

Lesson Planning, Part III: Making Effective Instructional Choices

Chapter Seven

Introduction

In the last chapter, you became acquainted with a host of grouping strategies and instructional methods. But given a particular objective, how will you decide what method of instructional delivery you will use and how to group your students?

Some degree of oversimplification is necessary to answer this question, given the infinite number of factors that might play into a teacher's decision to choose one combination of grouping and instructional strategy over another. (For example, decisions about grouping and instructional strategies could be informed by everything from the shape of the classroom to a teacher's headache.) However, we can highlight here the most common considerations for teachers as they decide how to introduce new material in order to most effectively meet their objective. Among the key factors to consider are:

- (1) Student Needs and Interests
 - a. Developmental Levels
 - b. Learning Modalities
 - c. Student Interests
- (2) The Objective's Cognitive Level
- (3) The Nature of the Content
- (4) The Time and Resources Available

Weighing these considerations is an individual process. This chapter will introduce you to all of these factors and show you how two teachers, using the same objective, made different decisions using these factors to ensure student mastery of the objective.

Two Example Lesson Plans

To provide a concrete context for the idea of making effective instructional choices, we will use the following two examples of approaches to teaching students how to write descriptive paragraphs. We will use these examples throughout this chapter to discuss how to make effective instructional choices. Please note that we are not suggesting that one of these lesson plans is necessarily better than the other, as both lessons have strengths and weaknesses.

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<p>Objective: Students will be able to identify the characteristics of a descriptive paragraph and apply these characteristics in their own paragraph.</p>		
Beginning	<p>Lesson A "Learning from Model" Lesson</p>	<p>Lesson B "Cut-Up Poster" Lesson</p>
	<p>Lesson Opening: The teacher tells students that she finished a great book last night that everyone should read. She asks if anyone would like to read it. When someone asks what the book is about, the teacher segues into the day's lesson: how to write a descriptive paragraph, explaining that in order to get someone to understand the way you have seen or felt something, you need to know how to describe it effectively. The teacher tells the class that they will first discuss the characteristics of a descriptive paragraph, and then they will work with a partner to write a descriptive paragraph on a topic of their choice. The teacher asks a student to repeat back the agenda.</p>	<p>Lesson Opening: The teacher cuts up a huge poster of a garden into small squares and begins the class by distributing one square to each student. The teacher tells his students that later in the period, students will write a paragraph about their square. He explains that the next day he is going to tape up all the squares on the walls around the classroom. After carefully reading someone else's paragraph to him or herself, each student will try to determine which square their classmate wrote about. The teacher then asks the class to infer what will be the purpose of this activity, guiding them to the objective.</p>
Middle	<p>Introduction to New Material: The teacher writes the characteristics of a descriptive paragraph on the board, and then the teacher and students discuss each of the characteristics that she has enumerated.</p>	<p>Introduction to New Material: Before they write their paragraphs about their poster square, the teacher asks students what they think will ensure that their paragraph can be effectively matched with their picture. Through brainstorming responses to this question, the class generates criteria for what makes a good descriptive paragraph.</p>
	<p>Guided Practice: The teacher provides two paragraphs as examples (one a descriptive paragraph and one not). As a whole group, the class compares and contrasts the paragraphs, discussing which one meets the criteria for a descriptive paragraph and which does not.</p>	<p>Guided Practice: The teacher displays three different squares from the poster. After reading a very explicit and detailed prepared paragraph, he asks students to guess which square was being described. He then asks volunteers to point out how the sample followed the criteria for an excellent descriptive paragraph.</p>
	<p>Independent Practice: The students work with a partner to write a paragraph on a topic of their choice. The teacher asks two students to read their paragraphs and asks other students to explain which criteria they heard.</p>	<p>Independent Practice: Students then use these criteria to write their own paragraphs about their square of poster. The next day they will continue this student practice by reading a peer's paragraph and matching the paragraph to a picture. They will then articulate to the rest of the class which of the criteria their classmate employed.</p>
End	<p>Lesson Closing: As a class, they review the criteria for descriptive paragraphs. The teacher then collects each paragraph and returns them the next day with written feedback on whether their writing demonstrates the characteristics of a good descriptive paragraph.</p>	<p>Lesson Closing: At the end of the period, the teacher quickly reminds them what will happen the next day and tells them to finish their paragraph for homework if they haven't already.</p>

(1) Student Needs and Interests

As you are planning a lesson, you will no doubt be wondering, “How will the students respond to this?” “How will my lesson be received?” “Will my students engage with the material?” Clearly, students’ engagement with and interest in the material you are introducing is paramount to their academic success. And, it is common sense that a successful teacher must “meet the students where they are,” bringing the material to them in a way that is conducive to *their* learning.

