



## Teaching InSITEs: Lesson Planning

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### DEFINITION

Lesson planning is the process an instructor undertakes to plan a single lesson or class. When done well, it organizes instruction, focuses on student learning, and explicitly targets the course learning objectives.

### RATIONALE

A lesson plan gives purpose and structure to a block of instructional time. The key is to find a lesson plan format that works for you. The goal of your plan should be to **organize instruction** in a way that sets up expectations, outlines teacher and student activities, and establishes a means of assessing whether students learned what you intended. It should also be a reminder that the lesson is not all about you as the instructor—it should **focus on the student**. Perhaps most importantly, it allows you to **assure alignment** among the learning objectives, learning activities, and assessments. The bonus for the instructor is that when class time arrives a well-conceived plan for instruction is in place! While there are innumerable formats to use, researchers agree on some key *components*.

### COMPONENTS

**Learning objectives/lesson goals:** Set clear expectations for yourself and for your students. Avoid the temptation to just list content to cover!

**Gain attention and tap into prior knowledge:** Right away, get the students focused on the task at hand. This is often effective when it's novel, but brief. Also, new knowledge is best built upon foundational knowledge. Activating what learners already know about the day's topic (e.g., ask a question, brief activity) will prime them for the lesson.

**Input/teaching:** This is the point where students are provided new information, often by means of instructor lecture, demonstration, or modeling. Find varying and novel ways to do this. Chunk content into meaningful pieces and organize it in ways that give consideration to novice learners. Remember...you're an expert; your students are not. But that doesn't mean you should do all the talking!

**Guided practice with feedback:** Practice is important. But practice with feedback from you and/or students' peers is even more important. Devise ways for students to refine their thinking or skills, experience non-examples of concepts as well as examples, ask questions, and create alternative representations of content.

**Independent practice/assessment:** This may come before or after the wrap-up. Learners need opportunities to practice and to feel that they can successfully demonstrate their learning. Activities should be diagnostic, designed to help you and the students figure out what they have learned and where they need to continue thinking, studying, working, practicing.

**Closure/wrap-up:** Don't abruptly stop teaching. Bring some sort of closure to the lesson. Frame the day's content and experiences.

Optional lesson plan components:

- Materials/technology set-up
- Descriptive documentation (e.g., course name, semester, module/unit/lab)
- Estimated time for specific parts of the lesson
- Key terms/concepts; Central questions/big ideas; Requisite skills
- Instructor reflection/notes after the lesson (e.g., "Devise a way to include more students in discussion next time"; Or, "Turn large group Q & A into small group exercise")

**What if...?** If you are a more experienced instructor, or if you prefer more flexibility in your lesson flow, you can still devise a useful lesson plan. A plan should not constrain your teaching, it should enhance it! Consider reading Billie Hara's (2010) post in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: <http://chronicle.com/blogs/profhacker/lesson-planning-for-the-university-classroom/22899>. She recommends an intentional, yet flexible, approach to lesson planning.

### **References:**

- Gagné, R. M. (1977). *The conditions of learning*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.
- Hunter, M. (1994). *Planning for effective instruction: Lesson design*. In *Enhancing Teaching*, pp. 87-95. New York: Macmillan College Publishing Company. (Madeline Hunter's model has been criticized at times. Mainly, it is not intended as a prescriptive order of events but a set of planning elements to be considered. See Wolfe's short thoughts on this below.)
- Rosenshine, B., & Stevens, R. (1986). Teaching functions. In M. C. Wittrock (Ed.), *Handbook of Research on Training* (3rd ed., pp. 375-391). New York: Macmillan.
- Wolfe, P. (1987). What the "seven-step lesson plan" isn't. *Educational Leadership*, 44(5), pp. 70-71.

See also the following links for additional information and lesson plan templates designed for faculty:

A nice resource from BYU-Idaho:

[http://www.byui.edu/Documents/instructional\\_development/Instructional%20Tools%20Page%20PDFs/Lesson%20Plans.pdf](http://www.byui.edu/Documents/instructional_development/Instructional%20Tools%20Page%20PDFs/Lesson%20Plans.pdf)

A fairly extensive—but searchable—resource

[http://www.wvcc.wy.edu/facres/tfs/focalites/LessonPlan\\_Focalite.pdf](http://www.wvcc.wy.edu/facres/tfs/focalites/LessonPlan_Focalite.pdf)