

# Chapter 4

## Planning for Success

**Technique 16: Begin with the End.** Progress from unit planning to lesson planning. Define the objective, decide how you'll assess it, and then choose appropriate lesson activities.

**Technique 17: 4 Ms.** Use four criteria to write an effective lesson plan objective, making it manageable, measurable, made first, and most important.

**Technique 18: Post It.** Display your lesson objective where everyone can see it and identify your purpose.

**Technique 19: Double Plan.** As you plan a lesson, plan what students will be doing at each point in class.

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# Chapter 4

## Planning for Success

The techniques in this chapter are different from the other techniques in this book in that they are designed to be implemented before you walk in the door of your classroom rather than executed during instruction, so few people will see you do them. To state the obvious, though, planning is critical to effective teaching—as critical as execution in many cases—so these techniques set the stage for your broader success in the classroom. In fact, references to planning and its role in executing the *Teach Like a Champion* techniques abound throughout this book—for example, how planning a right answer helps you hold out for all-the-way right, or how planning for emotional student responses helps you process them calmly. In many cases, the connection between a specific technique and certain planning tasks is so simple and direct that I’ve left the discussion of how to prepare in the relevant chapters. Still, I’ve tried to summarize many of those examples here so that you can reflect on them holistically as well. The theme is that planning is everywhere. In the end, it’s almost impossible to execute at a high level if your planning isn’t also thoughtful, consistent, and focused on the most important tasks.

I recognize as I write this that teachers are sometimes required to do significant amounts of planning that’s of secondary value—they plan lessons in the format that

serves their teaching, for example, only to translate it into another format in order to submit it to administration or upload it into a database (whereupon it may remain an open question whether anyone reads it). So I offer this side note to administrators: planning by teachers should be the expectation, but that planning can take many forms. Ideally a school would help teachers get better at key planning tasks; at a minimum, it should be careful not to crowd out high-value planning tasks with low-value ones.

It's worth noting that often when I have seen some brilliant teacher execute a stunning lesson or an inspiring new idea in class, he or she usually notes how critical it was to work through the idea in planning. She scripted just the right questions for the *Cold Call* or revised the writing prompt three or four times; he went over the directions in his car on the way to work until they had economy of language and he knew them almost by heart. Even what seems impromptu is driven by foresight. If, as Branch Rickey once put it, luck is the residue of design, then skill is the residue of planning.

## BEGIN WITH THE END

Progress from unit planning to lesson planning. Define the objective, decide how you'll assess it, and then choose appropriate lesson activities.

When I started teaching, I would ask myself while I planned, "What am I going to do tomorrow?" The question itself revealed the flaws in my planning method in at least two critical ways—even without accounting for my sometimes dubious answers.

The first flaw was that I was thinking about an *activity* for my classes on the following day, not an *objective*—what I wanted my students to know or be able to do by the end of the lesson. It's far better to start the other way around and **Begin with the End**—the objective. By framing an objective first, you substitute "What will my students be able to do by the end of my lesson?" for "In which activities will my students participate today?" The first of these questions is measurable in a meaningful way. The second is not. The success of an activity is not determined by whether or not you do it and students seem to want to do it, but by whether you achieved an objective that

can be assessed. Instead of thinking about an activity—perhaps, “We are reading *To Kill a Mockingbird*”—framing your objective forces you to ask what your students will get out of reading the book. Will they understand and describe the nature of courage as demonstrated in *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Will they understand and describe why injustice sometimes prevails, as demonstrated in *To Kill a Mockingbird*? Or perhaps they’ll use *To Kill a Mockingbird* to describe how the author develops important characters through their words and actions.

In short, there are lots of worthwhile things you can do in class and lots of ways you can approach each of them. Your first job is to choose the rationale that is most productive: Why are you teaching the material you’re teaching? What’s the outcome you desire? How does this outcome relate to what you’ll teach tomorrow and to what your students need in order to be ready for the fourth or eighth or tenth grade?

The second flaw my question revealed had to do with the fact that I was usually asking it the night before the class. Beyond the obvious procrastination that implies, it shows that I was planning my lessons singly. Each lesson was perhaps vaguely related to the previous one, but did not reflect an intentional progression in the purpose of my lessons. Of the two flaws, this was actually the more damning. I could cure the procrastination issue by planning all of my lessons the Friday before, say, but until I began to think of my lessons as parts of a larger unit, intentionally and incrementally developing ideas toward mastery of larger concepts, I was sure to be treading water. In fact, I would have been better off planning all of my objectives (only) for the trimester in advance and then procrastinating on the planning of each lesson than I would have been dutifully planning a batch of activity-driven lessons the week before.

## Planning Units and Lessons

Great lessons begin with planning, and specifically with effective *unit* planning: planning a sequence of objectives, one or possibly two for each lesson, over an extended period of time (say, six weeks). Unit planning means methodically asking how one day’s lesson builds off the previous day’s, how it prepares for the next day’s, and how these all fit into a larger sequence of objectives that lead to mastery. Logically, then, it also implies that if you know you’ve failed to achieve full mastery of one day’s objective—an objective on which tomorrow’s depends—you must go back and reteach the content to ensure full mastery before moving on. To be sure of mastery, great *Begin with the End* teachers often begin lessons by circling back to anything they’re not sure the class mastered the day before.

