

LESSON PLANNING – CLASS BY CLAASS

Whether you have been teaching for years or are new to teaching, planning lessons in advance is a good idea. It may help with your confidence level and allow you to map out how each class fits into, and prepares students to meet, the overall course learning outcomes. Using a consistent lesson plan template to design your classes also gives a sense of consistency across the course – giving students the sense that lectures will always include activities to help them build the necessary skills to succeed in your course and in their program. In addition, following one general outline from one class to the next will cut down your prep time. In this teaching tip, we give an overview of things to consider when planning your classes and provide you with a model you can use from one class to the next.

WHERE TO START

Before you begin planning your lesson, consider the most important skills and/or content for students to take away from this particular class. Once you identify them, outline the relationships between these key take-aways, the remainder of the course content, and the course-level learning outcomes. Remember that rushing through class to present every last bit of material to students may overload them and encourage surface learning methods. Instead, consider identifying difficult concepts to focus on during class time and encouraging students to apply, analyze, or create with these concepts. Following these steps is one avenue to move away from content-driven lectures – which are more like presentations of material to students – to pedagogy-driven lessons – where the focus is on presenting bits of information but getting students actively engaged with the material.

CHARACTERISTICS OF PEDAGOGY-DRIVEN LESSONS

According to current pedagogical literature effective lectures tend to share three characteristics. They are well-organized, focused on SMART Learning Outcomes, and interactive. In a well-organized lesson, instructors (1) clarify links between material, (2) explicitly identify transitions between topics, (3) relate all material and activities to student learning, and (4) provide a manageable amount of information for the time limit. In a lesson driven by SMART learning outcomes, instructors structure class around class-specific learning outcomes. These are written using the same technique as course-level learning outcomes, but focus on what will be accomplished in a smaller time slot; your learning outcomes for each lesson should be Specific, Measurable/Observable (by instructor), Attainable (by students), Relevant (to students, course, program), and Timed-well for your class period. Finally, interactive lessons encourage active learning, give students a chance to illustrate or apply learning, allow time for questions, and seek to confirm comprehension of material. One way to ensure your lesson meets these criteria is to follow the CLAASS model of lesson planning.

CLAASS MODEL OF LESSON PLANNING

The CLAASS model is a way of putting interactive teaching/learning into practice. It is a teaching model that allows you to plan lessons on the basis of sound pedagogical theory. For example, one element in the CLAASS model is the inclusion of a pre-test as a way for the instructor to gauge students' shared previous knowledge in order to identify a shared starting point for the lesson. CLAASS is an acronym: **C**apture; **L**ead; **A**ssess; **A**ctivate; **S**olidify; **S**ummarize. The lesson plan gives you a way to break up your class into segments. If you try to speak for 60-90 minutes, you will be exhausted and students may have a hard time taking it in. You can use the model to plan each portion of a 90 minute class. Follow the guidelines below to make sure you give students opportunities to speak, present material, ask questions, or apply concepts. In the table below, each element of CLAASS is defined, an example provided, and a place given where you can plan your next lesson.

LESSON-PLANNING TABLE

	YOUR DESCRIPTION
Capture their attention Lead into the lesson in a way that sets the tone for the next hour: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell a story • Ask a provocative question • Present a challenge • Share a current news item • Show a short video • Review a concept from last class and explain how it relates to today's lesson 	
Lead through the outcome Share the day's learning outcome(s) or guiding question(s) with the students to give them the big picture for the day.	
Assess previous knowledge Find out what (some) students may already know about the topic. You can use this as a base to gauge a shared starting point. It is a way to involve students and lead them from the familiar to the unfamiliar.	
Activate new knowledge Present a manageable amount of information at a time (one concept/idea). Make sure material is logically organized, clarify links to previous or upcoming material, identify transitions, and use questions to get students speaking.	
Solidify with assessment You can motivate students through engaging activities. In this portion of the class, give students the chance to apply what you have just explained. There are many ways to evaluate whether the learning outcome and content have been understood. You can use individual or group activities. It can be written work or accomplished through a discussion. Making sure they have learned this material will help prepare them for the next lesson.	
Summarize Summarize the key points of the lesson in an engaging way. Connect the lesson with what comes next and leave them with a question for the next class.	

RESOURCES

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