

Developing Effective Lesson Plans

1. (*Developing Lesson Plans*)

A 12-step program for writing lesson plans (and further questions to consider).

1. Identify topics to cover.

Lecture meets for ~150 minutes a week, while discussion section meets only 50 minutes a week. You cannot be expected to recap a week's worth of material. Don't even try! Pick **two**, at most three, topics to cover during your 50 minutes. Encourage students to attend office hours if they have more questions.

2. Define the learning objectives of the section.

Ask yourself "What do I want students to leave with at the end of our 50 minutes together?" Be specific. Are these goals long-term (e.g., mastery of a skill) or short-term (e.g., recapping material)?

3. Determine what method and materials you will use to accomplish these goals.

Will you spend section having a classroom discussion, individualized problem solving, or group work? Will there be demonstrations? What materials will you need?

4. Think of a motivation or "hook" to open the section with.

How will you get the student's attention? Flashy demos, hypothetical or real-world situations involving material from lecture, or an ungraded quiz of questions from past exams are good ways of getting students focused.

5. Write a draft of the discussion section. Including an opening hook, procedures, and closing.

Do not forget things such as conveying any administrative notes and allowing time for questions.

6. Add details and specific examples. Eliminate vague words like "discuss," "introduce," or "explain."

HOW will you explain a particular topic? Give details. What will you write on the board to aid in your explanation? What prompts will you give to the class?

7. Criticize your timetable.

The average attention span is 10–15 minutes. Are you spending longer than this on a particular exercise? Break up your discussion section with demos, lecture work, group work, class discussions, etc. that last only 10 minutes or so.

8. Come up with a backup plan.

Wednesday lecture was cancelled and students are not ready to discuss the material you had planned to cover. Or your students are so smart that you finish your discussion section in 30 minutes. What do you do now? Have backup plans.

9. Critique your lesson plan globally.

Look over your entire plan. Does it work to accomplish your learning objectives? If not, have your learning objectives changed or does your plan need revising?

10. Critique your lesson plan meticulously.

You should be able to write a sentence on how each part of your lesson plan goes to accomplishing your learning objectives. If you cannot, that may be alerting you to revise your learning objectives or to revise your plan.

11. Determine how you will assess the success of your discussion section.

Will you ask questions near the end of section to probe whether section was successful? Will you ask for written or oral feedback?

12. Repeat any of the above steps as necessary until the day of section.

Resources you might enjoy:

Websites on lesson plans

- http://www.ithaca.edu/hs/depts/education/docs/Education_Handbook/DesignLesson/
- <http://www.cndls.georgetown.edu/view/support/resources/lessonPlan.html>
- <http://www.adprima.com/mistakes.htm>

Pedagogy books I like

- McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers* by Svinicki and McKeachie. Wadsworth Cengage Learning.¹
- Tools for Teaching* by Davis. Jossey-Bass (Wiley).²

¹Almost biblical in the teaching pedagogy world.

²An encyclopedic reference of great ideas and pointers.