But what does that actually mean? How does one know how students will best receive new skills and ideas?

A full answer to that question, of course, is more than any book or resource can cover. Students receive information and learn in an infinite number of ways. Pedagogical research has, however, developed several paradigms through which to view student learning that will greatly enhance your ability to make purposeful instructional choices as you contemplate the most efficacious means of “Introducing New Material.” In this section, we will delve into three of those paradigms for considering “Student Needs and Interests”—students’ developmental levels, students’ learning modalities, and (simply enough) students’ interests.

a. Developmental levels

A student’s developmental level plays a significant role in how the student perceives information, relates to others, and manages the working of his or her body. Depending on their developmental stage, students may respond better to certain ways of approaching material. They may or may not have the physical, cognitive, or emotional capacity to complete certain tasks effectively at any particular time, thus requiring you to adjust your approach. For example, children ages 6-8 lack strong near-vision, making it important to provide them with large print, and making copying from the board difficult. Nine to 11-year-olds tend to be pre-occupied with the fear of being seen as different from their peers, making it important for the teacher to be sensitive to singling students out. By understanding your students’ physical, cognitive, social, and emotional stages of development, you will be able to more accurately gauge the appropriate level and type of instructional activities. A chapter in the *Learning Theory* course is devoted to describing the details and implications of developmental levels, so we will not repeat ourselves here.

b. Learning modalities

Consider what you know about how you best learn information. For example, are you someone who needs to see something written down in order to remember it? Do you absorb things best when you hear them? Or do you learn best by doing? If you tend to rely more on one of these modalities to learn effectively, it can be frustrating to be in a class where the teacher only uses the other.

As your *Learning Theory* text explains, the form, or modality, in which information is packaged and presented impacts learning, as different students learn and retain information differently. The most commonly referenced modalities or learning styles are sensory learning styles, i.e., visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic. Tactile learners learn most effectively if they are using their hands to touch materials that are helping them learn. Kinesthetic learners learn new information most effectively when the new material is associated with active participation or movement. Sometimes, tactile and kinesthetic learning are treated as variations of the same sensory modality.

In case you need a quick refresher of how these modalities play out in the classroom, consider the following examples of ways teachers might address the needs of these various learners.

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Visual Learners

Visual learners learn best from what they see. Therefore, as you are lesson planning, you should keep in mind that some of your students will learn most easily from visual tools such as:

- diagrams, photographs, charts, graphs, and/or maps
- visually organized notes on overheads
- guided imagery or visualization
- opportunities to take notes or highlight key ideas
- flash cards
- color coded notes to help reveal the categorization of information
- slide shows or movies
- mind maps, acronyms
- for visual learners, still time can be important, as these students may be more distracted than other students by movement or action

Auditory Learners

Auditory learners learn best from hearing spoken words, participating in discussions and explaining things to others. The following are tools you might use in your lesson planning to ensure that you are reaching those students who learn best this way:

- lectures, oral instruction
- reading aloud
- rhythmic sounds and songs
- group discussions
- for auditory learners, quiet time can be important, as these learners may be easily distracted by noise
- auditory tapes
- repeating ideas orally, reciting
- poems, rhymes, word association
- music, lyrics

Tactile Learners

Tactile learners need to experience the world through touch. Many teachers often overlook this learning modality. The following are a few means of addressing these students' unique learning style:

- experiments/labs
- props, physical examples
- making models, dioramas
- textured manipulatives, such as sandpaper letters or foam shapes
- field trips, exhibits, tours
- manipulatives, like unit blocks
- index cards with facts to sequence

Kinesthetic Learners

Kinesthetic learners learn through experience and movement, and make the greatest academic gains when they are involved and active in a lesson. Consider the following strategies to meet these students' needs:

