

10 Steps to Better Lesson Plans

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Master teachers are also master [lesson planners](#). They can look at a learning goal and piece together key components that will ensure that their students meet the goal. Not all lessons need to be a reinvention of the wheel, but there are several hallmarks of well-crafted lesson plans. Whether you are building your own lessons, or searching through databases of lessons, be sure to include these 10 key components:

1. Learning Goal-

Every [lesson plan](#) should have a clearly defined learning goal, after all, that is the reason for teaching! I have seen some very inventive lesson plans that lack this important ingredient. No matter how entertaining a lesson may be, if it is lacking a learning goal, it has missed its mark.

There is a day celebrated annually by students all over the country affectionately referred to as Mole Day. Celebrated every year on October 23 (10-23), Mole Day honors Avogadro's Number (6.02×10^{23}), which is a basic unit of measure in chemistry. There are some fun lesson plans out there for Mole day (and in fact entire websites dedicated to the celebration). Mole day is uniquely celebrated by creating moles (the animal) and creating a diorama that represents a play on the word 'mole'. For example "guaca-mole" or "Remember the Ala-mole". Students spend weeks creating their moles and mole puns. **But in all the entertainment, does the lesson completely lose its meaning?** What does the mole (the animal) have to do with Avogadro's Number aside from sharing a name? When the learning goal is lost, so is the learning. When writing and searching lesson plans, make sure you always have a clear [learning objective](#) in mind: everything hinges on this.

2. Resources-

List the [resources](#) needed for a lesson. Nothing is worse than having the perfect lesson planned only to find that you are missing an important material. Jotting down a list of resources needed for the lesson will ensure that you have all the paper, glue, copies, etc. when the time comes to use them.

Don't forget to list [digital resources](#) as well. Make sure if you are using technology that the websites you intend to use with students aren't blocked at school. A great lesson you created at home could come to a screeching halt if you can't access the video you found the night before. Also, be sure to note any of the plug-ins that may be required for a website (Silverlight, Flash, Shockwave, etc.). Often, if you can plan ahead, your tech department can confirm that you have everything in place for your lesson.

3. Standards-

It is important to note any [standards](#) being met by the lesson. Most schools are requiring a standard tie in for every lesson. Even if your school doesn't require that you note which standards you are meeting, it is good practice to be familiar with your state and national standards. You will be surprised how many [standards](#) you are meeting in any given lesson. You may also choose to note how a lesson falls into the scope and sequence for yearlong learning.

4. Anticipatory Set-

After the learning goal, the anticipatory set is one of the most important ingredients in a quality lesson plan. The anticipatory set [engages your students](#) in the learning that is about to happen. It sets the tone for the lesson and makes students hungry to learn more. Think of the anticipatory set as a movie trailer. The trailer doesn't tell everything about the movie but provides enough glimpses to leave you wanting more.

When I was in first grade, my teacher planted a UFO made out of cardboard boxes and yogurt containers spray painted silver in the middle of our classroom. All around the UFO were purple play dough "space rocks". We were immediately engaged and excited about the lesson. We had no idea what we would be learning, but she already had us thinking and questioning. As it turned out, the UFO was introducing a new leveled reader we were going to read together called "My Pet Space Rock". All these years later I still remember that lesson.

A good anticipatory set activates prior knowledge or [encourages students to ask questions](#). Students learn, by making connections and exploring. Build anticipation for your lesson through props, secret notes from historians or scientists written to your class, a video clip, a song, a short story, or role play. Students love pretend play, so think about how you can get them to use their imagination and pretend as they are learning.

For example, if your students are studying dinosaurs, tell them they are paleontologists going on a dig. Outfit them with field journals and a 'special' paleontologist pencils that they can use to take notes. In my classroom, I like to use Wordles to begin my lessons. These are word clouds that you can create at www.wordle.net. I include several "clue" words about what we will be learning and project the Wordle on the whiteboard. As students come into the classroom, they guess what we will be doing based on the Wordle.

This gets students thinking about what they will be learning, activating prior knowledge, and asking questions. It takes 2-3 minutes of guessing before we begin the lesson and it readies students for the learning that will follow. It seems to me that the anticipatory set is the piece most often left out of lesson plans, and it is a shame because it's what excites students about learning.

