

Instructional
Planning
for Effective
Teaching

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Table of Contents

Reproducible pages are in italics.

About the Authors	ix
Introduction	1
Why Planning Is Important	1
How Planning Fits Into the Big Picture	2
An Overview of the Book	2
Summary: So Where Do We Go From Here?	3

Part I

Strategies for Unit and Lesson Planning	5
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Chapter 1

Tactical Planning for Building Better Unit and Lesson Plans	7
What Research Says About Tactical Planning	7
How to Move From Research to Practice	8
Summary	13
<i>Guiding Questions for Planning a Unit or Lesson</i>	15
<i>Planning a Unit or Lesson: Self-Assessment</i>	17
<i>Stronge Lesson-Planning Template</i>	19
<i>Conventional Model for Unit or Lesson Planning: Hunter Plan Format</i>	21
<i>Alternative Model for Unit or Lesson Planning</i>	22

Chapter 2

Setting Learning Objectives	23
What Research Says About Learning Objectives	23
How to Move From Research to Practice	24
Summary	26
<i>Steps for Writing Learning Objectives</i>	28
<i>Learning Objectives Assessment Rubric</i>	29
<i>Trifold Objectives: Knowledge and Skills</i>	30
<i>Trifold Objectives: Dispositions (Noncognitive)</i>	32

Chapter 3

Organizing Learning Activities	35
What Research Says About Organizing Learning Activities	35
How to Move From Research to Practice	36
Summary	39
<i>Organizing Instruction</i>	41
<i>Organizing Instruction: Self-Assessment</i>	42
<i>Organizing Your Classroom</i>	43

Chapter 4

Selecting Meaningful and Purposeful Learning Materials	45
What Research Says About Meaningful and Purposeful Learning Materials	45
How to Move From Research to Practice	46

Summary.....	48
<i>Authentic Learning Materials</i>	50
<i>Developmentally Appropriate Learning Materials</i>	52
<i>Selecting and Evaluating Online Sources</i>	53

Chapter 5

Using Student Learning Data for Planning	55
What Research Says About Student Learning Data.....	55
How to Move From Research to Practice.....	56
Summary.....	59
<i>Using Formative Data for Instructional Planning</i>	61
<i>Assessing Your Assessment Practices</i>	62
<i>Percentage Mastery Formula for New Learning</i>	63

Chapter 6

Designing Engaging Opening and Closing Activities	65
What Research Says About Opening and Closing Activities.....	65
How to Move From Research to Practice.....	66
Summary.....	67
<i>Effective Opening Activities</i>	69
<i>Effective Closing Activities</i>	70
<i>Opening and Closing Activities as Assessments</i>	71

Part II

Strategies for Effective Instructional Planning	73
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Chapter 7

Strategic Planning for Teachers	75
What Research Says About Strategic Planning.....	75
How to Move From Research to Practice.....	76
Summary.....	77
<i>Curriculum Alignment</i>	79
<i>Curriculum Mapping</i>	80
<i>Strategic Planning: Self-Assessment</i>	82

Chapter 8

Planning Differentiated Instruction for Gifted and High-Ability Learners	83
What Research Says About Differentiated Instruction for Gifted and High-Ability Learners.....	83
How to Move From Research to Practice.....	85
Summary.....	86
<i>Interventions for Gifted and High-Ability Learners</i>	87
<i>Designing Advanced Learning</i>	88
<i>Differentiated Instruction Design Template</i>	89

Chapter 9

Planning Differentiated Instruction for Struggling Learners	91
What Research Says About Differentiated Instruction for Struggling Learners.....	91
How to Move From Research to Practice.....	92
Summary.....	95
<i>Steps for Differentiation</i>	97
<i>Differentiated Instruction for Struggling Learners: Self-Assessment</i>	98
<i>Improving Student Self-Efficacy</i>	99

