that is, you should begin by understanding your lesson objective and establishing a clear vision of what it will look like for students to attain this goal.

Before you create a lesson opening or begin thinking about how to deliver your content, you must determine what outcomes you expect your students to produce. What exactly should students know or be able to do differently by the end of your lesson? What evidence do you need in order to determine whether students have achieved your goal? Once you have established your vision of student mastery, use this understanding to design your formative assessment so that it elicits the necessary evidence. Follow the same guiding questions for creating assessments described in Chapter Two to facilitate your planning of this assessment. Make sure you clearly define what outcomes you expect of your students. Without this clarity on what you want to achieve in your lesson, it will be difficult to lead students to mastery of the lesson goal. As you have seen throughout this text, the backwards design process is a crucial skill to be utilized in all of your planning, including the creation of lessons. Consistently using this approach to planning calibrates your instructional actions to strategically align with and build toward your ultimate end—student achievement.

Next we will outline the purposes and key principles of each step in the lesson plan. It is imperative that you carefully consider what you and your students will be doing during each of these steps as you develop your lesson plan. Teachers that “wing it” by presenting lessons without a comprehensive plan are not as effective in leading students to significant academic gains. Thus, carefully plan all parts of your lesson so that they lead to achieving the objective. Doing this is critical for successful instruction. While we discuss the parts of the Five-Step Lesson cycle in the order that you will present them to students, this is not the chronology you should use in actually planning your lessons. Don’t forget to start with establishing your lesson vision and designing the assessment. Then focus the rest of your plans on accomplishing the objective.

I. The Opening – What Students Will Learn and Why It Is Important

A common rookie mistake is to fail to appreciate the importance of a lesson’s beginning and end. On the front end, some teachers jump into lessons without capturing student attention or providing any context for what is about to be learned. Consider the following “lesson opening”:

“Okay class, open your books to page 321 and begin reading. When you get to page 332 answer questions 3 through 11. Any questions?”

The kids need a reason to listen to you – a reason to buy what you’re selling. You have to lead with a hook, and keep it coming.

Ryan Hill, New York City ‘99
Executive Director
TEAM Schools - A KIPP Region

Lesson introductions like this one leave students with no understanding of the lesson purpose, no reason to be engaged, and no incentive to achieve. More than likely, beginning a lesson like this will contribute to off-task behavior, student apathy, and minimal progress towards any end goal. Without any sense of what is about to happen, why it is important to be able to answer questions 3-11, or how pages 321-332 connect to what has been done before, students may simply be following directions (if they even do that!) without connecting their work to any prior knowledge or future experience. According to the Association for Supervision and

Curriculum Development (ASCD), students who know what they are learning perform 27 percentile points higher than students who cannot articulate what they are learning.

Jere Brophy’s summary of academic research verifies the importance of a strong opening for every lesson:

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Research indicates the value of establishing a learning orientation by beginning lessons and activities with advance organizers or previews. These introductions facilitate students' learning by communicating the nature and purpose of the activity, connecting it to prior knowledge, and cueing the kinds of student responses that the activity requires.¹⁵

The lesson opening should clearly communicate what students are going to learn, why it is important, how it relates to what they already know, and how it is going to happen. You'll also want to ensure that your opening engages your students, and that it makes clear any behavioral expectations unique to the particular plan. Finally, you'll want to assess your students' understanding of the lesson purpose and procedure by allowing them time to ask clarifying questions about the purpose of the lesson or the final product, and/or by asking them to summarize what it is that you want them to take away from the lesson opening.

When students understand WHY you're teaching a lesson and WHAT they can expect to get out of it, they will learn leaps and bounds more than if you skim over the objective.

**Amanda Timberg, Los Angeles '96
Director, Leadership Development
Teach First**

The following text summarizes key points to cover in a lesson opening.

Effective Lesson Openings—Key Points and Examples

Communicate to students WHAT they are going to learn.

- "Today we are going to solve word problems that require you to add and subtract fractions."
- "Our objective today is to learn how to translate word problems into a mathematical equation for you to solve."

Communicate to students WHY IT IS IMPORTANT to learn this material.

- "These word problems will let you solve problems that you might face in everyday situations that require fractions, like when you are cooking, or divvying things up between friends..."

Communicate to students HOW IT RELATES to what has been done previously.

- "For the last week we have been adding and subtracting fractions with like and unlike denominators. You all have become pros with that! Today you are going to solve word problems that will allow you to practice that skill in real world situations."

Communicate to students HOW the learning will occur.

- "I'm going to show you some tricks to translating word problems into equations. Then, as you probably noticed when you entered, we are going to use the stations set up around the room. At each station you will have two word problems to read and solve. Our fraction pieces are there to help you if you need them. When you get to station seven, you will write your own word problem that one of your classmates will solve tonight for homework."

¹⁵ Brophy, Jere. "Generic Aspects of Effective Teaching." *Tomorrow's Teachers*, ed. Margaret C. Wang and Herbert J. Walburg. Richmond, CA: McCutchen Publishing Corporation, 2001, p. 23.

Engage students and CAPTURE THEIR INTEREST.

- By having the room set up in a different way when students enter, you will pique their interest immediately. (Sometimes what you say about the lesson will be engaging, other times what you do or materials you have in the room will draw them in.)
- You might start the lesson with a “discrepant event” or mentioning a curiosity that the lesson will attempt to address. “We know how to subtract when the number on top is bigger, but what if it’s smaller?” Or “is it possible that a man could go from weighing 180 pounds to zero pounds and back to 180 pounds, all in the same day? By the end of the lesson on mass, you will be able to explain why that is absolutely possible.”
- At the beginning of a new unit, Nikeya Bridges, Greater New Orleans '00, and her class would receive an oversized letter from their imaginary friend, Wonda Why, full of hints about the new unit. Nikeya’s third graders loved predicting what they would be studying based on the clues hidden in the letter.
- Some teachers give their students a journal prompt that aims to access prior knowledge or understanding about the subject matter or its themes. Before a lesson on the War of 1812, you might ask students to “describe a time when someone took something of yours, and you wanted to get back at them.” If you were introducing a lesson on genetics, you might have students first describe the physical similarities between members of their families.
- Others start with problems or exercises they call a “Do Now” or “Warm Up,” and students are expected to begin this activity when they come in the door. Brent Maddin, South Louisiana '99, teaches high school science and has his students begin the daily “Catalyst” after copying down the day’s agenda. Later on in the semester, students use their agendas to create study guides for exams.

I experimented a lot with active, super-creative openings and closings to my lessons. Soon, however, I realized that a consistent structure was more effective for getting kids on track immediately AND for ensuring maximum retention! So, the first 5 minutes of class was the “Start-Up,” usually a creative quickwrite or a few interesting questions to focus them on the topic for today. The last five-minutes were reserved for “Wrap-Up,” which reviewed everything we learned today and usually put a few students on the spot to give summaries or news reports. The best part was that the Start-Ups and Wrap-Ups were all written in their class folders, and could be flipped to for a quick refresher. (Did wonders for classroom management at the beginning and end of class, too.)

Kelly Harris-Perin, Delta '98
Director of Learning and Development
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Provide and model CLEAR, HIGH EXPECTATIONS OF BEHAVIOR (as to materials and activities).

- “For this lesson you will need your math journal and a pen or pencil. Get them out now before we begin.”
- “After my explanation of some key strategies, you will work individually at your station for five minutes. If you have any questions, raise your hand and I will assist you. When you hear the timer go off, you will move to the next station and begin to solve the two word problems there.”
- “Chantelle, will you please show the class how you will move from one station to the next?”

Check for understanding by asking students to SUMMARIZE EXPECTATIONS and ASK CLARIFYING QUESTIONS.

- “Can someone clarify what you will do at each station?”
- “Are there any remaining questions about what we are doing before we begin?”

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Three Example Lesson Openings

While it may not always be applicable to articulate “how the learning will occur” or “behavior expectations” at the start of your lesson, you should integrate as many of the above criteria as possible into every opening. Notice how the following relate what students will learn, raise curiosity and convey the importance or interest of the lesson.