- opportunities for movement
- plays, acting out, role playing
- problem solving
- writing notes
- props, physical examples
- associating gestures with ideas
- experiments/labs
- games
- field trips
- making lists
- associating emotions with concepts

We must emphasize, of course, that **most students can learn in any of these modalities**. While most students learn most easily in one predominant modality, many students have a balance of learning modes, and students rarely learn best in one exclusive modality. The key is to avoid relying too heavily on any one modality (perhaps the one with which you are most comfortable), as your students will invariably represent a range of learning styles. You could, for instance, use a variety of modalities to teach fractions. You might:

- Talk through a real-world example of dividing up a pizza among friends (auditory)
- Demonstrate the division of the pizza via a chalkboard diagram (visual)
- Provide students with cardboard wedges that form a circle and ask them to manipulate the pieces to divide them among different numbers of people (tactile)
- Ask student volunteers to *be* slices of a pizza pie; then separate some volunteers from the group and ask the rest of the class to determine what fraction of the whole is being represented (kinesthetic)

Although it is impossible to include every learning modality in every lesson plan, I tried to use a variety of modalities as much as possible. For example, when teaching students greetings in Spanish, we learned and sang a song about greetings, walked around the class and greeted each other while wearing neckties (for formal greetings), listened and responded to a tape of other teachers in the school saying greetings in Spanish, and read cartoons that depict people greeting each other. Over a few lessons, I knew I met the learning modalities of all of my students, and their mastery of the material was usually evident.

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In this way, students have several opportunities to grasp the meaning of fractions, and will most likely find it easier to apply the new knowledge since they have already interacted with it in several different forms.

While it is important to always consider students' learning modalities as you plan, that consideration occurs in the context of the other factors you must consider in making the instructional choices that are going to most effectively reach your objective. You want to ensure you are incorporating a variety of modalities in your lessons, but you shouldn't necessarily try to incorporate every modality into every single lesson. Students need to practice engaging with material in ways that are not necessarily their strengths.

c. Student Interests

A third approach to considering how your lesson plan will be received is through the lens of student interests. We are using the word "interest" here in the broadest of ways. Your students have interests related to content, the social dynamics of grouping strategies, and the liveliness and pace of the instruction. All of those factors should be percolating in your mind as you choose among instructional strategies.

Successful teachers see students' interests as opportunities, not burdens. In fact, you should invest time in knowing what your students' interests are so that you can leverage those interests into academic gains for your students. For example, you may find that the Olympics fascinate the majority of your students. In that case, you might teach an Olympics unit (just think of all the great ways to meet your objectives) in small groups representing countries that the students have researched and written about.

Students have process-related interests as well that can be used by a teacher to enhance student learning. For example, in your first quarterly feedback form from students, you might receive thirty

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variations on a theme: “Ms. Smith, you talk too much.” While you certainly have to filter that kind of feedback through your best judgment as a teacher, you may also need to consider using fewer whole-group lectures and injecting more hands-on learning opportunities into your classroom. Similarly, you might realize that, for whatever reason, students perform particularly well in response to a particular instructional strategy. For example, you might find that your students are highly motivated by the opportunity to get in front of the class and present their knowledge, and they work together in small groups very well. You might consider using that strategy more often.

The first set of considerations as you think about which grouping strategy and instructional tool you use to introduce new material are derived from your students themselves. Students’ developmental levels, learning styles, and interests (which we lump together here under the heading “Student Needs and Interests”) are of paramount importance as you plan your lesson and play a major part in whether an instructional strategy will effectively move your class toward your academic goals.

(2) The Objective’s Cognitive Level

The second general class of considerations to weigh as you try to decide among the many grouping and instructional strategies comes from the objective that you are teaching. The cognitive level of the objective being taught (which might be closely tied to the “nature of the content” below) should influence your choices regarding how you organize your students and what methods are used to present information. For example:

- For objectives that involve lower level thinking skills such as knowledge and comprehension (see discussion of Bloom’s Taxonomy, Chapter Two), the teacher should direct, tell, and show the new material. In this situation, **whole group instruction** might be most appropriate.
- For somewhat higher cognitive levels such as application or analysis (for example, students will be able to illustrate the path a water molecule takes through the water cycle), you might have **students explore** the concept **individually** or in a **collaborative group** before moving to a more **teacher-led explanation**.
- If the objective points to higher-level thinking (such as synthesis or evaluation of a complex concept), it may be important to exercise more control from the beginning, opting for a less collaborative and a more directive activity, such as a **lecture** or a **teacher-guided discussion**. In this case, student practice (which is the next step in the lesson plan process) should include activities that require complex thinking, such as designing a science experiment that tests the physics theory about which they have been learning.