Chapter 10	
Planning for Cross-Disciplinary Instruction	101
What Research Says About Cross-Disciplinary Instruction	101
How to Move From Research to Practice	102
Summary	104
<i>Cross-Disciplinary Instruction Continuum</i>	105
<i>Forms of Cross-Disciplinary Instruction</i>	106
<i>Planning for Cross-Disciplinary Instruction: Self-Assessment</i>	107
<hr/>	
Chapter 11	
Planning for Technology-Integrated Learning	109
What Research Says About Technology-Integrated Learning	109
How to Move From Research to Practice	111
Summary	113
<i>Technology Integration Planning Model</i>	115
<i>Planning Technology-Integrated Learning: Self-Assessment</i>	116
<i>Adapting Technology to Your Subject Area</i>	117
<hr/>	
Chapter 12	
Team Planning	121
What Research Says About Team Planning	121
How to Move From Research to Practice	122
Summary	124
<i>Collaborative Planning: Self-Assessment</i>	125
<i>Collaborative Planning Between General and Special Education Teachers</i>	126
<i>Time Management</i>	127
 References and Resources	 129
Index	143

Introduction

Planning is the logical first step that teachers consider in the process of teaching: effective instructional planning leads to more effective teaching and learning. When teaching is addressed in a thoughtful, well-planned, and systematic manner, the resulting impact on students is more likely to be satisfying and productive for everyone—the school as a whole, certainly the teachers, and most importantly, the students.

So, what is planning? Simply put, instructional planning is a systematic process involving the necessary tools and techniques to answer the following four questions.

1. Where are we?
2. Where do we want to go?
3. What will it take to get there (time, resources, effort)?
4. How will we know when we arrive at our destination?

Drawing from a variety of traditional planning definitions, key characteristics that apply to instructional planning include:

- Determining present status
- Determining future direction
- Establishing goals and objectives
- Designing actions to accomplish desired changes
- Using methods to partially order events and reduce complexity in decision making
- Identifying the most effective and efficient instructional, assessment, and related processes

All of these characteristics should be present in the planning process to be sure teachers are on the right track.

Why Planning Is Important

Planning is the foundation of most successful organizational action, and this certainly holds true for

teaching. To put this basic premise to the test, consider the characteristics of the most successful schools. They have a safe and orderly environment, a clear sense of direction, curriculum alignment throughout the school, excellent instruction, parent involvement, tutoring, and a host of other practices. All of these characteristics of effective schools require a sustained planning effort (Jacobson, 2011; Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013).

The same premise holds true for teaching: planning produces results. However, in order for instructional planning to pay off, it must be considered a process—not a product. Instructional planning is not the end result; it is merely the blueprint by which improvement and successful actions are charted.

Effective classrooms are led by effective teachers working to produce worthy results. There are numerous ways in which instructional planning can help make teachers more effective, including the following.

- **Eliminate haphazardness:** When teaching is thoughtful and purposeful, desired results are much more likely to emerge.
- **Encourage a systematic determination of students' needs:** Careful analysis of students' current status and future needs leads to better, more precise teaching.
- **Provide a basis for improvement:** Schools cannot rise above the quality of their people. Moreover, schools improve when teachers, principals, and other employees improve. For their role, when teachers plan effectively, they are much more likely to deliver instruction and assessment effectively and, ultimately, enable students to succeed.

Despite the direct benefits of instructional planning, both immediate and long-term, when teachers proceed without quality planning, poor results are sure to follow. The chain of events that unfolds without investing the requisite time and energy in quality planning is all too predictable. The concept of planning after the fact is an

oxymoron. A reactionary mode to teaching is composed less of planning and more of crisis management. Stephen Covey (1989), in his classic text on leadership, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, describes this mode of operation in his time-management matrix as not acting on important matters until they become urgent. He states that this approach to problem solving results in “crisis managers, problem-minded people, [and] deadline-driven producers” (p. 152). This anti-planning mode results in crisis-oriented classrooms with a constant need to put out brushfires.

How Planning Fits Into the Big Picture

Quality instructional planning is about marching successfully into the future. More specifically, planning should be viewed both as a precursor to instructional delivery and as an ongoing process that permeates all aspects of teaching. Consider how planning can and should permeate all teaching and learning processes, as depicted in figure I.1.

