

Tips for Effective Lesson Planning

Even experienced teachers who believe they can teach “off the cuff” are doing their students a disservice by not planning. If you have ever attended a class or workshop where the teacher was not prepared, you know that a lack of planning shows in the lesson.

Make a checklist of what you want to cover. Items on this checklist should include:

- TEKS/TAAS/ACP objectives
- Vocabulary
- Reading/writing/comprehension objectives
- A broad range of activities, including hands-on activities, group work, and independent practice
- Daily, periodic, and end-of-unit assessment
- Homework and classwork
- Items to be graded, posted, or sent home

Focus on the TEKS

The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for your course or grade level is the foundation of all instruction in our schools. If you plan all of your lessons using objectives from the TEKS, you cannot go wrong.

Expect that everything will not go as planned. You may need to shorten or extend a unit, or incorporate objective not mastered into the next unit.

Keep notes on changes and experiences as a reference in case you plan a similar unit the next school year.

Use a thematic approach. Lessons taught around a central theme bring continuity to the subject and establish mutually reinforcing concepts in the minds of the students, not to mention the fact that they make the lessons much more interesting!

Developing the Lesson

The TEKS objectives, activities, and assessments in your unit are the ingredients in a good lesson: you select from them to plan weekly and daily lessons. The more versatile and imaginative you are in their use, the richer the lessons will be. Consider these as guides to preparing a good lesson:

- **State the objective(s) clearly.**

Before you plan any lesson, think to yourself, “At the end of this lesson, my students will be able to...” Whatever the answer is to this question is the focus of your lesson.

Objectives are clear, specific statements that include basic knowledge/skills and central themes/concepts of the subject area.

Students are generally more successful if they have a target to aim at. Students should be able to articulate what they are doing and why as they construct the learning, connect it to other subject areas, their own lives, and/or issues in the world beyond the classroom.

• **Engagement/Motivation**

Research makes it clear that all information taken into the brain must first pass an “attentional” threshold. The student must be engaged and be interest in the new learning in order to be self-directed/intrinsically motivated, and successful in learning.

In his book, Teaching With the Brain in Mind, Eric Jensen presents the following information:

To increase intrinsic motivation and hook attention for 10-90 minutes:	To increase apathy and resentment and hook attention for 10 minutes or less:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide choices in content, timing, work partners, projects, process, environment, or resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher directs the learning 100% of the time with no student input. Resources are restricted – for example, students are required to work alone.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it relevant and personal: relate to family, neighborhood, city, life stages, love, health, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning is irrelevant, impersonal, useless, out of context, and done only to pass a test.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make it emotional, energetic; make it physical; use learner-imposed deadlines and peer pressure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning is passive: disconnected from the real world, low interaction, lecture, seatwork or video

• **Connections/Relevance**

New learning must build on prior knowledge – “hook” on which to hang the new. Teachers will be most successful when they can connect new information to prior knowledge and make the learning relevant to the lives and interest of the learners.

The highly successful teacher uses unique, creative, and/or innovative strategies to make multiple connections between the critical attributes of the learning and the students’ personal lives, work, prior/future learning, content within the subject area, and/or the content in other subject areas. When done successfully, the students will be able to make connections between what is being learned in other subject areas, their own lives, and the world beyond the classroom.

• **Application**

Brain research supports the opportunity for students to apply new learning, thus making stronger connections, and driving the knowledge deeper into long-term memory. Many of the TEKS/TAAS skills require the application of learning in order to be successful.

Application level activities might ask students to exhibit, solve, simulate, employ, use, demonstrate, dramatize, illustrate, calculate, show, etc. Students' ability to apply new learning gives both teacher and student information on students' understanding of the concepts taught.

- **Questioning/Inquiry**

The key to "minds-on" learning and a strong check for understanding is effective questioning and inquiry, both by the teacher and by the student. Instruction should be student focused, inquiry based, and directed to students as thinkers and problem solvers.

- **Feedback/Reinforcement**

Timely, specific, quality feedback helps students understand why they are successful or unsuccessful in learning and results in a higher level and frequency of student commitment to the learning. Students are then able to repeat their effort and success, or make adjustments in order to be more successful.

Feedback should be reinforcement for the learning process and should motivate the student to continue to put forth effort to learn. Teachers can reinforce learning using a variety of verbal, nonverbal, and extrinsic strategies. However, the intensity and frequency of reinforcement should be specific to the student and the student's response/performance in order to encourage effort. Reinforcement should also communicate high expectations for learning and performance.

- **Monitoring/Assessment**

Lipton and Wellman, in *Pathways to Understanding*, indicate that the role of teacher as monitor occurs ".....during four distinct phases of this instructional process; while planning a lesson or unit of instruction, during the implementation of this plan; after teaching, while reflecting on the effectiveness of the instruction and then again while applying new learnings to the ongoing planning process...Purposeful attention to the relationship between their own behaviors and the students' performance allows learning-focused teachers to make adjustments, modifications, and refinements – in their 'seat' while planning and reflecting, and on the feet while teaching."