The unit planning process is followed by lesson planning, which consists of

1. Refining and perfecting the current objective based on the degree to which the previous day's objective was mastered
2. Planning a short daily assessment that will effectively determine whether the objective was mastered
3. Planning the activity or sequence of activities that lead to mastery of the objective

Using this lesson planning sequence—objective, assessment, activity—disciplines your planning. It helps ensure that your criterion will not be “Is my lesson creative?” or “Does it employ enough of the right strategies?” but “Will it be the best and fastest way to help me reach the goal?”

Don't underestimate how critical this is. The prevalence of flawed lesson criteria is a major issue in teaching. Teachers care about earning the respect and admiration of their peers, and when teachers praise each other for their lessons, they are as likely as not to praise an artful, clever design or the loyal use of recommended methods such as group work, whether or not the lessons yield results. Having an effective lesson criterion (“Did this lesson accomplish the goal?”) allows you to constantly evaluate and refine your strategy and technique, rather than fly blind.

To summarize, *Begin with the End* means

1. Progressing from unit planning to lesson planning
2. Using a well-framed objective to define the goal of each lesson
3. Determining how you'll assess effectiveness in reaching your goal
4. Deciding on your activity

## Planning for Reading

In the schools I helped run, we used to plan reading lessons in almost the same way we planned lessons for all of our other subjects, beginning the process by developing unit plans, then dividing complex skills into a systematic sequence of manageable, measurable goals over a period of time—usually six weeks. In the case of reading, we adapted that process slightly by then choosing novels to read during our units, doing our best to use them to teach the standards we had planned. One novel might be used to teach three or four weeks on “character traits, perspective, and motivation,” for example, another to teach “summary and main idea.” A daily objective usually focused on some aspect

of the skill we were focused on. It often didn't mention the book, or did so only as an afterthought: "To infer a character's traits from his or her words and actions."

Over time, with the help of a lot of really great teachers, I came to realize that we had it wrong. *Begin with the End* looks different in reading and literature classes than it does in most others.

### Content-Based Objectives Versus Skills-Based Objectives

One primary reason for this difference is that good reading classes, in my opinion, must read first-rate literature, usually in book-length treatments, but novels and other great works of literature tend to be unwieldy, headstrong, unpredictable things. Sometimes teaching them went longer than we'd guessed. Other times, our daily objectives wanted one thing (character motivation!), but the novels went marching off in their own direction. Conflicts arose in our own hearts and minds as well. We kept trying to push our best novels to provide the perfect lens for teaching the day's objective rather than, say, telling the time-honored story of Scout and Jem. In reflecting on this conflict, we realized that being novel driven was often better from a teaching and mastery perspective than being explicitly and solely skill driven.

If things like understanding a character's motivation were "skills," they were only part of what led students to be able to read well, and, we came to realize, there were really two different types of skills we wanted students to practice. The first, portable skills (making inferences about a character, for example), could be practiced often and frequently throughout a novel. They tended to crop up everywhere and were best practiced in response to a situation in the text. Part of the skill, in fact, was learning to use it when a text demanded it. There were few enough portable skills that it was easy to cover them all in the course of a year if you let the novel guide when to practice them, so long as you tracked them to make sure you reinforced them constantly. We also realized that these skills weren't so much complex to understand as they were complex to execute. They were conducive more to a fast and simple explanation and repeated practice, time and again, in a variety of settings over the course of several months, than to a long explanation involving a mnemonic device and discrete practice for a few days in a row. It wasn't that kids didn't understand that they should use a character's words and actions to determine her traits; the problem was that they needed to do it a thousand times in a thousand different settings and with increasingly harder texts. We realized that being solely skills driven socialized us to be more formal than perhaps we should have been — planning a ninety-minute I/We/You lesson on character perspective when a ten-minute lesson and a lot of practice with a great novel would yield better results.

Sometimes, with portable skills, the more time we spent talking about them, the more time we wasted.

There were still nonportable skills, though: topics that didn't tend to come up in most texts. Understanding and defining characteristics of specific genres was a good example of that. We had to plan specific texts for our genre work because it was hard to talk about the characteristics of folk tales while reading *The Magician's Nephew*. We still needed a skills- or knowledge-based objective for that, but an exclusively skills-based approach to objectives had become a bit of a Frankenstein's monster. We found that it made more sense to start our planning by choosing great texts and then developing our objectives around the content of those texts, weaving in nonportable topics around them as it made sense.

