Great Teaching Starts with a Great Plan

Recipe for LESSON PLANNING

Purposeful Planning *Yields* Purposeful Results

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO INTENTIONAL INSTRUCTION

PLAN

ENGAGE

DIFFERENTIATE

ASSESS

REFLECT

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

- Clear Objectives
- Engaging Strategies
- Differentiation
- Meaningful Assessment
- Reflection & Growth

OVERVIEW

This document serves as an accompanying resource for a professional development series designed to be adapted for various audiences and instructional purposes. The goal is to help PreK–12 teachers demonstrate an understanding of each lesson plan component and how to intentionally incorporate those components when writing lesson plans that address the diverse needs of all learners.

PLANNING WITH PURPOSE

TEACHING WITH INTENTION

REFLECTING FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Every great lesson is a recipe for student success!

INTENDED AUDIENCE

PreK–12 Educators • Instructional Coaches
School Leaders • Professional Learning Communities

ENGAGE. INSPIRE. EMPOWER EVERY LEARNER.

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Recipe INTRODUCTION

Just as a master chef follows a recipe while adding creativity and expertise, effective teachers use intentional planning to create meaningful learning experiences.
A lesson plan is more than a schedule of activities, it is like a carefully crafted recipe that blends essential ingredients such as: standards, learning objectives, engaging activities, strategies for differentiation, assessment, and reflection to support student success. Purposeful lesson planning increases teacher confidence, promotes active student participation, and contributes to higher levels of achievement (Hattie, 2023; Rosenshine, 2012; Shulman, 1987; Li, 2024).

INGREDIENTS	PURPOSE
Standards/ Indicators	Define what students should know and be able to do by the end of the lesson based on grade level and subject.
Learning Objectives	Provide a clear, measurable goal or focus of the lesson aligned with the standard.
Learning Activities and Materials (Gradual Release Model)	Guide students' interaction with the content, teacher, and each other. The activities and materials provide opportunities to practice and promote the progression toward mastery of the learning objective(s).
Engagement Strategies Special Seasonings: ✨ Learner Interests 🌎 Real-world Connections 🤝 Collaboration 💻 Technology 🛠️ Hands-on learning 🎯 Projects, games, or simulations	Capture students' interest and promote active participation.
Differentiation Special Seasonings: ✨ Rigor (promote higher order thinking) ✨ MTSS/Interventions (provide targeted support)	Ensure access for all students by tailoring instruction to meet student's individual needs and abilities with targeted interventions or opportunities for enrichment.
Assessment	Measures learning progression.
Reflection	This ongoing process (before, during, and after a lesson), helps teachers and students to deepen their understanding, solidify new concepts, and improve future experiences.

Great lessons are thoughtfully planned, intentionally taught, and meaningfully learned.

Great Teaching Starts with a Great Plan!

Cooking INSTRUCTIONS

STEP #1 Sift Through Standard(s) to Determine the Learning Objective(s)

STEP #2 Mix and Remix Your Learning Activities

STEP #3 Spice Up Student Engagement

STEP #4 Adjust the Recipe for Every Student's Unique Tastes

STEP #5 Taste to Assess

STEP #6 Reflect on the Recipe

STEP 1: SIFT THROUGH STANDARD(S) TO DETERMINE THE LEARNING OBJECTIVE



Begin by selecting the appropriate standard(s) or indicator(s). Think of these as your main ingredient—they define what students should know and be able to do at the appropriate grade level and content area. Next, write learning objectives that align with the standard(s). Learning objectives should provide a clear, measurable goal or focus. As you write your objectives, consider:

- **Who are you serving?** What are the needs of your students?
- **How many servings do you need?** Will one objective accomplish your goal, or does the lesson require multiple objectives?
- **What will the finished dish look like?** How will students demonstrate that they have met the objective?
- **How will you know it's "cooked"?** What evidence or assessment will show students have achieved the learning goal?

Chef's Tip: If you can't easily identify how students will demonstrate their learning, you may need to adjust the objective before moving on to planning activities.

STEP 2: MIX AND REMIX YOUR LEARNING ACTIVITIES



Blend your ingredients with purpose by designing learning activities that help students achieve the intended outcomes. Active learning helps students stay engaged, motivated, and develop a deeper understanding of the content (Li, 2024). Stir in a variety of learning experiences such as discussions, projects, experiments, simulations, collaborative learning, and technology-enhanced activities to keep students actively engaged.