Objective #1 (Elementary ESL): *Students will be able to use regular comparatives correctly in an oral presentation.*

Lesson Opening:

Ms. Cate passes several pairs of objects around the room: a full and an empty jar of the same size, a sharply focused and a fuzzy photograph, and a ripe banana and an unripe one and asks students to jot down in their notebooks some quick differences between the two objects in each pair. During the discussion that follows, the teacher guides students towards making comparisons between the two objects in each pair and records on the board the different ways in which students use the comparative (one banana is “softer,” “riper,” “smellier,” “more flexible,” than the other one). She points out that students are sometimes using the suffix “er” and sometimes using the word “more” – and states that, by the end of the lesson, they will know definitively when to use the different forms.

Teacher’s Intentions:

By beginning the lesson with a bit of intrigue (“Why is Ms. Cate passing out these objects?”) and getting everyone involved by examining objects and recording observations, students are immediately invited into the lesson. The activity connects prior understanding (the student’s working knowledge of the comparative) with the objective of the day, clearly stated as consistently being able to use the comparative correctly.

Objective #2 (6th grade): *SWBAT write a bibliographic entry for a book.*

Lesson Opening:

Ms. Cartwright starts class with a group brainstorm, “Is it ever OK to copy someone else’s work?” After soliciting a few student responses, she explains that there are occasions when you can include other people’s thoughts and ideas in your own work; you just have to give them proper credit. She then directs the class to the back of their textbooks, containing a bibliography. She explains that the textbook authors wanted to give credit to the books that had helped them come up with their own ideas for the textbook. The authors also wanted the readers to be able to find these books if anyone ever wanted further information. She indicates that students will be learning how to give proper credit to the sources that they use.

Teacher’s Intentions:

This lesson begins with a question that immediately draws students in: the hot topic of cheating and the discrepant idea that it might be acceptable to copy. Ms. Cartwright furthers the relevance of her lesson by examining the textbook bibliography and explaining its real-world purpose. She makes the learning objective clear.

Objective #3 (10th grade biology): *SWBAT describe the biological risks of drug use.*

Lesson Opening:

When class begins, students will follow the instructions on the board: “For your Start Up, draw a T-chart in your notebook. On the left hand side, you have three minutes to list all of the things a smoker, drinker or other drug-user might say are the advantages of smoking, drinking or taking drugs.” After two minutes, ask students to share their lists. Ms. Donnelly explains that the list for disadvantages – or dangers – is much longer than the lists they just generated, and they will be spending the class figuring out some specific ways in which smoking, drinking and drugs destroy the body. Referencing their previous units on the different organs and organ systems, Ms. Donnelly notes that this lesson will extend their current understanding because they had only studied the structure and function of healthy organs. By the end of the period, students will not only be able to articulate how different drugs deteriorate different organs of the body (not just the lungs, as many students assume), but they will also have a list of specific medical reasons for just saying no to drugs.

Teacher’s Intentions:

Ms. Donnelly’s students have a routine every day when they come in: look at the “Start Up” on the board and follow the instructions, so there is little room for confusion about expectations. The activity (listing the supposed advantages of drug use) is also a bit unexpected and likely to capture student attention. With the right hand column empty, the day’s focus is clear: being able to describe the disadvantages of drug use. The teacher connects the objective with previous learning and explains its importance by noting that students will be equipped with the medical reasons for saying no to drugs.

Of course, effective lesson openings may take many forms. Sometimes it may be most effective to use a device to build students' curiosity, other times a simple dialogue will be the most effective strategy. However you decide to open your lesson, ensure you clearly address the points we've explained in this section.

When crafting your lesson opening, you may want to refer to some sample methods for opening a lesson in the **Instructional Planning & Delivery Toolkit** (pp. 59-60); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFA.Net. ✖ The methods included there involve a large number of students, which in turn has a positive effect upon classroom culture and student motivation.

II. Introduction to New Material – The Explicit Explanation

Now we have reached the moment of truth, the moment when you convey something new – a skill, a bit of knowledge – to your students. Your students are primed to receive this new information because you have gotten their attention, told them what to expect, and prepared their memory to make connections to new information by referring to prior knowledge. The Introduction to New Material phase of the lesson plan is the time when the teacher takes center stage and actually explains, models, demonstrates and illustrates the concepts, ideas, skills or processes that students will eventually internalize. You may recognize this phase most vividly from your four years of college: the lecture. In K-12 education, because children have not yet acquired the skills to process and organize data for long stretches of time, the Introduction to New Material will be much more varied and nuanced than a teacher pontificating at a podium.

The planning and execution of this phase is key. You are the expert in the room, so your explanations and examples need to be both clear and correct in order to serve as the mold in which student understanding takes shape. It is not uncommon for teachers to find themselves explaining one concept – and then realizing in the middle of the presentation that they need to explain a second or third idea as background for understanding the first. The main point is lost, and the students cannot discern what it was they were supposed to have learned. One cannot underestimate the importance of this fact: when it's time to tell your class what they need to know, the information students glean completely depends on what you present and how you present it.

In addition to deciding what to present, you must also choose *how* to deliver this information. If we chose one lesson objective, distributed it to ten different teachers, and then observed these teachers in the classroom, we would probably find that they chose ten different ways to

Outlining Main Ideas and Details

Your students can only remember so much in one sitting, so it's a good idea to identify the key points (versus the specific details) of your New Material. If your objective was for students to explain how global warming works, you'd first outline the pieces of that process yourself.

- I. The atmosphere traps heat like a greenhouse.
 - a. A greenhouse serves to trap heat.
 - b. The sun's rays hit the Earth and are often "trapped" by the atmosphere's gases.
 - c. Trapping is important to maintain a temperate climate.
 - i. If there were no atmosphere, like on Mars, we'd freeze.
- II. Human processes are creating an overabundance of gases in the atmosphere.
 - a. Manmade reasons for the production of gases: carbon dioxide emissions, burning of fossil fuels, deforestation, deep plowing of fields, CFC-filled refrigerators and air conditioners.
 - b. We use the word "overabundance" because fewer of the sun's rays can escape, making the Earth dangerously warm.

You may be tempted to have students know all of the different gases that make up the Earth's atmosphere, but then realize it is more important for students to understand the big picture before learning more minute facts.

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introduce the new material embedded in the lesson objective. Teachers may choose to lecture, present a demonstration, use a text, do a simulation, explore the Internet, or visit a museum.

Of course, what you present and how you choose to present your material are only two key parts of your instruction. While you may feel that you have a lot of content to deliver, this step should not be the bulk of your lesson. Always remember to leave plenty of time for students to practice with the new material.

Here are five guiding questions and principles to effective explanations.

1. What information will you convey? Emphasize and reiterate key points without glossing over ideas or drowning students in detail. Effective teachers determine what they want their students to be able to leave the classroom being able to say, think or do. Identifying what key points to emphasize, however, can be challenging, especially for new teachers. It is easy to forget how complex certain information can seem to students who are experiencing it for the first time. Therefore, keep in mind the developmental levels of your students as you determine your key points. You should not overwhelm or confuse you class with excessive information, nor should you skim over important ideas necessary for students to understand the content. To help do this, effective teachers create an *outline or scaffold* of main ideas and supporting points (see the adjacent table) and develop a list of *take-home messages* that they want their students to leave with. If they're teaching a new skill, such as how to solve a one variable equation, they pinpoint *key steps* ("First combine like terms...then isolate the variable") before they teach the lesson that students can remember and use.

During the lesson, effective teachers *model* skills by going through the key steps they outlined for their students, such as solving a sample problem and narrating their approach. They use *visual cues* (such as underlining or using different colors on the board), *vocal cues* (changing the volume of your voice – either suddenly softer or louder), *signal phrases* ("The fourth and final point is..."), and *body language* (through the use of gestures or position in the classroom) to *highlight* key concepts.

- "So main idea number one is that the Civil War was largely an argument over states' rights. Underline the phrase states' rights in your notebooks, and write down one example of a states' rights conflict that we have discussed."

2. How will you convey the information? Use multiple approaches when presenting new information. Two basic methods teachers use to help present material are modeling and lecture. These two methods are not mutually exclusive, of course. Many teachers often mix both techniques in a single lesson depending on the context of their instruction. In the next chapter we will discuss tips for creating effective lectures and demonstrations in more detail. For now, note that effective presentations do not simply involve the teacher talking, but may include *written text*, *visual aids* (posters, graphics, illustrations), *movement*, *additional sounds*, *manipulatives*, or even *smells and tastes*, if they help students remember key ideas. You can also connect to students' prior knowledge by using *examples* (and non-examples) and *anecdotes*, all in the name of making it easier for students to access the new information later.