### Nonexclusivity

We also realized that we had to develop a nonexclusivity arrangement with our objectives—or at least to make that clear to our teachers. That is, even if our primary focus for a day was to study the development of Simon in chapter 3, we still wanted our teachers to ask students to reflect on other questions as a novel like *Lord of the Flies* raised them. A significant portion of the day's questions would be aligned to the objective in the lesson, but not all of them. You couldn't (and shouldn't) ignore other key moments in the novel if you wanted to get the most out of it and to understand enough to grasp why Simon's character was changing in the next chapter. The practical solution was to read to understand the novel and sprinkle character development questions, say, as often as you could in a given lesson when they were your objectives and as often as was sensible, even if the lesson had another objective, if understanding the novel required it. As students got older and more sophisticated, and were introduced to most of the types of questions we asked, we found that a typical lesson's balance began to shift, and more and more of what we were doing became deciding *which* of the skills students knew how to use applied in a given setting. There might still be a single objective, but much of the lesson was actually devoted to applying reading skills to interpret the text in a rigorous and intrinsic way.

In the case of reading, then, I'd suggest using a novel plan (or a book plan) instead of a unit plan, with part of the planning focused on tracking and ensuring lots of practice with the full array of portable skills and constant use of key literary terms. A novel plan should still address reading standards, but daily objectives should be driven by the content of the text more than the sequence in which a skill appears on the unit plan. Teachers still need to make sure to keep things in balance so that students are

as able to paraphrase a very difficult piece of text as compare the perspectives of two characters, but the skills ideally become more of a means to an end—understanding an important and relevant story that students care about—and this makes them more compelling.

## 4 Ms

Use four criteria to write an effective lesson plan objective, making it manageable, measurable, made first, and most important.

Given the importance of objectives in bringing focus, discipline, and measurability to a lesson, it's worthwhile to think about what makes an objective useful and effective. My colleague Todd McKee artfully designed four criteria for effective objectives, the **4 Ms**, and if you're able to ensure that your objectives meet these criteria, your chances of starting with an effective one are high.

### Manageable

An objective should be of a size and scope that can be taught in a single lesson. It's not that you don't want your students to master the important skill of adding or subtracting fractions with unlike denominators, for example, but setting the goal that students will learn to add fractions with unlike denominators in a single hour's practice is probably unrealistic. Firm mastery of such a skill in both simple and complex forms requires multiple lessons. You'd probably want to revisit that objective several times to build depth and context into your students' skill and to give them lots of practice.

Given the importance of adding or subtracting fractions with unlike denominators, a key part of the process is conceptualizing the steps necessary to achieve mastery. Perhaps you'd start by finding the least common denominator of two fractions, then try adding with simple unit fractions, moving on to increasingly complex fractions and then perhaps to word problems or adding more than two fractions with unlike denominators. In any case, it would be a mistake to use the same objective—adding fractions with unlike denominators—every day for two or three weeks while you “worked on” the

skill. You would have a much greater chance of success if you built a series of day-by-day objectives that set achievable, daily goals. Not only would you make your work more strategic, but you'd also gain a better and better sense of what your students can accomplish in a day. Knowing how fast they can master information means knowing whether you need two or three weeks to master a basic skill. In addition, your students would learn a lot by understanding, through your objectives, how you conceived of complexity in math class. "Oh! Unit fractions are easier than most others."

## Measurable

An objective should be written so that your success in achieving it can be measured, ideally by the end of the class period. This lets you better determine what worked in your implementation. The best teachers take this opportunity to the next logical step: they measure every lesson with a short activity, question, or set of questions that students must complete and turn in before leaving class (see technique 26, Exit Ticket). Setting an explicit, measurable goal beforehand helps you hold yourself accountable.

Setting measurable lesson objectives disciplines you in other ways. For example, it forces you to think through key assumptions. If your goal is to have students know something or understand something or think something, how will you know they have reached it? Thoughts are not measurable unless they are described or applied. Do your lessons rely on a balance of methods for describing or applying understanding?

If your goal is to have students feel, think, or believe something, how appropriate is that? Is it sufficient to read and understand poetry without enjoying, appreciating, or loving it? Are students accountable for accepting the judgments and tastes of others — or for learning skills that can help them make up their own minds?

I am a pretty fair case study of this. Although I have a master's degree in English literature, I do not enjoy reading poetry. In fact, I usually find it almost unreadable. I'm sorry to say (to all my fantastic professors and teachers) that I have almost never achieved the objective of loving a poem. Nevertheless, having learned to analyze and sustain arguments about poetry, and having had to critique those of others, has helped me to become a more effective thinker and writer and, occasionally (I hope), a more insightful person. So, in the end, I am truly glad to have studied and read poems in my literature classes. My point is that my best teachers held themselves accountable for what they could control (the quality of my thinking and the sustainability of my arguments), not what they couldn't (whether I liked reading the stuff). Even though their love for the things they taught me was probably their reason for doing the work, passing that love on to me fell into the realm of what they couldn't control. They eschewed

loving poetry as an objective, even if it was their motivation — an irony, to be sure, but a useful one.