Just like a chef wouldn't hand someone a recipe and expect them to master it without first demonstrating the process, effective lessons gradually move learners from observing to independent practice. Gradual Release of Responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983), which was later adapted to the "teacher model" (Fisher & Frey, 2007), blends the ingredients of instruction by scaffolding learning through four phases:

I DO (TEACHER MODELING)	WE DO (GUIDED PRACTICE)	YOU DO TOGETHER (COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE)	YOU DO (INDEPENDENT APPLICATION)
Teacher models and think-alouds while students observe and build knowledge.	Teacher and students practice together with guidance and support.	Students work together in pairs or small groups to apply learning.	Students demonstrate independence by applying learning on their own.

Mix it up, layer it thoughtfully, and keep your learners coming back for more!

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COOKING INSTRUCTIONS

AS YOU DESIGN THE ACTIVITIES, CONSIDER:

How will you demonstrate the recipe steps?

How will you model the learning so students can see what success looks like?



When will students get to cook?

How will they practice, collaborate, and apply their learning?



How will you taste as you go?

How will you check for understanding throughout the lesson to know whether students are learning?



What tools and flavors are they already bringing?

How will your activities connect to students' prior knowledge, experiences, and interests?



Chef's Tip: Great chefs know that success isn't just about following the recipe—it's about demonstrating techniques, guiding beginners, gradually stepping back as confidence grows, and adjusting ingredients and methods for different tastes. Likewise, effective teachers gradually release responsibility while differentiating learning activities to support students' diverse needs, interests, and learning preferences.

Good lessons are like great recipes—intentional, engaging, and made with care.

5 STEP 3: Spice Up Student Engagement

Every skilled chef knows that the right seasonings bring a dish to life. Likewise, thoughtfully chosen **engagement strategies** make learning more meaningful, memorable, and enjoyable. As you add flavor to your lesson, consider:

Does this recipe invite exploration?
Can they participate in hands-on, interactive, or experiential learning related to the standard?

Who's doing most of the cooking?
Are students actively participating, discussing, creating, and solving problems rather than simply receiving information?

What should a busy kitchen sound like?
What will engaged students be doing, saying, thinking, or creating throughout the lesson?

Are there other special seasonings you might incorporate to "spice up" the lesson?
How can you include engagement strategies such as: student interests, real-world connections, collaboration, technology, hands-on learning, projects, games, or simulations, etc.



Chef's Tip: Season with intention and remember that not every lesson needs every spice! Choose engagement strategies that complement your learning objective rather than overwhelm it. A pinch of student choice, a dash of collaboration, or a sprinkle of real-world relevance can make a lesson more meaningful without distracting from the learning goals. The best recipes balance the essential ingredients with just the right amount of flavor.

STEP 4: Adjust the Recipe for Every Student's Unique Tastes

Every student brings different experiences, strengths, and needs to the classroom; Therefore, a lesson plan should incorporate strategies for **differentiated instruction**, or the practice of tailoring instruction to meet individual student needs and abilities (Tomlinson, 1995; 1999). This includes providing a **Multi-Tiered System of Supports** (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; Harlacher & Bailey, 2025) with targeted interventions or opportunities for enrichment. As you think about how to adjust the recipe, consider:

How can you determine the amount of seasoning needed per student?
Which students may need additional support, modeling, practice, or scaffolds to access the learning goal? Which students are ready for enrichment, extension activities, or opportunities to apply learning in new ways?

What tool(s) will help everyone achieve success?
What supports (visuals, examples, sentence starters, technology, peer collaboration, checklists, guided practice, etc.) will help students?

How can you ensure that the recipe has been adjusted for each student's unique tastes?
What will mastery look and sound like for different students while still connecting to the same learning objective?

Who can help prepare the meal?
What roles can teachers, peers, specialists, or other supports play in helping students succeed?

DIFFERENT WAYS TO SERVE LEARNING:

- **Different entry points:** Provide multiple ways for students to begin learning based on their background knowledge and experience.
- **Flexible ingredients:** Allow students choices in topics, tools, roles, or ways to demonstrate understanding.
- **Helpful utensils:** Use scaffolds such as examples, templates, visuals, guided notes, or step-by-step instructions.
- **Extra servings:** Provide enrichment opportunities for students ready to explore deeper concepts or more complex challenges.
- **Taste tests along the way:** Use formative assessments, observations, discussions, and students work to adjust support during the lesson.

