

# Planning

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How do I plan lessons that will reach all my students?

Curriculum Units, Lesson, and Spontaneous Teaching Skills

The Twenty-One Planning Decisions

**T**his chapter is about planning lessons, the small daily packages of crafted instruction within units. (For the important teacher knowledge base about unit design, see Chapter Fifteen and the excellent work of Wiggins and McTighe, 2005, on backward planning.) Well-designed units are still only general blueprints to what a teacher will do tomorrow with the twenty-eight students in front of her. Good planning skills for daily lessons stand behind good teaching.

Instructional coaches, department chairs, and administrators often find they get more payback from planning conferences with teachers than from observations with feedback. This will be true when the teacher's growing edge is issues relating to clarity and the other areas in Part Four.

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## Curriculum Units, Lesson, and Spontaneous Teaching Skills

The centerpiece of planning is the lesson: the planned time period when students engage content through experiences that teachers have designed. A lesson plan is the detailed implementation scenario that specifies what the teacher does and what the students are expected to do during a bounded chunk of time devoted to a particular mastery objective (see Chapter Sixteen, "Objectives"). It may take more than one class period to complete a

lesson so defined. Therefore, certain elements of the lesson, like activating student current knowledge, may take place on Monday, and most of the feedback on student work may be observable on Tuesday. These two class periods as a package comprise a complete lesson on, say, the separation of powers in the U.S. government. That lesson, in turn, is part of a unit on the U.S. Constitution. The design and overall construction of the unit may be in the district curriculum guide. But the actual plan for individual lessons probably is not, and should not be, in the curriculum guide. Designing lessons and crafting student work is the teacher's job, and curriculum guides and other district materials are supposed to be helpful resources for how to do so.

Good curriculum specifies the "what" of teaching, which should include the big ideas and enduring understandings students are expected to take away from units of instruction. Curriculum documents may also specify other agreements about instructional approaches, like an agreement that students will be writing about their interpretation of mathematical ideas. But it is teachers who plan the "how" of lessons that need to be designed in advance for each day. And then during lessons, teachers make spontaneous moves that weren't planned at all, and couldn't have been, but that are drawn mindfully from their repertoires of skills like "probing a student's thinking" to understand why they're confused.

This chapter is about what skillful teachers do the night before. In their planning, they:

- Check in with the big ideas of the unit
  - Articulate the mastery objectives for themselves after digging deeply into the content
  - Decide how to communicate objectives to the students
  - Decide what evidence would demonstrate mastery of this lesson objective
  - Analyze evidence about previous student learning (perhaps yesterday's quiz or homework) so they know where to focus
  - Plan pacing and subgrouping
  - Pick materials, models, examples, stories, and cases to use
  - Anticipate confusions, especially language and vocabulary meanings, and identify requisite prior knowledge students might not have
  - Design and choose learning experiences
  - Check that learning experiences are logically linked to the intended learning
  - Decide how to collect evidence of learning during or concluding this lesson
  - Plan how students will make their thinking visible and public
  - Plan how to get students to summarize
- In addition, they may:
- Plan how to get students' minds in gear at the beginning
  - Predict how much time will be needed for each task or activity and plan other environmental variables (space, management routines) that may need to be arranged
  - Plan the effective effort strategies that may be employed or taught
  - Plan how to diversify for different learning styles
  - Plan certain key interactive moves like an opening question
  - Decide who may need assistance or extensions during the lesson and provide for it
  - Plan what extensions and challenges will be provided for students who are ready for them
  - Plan how and when to explain the homework and its connection to today's lesson

This chapter now expands on these points and looks at planning decisions a teacher could conceivably make. These steps are important for planning any class regardless of whether it's a literature discussion in AP English, second graders circulating at math learning stations, a seventh-grade earth science lab, or whole class direct instruction in the U.S. Constitution.

Some of the decisions are not applicable in certain classes. Don't get the idea that if one doesn't go through all twenty-one decisions, the planning is poor. In certain situations, some decisions above are not applicable. In primary grade literacy, for example, in a guided reading group with three first graders on book "D," there is no decision about materials. The leveled books are the materials. Checking for understanding is continuous as children read, and objectives may be slightly different for each of the three children. A teacher conducting lessons based in curricula that use inquiry models of teaching might not start by clarifying objectives for students (though they would be developed at some point later). For the first lesson or two on representative government, for example, there is no "evidence from yesterday" about how much progress students have made toward mastery (though there might be a preassessment to find out what they already know or think they know about representative government.)

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## The Twenty-One Planning Decisions

The decisions that follow are divided into two sets. The first thirteen are basic and indispensable decisions for any lesson planning. The second set of eight decisions is important too, but these topics are at a finer level of specificity. Good planning allows quite a bit of flexibility about the order in

which a teacher addresses these issues, and as we have noted, not all of them need to be addressed for certain lessons. In general, the decisions don't have to be addressed in a linear fashion in the order presented. This should reassure nonlinear thinkers who hate lists and recipes. The first five decisions, however, are so important for getting focus in one's teaching and getting student results that we are going to ask even the creative-random among you to think these through thoroughly before going on with your planning.