- "Here's another way of thinking about it. An independent clause ("I went to the store") is like Destiny's Child's 'Independent Women.' It's a sentence that can stand by itself. Dependent clauses ("because we were out of milk") are like the backup singers; they don't perform by themselves, but they help out the main act."

3. What will students be doing? Children do not learn as passive agents, so build in activities that allow students to “take in” the information. What your students remember from a lesson depends on what they are thinking about during your presentation of material. Consequently, you should always proactively anticipate where your students’ attention will be and create ways to aid their processing and retention of key information. To do this, many teachers have students create *memory or processing aids* to help students to organize information in their heads. *graphic organizers*, described in more detail in the next chapter, give students a structure in which to take notes. Another strategy is to stop the presentation and *ask clarifying questions* or *have students paraphrase* the key ideas thus far. Creating an outline of your presentation will allow you to notice natural breaks in the lesson during which to allow students to process the information more deeply. To keep students’ attention and allow them to connect new knowledge to what they already know, teachers may ask *fact-based, objective questions* (“What are the facts?”), but then *reflective* (“What do you think, and how do you feel?”), *interpretive* (“What does all this mean, and what are the implications?”), and *conclusion-driven* (“What should happen next?”) *questions*. You can also have students generate examples and analogies themselves.

- “I need six volunteers to help me demonstrate the different stages of metamorphosis in front of the class while everyone else fills in the flowcharts of their graphic organizers.”

4. How will you know that your students understand? Target potential misunderstandings. You need to anticipate potential areas of confusion for your students and *adjust your pacing* to allow time for *noting and clarifying potential contradictions*. When you are teaching complex ideas or rules (all of the exceptions to English spelling and grammar rules, for example), *choose familiar terms* and *explain any new vocabulary words*. Allow students to *make mental bridges from prior knowledge* (noting that *misanthrope* comes from the same root as *miserable*, for example) to minimize all of the completely new information that students must internalize. Another effective technique is to *make common mistakes* during your presentation and have students correct your errors - a method that can also serve as an effective way to check for understanding. Finally, you may determine that there is so much prerequisite knowledge involved that it is necessary to break the lesson into two different lesson objectives. It probably would have been too much to cover the process *and* the effects of global warming in one 45-minute lesson, for example.

- “A very common mistake when multiplying decimals is forgetting to move the decimal point, so I want you to pay extra careful attention to how I do this...”

5. How will you know that your students understand? Check for understanding. Before moving to student practice, it is important to assess student understanding of the new material, just as you checked for student understanding of the lesson purpose and procedure during your lesson opening. Think about what is absolutely essential for students to understand before they begin to practice and what can be reinforced later. Checking for understanding—by asking students to paraphrase the information orally, write a one-sentence summary, or answer questions—is integral to introducing new material so that you can adjust your instruction accordingly. Only by knowing what students do and do not understand can you tailor your lesson to meet their needs. Here are some examples of teachers checking for understanding during their Introduction to New Material:

- “Hold up two fingers if you can tell me why independent clauses are like Destiny’s Child.”
- “What do I mean when I say the Civil War was largely about states’ rights? Take 30 seconds to write a one-sentence answer in your notebook. Then you’ll compare your response with a partner’s.”

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Three Example Introductions of New Material

Keeping in mind that the next chapter will provide further explanation of the methods for presenting new material, notice for now how the following Introductions to New Material highlight key points, use multiple approaches, plan for student participation, consider common confusions and check for understanding.

Objective #1 (Elementary ESL): *Students will be able to use regular comparatives correctly in an oral presentation.*

Introduction to New Material:

Ms. Cate points out the key to knowing how to form a comparative is counting the word's number of syllables. She unveils a three-column chart indicating that adjectives with one syllable usually take *-er* and *-est*. Adjectives that have two syllables and end in *y* (*early*), *ow* (*narrow*), and *le* (*gentle*), can also take *-er* and *-est*. Almost all other adjectives with two or more syllables require the use of *more* and *most*. She knows that some students may never have counted a word's syllables before, so she demonstrates by clapping out the stresses of a series of words. Using the chart, she shows how the student-generated examples from the Lesson Opening demonstrate how the rule works. Students copy the chart in their notebooks and fill in the student-generated examples during Ms. Cate's demonstration. She walks through the classroom, monitoring.

Teacher's Intentions:

By focusing her lesson on the syllable and suffix rules for forming comparative adjectives, Ms. Cate boils down her lesson into some memorable main points. She uses a visual aid to highlight these points, employs examples and plans for the potential confusion over syllable counting. Students are recording the information through a graphic organizer.

Objective #2 (6th grade): *SWBAT write a bibliographic entry for a book.*

Introduction to New Material:

Ms. Cartwright notes that the way to give proper credit to books you've used is to create a *bibliography*. Students already learned the word *bibliophile*, and Ms. Cartwright guides them to see the relationship between the two words. She then points to the board, where she has written the structure for a bibliographic entry for books (with different colors of chalk for the five different parts). She asks students what they notice about the entry: that the author's last name comes first, followed by the first name; the title has been underlined; there is a city, a company name and a year. Ms. Cartwright asks her students, "What is a publisher? Why might it be important to have the publisher's name? Why might it be important to have the date of publication?" She then affirms that a publisher helps authors get their books printed and sold. Including this information in the bibliography is useful in case people want to find the book themselves. She further mentions that this information can usually be found on one of the first inside pages of the book, and she demonstrates with the class textbook, showing everyone the publisher's name, which is the most difficult to locate. She then summarizes the five parts of a bibliographic entry in order. She asks students to write down the bibliographic entry in their notes and circulates to make sure students are doing it correctly. She reminds everyone to feel free to use colored pencils if necessary to separate the different parts of the entry.

Teacher's Intentions:

Ms. Cartwright explicitly highlights the different pieces and the sequence of a bibliographic entry, the new information that she wants her class to learn. By asking questions about the relevance of the book's publisher and date of publication, she is moving her lesson beyond sheer memorization and into the world of practicality. She realized that the book's publisher is often difficult to find, so she decided to spend extra time explaining how to locate that information. She enables student input of the information by providing targeted directions for taking notes. She also takes advantage of student prior knowledge (and reinforces the idea of relationships between words) by noting connections to the root "biblio."

Objective #3 (10th grade biology): *SWBAT describe the biological risks of drug use.*

Introduction to New Material:

Ms. Donnelly first displays pictures of a healthy liver and the liver of an alcoholic, a healthy lung and the lung of a smoker, a healthy brain and the brain of a cocaine user. The teacher then asks students to read silently a handout from the Just Say No Foundation, which describes the ways in which smoking, drinking and drug-use eat away at the various organs. The teacher also shows a short film, featuring people who describe the effects of their drug use on their bodies. Students are instructed to fill the right-hand side of their T-chart (dangers of drug use) during their reading and the film. After the film, Ms. Donnelly asks students as a group what surprised them most about the stories they heard.

Teacher's Intentions:

Ms. Donnelly uses pictures of charred lungs and corroded livers to introduce her points about the consequences of drug and alcohol use, knowing that students are likely to remember the visually arresting images. Students continually process new material from a variety of sources by recording information in their graphic organizers. Ms. Donnelly shows the film to let students see and hear how drug use affected real lives. In addition, she allowed them to connect to the material in more personal ways by asking for their responses to the material.

The Bottom Line—Reaching Your Objective

There is a lot to consider when planning your Introduction to New Material. We have not even discussed the choices that you will be making when you plan your lesson (what precise method you will use to deliver the new material, how you will have students grouped during this phase of the lesson process) and how you will make those choices (by considering students' needs and interests, the objective's cognitive level, the nature of the content, and the time and resources available). You will read more about making these decisions in the next two chapters.

But whether you are teaching your students how to end sentences with a period, how to explain the effects of industrialization on agriculture, or how to use Avogadro's number to make chemical calculations, your instructional choices must always align with your objective. This begins with the key points or steps you want your students to take away from your lesson. By emphasizing main ideas over supporting details, presenting information through multiple approaches, giving students a role in their learning beyond "listening," and being mindful of potential misunderstandings, you can help students begin to store the knowledge and skills necessary for objective mastery into their long-term memory. While introducing new material is important, this stage in the lesson cycle should not dominate your lesson plan and execution. You always need to give students plenty of time and opportunities to engage with and practice the key ideas. Practice constitutes the next two parts in the Five-Step Lesson Cycle.