(3) The Nature of the Lesson Content

Some concepts and skills—because of their content—are best presented and practiced using a particular instructional strategy, such as lecture, student exploration, or questioning. At the same time, some material is most effectively received in a large group and some in a small group.

- When teaching about the effect of temperature on the solubility of salt in water, **student exploration in small groups** is probably most appropriate, given the process-based nature of the skills that you are teaching and the fact that salty water is difficult to see clearly in a whole class setting.
- When teaching about the implications of cloning, **questioning and discussion** may be the best way to lead the **whole class** to analyze the material because fostering an exchange of ideas may manifest the poles of the larger debate on the issue.

(4) The Time and Resources Available

As we discussed in Chapter Five, successful teachers think critically about how much time to devote to introducing material, and about what resources they have available or can access in order to introduce that material.

For some material, it might make sense to spend a good deal of time up front ensuring that the Introduction to New Material sets students up for success in practicing or using it. On the other hand, some topics are best internalized through practice and might not require lengthy introductions. Given how much you want to accomplish in the year, it often makes sense to choose the instructional strategy that will lead to mastery in the least amount of time. For example, if you have a limited amount of time to teach the properties of water, and the lesson objective could be achieved through either a **teacher-led demonstration** to the **whole group** or **individual student research** (which typically takes longer), you might opt to lead a **demonstration** in order to move on to other objectives sooner. Regardless, always make sure that your timing decisions support the learning of your students.

Similarly, you will almost intuitively be considering the implications of what resources you have available for your instructional choices. Sometimes, for example, you will need to choose a whole group strategy because you only have one set of materials to run an experiment:

- If you want students to conduct in-class research and write about a particular aspect of Jamaican culture, yet you have only a set number of books on the topic, students probably will not be able to work individually. Instead, you might put students into **homogeneous “interest” groups** and distribute the books accordingly.
- If you are conducting an experiment on the surface tension of various liquids, and you have enough droppers and bottles for each student to work individually, you would logically have each student **perform the experiment individually**, and then perhaps **facilitate a whole-group discussion** of the results.

Two Example Lesson Plans—Examining the “Introduction to New Material”

A teacher decides how to introduce new material by choosing a combination of grouping and instructional strategies. Among the factors that inform that decision are (1) the students’ needs and interests, (2) the objective’s cognitive level, (3) the nature of the content, and (4) the time and resources available.

With this decision process in mind, let’s critically evaluate the two descriptive paragraph lesson plans that we introduced earlier. Both lessons were created to reach the same objective—the students will be able to identify the characteristics of a descriptive paragraph and incorporate these characteristics in their own writing. As you will recall, the two lessons took different paths to those objectives. The table below reconstructs some of the reasoning—for better and for worse—that may have gone into deciding how the new material would be presented:

	Lesson Plan A “Learning from Model” Lesson	Lesson Plan B “Cut Up Poster” Lesson
Introduction to New Material	The teacher explains and writes the characteristics of a descriptive paragraph on the board, and then the teacher and students discuss each of the characteristics that she has enumerated.	After opening the lesson by explaining the purpose of the cut-up squares of poster, the teacher asks students what they think will ensure that their paragraph can be effectively matched with their picture. Through brainstorming responses to this question, the class generates criteria for what makes a good descriptive paragraph.