### Made First

An objective should be designed to guide the activity, not to justify how a chosen activity meets one of several viable purposes. The objective comes first. Be aware, however, of just how many teachers who believe they are objective driven start with an activity (“We’re playing Jeopardy today!” “We’re reading *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* today”) and retrofit an objective to it. You can often identify these teachers because their objectives look like learning standards (which are different and far broader) and are occasionally written on the board undigested from state documents: “3.L.6 Students will read a variety of texts for understanding.” To risk beating a dead horse, you must digest the standard into a strategic series of daily objectives — component pieces — to ultimately achieve broader mastery.

### Most Important

An objective should focus on what’s most important on the path to college, and nothing else. It describes the next step straight up the mountain.

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## Assessing and Improving Objectives

The following objectives fail to meet at least one of the 4Ms criteria:

- *Students will be able to add and subtract fractions with like and unlike denominators.* This objective isn’t manageable. It contains at least four different objectives for four different days (and more likely four different weeks): adding fractions with like denominators, subtracting fractions with like denominators, adding fractions with unlike denominators, and subtracting fractions with unlike denominators. Realistically, this objective is in fact a standard, a huge one, and the topic of a unit plan.
- *Students will be able to appreciate various forms of poetry, including sonnets and lyric poetry.* What is appreciation? How will you know whether it happened? Can students understand T. S. Eliot and not like his writing, or do they have to pretend to assimilate your tastes as well? This objective isn’t measurable. It’s probably not manageable either.

- *Students will view scenes from the film version of The Crucible.* This is an activity, not an objective. Therefore, it's not made first. Showing the film version of Arthur Miller's play *The Crucible* could be a home run or a waste of time, depending on what its purpose is. Will students compare the film version of *The Crucible* to Elizabeth George Speare's *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*? If so, why? Will students better understand Speare's perspective on witchcraft by comparing it to another contemporary story? If so, that should be described in the objective: *To better understand the author's perspective on witchcraft in colonial America by comparing her portrayal to another contemporary portrayal.*
- *Students will construct a poster to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day.* In addition to describing an activity, this objective isn't "most important." Skill at making posters won't help put students in a position to succeed through the content of their character. Understanding Dr. King's legacy certainly is deeply important, and that understanding might even be reflected in a poster, but a champion teacher would consider poster making useful only if it was the best way to reinforce that understanding. The objective should be about Dr. King.

## POST IT

Display your lesson objective where everyone can see it and identify your purpose.

Once your objective is complete, **Post It** in a visible location in your room — the same location every day — so that everyone who walks into the room, your students as well as peers and administrators, can identify your purpose for teaching that day in as plain English as possible.

In the case of students, posting your objective is important because they should know what they're trying to do, which will help them work more intentionally toward the goal. In the example of *The Crucible*, students will watch better if they know what they're looking for. You can go a step further by making the objective part of the fabric of the classroom conversation. You can underscore its importance by asking students to discuss, review, copy, or read it, as a matter of habit, at the outset or at the conclusion of the lesson. You might even make a habit of asking your students to put the objective in context, to say why it matters, to connect it to what happened yesterday, and so on.

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## Draw the Map: Floors

Draw the Map isn't limited to wall space. Planning floor space is just as important. Many teachers seat their students in pods of desks that face each other because they believe that students should be socialized to interact in school. With the exception of realigning desks for tests, this classroom layout often doesn't change. If the teacher's goal is to be attended to for much of the lesson, she has created a strong disincentive for that. The classroom layout has made the primary lesson objective harder to accomplish in deference to philosophy.

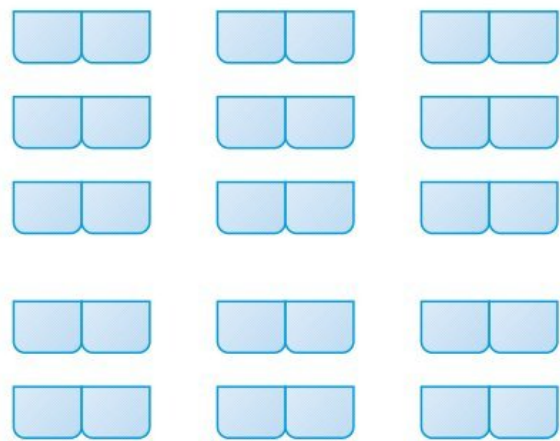
What if, rather than asking whether students should interact in school or opining that they should, a teacher asked:

- *When* should students interact in school?
- *How* should students interact in school?
- *What* should the way students sit signal and incentivize about the various kinds of interactions?
- *Which kinds* of interactions support which kinds of lesson objectives?
- *What other* kinds of ways can students be socialized to interact appropriately without necessarily building the classroom around that one idea every day?

I am a big fan of rows as the default classroom structure—specifically, three paired columns of rows (see Figure 4.1), mostly because I see so many teachers use it. This layout socializes students to attend to the board and the teacher as their primary focus. It can of course be altered to match the lesson

as your plan dictates, but if you’re not sure what “default” layout to use as a starting point, I’d start there.