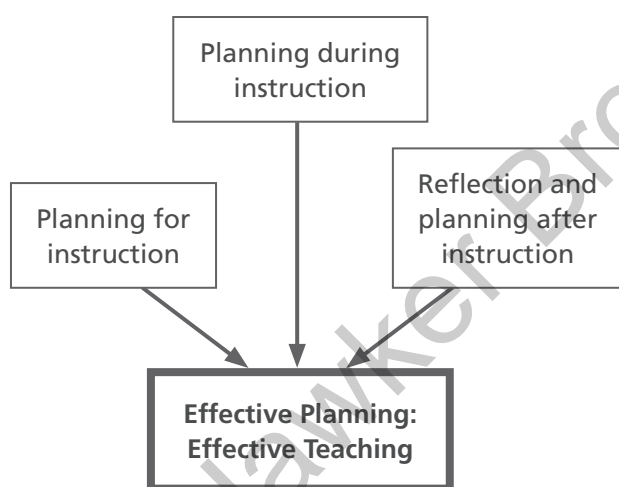


Figure I.1: Planning as an integral part of instruction.

So, what are the right starting and ending points of effective planning? Following are the appropriate steps.

1. Plan thoughtfully.
2. Plan before teaching.
3. Plan during teaching.
4. Reflect on and plan after teaching.

Simply put, the best mantra for the role of planning in the big picture of teaching may be: don't leave home without it.

An Overview of the Book

Teaching is a complex activity that requires careful preparation and planning of objectives and activities on a weekly, daily, and even hourly basis. Part I of this book includes research-based strategies and tools designed to help teachers build quality components in a typical unit or lesson plan. These components include setting learning objectives, organizing learning activities, selecting meaningful and purposeful learning materials, using student learning data, and designing engaging opening and closing activities.

Part II of this book focuses on a variety of broader topics related to planning rather than specific components of an instructional plan. These overarching topics of planning include elements such as strategic planning, planning differentiated instruction for learners at both ends of the achievement spectrum, planning for cross-disciplinary and technology-integrated instruction, and team planning.

To make the book relevant and useful, each chapter includes the following sections.

- An introduction to the instructional planning strategy
- What research says about the instructional planning strategy
- How to move from research to practice

To end each chapter, we include several reproducible handouts to help teachers immediately implement these instructional planning strategies. Our intent is for teachers and school leaders to take the strategies right off the page and put them into practice as seamlessly as possible.

The introduction and research sections provide a solid foundation for what and why the planning strategies should be part of a teacher's repertoire. The research-to-practice section is designed as a solid bridge connecting the best research with best practices.

Most certainly, there are other valuable instructional planning methods and strategies to consider, and while we have not included all possible strategies, we have included those that meet the following two criteria.

1. The strategies must have a solidly researched and empirical background and, where possible, a historical track record.
2. The strategies must be teacher friendly and practical.

Our aim is to provide a set of prominently used, well-researched, quality strategies for teacher growth and development within the domain of instructional planning. As summarized in table I.1, we aim to support three specific groups of educators in the important work of supporting effective instructional planning.

Table I.1: Goals for Each Audience

Audience	Goals of Book
Teachers improving practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-reflection • Guided study • Teacher-directed growth
Teachers teaching teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentor tips • Instructional coaching tips • Peer networks
Leaders supporting teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directed growth • Supervisor support for teachers • Coordinated curriculum

Summary: So Where Do We Go From Here?

Instructional planning is a process of mapping out what learning targets to focus on, what materials to incorporate, what content-specific instructional strategies and activities to adopt, and what assessments to use to evaluate how students are doing and to inform future planning. Although many expert teachers plan in a seemingly effortless way and rely on their intuition and common sense, such ease derives from years of habitual examination and reflection of instructional planning. Well-designed instruction more often than not requires effortful, careful, and purposeful planning.

Our goals for this book include providing content to help you plan for, improve, support, and sustain student learning with high-quality instructional planning. We hope you find this guide on instructional planning practical, solidly researched, and easy to use. Now, let's put these instructional planning strategies to use in your school or classroom.