The Connection Between Management and Instruction

As you have probably realized, effective classroom management is closely tied to effective instruction. In fact, while you will be exploring these skills in separate courses this summer, *Instructional Planning & Delivery* and *Classroom Management & Culture* are inextricably combined. Indeed, as much as your classroom environment influences your ability to teach, your instructional planning and delivery influences your classroom environment. If a lesson is well planned and your instructional strategies are effective, students will be more focused on learning and less inclined to engage in inappropriate or distracting behavior. While they are essential to student success, excellent classroom management systems alone will not make for an efficiently run classroom if you are implementing an ineffective lesson plan.

All of this is to say that successful teachers think about lesson planning and classroom management simultaneously. As you are planning a lesson, you will need to think through what each student is supposed to be doing at every part of the lesson to minimize opportunities for off-task behavior. When one student is doing a problem on the board, for example, what do you expect other students to be doing while they wait? By anticipating these situations (a skill at which you will quickly become more adept) and thinking through these scenarios in advance, you will avoid situations in which students begin to misbehave simply because there's nothing else to do.

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III. Guided Practice

After new material has been introduced, students will need time to practice their new skills and knowledge. “Practice is one of the most important yet least appreciated aspects of classroom learning.”¹⁶ Teachers can become so intent on introducing new material, explaining the concept, demonstrating the skill, or modeling the process that they do not allow time for *students* to explore new material and begin to internalize it. Likewise, teachers often leave students to work independently right after introducing new material, without first taking time to support students while they practice. If teachers do not allow time for student practice—both with guidance and independently—they will not have an opportunity to assess the degree to which students understand the new skill or concept.

Creativity is a Means, Not an End

A common pitfall for new teachers is to focus so much on *how* they are presenting material that they forget to consider their objective. While sometimes a creative lesson plan will be more effective than a less innovative one, you should not strive for creativity at the cost of your lesson’s effectiveness. For example, you may become immersed in developing a hands-on math game that will engage your students, but forget to consider exactly what mathematical concepts students will learn through participating in the activity. A teacher who takes such an **activity-driven** approach may discover that students (and the teacher) are well entertained but have not developed the skills and knowledge expected for their grade.

The purpose of practice, of course, is to engage students with the material to a degree that causes them to internalize it for the long-term. “Research indicates that skills practiced to a peak of smoothness and automaticity tend to be retained indefinitely, whereas skills that are mastered only partially tend to deteriorate. Most skills included in school curricula are learned best when practice is distributed across time and embedded in a variety of tasks.”¹⁷ Daniel Willingham also notes in that students need to practice ‘beyond perfection’ to maintain perfection in acquiring knowledge and skills¹⁸. That is, for students to truly internalize and master material, they need to successfully practice multiple times at the level required by the objective. This repeated practice helps move knowledge and skills from working memory to long-term memory, allowing students to retain the content of the lesson over time.

Of course, “student practice” does not mean that the teacher is not actively involved in the classroom’s activities. In fact, “The effectiveness of assignments is enhanced when teachers explain the work and go over practice examples with students before releasing them to work independently, then circulate to monitor progress and provide help when needed.”¹⁹

Thus, there are two stages to the practice process. If the Introduction to New Material was the section in which the teacher modeled, demonstrated, illustrated and explained, the Guided Practice stage is where teachers share the reins – gauging student practice of the new material and clarifying steps and points. When you get directions to someone’s house, you may repeat them back to your friend, making sure you heard correctly and understand all of the nuances. In Independent Practice, you are completely in the driver’s seat, demonstrating your performance of the objective.

When you think about the Guided Practice section of the lesson sequence, it may help to imagine an apprentice testing out the steps that an expert has modeled, or an actor rehearsing a scene that the

¹⁶ Brophy, Jere. “Generic Aspects of Effective Teaching.” *Tomorrow’s Teachers*, ed. Margaret C. Wang and Herbert J. Walburg. Richmond, CA: McCutchen Publishing Corporation, 2001, p. 27.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Willingham, Daniel. “Practice Makes Perfect—But Only If You Practice Beyond the Point of Perfection.” <http://www.aft.org/newspubs/periodicals/ae/issues.cfm>, accessed 7/1/2010.

¹⁹ Brophy, Jere. “Generic Aspects of Effective Teaching.” *Tomorrow’s Teachers*, ed. Margaret C. Wang and Herbert J. Walburg. Richmond, CA: McCutchen Publishing Corporation, 2001, p. 28.

Practice Makes Better

In some highly efficient classrooms, teachers have developed systems that students use on a regular basis for introducing new objectives, or reinforcing or extending old ones. Here are three:

- **Morning message.** Usually used in elementary classrooms, the teacher writes on chart paper or on the board a relevant and topical message for the day (the schedule, a birthday, current events). After reading it as a class, the teacher takes a few minutes to ask questions relating to specific literacy skills that the students have learned (“Can anyone find an apostrophe? Why is it there? Why is this word capitalized?”) or to discuss reactions to the message (“What were the main points of last night’s State of the Union address? Was it a good speech?”)
- **Do Now.** Used in many different contexts, the teacher can have an assignment on the board for students to complete as soon as they sit down. Sometimes, this can serve as anticipation for the upcoming lesson (making it part of the lesson opening), but often teachers will use this activity to have students answer quick review questions.
- **Journal.** Classrooms across the grade levels have regular journal assignments where students engage in further thinking about content by referring to previous lessons or connecting current knowledge to earlier learning. In kindergarten, students may use their journals to draw pictures predicting what will happen next in a story shared during reading time. In a European history class studying Britain’s civil war, students may be asked to imagine what Machiavelli would have advised Oliver Cromwell had they lived during the same era.

director has staged. During this phase, the expert is still watching, gauging proficiency, clarifying points of confusion; the director is still making adjustments and critiques. Yet the apprentice and the actor – the ones who will be eventually expected to master the skills and the scenes – are actively involved in practicing.

Guided practice comes in many forms: teacher questioning, sample problems, graphic organizers, concept webs, recitations, summaries, and the review of mnemonic devices. It may occur in groups or as a whole class. When dealing with knowledge objectives, the Guided Practice may be the time for students to put away their notes, attempt to recall the facts or concepts taught, or work with the ideas they’ve been taught in a slightly new way. When practicing skill-based objectives, such as math facts or grammatical corrections, teachers may provide a series of practice problems.

Because of the overriding importance of practice for student learning, it is imperative to carefully plan all parts of your guided practice to ensure successful instruction. As with the Introduction to New Material, there are a number of ways to plan the phase of Guided Practice. Yet several principles overlap these methods.

Be clear about and model behavioral expectations. Once students start participating in Guided Practice, they are often involved in

individual, partner or small group work. You will want to be very explicit about the behaviors you wish to see in these small group settings. As you will learn about in greater detail in your Classroom Management and Culture course, you end up maximizing instructional time by taking the opportunity to practice procedures and set clear guidelines upfront.

Not So Effective: “Get into groups and make a model airplane.”

Effective: “I am going to give each member of the group a job. The materials manager is in charge of...”

Ensure that all students have an opportunity to practice. A common and dangerous mistake during the Guided Practice phase of the lesson cycle is to allow one student to serve as a representative for the entire class, leaving the rest of the students without adequate engagement with the material. This can be an invitation for misbehavior. Asking for volunteers to participate is an excellent technique, but you should simply be mindful of what all of the students are doing in the meantime. Having the rest of the class discuss and evaluate the answers of volunteers, for instance, can be one way to help ensure the rest of the class is involved in the practice. A main way teachers engage students at this stage in the

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lesson cycle is by completing a sample problem together as a class. During this activity, you may have students walk you through or explain each part of the process that you just presented. In addition to constant circulation within the classroom and frequent questioning discussed earlier, teachers will often use a choral response, some variety of hand-signal, or another form of checking for understanding (you'll find a host of ideas later in this section) to gauge student understanding.

Not So Effective: "Carmen, come up to the board and complete these division problems. Everybody watch!"

Effective: "Everyone, use your mini dry-erase boards to answer number seven. Raise your hands when you're done. If you finish early, check your work by multiplying..."

Use multiple opportunities for practice. In order to solidify skills and concepts in students' minds, teachers will plan a host of practice tasks – a series of problems, rather than just one or two. Remember that students need to engage in multiple examples of practice in order to gain proficiency with a skill or piece of knowledge. Often, the tasks teachers create will come from several different contexts to expose students to the various arenas in which they may encounter the new knowledge or skills. Since students work at different paces, and because students need to be exposed to material several times, effective teachers have a variety of practice activities available.