**Figure 4.1**



In addition, you have to be able to get anywhere in the room without a word—while you are teaching, in fact. Once you have to say “Excuse me,” you are essentially asking permission. This limits your ability to hold students to high behavioral and academic standards. No matter what layout you choose, think as intentionally about aisles and alleys as about desks.

Beyond desks, aisles, and alleys, the floor itself can be helpful in terms of planning your own movements. A little piece of tape on the floor—not unlike the kind used to indicate stage directions during a theater performance—can help you move quickly and purposefully about the room. Another piece can help you get everyone moving and in line (“Class, everyone line up on the blue tape in three, two, one ...”).

*Post* It is important for visitors, your fellow teachers, and your supervisor, for example, because these people give you feedback, and feedback is more useful when the person giving it knows what you’re trying to do—if he or she addresses not just whether your teaching was “good” in some abstract sense, but whether it appeared to be getting at your goal. A visitor who thinks you should be discussing more about how the characters are developed in *The Crucible* may or may not be right. Whether you should spend more time on the development of characters depends on what your

ultimate purpose is. It's to your benefit to discipline those who offer help to focus on what best meets your objectives. Otherwise, their advice and evaluation of your lesson fall to idiosyncratic criteria—for example, your department chair observes you and says that you should be emphasizing character development more because that's what *she* does with *The Crucible*.

## DOUBLE PLAN

As you plan a lesson, plan what students will be doing at each point in class.

It's natural for teachers to write lessons that focus on what *they* will be doing: which key points they will cover, questions they will ask, activities they will facilitate, work they will assign, and so forth. Still, the most effective teachers I know **Double Plan**, that is, they plan at least as carefully what *their* students will be doing each step of the way. You might imagine a sort of T-chart lesson plan in which the teacher details her actions on the left side and what students should be doing on the right, but it was in the course of reviewing lesson materials from top teachers that I realized that many of them *Double Plan* in a more specific format: lesson packets.

A lesson packet is a carefully designed handout that students work on during the lesson. It has space to write or take notes as well as background readings posted in it; it's a lesson plan from the student's perspective. (You can see examples of packets in the Useful Tools section at the end of this chapter. These packets can also be found on [www.teachlikeachampion.com](http://www.teachlikeachampion.com).)

Packet planning is an effective tool for *Double Planning* because it forces you to see the lesson through your students' eyes. Teachers who do this best design packets that satisfy six goals, which we'll explore in more depth in the next sections.

### Goal 1: Everything in One Place

A well-designed packet gives both teacher and students everything they need for the lesson at their fingertips. Whether you're teaching students how to solve systems of

equations or exploring the theme of the destruction of familial structure in *Night*, a packet can make sure that students have all of the lesson materials accessible in one place, minimizing the need to distribute additional materials, take out new documents, and move back and forth between activities, such as reading a text and writing about it. Great *Double Planners* embed it all: graphs, tables, maps, primary source documents, sometimes novel excerpts, places to write, and more. Further, having a copy of the packet yourself enables you to work from the same set of materials as your students, allowing you to manage the student experience — such as which activity to flip to or what passage you’re reading — quickly and effectively.

Champion teachers also turn packets into a powerful *Double Plan* tool by making detailed margin notes. For instance, Colleen Driggs used the margins of her packets to carefully plan the pacing of each activity and section of her lesson. She noted everything from the length of her *Do Now* to the amount of time she would give students to read and then write for each independent practice question. Likewise, Taryn Pritchard, a middle school math teacher at Leadership Prep Bedford Stuyvesant in Brooklyn, uses this space to plan the format of the questions she will ask, as well as identify the students she will call on for each question. As we’ll discuss later, in the section “Synergy with Checking for Understanding” (goal 4), this level of planning enables teachers like Taryn to strategically collect data from students across a range of ability levels and frees them up to focus on other things, such as which follow-up questions they will ask or which topics they need to reteach. Meaghan Reuler, a fifth-grade reading teacher from the same campus, includes stage directions in her packets, or reminders to do things like “Put two scholars’ work up on the document camera and evaluate which is better supported” or “Look for students to be marking up the question” as she circulates during independent work. By scripting in key teacher actions that might not ordinarily show up in a packet, Meaghan frees herself from having to rely on multiple planning documents. She keeps everything she needs in one place.

Strong *Double Planners* also work in the margins during instruction to keep a running record of any revisions and adjustments they want to make to the lesson. Jason Armstrong, a fifth-grade math teacher from Roxbury Prep in Boston, often jots observations about things that surprised him or that he wants to change for the next time he delivers this lesson. For example, during a lesson on classifying quadrilaterals, Jason noted that “some didn’t realize that they should use the previous page for filling these out” or “some had trouble recognizing that sides could be parallel and congruent at the same time.” He also flagged sections that students did not complete and added time

stamps to indicate precisely when the majority of students reached specific points in the packet, so that he could improve his pacing for next time. Similarly, Bryan Belanger, an eighth-grade math teacher at Troy Preparatory Middle School in upstate New York, adds revision notes in the margins during the lesson so that he can make same-day changes to his lessons. This allows him to act on what he learned while his memories of the lesson are still fresh.

