



A great deal of your effectiveness as a teacher has to do with your ability to design and implement instruction that promotes learning. A lesson plan, which is a (more or less) detailed plan of the goals and activities for a particular class, is an important part of this process. Creating a lesson plan is when you consider how to organize and achieve some of the goals and objectives you outlined as you planned the course.

While developing lesson plans for each class may seem like an onerous burden at first, doing so is important because:

- ▲ *The process of planning each lesson forces you to reflect on what you want to accomplish in each class and how best to do so.*
- ▲ *Planning helps you control how class time is used and, as a result of reflection, use that time as productively as possible.*
- ▲ *Lesson plans can be used, with revisions and adaptations, each time you teach the class, and they can be put in your teaching portfolio, to be used when you apply for teaching positions.*

This module will outline the three main steps in lesson planning, as well as the main elements of a useful lesson plan. As you read, remember the following points:

- ▲ Your goals, objectives, teaching methods and assessment forms all come together in a lesson plan, which ideally facilitates student learning.
- ▲ An effective lesson plan applies different instructional methods to give the class variety and meet the needs of different learners.
- ▲ Once you have finished the class, you should take the time to evaluate how effective the plan was and make any additions or revisions for future use.

Before we continue, it is worth noting that lesson plans vary in degree of detail. Some instructors (typically the more experienced ones) are comfortable with a few notes scribbled on a cocktail napkin, while others carefully type and color-code each plan. As you develop experience, you will discover the system that works best for you.

### **The Preplanning Stage**

As you begin to think about your lesson plan for a particular class, ask yourself these questions:

- What are my goals for this class? Goals are your statements of what you want students to learn. Your goals will most likely be the same, or close to, many of the ones you outlined when you planned the course. You may have changed some since then, and you may have some goals that are specific to the particular class session.
- What are my objectives for this class? Objectives take goal statements to the next level of specificity. They state exactly what students should be able to do, and under what conditions (in class, on a paper, in an exam, etc.) they should learn the material. For instance, if your goal is for students to understand the causes of racism, then an objective might read: "Students will be able to explain and discuss three main causes of racism in a small group." Objectives are what you use to determine whether students are learning and meeting the goals.

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- What is your rationale for these goals and objectives? Why is this material important? What is worthwhile about the skills or knowledge you are asking students to display, and how do they fit into the larger goals and context of the course? You should state this rationale and be ready to explain it to your students.
- What content will I cover in this class? Stating the rationale will also help you decide what content needs to be conveyed. What will students need to know to meet the goals and objectives you have laid out? What content is most essential for them to understand?
- What will the students already know? While each learner will have different knowledge, you must still try to assess, at a general level, what it is students already understand or are able to do. Having done this, you are in a better position to decide where to begin your class and how to help students learn.
- What materials will I need? You may find that you need special props, overheads, or equipment to accomplish your goals. Planning well in advance will allow you to be prepared.

### Crafting a Lesson Plan

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#### Introduction

When you sit down in a classroom, are you ready to receive information immediately? Probably not. The introduction is a way to warm up students, to ease them in to the class and to give them a context for what they are about to learn. Consider doing any of the following to start:

- Provide and review an outline of what you will be doing that day. Giving a structure helps students organize their thoughts and integrate new ideas.
- Summarize the previous class if the ideas are connected to this class. Helping students recall previous knowledge gives them something to relate new ideas to.
- Present an issue related to the topic and ask students to generate a list of concerns or questions. Connecting what you will teach with questions students have or experiences they are familiar with relates the topic to their lives. This shows that what you are teaching is relevant and elicits their attention.

#### Development

Once you have the basic idea on the table, you can then begin to work with students to explain and explore the idea. This is what people often mean when they talk about teaching, or “instructional methods” – lectures, discussions, labs, collaborative learning, etc.



- Strive to engage students as much as possible in the learning process. Active learning not only retains students' attention but also helps them develop higher-level thinking skills.
- Attempt to use a variety of methods in each class and across classes. Any single method can become monotonous and may not work for all students. A variety of methods keeps their attention and enhances learning.
- Give students the chance to apply the skills you have taught or practice using the concepts. This helps them learn and gives you a chance to assess informally where you need to provide clarification and greater assistance.

### Conclusion

This is your chance to tie it all together for the students, to remind them of what you hoped they would learn and why it is important to them. Consider the following activities in conclusion:

- Ask for questions. The last few minutes of class are an excellent time to have students raise questions after having had a chance to explore the ideas on their own.
- Summarize the main points and explain how they relate to the course. Students may not always see how everything fits together. You may need to link the activities of that one class to the larger course to help them develop a conceptual understanding.
- Talk about what the next class will cover. If the following class builds on what you have just done, then foreshadow what you will be doing in the next class. Again, this shows relevance and helps students develop a conceptual understanding.
- Have students write a one-minute paper. With one or two minutes remaining in class, ask students to take out a sheet of paper and, without putting their name on it, write what they believe was the main idea of the class and one question they have about the day's content.

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### The Post-Planning Stage

Completing the class is not enough to say you are finished. How do you know that you were successful in helping students learn? Your lesson planning process should take into account the need to assess whether students learned and how effective your lesson was at promoting that learning.

This assessment does not need to be a complicated or difficult task; in fact, it can be fairly simple and informal. For instance, using part of the class to let students work on problems you have given them, or discuss issues and apply concepts, can give you a good sense of what and how much they have learned. The one-minute paper (above) or homework problems can be similarly helpful.

### Source

Center for Excellence in Teaching. (1999). **Teaching Nuggets**. Los Angeles: University of Southern California.

DH/April 2000

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### ✓ TIPS ON...

#### Designing and Using Lesson Plans

- ✓ When you plan, plan for the mundane. Remember to allow time for things like handing back papers or homework, or making announcements.
- ✓ Be flexible. Do not adhere to your plan rigidly – it is simply a roadmap. If you fail to make adjustments based on how your class is going, you will miss valuable learning opportunities.
- ✓ Have alternative plans. Things will happen in class and you will want to make adjustments on the spot. As you plan, anticipate one or two possible scenarios and be ready with alternative plans. These can help you to be flexible.
- ✓ Find the format that works for you. Each teacher is different. Once you understand the basic elements of lesson planning, you can modify the process to reflect on whatever makes you comfortable.