Not So Effective: "We just learned about similes. Use one in a sentence before we move on."

Effective: "When you are done locating the similes in the poem, please make a list of five similes you know from your favorite songs."

Scaffold practice exercises from easy to hard. "Scaffolding" means maintaining high expectations for achievement but giving students the support they need as they grow to their potential. Some teachers are eager to jump to the more challenging aspects of a problem or concept, mistakenly assuming that all of their students understand all of the fundamentals. First, guarantee that your students can do simple iterations of a problem. *Then* move on to more nuanced or complex tasks.

Not So Effective: "In this first question, I slipped in an exception to the rule I just taught you..."

Effective: "In the first four examples we went through, the questions followed the rule we learned. But look at this last question. I slipped in an exception. Let's take a closer look..."

Be clear how an activity aligns to the objective. Often, teachers intending to be creative will launch students off into some scissors-and-glue activity without communicating (or sometimes even considering) how the task relates to the lesson goal. It is excellent to have students involved in active learning, but be sure that they know the purpose of the exercise they're completing.

Not So Effective: “Sammy’s going to stand in the middle of the room, and everyone else is going to rotate and revolve around him. Go!”

Effective: “Sammy is going to be our sun. Erica will be Earth and will rotate for us. Erica, when you face Sammy, you will hold up the ‘day’ sign. When you turn away, you will hold up the ‘night’ sign. Everyone else, write down why...”

While student practice should align to all parts of your objective, it can also include prerequisite knowledge and skills. For example, it is acceptable for students to first practice identifying different types of adaptations in order to then practice the skill of analyzing how these traits help living things survive. Just make sure that your practice activities are aligned to your lesson’s objectives—you don’t want to spend so much time teaching prerequisite skills that you fail to actually reach the objective.

Monitor and correct student performance. The whole point of Guided Practice is to provide a sheltered environment for students to shape their knowledge or skills. If students are showing signs of confusion, this is the time to go back and review missed concepts or ideas.

Not So Effective: “Does anyone have any questions? No? Great!”

Effective: “Everyone, raise up your mini dry-erase boards so I can see how we did. Aha! I see I confused some of you. Take a look up at the board for a moment...”

Three Examples of Guided Practice

Notice how these examples of Guided Practice give every student several different opportunities to engage with the material and allow the teacher to gauge student progress before moving on to independent practice.

Objective #1 (Elementary ESL): *Students will be able to use regular comparatives correctly in an oral presentation.*

Guided Practice:

Ms. Cate tells her students that she is thinking of an animal. The class needs to formulate comparative questions to get more information about the mystery animal in order to make a good guess at its identity. Examples: Is it noisier than a dog? Is it faster than a chicken? Is it more dangerous than a tiger? As each student makes his or her guess, Ms. Cate has the class use a graphic organizer to record the adjective used, count its number of syllables, refer to the corresponding rule for comparatives and verify that the child has used the comparative correctly. If a student does not use the comparative properly in his or her question, Ms. Cate does not answer. After every child has participated, students record their guesses for the teacher’s mystery animal – and the teacher announces the correct answer.

Teacher’s Intentions:

The teacher has designed an activity that reinforces the objectives continually while enabling everyone to stay engaged and participate. This activity could have neglected the objective of using syllable rules to determine proper comparative forms by having each student simply make their guess – without the graphic organizer. This would have limited each student’s practice to one opportunity, rather than involving students after every guess. The game-like aspects of the activity should also keep students engaged and motivated, and because students get to choose their own adjectives, the game is scaffolded to different levels of ability.

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Objective #2 (6th grade): *SWBAT write a bibliographic entry for a book.*

Guided Practice:

Ms. Cartwright distributes a sheet of 10 bibliographic entries that do not follow the proper format in one way or another. For each example, she asks students to circle the mistake. Ms. Cartwright circulates and checks for understanding. The first three entries are missing components of the proper format (no author's name). The next three have components out of order. The last four are subtler (author's first name first; commas or colons incorrectly written). After correcting the entries, students are to take out their copies of Lois Lowry's *The Giver*. She then asks a volunteer to state the first step for forming a bibliographic entry. After each step, students write that piece of the entry in their notebooks. They continue until they have written the entire entry. Ms. Cartwright unveils a poster featuring an entry for *The Giver*, explaining that she thinks she made a few mistakes. She asks students to compare the entries they wrote with her entry and circle where they followed directions and Ms. Cartwright did not. Once Ms. Cartwright's "mistakes" have been uncovered, students take out their individual library books and write an entry in their notebooks. The teacher monitors and assists.

Teacher's Intentions:

The worksheet activity is scaffolded to ensure that the teacher can eventually recognize all of the intricacies of the bibliographic entries – beginning with obvious errors (a missing piece), then focusing on sequence, and then getting even more nuanced. Then students practice the process while being prompted on the individual steps. Ms. Cartwright further reinforces the steps by presenting an example with many mistakes at once. By going through the process of locating and writing the information for a bibliographic entry, as well as noticing errors in the sequence of the entry, students are taking the next step toward being able to accomplish the task independently, which they do with teacher support by the end of this Guided Practice.

Objective #3 (10th grade biology): *SWBAT describe the biological risks of drug use.*

Guided Practice:

Ms. Donnelly tells her students that they are now doctors. She presents a series of symptoms that patients are complaining of, and she asks students to work in pairs and write down what they believe was the cause of those symptoms, justifying their answers. They may use their charts. Ms. Donnelly bases these case studies on the handouts the students read and the film they watched. When students are done, she asks pairs to present and defend their choices in front of the class. While each pair is presenting, the rest of the class takes notes and then votes thumbs up or down if they agree with their classmates' diagnoses. One student facilitates the ensuing discussion.

Teacher's Intentions:

This activity promotes active student engagement and participation by creating a scenario where students must use inductive reasoning to solve real-world problems. By working in pairs, students get support as they practice the objective. During the whole class activity, students are still engaged in the lesson by being required to think critically about their peers' analyses.

The "Guided Practice" of Concepts

You'll notice in the third example above that students were not practicing a skill like conjugating verbs, performing a computation or writing a five-paragraph essay, but rather further developing their understanding of a concept. This issue of "practicing an idea" is an important one because, very often, teachers of content develop lessons in which students may be able to recall facts in the short run—but will not develop a rich understanding later on. David Perkins, an expert in cognition and instruction, cites the classic classroom question, "What are the causes of the U.S. Civil War?" as an example of how some teachers unwittingly equate textbook regurgitation with learning. When you think about it, this Civil War question may test whether or not students comprehended what they read, but not whether they understand the relationships between certain events and the war.

Here's where using Bloom's Taxonomy, students' own opinions, and some creativity can help. Perkins recommends asking students to name the one cause of the Civil War listed in the text that they think was most significant and why, which would spur students to reason through the ideas of the day. You could also share regional differences of opinion in the causes of the war, asking students to analyze the perspectives and strengths in argumentation of a newspaper editorial on the subject published in New Orleans versus another from New York. You might even organize a debate, with different groups of students defending the different interpretations. This is all to say that guided practice can mean pushing students to high levels of understanding in order to crystallize certain concepts and ideas in their minds.²⁰

Checking for Understanding Through Students' Practice of New Material

By now, you are undoubtedly noticing a pattern—"Checking for Understanding" is a critical component of every step of your lesson plan. While that is true, this theorem may be most true in the context of student practice of new material. Student practice gives you an opportunity to determine whether students have grasped the new material so that you know if you can move on to new skills or if you need to re-introduce the material or provide more opportunities for practice. Because of this, you should explicitly write or script checks for understanding into your lesson plan. Here are some of the key techniques you can use in gauging student comprehension.