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<p>Choices of Grouping and Instructional Strategies</p>	<p>The teacher chooses to introduce the characteristics of a descriptive paragraph to all students at the same time. This will ensure that the information presented is accurate and available to all students.</p> <p>The teacher uses a small lecture and a discussion to simultaneously deliver the information and assess the students' understanding of the material.</p>	<p>Like Teacher A, this teacher chooses whole group instruction as a means of efficiently introducing new material to all students before engaging them in individual practice, where the teacher will have a chance to assess each student's individual mastery of the objective.</p> <p>Using a student-driven brainstorming and discovery activity, the teacher ensures the students' engagement with the concepts.</p>
<p>Factors that Inform those Choices:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Needs and Interests • Objective's Cognitive Level • Nature of the Content • Time and Resources Available 	<p>This lesson may not have as varied a set of learning moitiesdal represented as Lesson B. For most students, this lesson would probably be a less engaging experience, at least initially, given its lecture-style presentation and whole-group discussion. That is not to say that this factor would necessarily counsel a teacher not to use this lesson plan. In fact, given the right circumstances (e.g. this strategy is a welcome relief to a week of small-group work, or the students are at an age where lecture is what they best respond to, etc.), this lesson plan might be a good choice. It would be important, however, that the teacher made that decision knowingly.</p> <p>In terms of the cognitive level of the instruction, this teacher focuses upon student knowledge and comprehension. If executed effectively, students will be able to name the characteristics of a descriptive paragraph (and, later on in Guided Practice, identify those characteristics in the writing of others), but it is less clear whether they will be able to or be motivated to incorporate those characteristics into their <i>own</i> writing. This "introduction to new material" therefore does not truly prepare students to achieve the <i>entire</i> objective and should probably be reconsidered.</p> <p>The teacher chooses to save time by outlining the criteria of effective descriptive paragraphs himself.</p>	<p>Both of these lessons were designed for students of similar developmental levels. However, this lesson seems more conducive to tactile and visual learners. In terms of student interest and engagement, this lesson would probably immediately engage more students. The cut-up posters create a mystery inherent in the lesson that will help maintain students' interest and learning. And, the more complex involvement for the students (thinking about the purposes of descriptive writing) might also help them maintain their focus on the day's lesson. A drawback of this approach, however, is that students may not generate all of the qualities of a descriptive paragraph out of thin air; they are given no models from which to divine their criteria.</p> <p>Although both of these lessons have the same objective (with the verb "identify"), Teacher B takes the lesson beyond the relatively basic cognitive level related to "identification" by having the students derive the characteristics of the descriptive paragraph from the picture itself. This method of introduction is geared toward a higher cognitive level (application and analysis), as students generate their own criteria for effective descriptive paragraphs by thinking through the analytical question of what will make their paragraphs identifiable. As a result, these students are likely to be better equipped and more motivated to incorporate the characteristics in their own writing, as called for in the objective.</p> <p>Given the nature of the content of the lesson, a strong sensory lesson plan seems appropriate.</p> <p>As students are generating the criteria themselves (rather than the teacher listing them upfront) this part of the introduction could take more time. Yet the teacher chose to skip the group assessment of paragraphs, assuming that students would internalize the criteria through their own practice. This method of introducing the new material requires more (but not much more) preparation of resources than Lesson A.</p>

The thought process for a teacher deciding how to structure Guided and Independent Practice of new material is analogous to the thought process described above for introducing new material. The teacher faces the same two general questions as before:

- (1) How should the students be organized during the practice time?**
- (2) What practice method should students use?**

And, once again, students' needs and interests, the cognitive level of the objective, the nature of the content, and the time and resources available are some of the key factors that will inform a teacher's decision.

Yet there are key differences in the decision-making process this time around, largely because instead of processing the information that the teacher presented, the students are now making the knowledge and skills their own. As we already know from previous chapters, there are particular methods to consider for students to practice new material—including engaging in a series of practice problems with a partner, using graphic organizers, or working on a skill at a center.

Students best internalize new material when they have the opportunity to significantly interact with it, making grouping decisions particularly important in the practice phase of the lesson plan. Whole group activities often do not allow each student to become fully involved, so extended student practice is generally more effective in small groups or individually. On the other hand, some material is most effectively practiced in a large group, such as repetition or recitation of vocabulary words or writing short responses.

If the teacher is concerned about getting accurate individual assessments of each student's understanding, having students work on their own may be preferable. Individual practice also affords fewer opportunities for off-task behavior than does small group practice. Small groups engage students in dialogue about the subject matter, and if the practice focuses on complex subject matter, students will benefit from this exposure to divergent thinking. Small group practice also develops students' skills in communicating complex concepts.