### Thirteen Basic, Indispensable Decisions

Plan before instruction begins with these basic decisions:

1. Check in with the curriculum, the standards you're working on, and particularly the big idea (enduring understanding) that's on the table to be sure the lesson you're planning connects explicitly to it.
2. Articulate the mastery objective of this lesson (or series of lessons) to yourself fully. Say exactly what the students will know or be able to do, or do better, at the end of the lesson. Dig into the content to examine its nuances and central ideas before arriving at this statement.
3. Plan how to communicate the objective to the students with unmistakable clarity in language they will understand. How are you going to get them clear about what they're trying to learn? Will you generate essential questions and criteria, give exemplars, or share assessments you will be using?
4. Decide what evidence you will use as confirmation of student mastery. (They may not meet it tomorrow, but having this end in mind is the fulcrum of good planning.)

5. Give careful attention to the evidence from yesterday (or . . . whenever else is relevant) about who “has it” and who doesn’t. Also look carefully at those who have it so well they’re ready for an extension or deepening activity.
  6. In light of the evidence from yesterday’s work (or from your preassessment if this is the first lesson in the series), plan the pace and grouping or subgrouping if appropriate for differentiation of instruction. This includes the size of the bite (how big an increment of learning) you will aim for in this lesson. It also includes whether you need to do some preteaching for some students and some reteaching for some students who didn’t get it yesterday. It means coming up with extensions and challenges for those who got it quickly.
  7. Pick materials, including exactly what manipulatives, pictures, diagrams, pieces of text, equipment, and media will best make the learning accessible to the students.
  8. Anticipate confusions especially about vocabulary and concepts to be used, and preteach if necessary. Anticipate misconceptions, and plan how to surface them and contradict them.
  9. Choose student learning experiences:
    - Instructional strategies you will use. . . (e.g., demonstration, modeling, thinking aloud, minilecture with graphic organizer). Pay particular attention to how you can embed reading strategies in your routines for engaging text.
    - Tasks, exercises, and activities the students will do.
    - Hooks that will engage student interest.
    - The sequence of student tasks and teacher-guided strategies within the lesson
  10. Check that doing the task will logically lead to learning the intended skill or concept.
  11. Decide when and how you will gather the evidence of student learning during or after the lesson.
  12. “Plan how students will make their thinking and understanding public” (West and Staub, 2003, p. 13; see “Making Students’ Thinking Visible” in Chapter Nine).
  13. Select a strategy for getting students cognitively active in summarizing and assimilating their new learning.
- most likely to develop the concept, skill, or understanding.
- How to preteach essential vocabulary or concepts that some student may lack.

### **Eight Implementation Detail Decisions**

Next come eight implementation decisions:

14. Decide how you will get students’ minds in gear for this lesson at the beginning, activate their prior knowledge, and find out what they already know.
15. Arrange the environmental variables (space, routines that may need to be preplanned or taught) and how much time you predict will be needed for each task or activity.
16. Choose the effective effort strategies you may explicitly teach or that you may ask students to use (e.g., student self-evaluation, use of “effective effort rubric”).
17. Decide specific interactive moves you should make (key steps in directions, key questions to ask, cues to give, connections to past learning . . .) “to make sure important ideas are being grappled with and will be highlighted and clarified” (West and Staub, 2003, p. 12).

18. Decide how to diversify for different student learning styles.
19. Decide how much support, cuing, and help students may need while doing the work, including deployment of other people who may be in the room.
20. Decide “what extensions or challenges you will provide for students who are ready for them” (West and Staub, 2003).
21. Choose homework and how and when to explain it and what it’s for.

In the next sections we comment on each of these decisions and some of the fine points in their meaning.

### The Finer Points About the Basic and Indispensable Decisions

Although most of these decisions may seem relatively straightforward, some further discussion and concrete examples may help to clarify the importance of giving each our thoughtful attention during planning.

#### Decision 1: Check In with the Curriculum, the Standards, and the Big Idea

You could do a good lesson on consonant digraphs in second grade and get away without connecting it to a big idea. The same is true with density in eighth-grade science or separation of powers in eleventh-grade U.S. history. Most of us who are veterans have taught our way through the decades without making connections to big ideas. But our students would have been better off if we had kept big ideas in mind and made explicit connections for them when appropriate.

The big idea in the second-grade lesson may be a theme we’re pursuing all year long: “You can

get tools for figuring out any word you don’t know, and this year we’re filling in our tool box so you’ll be able to sound out any word!” Perhaps in your curriculum, the word is *strategies*, and the big idea is that “we’re learning to be strategic readers.” “As readers we’re in charge, and we have lots of different strategies to reach for if we don’t know a word.” So in today’s lesson, digraphs are explicitly connected to phonic clues, a strategy different from the one the class worked on yesterday (which was reading the whole sentence and skipping the unknown word to see if that enabled the children to guess).

Another example is about how the Constitution designs separation of powers of the three branches of government into the working of our republic. Teaching how that operates and why (checks and balances) is a standard U.S. history objective. This learning (and, in fact, most other teaching points, regardless of academic discipline) becomes more compelling and more interesting to students if they see it as connected to something that’s bigger and inherently important. That’s what a big idea or enduring understanding is—something important to connect the learning to that is motivating. One possibility of a big idea for the separation of powers might be: “It takes vigilance to preserve the balance of powers our founding fathers built into the Constitution. Every few decades you can find an episode in history where an interest group tries to assert its power by strengthening one of the branches above the others. So far, we’ve managed to counter those campaigns, but it hasn’t been easy.”

A big idea like that stimulates a strong reason for students to understand the operation of separation of powers because they’re going to be asked to use it to analyze historical episodes that could have derailed the U.S. democracy and perhaps analyze current efforts to swing power to one branch.