

Planning a lesson

OVERVIEW

You probably learned a specific lesson plan format in college - but that format is built for evaluation, not for practical lesson planning. What you actually need is a simple structure: a clear goal, a way to start, a way to teach it, and a way to end that confirms whether students learned it. That's the whole job.

PROCEDURE

1. **Write one learning target.** Finish this sentence: By the end of class, students will be able to _____. Be specific. “*Understand the Revolutionary War*” is not a target. “*Identify two causes of the Revolutionary War*” is.
2. **Plan how you will open class.** The first few minutes set the tone.
 - a. It helps to use a consistent routine that students can start without being told: a warm-up problem, a journal prompt, or quick review questions. While they work, you’re free to take attendance, check in with individual students, or finish setting up.
3. **Identify the core content.** Different places call it different things, but you’ll want to break down that core learning into parts. Ask: *What do students need to be able to know and do to meet today’s learning target?* Remember that one target taught well is better than three targets taught poorly.
4. **Choose how you will deliver the content.** This is the part where you explain, model, or demonstrate - whatever students need to understand the material. Keep it focused. It’s easy to let delivery run long and crowd out practice time.
5. **Choose how students will practice.** Plan at least one moment where every student does something with the content: solves a problem, writes a sentence, discusses with a partner. This is not filler. If you skip it or cut it short, students leave without having learned.
 - a. **Pro tip:** The strongest lessons build in multiple short practice moments instead of one long block at the end.
6. **Account for transitions.** For each shift between activities, know what you’ll say and what your students will do. If it’s unclear in your head, it will be chaotic in the room.
7. **Choose how you will assess students’ learning.** “Thumbs up if you get it” is not an assessment. You need every student to produce something you can *actually see and evaluate*. This doesn’t have to be complicated, but it has to give you real information about what students know.
8. **Plan your lesson ending.** Every lesson should end with a return to the learning target. This is not a bonus – it’s the point of the lesson! Reserve a few minutes for it and protect that time. See Survival Sheet #6 for more details.
9. **Write it down – briefly.** Your plan doesn’t have to be long or complicated. But it should be written down so you can refer to it and stay on track.

TIPS/TRICKS

- **Every student should think and respond, not just the willing volunteers.** Design ways to have every student consider and respond.
- **Spend equal time on the “how” of your lesson.** New teachers often over-plan the content and under-plan how they’ll carry it out. Your students don’t experience the content; they experience how they interact with it.