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## Draw the Map: Walls

You put a lot of time into planning out your curriculum, so why shouldn't the same kind of thought go into the way that content is delivered and received? To *Draw the Map* means making space planning part of your lesson planning. The first rule of thumb for effective wall space in the best classrooms is that walls should help, not harm. This means that they should avoid clutter and overstimulation. A few critical items should be up, and they should not distract students' attention from the primary instructional space by being too close to it. Posted items are best when they focus on useful tools: reminders of key steps in adding fractions; examples of common themes; seven types of conflict in a story; pictures representing recent vocabulary words; phrase starters for agreeing or disagreeing with a peer during discussion. Once you've taught a key skill, posting a tool quickly after helps students review it and use it frequently. (See Figure 4.2.)

This doesn't mean you shouldn't also post student work on the walls. You should, but be sure to post work that provides a model to other students. Can you make comments on posted work specific and aligned to learning goals? Can you replace writing "Great Job!" in the margin with "Great topic sentence—clearly previews the key issue in the paragraph"? If you can, it will help make success replicable for other students.

Lastly, some insightful teachers use wall space not only to remind students of key actions but also to remind themselves. One school asked teachers to work on economy of language and "bright face" (see technique 56, Strong Voice), so several teachers put signs on their own walls to remind themselves. Whenever they looked up, a bright and cheery sign reminded them to use the fewest words they could and to show their appreciation for their students in their visage. We can use the space in our classrooms and our schools to bring out our own best selves as much as our students'.

**Figure 4.2** A more useful take on the Word Wall: vocabulary words with pictures to help scholars remember what they mean can better help them put the words to use.



## Goal 2: Synergy with Pacing

A well-designed packet supports airtight pacing because it minimizes transaction costs involved with switching between tasks, formats, and activities. Embedding everything into students' packets allows you to skip pace-killing routines like distributing novels or collecting papers. Although it may seem trivial, saving minutes this way each day can help you add back days of lost instructional time to each school year.

Champion teachers often add visible markers to handouts so that it's easier to make sure everyone is on the same page. For instance, eighth-grade history teacher Ryan Miller of Williamsburg Collegiate in Brooklyn color-codes the pages so that lecture

notes appear on red paper, readings on yellow, and so forth. Color-coding handouts also makes giving *What to Do* (technique 57) directions much easier. All Ryan has to say is “Flip to your notes on Social Security in yellow,” or “Make sure the red one-pager is in your portfolio.” This helps Ryan shave several seconds off each transition and makes his directions stickier for students.

As we discuss in the chapter on pacing, one way to draw attention to mileposts (see Chapter Six, “Pacing,” for a definition of the term) — reference points inserted along the route of a journey to make the distance covered more visible to travelers — and to create the “illusion of speed” is to walk through the agenda for the lesson. Many teachers who *Double Plan* with packets already do this because their packets inherently provide students with a visual rundown of what’s to come. They can embed new and intriguing activities, not to mention images and icons, into packets, building suspense and excitement and giving students something to look forward to.

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## Shortest Path

The goal in teaching is to take the *shortest path* from A (lack of knowledge and understanding) to B (durable long-term knowledge and understanding), so the primary criterion for evaluating a lesson should be “How quickly does it get me there?” Sometimes, alternative criteria—how clever, how artfully designed, how inclusive of various philosophies, even how enjoyable to teach a given lesson might be—can distract us from choosing the methods and lesson design that get students most quickly and effectively to the goal. So it’s important to strive to keep in check the part of us that wants to evaluate lessons on how self-actualizing they were to teach or how well they demonstrated some theory (even one in this book!).

The shortest path almost always involves using a *variety* of teaching approaches, but it’s also important to note the critical importance of the “I” portion of the lesson—that is, direct instruction. *A series of lessons that doesn’t include at least some direct instruction is unlikely to lead to long-term mastery.*

For some readers, I have just committed the ultimate pedagogical sin by joining the words: “direct” and “instruction.” But please note that I did not say that an entire lesson needs to be made up exclusively of direct instruction, merely part of it, and that I said this with the goal of pointing out that it plays a role in teaching that is often underacknowledged.

Critics of direct instruction often suggest that it inherently causes students to be passive. It consists of “teacher talk,” which implies that students are not talking and are therefore inactive as learners. There are several problems with this argument. First, it’s not necessarily true that teachers are always talking and students always listening during direct instruction. Perhaps this is so in an exaggerated version of it involving an uninterrupted monologue, but such a form of direct instruction is rare outside (1) certain very large or very technical classes at the university level and (2) the exaggerated straw-man arguments of those who set out to discredit direct instruction. Effective teachers often use direct instruction much differently—with questions and short discussion points and engagement strategies embedded within it, and generally for periods of time closer to ten or fifteen minutes, whereupon it gives way to guided and independent practice. Second, even if it were true that direct instruction was similar to “teacher talk,” it could still be highly engaging—I note here that when you read or you watch a movie, you are technically a passive recipient of something a lot like direct instruction, but that doesn’t mean your imagination and critical faculties are not highly active.