- 1. Questioning** may be the most common form of informal assessment. Most teachers find themselves constantly facilitating discourse with and among their students, asking both questions with one answer ("What comes after 'kingdom' in the classification system?") and many ("Why do we classify living things?"). In many cases, good questioning serves the dual purpose of delivering instruction and checking for understanding on that instruction. Keep in mind, however, that questioning as an assessment tool has risks. You must have systems in place to ensure that you are not checking for understanding with only a few, vocal students. The next chapter, on Instructional Methods, features more information about how to craft and use questions that can give you the information you need to assess students' mastery of the objectives.
- 2. Slates.** You can quickly check your whole class' comprehension simply by giving your students tools to write down their answers and quickly hold them up to you. Some teachers use scrap paper, and others get shower board donated from their local home and garden store to create mini dry-erase boards for their students.
- 3. Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down.** A teacher calls on a student to solve a mathematics problem. After the student finishes, the teacher asks the class if the student found the correct solution. The teacher asks students to respond using "Thumbs Up/Thumbs Down" (thumb up = yes, thumb flat = not sure, thumb down = no). The teacher can then quickly scan the room, getting a sense for where everyone stands relative to the skill. This method is less reliable than having every student answer the question, but it can serve as a quick thermometer reading of the class. This method is frequently misused as a form of summative assessment, so proceed with caution.

I constantly check for students' understanding of material – through journals about things we're doing in class, large and small group Q&A sessions, and individual mini-chats that last anywhere from 10 seconds to 2 minutes at students' desks. I find it imperative to check in with students individually before I can assume that everyone has mastered a concept or objective.

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²⁰ Perkins, David. *Smart Schools: Better Thinking and Learning for Every Child*. New York: The Free Press, 1992.

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4. **“Fist to Five.”** Many teachers find it helpful to have a nonverbal signal system with more gradations than a system like “thumbs up/thumbs down.” They practice with their students the “fist to five” process, by which students are told to hold up five fingers if they strongly agree, no fingers if they strongly disagree, and any number in between to show intermediate levels of agreement. This is also a useful process when you are providing students with multiple-choice answers.
5. **Sign language.** Some teachers will ask students to sign the first letter of the answer to a oral multiple-choice question. Not only do students on almost any level love to learn the alphabet in sign language, but once your students know the alphabet you have opened up a whole world of possibilities for nonverbal, immediate checking for understanding. This is a means of getting every single student in the room involved in answering each question. (Just beware that your students really know their Sign Language before using this regularly; otherwise, you will not know if your students are unsure about your objective, or if they are simply making a Sign Language mistake.) Many elementary teachers find this to be an excellent way to teach spelling, as well. There is a “Guide to the American Sign Language Alphabet” in the **Instructional Planning & Delivery Toolkit** (p. 61), which can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFA.Net. ✖

I relied on “thumbs up” checks for understanding too much. I soon realized that students would give me a “thumbs up” even if they didn’t get it. That was not good. I began to use dry erase boards and checks for understanding where students had to actually SHOW me their work.

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6. **Signal cards.** Some teachers use analogous systems that utilize different colored or labeled (e.g., “yes” and “no”) note cards. It becomes second nature for students to hold up a note card to answer each question. After introducing new material, a quick “true/false” showdown can help you gauge if students are grasping your objective.
7. **Observations and anecdotal records.** A subtler form of formative assessment, teachers who determine one or two variables to observe (a specific skill, work habits at a learning center) and track student strengths and weaknesses with a clipboard or notebook.

Student practice can be an excellent time to collect information on where both individual students and the class as a whole stand against an objective. Developing methods to ensure constant student participation also keeps everyone engaged and thinking about the lesson, rather than being idle.

IV. Independent Practice

The Independent Practice phase occurs when students refine their skills, without teacher assistance, and can be the time when students demonstrate their understanding of the objective through completing a formative assessment. If a friend had showed you how to ride a bike (Introduction to New Material) and then held it steady as you pedaled (Guided Practice), now is the time for you to ride on your own. Independent Practice may involve solving problems, answering questions, demonstrating a skill, completing a “performance task” (an experiment, role-play, debate, report, song, poem, skit, project) or applying the knowledge in some new way (such as developing a new analogy or metaphor) to demonstrate mastery. By the end of Independent Practice, students should be able to achieve the objective that you set at the beginning of the period. For students who easily achieve the objective or for those who continue to struggle, extension activities and homework assignments are two ways to get students to further engage with the material they learned. If you use Independent Practice as your way of assessing

mastery of the objective, then you should begin planning at this step (after first developing your vision for student learning). As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, lesson planning, like all planning, should start at the end – with the outcome or goal you want students to achieve. Keeping this in mind, here are the key guidelines for an effective independent practice:

- **Be clear about and model behavioral expectations.** Just like the other phases of the lesson plan cycle, it is crucial to specify exactly how you want students to behave.
- **The activity should focus on the achievement of the objective.** By the time you have reached the Independent Practice of your lesson, your students should be performing on the rung of Bloom's Taxonomy stated in your objective. If your objective states that, by the end of the lesson, students should be able to label the 50 states on a map, the Independent Practice should ask students to do just that. Having students sing a song about the 50 states may be fun, but a student has not mastered the intended objective by virtue of performing it (unless, of course, the corresponding choreography has students pointing to each state on an unlabeled map as they sing).

A related pitfall occurs when activities give students an unintended focus. If an objective requires students to describe the California Gold Rush's effect on migration, having students make a sugar-cube model of Sutter's Mill forces students to concentrate on gluing a structure together, rather than developing an understanding of America's expansion. Sometimes, teachers will plan out Independent Practice activities that focus on the objective but require several days to complete. You will want to weigh the importance of completing certain projects with the urgency of meeting your objectives.

Lastly, just like in guided practice, make sure that your activity aligns with **all parts** of the objective. If your objective includes more than one part, then your practice should cover the entire objective, not just one section. For example, if the objective is to outline the main events of the California Gold Rush **and** describe its effect on migration, the assessment should require students to do both actions (outline events and describe the effect). Only having students produce a timeline of the Gold Rush would not tell you whether students have mastered the second part of the objective.

In order to check for ALL students' understanding, I spent a lot of time during independent practice walking around the room with a clipboard to find out which students were demonstrating mastery and which were not. I would take notes on students' work, ask them to explain how they were approaching the work and why, and reteach individuals or small groups as needed.

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- **All students should have to master the skill or knowledge independently.** Not only should the activity reflect achievement of the entire objective, but every student should be responsible for demonstrating mastery. Often teachers will plan group activities that assign roles to different students for different tasks. There are legitimate reasons for doing so, but by the end of the lesson, every student should have completed a task or series of questions that measures his or her level of achievement on the lesson objective. Only by doing this will you be able to know whether all students truly understand or are able to do what the objective requires. The teacher may collect the Independent Practice and provide feedback on it.

Like guided practice, your independent practice should give students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding. Include more than one example or problem in your practice, especially if it serves as your formative assessment. This will provide you with a more complete view of whether your students truly have mastered the material.

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- **Provide opportunity for extension.** Students work at different paces. Preparing extra opportunities for students to go beyond the intended objective – finding analytic, creative or practical applications for the material – will be excellent practice and serve to allow students to discover deeper meaning to their learning. Planning homework in addition to, not instead of, Independent Practice will also allow students to retain and extend their newly gained knowledge. You will find suggestions to frequently asked questions about homework later in this section.

Three Examples of Independent Practice

Notice how these examples of Independent Practice focus on allowing each student to demonstrate their mastery of the objective, clearly state expectations, and provide an opportunity for extension.

Objective #1 (Elementary ESL): *Students will be able to use regular comparatives correctly in an oral presentation.*

Independent Practice:

On their own, students are to think of two famous people and develop five different comparisons between them. These comparisons must include adjectives that have a variety of syllables. For homework, students are to prepare a brief presentation on their celebrities (they can bring in pictures, to provide a visual reference for the comparison), explaining how they used the comparatives correctly by referring to the syllable rules. As an extension, students can complete a journal activity that asks them if they enjoy being compared to others.

Teacher's Intentions:

This assignment incorporates student interests with the achievement of the objective, asking every student to use regular comparatives correctly. The teacher thought through the assignment and realized that students could choose very simple adjectives and therefore added the stipulation about a variety of syllables. Ms. Cate also taps into the evaluative cognitive domain by asking students to weigh the pros and cons of comparison.

Objective #2 (6th grade): *SWBAT write a bibliographic entry for a book.*

Independent Practice:

Students are to trade reading books with a neighbor, find the appropriate information and write the bibliographic entry for that book on the bottom of their page. They are then to check their answers with their neighbor. For homework, students are to make a bibliography of half of the books they are using for their upcoming research project, making sure to put the books in alphabetical order by author's last name. Ms. Cartwright also provides a guide for making bibliography entries with magazine articles for those who completed research using periodicals.

