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# Secret One

## The Secret of Planning

### The Rewards of Planning

*Coaches go into every game with a very specific plan  
And surgeons plan their surgeries and proceed with a steady hand  
Attorneys defend their clients following much preparation  
And players of chess only make a move after much deliberation  
Travelers go on vacation with their maps and proper clothing  
So why's it that some teachers speak of lesson plans with loathing?  
The fact remains that failing to plan becomes a plan to fail  
You're a ship without an anchor, a hammer without a nail  
So plan your lessons every day  
Stay on the path so you won't go astray  
Know why you're teaching the things that you teach  
And reap your rewards from the students you reach.*

Secret 1.

## Part 1. How to Have a Great Plan

The very best teachers know that if you want to *have* a great lesson, you need to *plan* a great lesson. It is truly that simple. But understand that planning takes time. However, if you teach with a well-planned lesson, then you can really enjoy your teaching. Now, does that mean that you will accomplish everything you intend to accomplish or that your plan will go off without a hitch? Of course not. Teaching is not an exact science, and that is why we need to plan so thoroughly.

The very first thing you will want to do, when you sit down to plan your lesson, is to center the entire plan around your *objective*—what it is you want the students to accomplish on that day. Let's say that today you will be teaching your students how to write a friendly letter. (The reason we chose this particular skill is that everyone, regardless of their content area, can relate to using this skill.) So your objective is that the students will be able to write a friendly letter, including all of the five parts—heading, greeting, body, closing, and signature. Now, the first thing you need to plan, of course, is how you will get your students to actually *want* to write a friendly letter. So you'll want to begin a discussion of some sort in which you ask them if they ever write letters to their friends. All students, at one time or another, have passed notes in class. Yes, you have their attention. You will, of course, lead the discussion beyond writing notes to their friends as you continue to discuss the friendly letter and its purpose. Then you may want to have a friendly letter already written to the class by you or another teacher or even the principal. Yes, this takes some preparation. It involves either writing the letter yourself or having someone else do it. But it's not difficult.

Let's say that you have the principal write a friendly letter to the class. (You may even choose to write the letter *for* the principal. It really doesn't matter, as long as you make the principal aware of what you wrote.) It is best to write the letter on chart paper or on an overhead transparency so that it is in an enlarged format, visible to all.

Now read the letter with the class, and then have them analyze each part with your guidance. As they analyze each part, have a student write the name of that part next to it. For instance, where it says, "Dear Class," the student would label it as the "greeting." You get the point. Bottom line? With your guidance, they will identify all of the parts of a friendly letter.

### 2 ♦ Seven Simple Secrets: What the *Best* Teachers Know and Do

Now you'll want to *model* the skill for them. (By the way, modeling is one of the most important parts of teaching anything to anyone, yet it is often overlooked.) To model, simply write a letter to a friend of yours, either on the board, on chart paper, or on an overhead transparency. As you write, think aloud for the benefit of the students. You may even choose to allow them to guide you as you write. (Please take note that we have not yet, nor will we, give a definition of a friendly letter. Instead, we're pulling the information from the students. This is much more meaningful, and thus lasting.) After you've finished that, you might then plan to write a friendly letter, maybe in response to the principal, as a class. Either have a student write it on chart paper, or you can write it as they all participate.

Once you've actually taught and modeled the skill and then guided students through the skill, they should be ready to try the new skill on their own. So what should their assignment be? You guessed it. They will write their own friendly letters as you walk around and monitor for understanding. You may even choose to have them bring envelopes and stamps so that they can actually mail the letters. And now that that's done, you will always want to wrap up your lesson with a review to provide closure. The most effective teachers know that you never tell the students what they've learned. Instead, you have them tell and/or show you.

That's it. You've written a great plan! Yeah, but what if you have one or two students who don't spell all the words correctly in their friendly letters? Remember, the objective was to write a friendly letter including all of its parts. No one said anything about spelling everything correctly. While you're monitoring, simply help them with their spelling. And even if you didn't catch every misspelling, the bottom line is that they've accomplished the lesson's objective anyway! (Please don't misunderstand. We're not saying that spelling is not important. Rather, we're suggesting that you focus on the objective for that particular lesson on that particular day.)

In writing this book, we came up with a plan. First, we thought about our objective and decided that we wanted to share with everyone the secrets of the most effective teachers. Next, of course, we had to determine what the very best teachers have in common. We found seven things. Then we had to summarize, in a simple, easy-to-read format, those seven things that the most effective teachers know and do. We then decided to divide each secret into seven simple parts. After we had all of that in place, the book practically wrote itself. So it is in the classroom. If you have a really great plan, your lesson will practically teach itself!