Finally, it’s worth noting that even if there are occasional times when direct instruction lasts longer than ten to fifteen minutes *and* asks students to learn by listening, this may not be inherently bad. Certainly it would be if it were a daily offering, but it is probably a good thing for students to occasionally be able to absorb information by listening to someone more knowledgeable than themselves. They will have to do this in college classes, not to mention their graduate studies and professional lives should they choose to become doctors, say, or lawyers. An occasional lesson that requires engaged listening and diligent note taking, and that assumes that there might be power in great ideas shared to and noted by aspiring scholars, might not be the worst thing in the world.

Somehow, though, teachers have been convinced that “teacher talk” is the ultimate pejorative. Of course you can do too much of it, but you also can’t do much without at least some of it. Daisy Christodoulou points out in her outstanding and important book *Seven Myths About Education* that highly non-teacher-centered activities (for example, projects and Socratic seminars and other forms of “active learning”) are devoid of rigor unless first informed by extensive background knowledge. Direct instruction, when it provides

facts, knowledge, and skills that are later practiced, applied, and reflected on, *builds the foundation that makes other forms of instruction possible*. And as Dylan Wiliam has astutely pointed out, more teacher words are not necessarily worse. In school systems of Japan and Hong Kong, for example, a greater proportion of the words in the average classroom are spoken by the teacher than in the United States. Let us respect the power of what a teacher can do enough to accept that a teacher talking to a class about content is not inherently bad.

So let me observe that effective teachers include direct instruction regularly in their lessons. Do they also pepper it with engagement strategies to involve students—brief questions to ensure involvement or to check for understanding, perhaps even a *Turn and Talk*? Yes. Do they use it for manageable periods of time before asking students to practice and apply what they've learned? Also yes. But they often use it frequently, and in my observation they use it more frequently as they progress in their teaching careers. They often start out believing it is wrong, using it only with trepidation, but with experience become more confident in accepting its balanced application. There is a fundamental difference between the fact that something poorly executed can result in passive and disengaged students and the assertion that it inherently does, and the solution to poor execution is better execution, not the dismissal of the method out of hand.

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### Goal 3: Engineered for Accountability

*Double Planning* with packets forces you to consider how you will at each step hold students accountable for the content and quality of their work. The teachers who do this best require students to constantly interact with their packets, and they engineer the physical space students need to do so. For example, Maggie Johnson, an eighth-grade teacher at Troy Preparatory Middle School, provides space for her students to write everything, from recording the objective to taking notes during a discussion (see Maggie's packet in the Useful Tools section for this chapter on the website, [www.teachlikeachampion.com](http://www.teachlikeachampion.com)). She even includes a specific space labeled "Leave this space blank" for students to go back and rewrite their answers to writing prompts to make them stronger. Regardless of your approach, the key takeaway is that effective *Double Planning* involves constant written accountability—even for tasks that

don't traditionally involve a lot of written work (for example, reviewing the lesson objective or tracking class discussions).

When you have a million things on your mind, it's easy to overlook an activity, forget a question, or neglect a topic that you intended to cover. Because *Double Plan* packets provide teachers with such a clear road map about what they and students should do at every step, teachers are less likely to let activities slip through the cracks or to short-change important content. If it's on the page, it's visible and therefore more likely to get covered. And if you still manage to skip something, students will often let you know.

On a similar note, when you script your questions into your packets, it also holds you accountable to ask them in the same form that you planned. This prevents you from unintentionally diluting the rigor of your planned questions or leading students astray with tangential prompts (for more information, see Chapter Nine). The same holds true for *What to Do* directions: the more clearly you script those into your packets, the easier it will be to ensure that students do what you planned, in the manner you intended.

#### **Goal 4: Synergy with Checking for Understanding**

Because *Double Planning* with packets inherently *Standardizes the Format*—enabling champion teachers to monitor the content and quality of student performance reliably and efficiently—these teachers often use them to collect and organize information on what students know and don't know. During their lessons, champion teachers gather data through observation as they circulate. Occasionally, they might stop to compare students' written work with the target responses that they've scripted into the margins of their packet. (For an example, see Taryn Pritchard's packet in the Useful Tools section for this chapter on the website, [www.teachlikeachampion.com](http://www.teachlikeachampion.com).) Planning target responses holds you accountable to sticking with the standard that you initially set. It's easy to accidentally miss errors or "round up" student responses, but it's much harder to do that when you can immediately compare students' work against a concrete exemplar. Scripting target responses also enables you to *experience* the lesson through their eyes, which can help you better anticipate error, gauge pacing more accurately, and draft clearer *What to Do* directions so that students can spend time grappling with content rather than the logistics.