Teacher's Intentions:

By this point in the lesson, students are locating and recording bibliographic entries on their own, therefore achieving the objective. Students can verify their accuracy with their neighbor, who had already written down the bibliographic entry for the book during the Guided Practice. This activity has extension possibilities through a varied and more complex task that is relevant to a larger assignment that students are working on: their research project.

Objective #3 (10th grade biology): *SWBAT describe the biological risks of drug use.*

Independent Practice:

Students are to create "Say No to Drugs" posters, with a series of pictures depicting the gradual debilitation of three different bodily organs through smoking, alcohol or drugs. Ms. Donnelly distributes a rubric, noting that students will be evaluated by the extent to which they detail the biological processes at work. Students may begin their posters during class, but they are to finish them for homework. As an extension, students can strategize where the class could hang these posters for maximum effect.

Teacher's Intentions:

The creation of a poster that describes the biological risks of drug use is an achievement of the objective. The teacher ensures that students focus on the substance, rather than the style, of the poster by providing a rubric for the assignment. Ms. Donnelly plans a practical extension to the assignment by asking students to consider the most effective forum for persuading peers to "just say no."

The Bottom Line – Reaching the Objective

While there are many ways to structure and approach the Independent Practice, the main focus should be on having students demonstrate their mastery of the objective. By being clear about behavioral expectations, focusing activities on the objective, ensuring that all students are participating, and providing opportunity for extension and extra practice, your students will be much more likely to achieve your goals for them.

Effective Lesson Timing

As you plan your lesson, it is extremely important to reflect on the time you allot for each step of lesson cycle. Without carefully planning your lesson pacing your class will be less likely to meet the lesson's objective. At a basic level, your pacing should allow your class to complete all parts of the lesson in the time available. To be truly effective, however, your lesson pacing should **support student learning**. Again, this means that you should allot the majority of instructional time to the activities that best promote student mastery of the objective. As previously discussed, practice is the most important part of a lesson for allowing students to internalize and master the key points. Therefore, effective lessons almost always allocate the most time to guided and independent practice—the place where students demonstrate and further develop their understanding of what you are teaching.

While this previous point may seem obvious, many new teachers actually struggle to include the appropriate amount of practice in their lessons. Instead, they often schedule, and then spend, too much time engaging students and presenting new material and fail to get to all parts of their guided and independent practice. This common error does not support student learning because students are not given enough opportunity to develop their understanding with teacher support and demonstrate what they know and what they need help with. While the Opening and Introduction to New Material sections are clearly important, **they should not come at the expense of practice and assessment**. Make sure that your lesson plan prioritizes what is most important by scheduling ample time for guided and independent practice.

You will notice that the “Five-Step Lesson Plan Framework” in the **Instructional Planning & Delivery Toolkit** (p. 51; this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet) ✖ has space for you to write how many minutes each section of your lesson should take. Don't forget to write in your time estimates as you plan and think about what lesson pacing will best support student learning.

In addition to having pacing that supports student learning, the best lessons also allow for flexible adjustments to be made during the execution of the lesson. This means that, when possible, your plans should allow space for re-teaching material if you see that some students are struggling, and conversely, extending the lesson content for students who quickly master the objective and need something more challenging. Creating a lesson with pacing that allows for real-time adjustments is an advanced skill and can be difficult, especially for new teachers. Just remember that you should think about what to do if your instruction is not meeting the needs for all of your students.

Knowing When You Can and Cannot Move On

When you are finishing up an independent activity or assessing student understanding, you will likely find one of several things:

- **You've run out of time.** That bell can sneak up on you. Avoid this at all costs by choosing manageable objectives, giving students ample time for practice, using a stopwatch to keep your class on task, and even scheduling in a moment for questions and announcements after your lesson closing. Yet if you find time running short – don't press on. It is better to know that your class has made measurable progress toward a less rigorous objective than rushing

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to finish, simply to say you've "covered" material. Naturally, you will need to adjust your planned objective for the next day's lesson, given that you did not meet your original goal. Of course, if your students are really struggling, you may need to expand the amount of time you spend with them by meeting after school.

- **You still have a great deal of time.** If you find you have *more* time than you need in a given period, don't forget Bloom's taxonomy. Keep challenging your students and ask more complex questions. If you find yourself regularly allowing students to have "study hall" instead of using class time to move students as far as you can, step back and reflect on your lessons. You may be underestimating what your students can accomplish in a given period, or you may not be doing an adequate job of checking for understanding, when more could be necessary. Some teachers also maintain a series of "sponge activities," mind benders, riddles, and intellectual puzzles used to sop up three or four minutes left over in a period, after ensuring that their students have mastered the objective. Other teachers review the material of previous lessons to keep old objectives fresh in the minds of their students.
- **The majority of students do not yet grasp the material.** Sometimes formative assessment results tell us information we do not want to hear. Not only will we share our students' disappointment if they have not mastered certain objectives, but poor assessment results also reflect directly on our success as teachers. When a significant number of your students perform poorly on an assessment, you should evaluate to what degree this reflects your effectiveness in teaching that specific lesson. You should consider variables such as whether the assessment tool accurately measured student performance, whether you utilized effective instructional strategies, and whether students were focused on and invested in achieving the lesson objective or completing the assessment. When a few students perform poorly on an assessment or independent learning activity, and you have determined that a poorly designed assessment is not the cause, you may need to develop specific instructional strategies to re-teach those students separately.

In either scenario, you may need to step back and reflect on why the instructional strategies you implemented were not effective in ensuring that your students learned the material. Perhaps your Introduction to New Material was rushed, for instance, or you did not schedule enough time for students to engage in guided practice. In preparing to re-teach, you may first want to conduct smaller, more specific assessments to determine exactly where in the lesson the students first fell behind in order to determine how to best focus your re-teaching. In some cases, your students may generally understand the new material, but may simply need more practice. In such situations, you may want to provide students with more opportunities for guided and then independent practice.

- **The majority of your students do grasp the material.** If students *have* achieved the objective, you should proceed to the next objective in your sequence. Avoid the trap of reviewing material simply because the students are "enjoying" the topic or because you think one more "fun activity" should be included before you move on. Constantly push students towards your end goal.

What do you do if most of your students have not mastered the objective while some of your students have? This is one of the many difficult dilemmas of teaching: you need to meet the needs of both sets of students. While you are reinforcing the skills with the majority of the class, you might assign an extension project to the students who have already achieved the objective. If the majority of your students do understand the objective, but a few students do not, you also need to meet the needs of both groups.

You might arrange a time before or after school to work individually with the small group of students so that they don't get farther behind when you continue on in class with a new objective.

Teaching to a variety of student levels (known as "differentiated instruction") is an extremely challenging task. You will learn more strategies for differentiating your instruction in Chapter Eight. The mastery of this teaching technique is one that takes time, practice, reflection, and observation of experienced teachers.

Frequently Asked Questions About Homework

Beginning teachers often wonder how to deal with the question of homework. Some of the suggestions below are based on research in *Classroom Instruction that Works*.²¹

Q: *Should I give any?*

A: While there is no quantitative link between homework and improved test scores in elementary school, researchers recommend assigning a moderate amount of homework every night (no more than a half hour) to help young children develop study habits and foster the idea that learning needs to take place at home as well as school. Researchers did find that, by high school, the more homework students do, the better their achievement. Students of all ages should be reading at home regularly.

Q: *What's an appropriate homework assignment?*

A: There are two common purposes: (a) practice, (b) preparation or elaboration. When homework is assigned for practice, such as solving one-variable equations, students should already be very comfortable with the task; otherwise, students may make and reinforce errors. When homework is used to preview or extend a lesson – such as a journal entry about a reading assignment – it is often more effective to create an assignment that will allow students to explore their own interests and ideas.

Q: *How do I get students to do it?*

A: Explain how homework will help your students, be clear about your expectations, and get parents on board to make homework-completion a routine. Establish and communicate a homework policy that articulates the role of homework, the amount expected, the consequences for not completing homework, and the types of parental involvement you desire. Give advice to parents, such as providing a consistent, organized place to complete it, as well as a consistent schedule. When using homework for practice, have students keep track of their own speed and accuracy to see the tangible results of their efforts.