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5. Introduction-

The [introduction](#) of your lesson is a great place to give your students a 30,000 foot view of the lesson. Tell your students what they will be learning (the learning goal) and give them an overview of what will be expected of them during the lesson. During the [introduction](#), you can also begin to activate prior knowledge about the subject. Do this through class discussion, a KWL chart, or through small group or buddy discussion.

6. Direct Instruction-

Direct instruction is the meat of your lesson. This is where you are actually teaching or coaching your students. This can be done in a variety of ways. Sometimes direct instruction is simply giving students directions and guidelines for the self guided, discovery learning they will be completing independently or with a friend. During direct instruction, make sure that you are incorporating different learning styles. I have found that one of the best ways to teach something is through a [story](#). Students may not recall a list of facts about the Civil War, but if you can tell an engaging story about an event from the Civil War that includes pictures and role-playing for students, they will be able to recall significantly more later on.

Humans learn and relate to the world through [stories](#) and pictures. When someone mentions September 11th, you likely don't think about a definition type answer of what happened on that day. What comes to mind are the stories

people told, the video, and pictures that you saw. This is how we construct and frame knowledge. As often as you can, teach through stories. This is a difficult task at first, because it requires each of us to become storytellers. The rewards are great and as you compose lesson plans; you too will begin to think in story.

7. Guided Instruction-

Guided instruction is the instruction that happens in small groups or one on one with students. This is the point where students have actually begun a project or assignment. As students work, you can encourage and guide students in their learning. [Guided instruction](#) gives you the opportunity to find out what your students know and can do through anecdotal assessment. You are observing and helping or redirecting as needed. Students can pair up in partners or work in small groups to guide each other in new learning or review. During this time, if you notice students who aren't quite getting it, you can pull them into smaller groups to re-teach.

8. Assessment-

Every lesson should have some form of assessment. This can be formal, informal, or anecdotal in nature. [Formal assessment](#) is usually in the form of a test, quiz, worksheet, or project that is turned in and graded. Informal assessment can be done during direct instruction. Asking students to write down their answer on a small whiteboard and hold it up, using clickers with an interactive whiteboard, or a simple "thumbs up if you agree, thumbs down if you disagree". These are all great informal ways to gauge understanding. Anecdotal assessment is usually done during guided instruction as you are walking around and observing your students understanding. Not every lesson needs to be graded but every lesson does need to be assessed. As the teacher, you need to know if your students understood the learning and what re-teaching or follow-up teaching may be required. Every lesson should include informal and anecdotal assessment throughout the lesson.

9. Closure-

Every lesson should have some type of closure where students can summarize or wrap up their learning.

This could be done in several ways:

- Through informal class assessment with clickers or thumbs up/down
- Students could each list something they learned as a ticket to line up for lunch
- Students could write a sentence in their journal summarizing a lesson
- Students could whisper the answer to a question to their elbow buddy
- The class could complete the KWL chart
- Students could blog about their experience or learning
- Students can add a piece of learning to a Wall Wisher wall www.wallwisher.com

Often times a completed project is adequate closure for students, but don't let them just turn the project in, let students show off their work to others and discuss.

10. Differentiated Instruction-

Students all learn in different ways and at different rates. Make sure that you account for adjustments that may need to be made for students. For example, if you have a student who struggles with reading, and the history lesson for the day requires extensive reading, plan to pair them up with a buddy, make an audio recording, etc. Think about those who will [struggle with the learning](#) and make a plan for them.

Don't let these rules for lesson planning overwhelm you. After you have written out a few lessons you will be able to start jotting notes down in your lesson planner and still fulfill every one of these key components for a quality lesson plan.

Lesson planning takes practice, but with a little planning, your students will be learning more effectively and you will know exactly where they need review or additional practice.

There are thousands and thousands of free lesson plans online. As you are looking through lessons, make sure that they follow these rules. If there is a component missing, add to the lesson and customize it for your classroom.

[Free Lesson Plan Resource >>](#)

Free Lesson Plan Resources:

teaching.monster.com

www.thinkfinity.com

www.teachnology.com

www.scholastic.com

www.atozteacherstuff.com

www.teachers.net

www.lessonplancentral.com

www.edhelper.com

www.schoolexpress.com

www.teachercreated.com/lessons

www.free.ed.gov

www.lessonplans.com

www.learningpage.com