

## AVOID THE PITFALLS OF MEDIOCRE LESSON PLANS

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Good lesson plans makes for good teaching. A lesson plan organizes what you will do and say in the forthcoming lesson. Also, it provides an opportunity for other people such as your college supervisor or cooperating teacher to discuss with you ideas about the lesson. The amount of detail in a written lesson plan depends upon the complexity of the lesson and upon your own experience and background. A good lesson plan does not guarantee the teaching of a successful lesson, but without a clear plan the changes for success are greatly diminished. In general, beginning practice teachers find it helpful to write out their lesson plans in detail, whereas more experience should require fewer details.

***The first pitfall to avoid is a bad attitude.*** Remember that good teaching is a reflection of good planning. Writing down your thoughts beforehand clarifies your lesson. Also, remember that others have expectations that teachers are organized, even if they know their subject or have taught it before. If you ask a contractor to build a house, we expect that person to show us a written house plan, even though he may have built hundreds of houses. Principals, directors of education, and parents have the right to have similar expectations of the teachers of their children. Often effective teachers want to show others their plans—to tell others of the good job they are doing.

***Avoid a second pitfall of neglecting to include all things you need to think about in preparation of your lesson.*** Although there are a number of formats for lesson plans, each requires thought in these areas: topic, materials, objectives, procedures/activities (introduction, main steps, closure), and evaluation. Your lesson plan should clearly set out each of these areas.

In considering your topic, think about how it fits into the sequence of learning that students have experienced. Some prefer to make materials a separate category; others prefer to incorporate materials into the procedures of activities section of their lesson plan.

***Vague objectives is a third pitfall.*** Objectives are critical guidelines. Pitfalls include writing them in ways that are not very helpful. If your topic is *weather* it is not very helpful to write your objective as *To learn about the weather*. This is merely writing your topic in the form of a phrase or sentence. The most common way to write objectives is in terms of student activities or behaviors. Examples are *students will demonstrate an ability to set the volleyball correctly at least eight times out of ten*.

If you want to focus on learning knowledge, the best way to write objectives is in terms of the key learning principle you want students to understand in your lesson. These are called *learning objectives*. Writing objectives as learning principles is most effective if the lesson is designed to emphasize the learning of knowledge. These objectives require you to clearly and concisely identify the key points or understanding you expect your students to learn.

When writing *learning objectives*:

1. Think of your objective in terms of “What must the students *learn* in this lesson?”
2. Write out the answer to this question in a straight-forward, meaningful simple *sentence*.
3. In your planning, keep your objective (what the student must *learn*) separate from what the students must *do* (activities and/or procedures) in your lesson plan.
4. Clearly distinguish the *topic* of the lesson from the *objective* of the lesson.

Keep what the student must *learn* separate from what he/she must *do*, and it will give you a clearer focus to your lesson. Once you decide upon your objective, your next step is to list class activities or procedures in your lesson plan. The key to writing a meaningful learning objective is to begin with the phrase *The student will learn that . . .*

For example, if your lesson’s topic is “price, supply, and demand” it would not be very helpful to merely write the topic into the form of a sentence “The student will learn about supply and demand.” This is too general.

Instead, identify the key principle about your topic and use the word “that” in your objective statement “The student will learn *that* price increases as supply decreases and demand increases.” This principle is the key understanding you want to have students learn—your lesson’s objective.

Finally, don’t have too many objectives for a single lesson. You need only one or occasionally two objectives for a lesson. A small number gives focus to your lesson. Identify the key *point* you want students to learn today. Remember that the word “objective” means “most important idea.”

***A fourth pitfall is to begin your lesson in a mediocre manner.*** Try to interest the class in what you will be teaching. Ways to begin a lesson include:

- a. Review the previous lesson.
- b. Give directions.
- c. Give an overview of what is going to happen.
- d. Tell students the main learning principle you expect them to learn.

While the four ways listed above are common and reasonable ways to begin a lesson, try to think of other ways that will spark interest in your lesson. *Motivation* at the outset is important. Some ideas are:

1. Tell a story.
2. Ask a question.
3. Show pictures.
4. Role play.
5. Show an object.
6. Play a guessing game.

7. Refer to student's personal lives, attitudes, or ideas.
8. Read a quote.
9. Demonstrate something that is mysterious or interesting.
10. Ask a few quick, interest-generating questions.

***A fifth pitfall is to write long sentences or paragraphs in your lesson plan.*** Instead, make your lesson plan in outline form. List your procedures, questions, and main points. List your main guide questions in appropriate places throughout your procedures. Avoid making a separate page for guide questions because it is difficult to refer to them while you are teaching the lesson. Finally, provide potential or expected responses from students. You might write these expected student responses in parentheses after each question.

***A sixth pitfall is to neglect the ending of your lesson.*** Don't break off abruptly in the middle of a point or activity. What will *wrap up* the whole lesson? *Finish* your lesson in one of these ways:

1. Summarize what was learned or done in the lesson.
2. Asking a few main summarizing questions.
3. Have students work at their desks in related follow-up work until the end of the period.
4. Make your class discussion or sequence of questions lead toward a conclusion about the topic/issue under discussion.

***Seventh, avoid the pitfall of neglecting evaluation.*** Evaluation divides into two aspects: (1) evaluation of the students and (2) our own self-evaluation of how well the lesson seemed to go.

*Evaluation of students* can be done by asking them oral or written questions near the end of the lesson, but most lessons do not include formal evaluation. More frequently, an informal assessment is done. Did the class follow me? How well did they respond to my questions? Did they pay attention? Could they do the follow-up work?

*Self-evaluation* of your own performance is important. Before the actual teaching of your lesson, identify something you want to achieve in your own teaching performance. It might be *giving clear directions, asking a logical sequence of questions, or asking questions beyond simple memory-recall level*. It could focus on some aspect of classroom management, the effectiveness of involving students in a class discussion, moving the lesson along at an appropriate pace, the effectiveness of following each part of your lesson plan, or any part of teaching that is of most concern to you at this point of time.

*Reflect upon* the identified area for improvement from your own impressions or talk it over with the person (another student, cooperating teacher or college supervisor) who watched you teach. Finally, draw some conclusions about things you would want to focus on in your next lesson. Reflection about the effectiveness of your teaching is most important. Only through reflection on specific aspects of our teaching can we improve and become more effective teachers.