Q: *Do I have to grade every homework assignment?*

A: It is not necessary to grade every single homework assignment. That said, it is important to develop a system that allows students to get feedback on their work and enables you to gauge student understanding of objectives. Some teachers use the review of some homework problems as an element of their lesson opening, with students grading their own work. Other teachers write comments on homework and use a check-plus, check, check-minus system, which they use for parent conferences and report card effort grades. These teachers may have their students put their homework in a portfolio and check it regularly, rather than daily. A variation on this strategy would be to collect homework daily and examine a fraction of the problems from each child to get a snapshot of the classroom's understanding and provide a bit of feedback to everyone.

²¹ Marzano, Robert. *Classroom Instruction That Works*. Alexandria, Va.: ASCD, 2001.

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V. The Closing – Stressing Connections and Checking for Understanding

The last component of an effective lesson plan is the lesson closing. This final stage of your lesson (1) reinforces the lesson objective, and (2) provides an opportunity to check for student understanding. New teachers often underestimate the value of the lesson closing. Lesson closings will make your teaching more effective by crystallizing students' understanding of each lesson's objective and by keeping you informed of students' progress toward your academic goals.

Unfortunately, most of us have probably not witnessed many effective lesson closings. All too often, teachers fail to reserve enough time to effectively close a lesson. Since it is easy to feel rushed or run out of time at the end of the lesson, it is crucial that you explicitly set time aside for the closure. Teachers might set a timer or ask students to remind them when to transition into the lesson closing.

It's important to mix up how you close a lesson, but to date I have found nothing that fulfills the purpose of a closing better than walking over to the objective on the board at the end of class and asking for volunteers to do exactly what it says.

Rob LoPiccolo, South Louisiana '99
Executive Director, The Collaborative

An effective lesson closing does not take much time. In fact, your closing should usually take between five and ten minutes. An effective closing, at a minimum, does the following:

- (1) Reemphasizes and clarifies the objective that the students have learned.
- (2) Reemphasizes the significance of that objective.
- (3) Assesses students' mastery of—or progress toward—that objective (if not done earlier).

Consider the following example of how a teacher met these objectives through questioning.

What did students learn today?

Teacher: What is one specific thing that we did today?

Student A: We wrote letters.

Teacher: Yes. What type of letters specifically?

Student B: Ones where we try to convince people to do something.

Teacher: Yes, that's a good way to put it in your own words – does anyone recall the common name for that type of letter?

Student C: Persuasive?

Teacher: Exactly!

What is the significance of what the students learned today?

Teacher: Today we expanded our understanding of different types of letters. What type of letters had we developed in the past?

Student D: Narrative.

Teacher: And why do you think it was important to expand our understanding and learn how to write persuasive letters?

Student E: Well, sometimes you write to different people, like sometimes you write to your grandparents to say hello and sometimes you write to an important person in the government.

Teacher: True, but couldn't you write to them in the same way?

Student F: No, you need to know how to write different letters for different audiences, and sometimes you are writing to them for different reasons.

What progress did students make toward the objective?

Teacher: Take a moment to write down the characteristics of good persuasive writing that are different from the characteristics we have discussed about narrative writing. I will call on individual students to share their characteristics – listen carefully to what your classmates say. If you also wrote down that characteristic, I want you to stand up.

Closing Up the Sample Lessons

For more guidance regarding particular strategies to stress connections and check for understanding at the end of a lesson, see the **Instructional Planning & Delivery Toolkit** (pp. 62-62: “Methods for Closing a Lesson”); this Toolkit can be found online at the Resource Exchange on TFANet. ✕

For now, let’s refer back to our sample lessons for the final time and consider their closings in light of the points that should be covered in an effective lesson closing.

Objective #1 (Elementary ESL): *Students will be able to use regular comparatives correctly in an oral presentation.*

Closing:

Before students leave for lunch, Ms. Cate assesses each student’s knowledge of the syllable and suffix rules by using five adjective flashcards and asking students to write down the proper comparative forms on an exit slip. She explains that tomorrow’s lesson will feature a set of comparative adjectives that are exceptions to the rules: the words good and bad. Ms. Cate collects the exit slips as student file out.

Teacher’s Intentions:

By using exit slips, the teacher is taking one final opportunity to assess and strengthen each student’s mastery of the lesson objective. Ms. Cate also connects this lesson to future learning, previewing the next day’s objective.

Objective #2 (6th grade): *SWBAT write a bibliographic entry for a book.*

Closing:

Ms. Cartwright asks her students to complete their daily Lesson Checkup, which includes an in-their-own-words summary of what they have learned and an explanation of why the lesson is important. The teacher reviews these Checkups regularly.

Teacher’s Intentions:

The daily Lesson Checkup activity reinforces the key ideas of the lesson and further communicates its relevance. It provides a snapshot of student understanding for the teacher.

Objective #3 (10th grade biology): *SWBAT describe the biological risks of drug use.*

Closing:

Before students leave, Ms. Donnelly will ask students to write a paragraph reflection about the danger that scares them most about taking drugs.

Teacher’s Intentions:

This final activity requires students to demonstrate their understanding of the objective once more. It also zeroes in on the real-world importance of the day’s lesson and serves as a link between the curriculum and students’ thoughts and feelings.

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The Importance of Assessing Student Mastery

If you haven't already administered a formative assessment of student understanding, the lesson closing needs to serve this purpose. By carefully crafting your lesson assessment, you should be able to gauge the effectiveness of a lesson and the degree to which students have achieved all parts of the objective. Remember to give your students multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding, if possible. Without a formative assessment of student understanding, it is entirely possible that you could transition into new material before students have a strong mastery of the current subject matter. Always administer a lesson assessment by the end of the lesson to determine what your class knows and what it needs additional help in understanding.

Conclusion and Key Concepts

Every day you will have the responsibility and opportunity to determine how best to ensure that your students are meeting the high expectations you have for them. Not every lesson will be uniquely creative, not every lesson will involve small group work, and not every lesson will involve a diverse array of activities, but every lesson should be carefully designed and implemented to ensure that your students learn, understand, and retain the skills and knowledge defined in the goals you have set. When you are planning your lessons, you must ask the following fundamental question: ***What must occur in this lesson to ensure students successfully meet the objectives in the most effective and efficient way possible?***

Consider that question as you outline the opening, as you plan the Introduction to New Material, as you think through the student practice, as you develop the lesson closing, as you integrate strategies to constantly assess students through the course of the lesson, and as you consider transitions and overall pacing of your lesson. Remember that each stage of a lesson has a specific purpose, and that a coherent and effective lesson is the result of carefully planning all parts.

To summarize, all lesson plans should be built around a student-learning-centered, measurable, and rigorous objective that you derive from standards-aligned learning goals. One of the most common, effective lesson plans has five stages:

(1) The Lesson Opening. The lesson opening should communicate:

- What is about to happen
- Why it is important for it to happen
- How it relates to what has been done previously
- How it is going to happen

It should also:

- Engage students and capture their interest
- Provide and model clear expectations for student behavior (if necessary).

Remember that a component of opening the lesson is assessing student understanding by asking students to summarize expectations and allowing students to ask clarifying questions.

(2) The Introduction to New Material. During this phase, you should:

- Emphasize and reiterate key points instead of drowning students in details
- Build in activities that allow students to "take in" the information
- Use multiple approaches, such as using different senses and different angles to get at information and make it accessible
- Be mindful of potential misunderstandings
- Make purposeful choices when making instructional delivery decisions

(3) The Guided Practice of New Material. During this phase, you should:

- Be clear about and model behavioral expectations
- Use multiple opportunities for practice
- Scaffold practice exercises from easy to hard
- Ensure that all students have an opportunity to practice (consider both choral responses and individual responses)
- Monitor and correct student performance

(4) The Independent Practice. During this phase, you should:

- Be clear about and model behavioral expectations
- Ensure that the activity reflects the achievement of the objective
- Ensure that all students can demonstrate the skill or knowledge independently
- Provide opportunity for extension

You can choose to administer a formative assessment to determine student mastery of the objective during the Independent Practice.

(5) The Lesson Closing. Your 5-10 min. closing should address the following questions:

- What did we learn today?
- What was the significance of what we learned?
- Can students demonstrate achievement of or progress towards the objective (if you haven't assessed them already)?

Remember to plan your lesson pacing so that it supports student learning – allocate sufficient time to guided and independent practice.

You are now familiar with the pieces of the Five-Step Lesson Plan—a process for helping students acquire knowledge and skills they did not have before entering the classroom. In the next two chapters, you will learn the different strategies that can serve to introduce new material and help students practice, as well as the factors involved in choosing between these strategies.