Chef's Tip: Differentiation does not mean creating a completely different meal for every student. Instead, effective teachers adjust the ingredients, tools, and preparation methods so all students can work toward the same goal (Tomlinson,1995; 1999).

6 STEP 5: Taste to Assess

Tasting the dish throughout cooking (not just at the end) is part of the process in order to evaluate and make any necessary adjustments before serving. Likewise, effective teachers gather evidence of student learning before, during, and after instruction. Assessment is more than assigning a grade; it provides valuable feedback that helps teachers refine instruction and helps students understand their progress toward the learning goal.



As you plan to taste and assess the learning, consider:

When should you taste the recipe?

How will you check for understanding throughout the lesson—not just at the end? What observations, questions, discussions, or quick checks will help you monitor learning as students work?

How will you know if the recipe turned out as intended?

What evidence will demonstrate that students met the learning objective? Will students show their understanding through quizzes, projects, presentations, performance tasks, writing, or another authentic demonstration?

Does everyone have a chance to show their best work?

Are there multiple ways for students to demonstrate learning? What accommodations, modifications, or alternative assessment options may be needed to ensure every student can demonstrate what they know?

What feedback will help improve the next batch?

How will students receive timely, meaningful feedback? How will you use assessment data to celebrate successes, identify misconceptions, and adjust future instruction?

DIFFERENT WAYS TO TASTE LEARNING:

Quick tastes: Use observations, questioning, discussions, exit tickets, polls, or thumbs-up/down to monitor understanding during learning.

Final taste test: Use quizzes, projects, presentations, essays, or performance tasks to evaluate mastery of the learning objectives.

Recipe reviews: Provide timely, specific feedback that helps students reflect, revise, and improve their learning.

Adjust the recipe: Use assessment results to reteach concepts, provide additional support, extend learning, or modify future lessons based on student needs.

Taste, adjust, improve, repeat!

Chef's Tip: Assessment isn't just the final taste—it's an ongoing process throughout the lesson. Just as chefs taste, adjust, and refine a recipe before serving, effective teachers use formative and summative assessments to monitor learning, provide feedback, and make instructional decisions that help every student succeed (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

7 STEP 6: *Reflect on the Recipe*

After you've sifted through standard(s) to determine the learning objective(s) (Step 1), mixed and remixed the learning activities (Step 2), spiced up student engagement (Step 3), adjusted the recipe for every student's unique tastes (Step 4), tasted to assess (Step 5), the last step is reflecting on the recipe (Step 6).

Reflection should occur before, during, and after the lesson and might include: celebrating successes, examining the results, gathering student feedback, and refining the lesson (Gibbs, 1988; Schön,1983; 1987). While reflecting, consider the following:



How did the meal turn out?

What happened during the lesson?
Did students meet the learning objective?
What evidence supports your conclusions?

Why did the recipe work—or not?

Which instructional strategies helped students learn? What challenges or unexpected outcomes occurred? What contributed to student success or difficulty?

What would you change for the next serving?

What adjustments would improve the lesson next time? Should you modify the pacing, activities, supports, assessments, or learning experiences?

What did your students think of the meal?

How will students reflect on what they learned and how they learned it? What feedback can they provide about the lesson that may help improve future instruction?

REFLECTION IN ACTION

BEFORE THE LESSON

What do I know about my students? What do they need? What are my goals for this lesson?

DURING THE LESSON

What is working well? What are students struggling with? What adjustments can I make now?

AFTER THE LESSON

What went well? What could be improved? How will I use what I learned to strengthen future lessons?

CELEBRATE & GROW

Celebrate student successes—big and small. Use what you learn to keep growing as a teacher.

Chef's Tip: The best recipes are rarely perfect the first time—they improve with each preparation. Reflection is the final ingredient that transforms teaching into continuous learning. By regularly reflecting on student engagement, instructional strategies, assessment results, and student feedback, teachers can refine future lessons to better support every student and create even more meaningful learning experiences.

Great teaching is a recipe for continuous improvement.

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