Most of these grouping considerations are common sense, and you will quickly find yourself making these judgments almost subconsciously. You will also find that the same four factors that were so important to the process of introducing new material apply to your determination of how to practice new material.

(1) Student Needs and Interests

The same factors play into how you decide to have your students practice new material, though in slightly different ways.

- You would probably find that your attempt to implement co-ed cooperative learning groups would encounter a different set of **developmental** challenges if you were teaching eighth grade than if you were teaching fourth grade.
- **Student interests** may really come into play when students practice skills on their own. The simple act of allowing students to pick a research topic within some predefined parameters is based upon a recognition that you need to leverage students' interest into learning the key skills in your unit plan.

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(2) The Objective's Cognitive Level

You should ensure that the mental rigor of student practice is aligned with the cognitive level of the objective.

- If the cognitive level of the objective involves *knowledge* and *comprehension*, simple short answer questions and more rote activities can provide effective student practice. These activities give the teacher an easy opportunity to check for student understanding of new terms or skills.
- If the cognitive level of the objective points to *application*, students need to apply their knowledge to specific scenarios, such as word problems in math or a document to edit in language arts.
- If the objective requires *synthesis* and *evaluation*, student practice should include activities that require complex thinking, such as designing a science experiment that tests the physics theory about which they have been learning.

(3) The Nature of the Content

As mentioned in connection with introducing new material, some concepts and skills, by their very nature, are best presented and practiced in particular ways.

- If your objective involves the mastery of some process (determining the area of a circle, or tying shoes, for example), your system of practice should probably involve repeated completion of that process.
- If your objective involves straight memorization of facts (the bones in the human skeleton, or multiplication tables, for example), your practice system should probably engage students in a process of repetition that will facilitate memorization.

(4) Time and Resources Available

The amount of time dedicated to student practice should be a function of the time students need to master the objective. Remember that practice is the most important part of the lesson cycle, so make sure you give students enough time to practice and internalize the content of your objectives. As you might expect, the cognitive level of the objective might also affect the amount of time that should be dedicated to student practice.

- *Knowledge* and *comprehension* activities generally only need to be of short duration. Such activities are suitable to discrete periods of class time or as homework.
- *Application* activities generally take longer, depending on their complexity.
- Complex thinking—such as that demanded by *evaluation* or *synthesis activities*—often requires think-time and usually calls for extended practice.

Again, just as with introducing new material, the types and amounts of resources you have available may also influence your choice of practice strategy.

In addition to these several factors that influence your decision about how to have your students practice new material, you should remember the value of variation. You might think of the need for variety as a fifth factor that will affect your instructional strategy decisions. You will have more engaged (and therefore more successful) students if you vary your instructional strategies.

Two Example Lesson Plans—Evaluating Methods of Guided and Independent Practice

In the same way we returned to the descriptive paragraph lessons regarding the Introduction to New Material, we can critically assess the practice methods (both Guided and Independent Practice, since the factors are identical) used in our two descriptive paragraph lesson plans:

	Lesson Plan A “Learning from Model” Lesson	Lesson Plan B “Cut Up Poster” Lesson
How the students practice new material (first guided, on their own)	<p>The teacher provides two paragraphs as examples (one a descriptive paragraph and one not). As a whole group, the class compares and contrasts the paragraphs, discussing which one meets the criteria for a descriptive paragraph and which does not.</p> <p>The students work with a partner to write a paragraph on a topic of their choice. The teacher asks a few students to read their paragraphs and asks a few other students to explain which criteria they heard.</p>	<p>The teacher displays three different squares from the poster. After reading a very explicit and detailed prepared paragraph, she asks students to guess which square was being described. She then asks volunteers to point out how the sample followed the criteria for an excellent descriptive paragraph.</p> <p>Students then use the student-generated criteria to write their own paragraphs about their square of poster. (The next day they will continue this student practice by each reading a peer’s paragraph and matching the paragraph to the picture, and then articulating to the rest of the class which of the criteria their classmate employed.)</p>
Choices of Grouping and Instructional Strategies	<p>The guided practice puts students in a whole group, allowing students to continue to benefit from the perspectives of their peers. Through an inquiry of examining example and non-example paragraphs, the teachers can provide concrete parallels between theory and practice.</p> <p>Working in pairs to write the paragraph might allow for more divergent thinking but limits the opportunity individual students have to practice. Pairs may also prevent the teacher from accurately assessing each student’s ability to incorporate the characteristics of descriptive paragraphs into their own writing. Also, by only asking a few students to share, the teacher still isn’t able to assess everyone’s achievement.</p>	<p>The guided practice is very similar to Teacher A’s approach in form. Teacher B does not include a non-example, which serves to alert students to potential pitfalls of careless writing in Teacher A’s lesson.</p> <p>By choosing to have students write descriptive paragraphs individually, the teacher provides the opportunity for each student to explore the concept and for the teacher to assess students’ writing individually. The teacher also requires each student to analyze a paragraph individually, again allowing assessment of each student’s achievement when they share their analysis with the class.</p>