Once champion teachers collect data, they use a variety of approaches to record and organize it in their packets. For instance, Taryn Pritchard of Leadership Preparatory Bedford Stuyvesant uses the margins to keep track of students who make common errors. Later, she intentionally *Cold Calls* these students (technique 33) so that she can address their common misunderstandings in front of the whole group. Taryn also jots

the names of students who produced particularly stellar work so that she can *Cold Call* them to share their unique approach or insights with the class. In cases where students make isolated errors or need individual assistance, teachers like Ryan Miller of Williamsburg Collegiate also use their packets to keep a running log of the students they plan to check in with during independent work. This frees them up to devote their energy to collecting data and acting on it.

### **Goal 5: Success Oriented**

The most effective *Double Planners* wire their packets to help as many students as possible meet or exceed a high standard of excellence. To do this, they view the lesson from the student's perspective and then systematically add supports or remove obstacles to success, without diluting rigor.

In one history class, for example, the teacher embedded the rubric she'd use to evaluate the quality of students' analysis of primary source documents. We've also seen teachers add supports like a "tip box," examples of correct work, standard-setting directions (for example, "Remember to include 4+ sentences"), and reminders about the resources students should refer to when tackling a question (for example, "Be sure to use your notes from yesterday's lecture on fascism"). Taken together, these additions set up students to practice success while also preparing them to self-monitor the quality of their work within and across subject areas.

### **Goal 6: Embedded Adaptability**

Strong *Double Plan* teachers recognize that their lesson packets are living, breathing documents that should help them respond to the evolving needs of their students. As I've mentioned, Bryan Belanger regularly includes more questions in his packets than his students need so that he can strategically speed ahead or double back, depending on student mastery. Taryn Pritchard applies similar thinking to independent practice by dividing it up into sections by order of difficulty: "mild," "medium," and "spicy." Taryn asks all students to complete the "mild" independent practice first and then to get as far as they can through the final two sections for additional enrichment. This allows students to speed ahead at their own pace without having to disrupt other students by continually asking permission from the teacher before moving on. Other teachers have taken a slightly more binary approach by embedding their handouts with "Challenge" or "Deep Thinking" questions. Regardless of which format you choose, strive to design independent practice that ensures all students are able to challenge themselves at their own pace.

## CONCLUSION

It seems obvious, but diligent planning—especially planning of the lesson through the student's eyes—is necessary to set the stage for productive class time. Even if things don't always go exactly according to what you have planned, simply having thought through activities, potential trouble spots, and ways to keep your lessons focused on specific objectives ahead of time can make responding in the moment feel more natural and less reactionary when the time comes. You may not have the time to *Double Plan* every lesson or to post everything just so before the bell rings each day. Still, the more you get in the habit of thoroughly preparing materials and responses ahead of time, the more meaningful you will make the already short time in your class. In Chapter Five, we'll look at ways champion teachers structure their time in class to make the largest, most efficient strides toward common mastery.

### Reflection and Practice

The following activities should help you think about and practice the techniques in this chapter.

1. Choose an especially large learning standard from the state in which you teach. Before you analyze it, try to guess how many objectives you'd need to truly master it. Now break it up into a series of manageable, measurable objectives that flow in a logical sequence from introduction of the idea to full mastery. Next, try to increase or decrease the number of days you have available by 20 percent. How does this change your objectives?
2. Make a building tour of your school, visiting classrooms and writing down the objectives. Score them as to whether they meet *4Ms* criteria. Fix the ones you can and then ask yourself where as a school you need to improve objective writing.
3. Think of a recent lesson you taught, and write out all of the actions from a student's perspective, starting in each case with an action verb—"Listened to" and "Wrote," for example. If you feel daring, ask your students whether they think your agenda is accurate. Even more daring is to ask your students to make a list of what they were doing during your class.

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4. Make an action plan for your classroom setup:
  - a. What should your default layout be, and what would the most common other layouts look like? Will you use them enough to justify having your students practice moving from one to another?
  - b. What are the five most useful and important things you could put on the walls to help students do their work? Are they up?
  - c. What things are on your walls that don't need to be? Nominate five to take down.

FIND THESE TOOLS AT [WWW.TEACHLIKEACHAMPION.COM/YOURLIBRARY](http://WWW.TEACHLIKEACHAMPION.COM/YOURLIBRARY)

USEFUL  
TOOLS

**Maggie Johnson's *To Kill a Mockingbird* packet.** Check out one of Maggie Johnson's reading packets for ideas on how you can hold students accountable for interacting with the content of every lesson from start to finish.

**Ryan Miller's Double Planning.** See how Ryan Miller color-codes students' packet materials to make it easier for them to find specific pages and activities.

**Taryn Pritchard's marked-up packet.** Take a closer look at how Taryn Pritchard marks up her packets as she circulates to keep track of what students know and don't know.

**Meaghan Reuler's Word of the Day packet.** Take a peek inside a fifth-grade vocabulary packet that reading teacher Meaghan Reuler carefully designed to make student errors easier to see and respond to.