## Tips for Planning

The following are some simple tips for you to use when planning any lesson:

- ◆ Determine your objective.
- ◆ Decide how you will make the lesson interesting and inviting for your students.
- ◆ Be sure to make an effort to actively involve your students in every part of the lesson.
- ◆ Plan to state the lesson's purpose, relate the skill to students' real lives, teach and model the skill, practice the skill with them, have them try the new skill independently, and review. (See Secret 3, page 41.)
- ◆ Be sure to gather any necessary materials beforehand.
- ◆ Enjoy teaching your well-planned lesson!

We guarantee that any teacher who plans all lessons with activities such as the ones in the above plan and gives careful thought to every step of the lesson will see instant results from students.

If you plan your lessons with careful attention and treat each one as a special invention, you're sure to see student success and retention, reducing your levels of stress and tension!

## Part 2. How to Overplan

The very best teachers, as part of their secret to successful planning, always overplan. Most, if not all, will admit that they learned this secret the hard way. As teachers, we can all relate to planning some lesson or activity that we thought would take a certain amount of time, only to realize that we were dead wrong. For instance, you are a teacher planning an activity, envisioning that it will take about 20 minutes. The activity turns out to take seven minutes. Now what? There are 13 minutes left to fill. What do you do? Unless you have overplanned, you resort to desperate measures. Yes, the ever-present, much-hated worksheet. And when that worksheet is finished, there's always another one waiting. Students, of course, are doing anything but completing the worksheet. Or, they finish the worksheet mindlessly, getting mostly wrong answers. During this time, the teacher is continually reminding students to get busy, to proofread their work, to stop talking, and so forth. And, of course, some students complete the worksheet within a couple of minutes, whereas others have not yet begun. So what do you do with the students who now have nothing to do? You resort to another desperate measure, like saying, "If you're finished, read your library book." Or better yet, "When you finish, put your head down and be quiet until everyone else is finished." Sound familiar? This frustrating, all-too-familiar scenario can be avoided by doing what the most effective teachers are doing—overplanning!

**How do you overplan?** You do just that. You plan more than you think you will need. However, a word of caution here: Don't just plan another of the same type of activity. This will bore students out of their minds. Instead, if one activity is successfully completed by your students, then it is time to take the newly acquired skill to the next level. Therefore, when overplanning, be sure to plan subsequent activities that are increasingly challenging for your students.

**What's the downside of overplanning?** There really isn't one. At worst, you will not get to do everything you have planned for that lesson. The most important thing is that you have actually managed to teach a new skill, successfully, to your students. And, as a bonus, you're left with more activities to use in future lessons. In the next section, you will learn a skill for managing your time that will also help you not to "overly" overplan!

## Part 3. How to Manage Your Time

Even the very best teachers will admit that it's difficult to plan for a one-hour lesson and make sure that it actually takes an hour. It is even more difficult to plan for a 90-minute lesson and end within one or two minutes of 90 minutes. And even if you're overplanning, you don't want your 60-minute lesson to take only 30, so that you have to rely on 30 more minutes from your overplanning activities. Nor do you want your 60-minute lesson to take 90 minutes. So how is it that some teachers always manage to teach what they plan to teach in the amount of time that they actually plan to teach it? **The very best teachers have a secret. When planning their lessons, they plan in 5-minute segments.** In other words, a 60-minute lesson is broken into 12 five-minute segments. For instance, the introduction to the lesson is planned to last about five minutes. A brief discussion following the introduction may also take five minutes. Following that, the teacher may actually teach the new skill for one five-minute segment. The teacher may then actually take about 5 minutes to model the skill for the students. Following this, there may be two 5-minute activities in which the teacher practices the new skill with the students. Next, the teacher may put the students into cooperative groups for two five-minute segments. Following this, the students attempt the new skill independently for two five-minute segments while the teacher monitors for understanding. There are now two five-minute segments remaining. If students are having difficulty, another five-minute segment may be needed for reteaching or simply for more practice. If not, put that segment into the review activity, which may last for one or two five-minute segments, to be determined as the lesson progresses. That's it. That's a 60-minute lesson. And a good one at that!

When teachers plan this way, several things happen. It ensures that the lesson will continue to move and that the activities will be varied. This increases the likelihood of your holding the students' attention. It also ensures that you will not stay on one thing for too long—a fatal mistake made by many teachers. And finally, it keeps you within your time frame so that your lessons are well paced, almost always ending right on time!

Okay, but what if during your guided practice you notice that the students are not ready to try the skill independently after only one or two five-minute segments? Then you do what the best teachers do—you adjust.