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	Lesson Plan A “Learning from Model” Lesson	Lesson Plan B “Cut Up Poster” Lesson
Factors that Inform those Choices:	As mentioned before, this lesson plan does not do a particularly good job of reaching out to various students with various learning styles . However, if the students are at an advanced enough developmental level , they should be able to handle the structure of this lesson without a problem.	This lesson seems to have slightly more activity, but it does not include any components that are dramatically helpful to any particular learning modality .
• Student Needs and Interests	The fact that students are choosing their own topics is an opportunity to lever their individual interests into energy on this assignment. Moreover, the decision to use the pairing strategy would be made in the context of the teacher’s previous experiences using that technique.	The students may be more engaged, however, because there is an element of guessing in the Guided Practice <i>and</i> students know that they are writing their paragraphs for a real world reason – to enable other students to identify their portion of the poster – rather than for the sake of demonstrating their ability to write descriptive paragraphs.
• Objective’s Cognitive Level	The practice techniques of this lesson are much more aligned with the cognitive level indicated by the objective “to identify” than are the practice techniques of Lesson B.	Here students not only create their own paragraphs with a clear purpose in mind, but are also each required to analyze writing samples of their peers’ to identify the characteristics of descriptive writing. This increased mental rigor is likely to facilitate student internalization of the skill.
• Nature of the Content	Writing the paragraph is an application level activity, and the following group discussion involves analysis. However, by asking students to identify their own topic, the teacher forces students to expend energy on developing a topic in addition to creating a paragraph that’s descriptive.	The acceleration of the cognitive level being taught, however, means either that the objective was not designed ambitiously enough or that the students may not (for developmental or prerequisite-knowledge reasons) be able to meet that objective.
• Time and Resources Available	Working in pairs generally takes longer than working individually, especially for students not accustomed to group work. Depending on the advantages of this grouping strategy, the extra time may or may not be worth the investment.	This practice will probably extend into two class periods, and the teacher will need to allow more flexibility to move at the pace dictated by students, given that so much of the work is student-centered. This time allocation might be worth it given the possibility of increased student internalization of the material.

Conclusion

Consider this chapter another layer of elaboration on the skeleton of the lesson plan structure. In Chapter Five, you learned the five parts of the lesson cycle. In Chapter Six, you learned ways to fill the different parts with strategies. This chapter has served to synthesize those elements and add a bit of strategy to the choices you make when creating your plan. To review, those strategic factors are:

- (1) Student Needs and Interests
 - a. Developmental Levels
 - b. Learning Modalities
 - c. Student Interests
- (2) The Objective’s Cognitive Level
- (3) The Nature of the Content
- (4) The Time and Resources Available

You now see that choosing a particular instructional method and grouping strategy is a function of considering these factors. By considering the readiness of your students (kindergartners are not developmentally equipped to handle an independent study), their optimal learning conditions (students of all ages may need visual, as well as auditory, explanations of new material), the goals you hope to reach (giving a lecture analyzing the arguments for and against the death penalty misses a great opportunity to engage student opinions on a controversial issue) and the time and resources you have (there might not be enough copies of *The Outsiders* to do independent reading), you will go a long way in reaching objectives with your class.

The last chapter of this course sharpens these factors even further—by asking you to consider the multitude of individual student needs in your classroom and plan specific instructional methods to reach them. This is a challenging but necessary final step to make your teaching truly student-centered: differentiation.