

THE  
**HOW**  
AND  
**WOW**  
OF  
**TEACHING**

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# Introduction

Another book about teaching?

Why this book?

Will it wow me?

What does it offer that I can't get from Google?

These are valid questions that require valid answers. What this book can do for you is save time and frustration, facilitate your teaching experiences, generally make each day a little easier, and, at the same time, help you create wow in your classroom. The wow factor is that element that captures students' attention and enhances experience—something every teacher hopes to accomplish. When teachers teach effectively, efficiently, and enthusiastically, as opposed to simply instructing, both they and their charges will experience the wow! But as every educator knows, it's not always easy to teach with passion, especially when the *how* of the profession is sometimes not clear. *The How and Wow of Teaching* will bring together these two elements so that great teachers can become even greater, and also can get profound satisfaction from their work. In other words, this book endeavors to provide both the how and the wow to facilitate the highest level of teaching and learning.

Since the wow of teaching is a direct result of understanding the how of teaching, how is it possible to make all the magic, all that wow, come about in your class? And how do you do that while managing the endless requirements of your profession? The answer is that you find resources like this book, keep them handy, and love what you do.

Internet searches, as productive as they might be, take time, skill, energy, and the ability to weed out the not-so-good from the good, and then the time to tabulate, collate, and record. Rather than using your valuable time in this sort of search, you can access instantly available ideas from this book. For example, you can use an Inaccurate Analogy (page 9) to begin a lesson, or you can play Yes, Yes, No! (page 81) to improve spelling. Both you and your students will enjoy the inherent wow of these activities.

Consider the following:

Teacher A is fresh out of teacher training. She enters the school on Day One filled with excitement and zeal, her arms overflowing with books, papers, charts, and various other supplies. She greets her fresh-faced new students and prepares to begin her very first lesson and... she suddenly realizes she is not sure how to start. Day One is filled with hesitancy and very little, if any, wow.

Teacher B has experience. She has been in the profession for several years and feels confident she knows many of the tricks of the trade. She enters the school on Day One carrying a single book and wearing a confident smile. She greets her students and prepares to deliver her beginning-of-the-year lesson and... she suddenly thinks to herself, *This is exactly how I began last year, and all the years before that.*

*Perhaps it's time for something new.* Day One begins with some wow, as the excitement of getting reacquainted with peers and students is high, but fades considerably as the teacher falls back into the comfortable, established pattern of how.

In both these cases, the what and why of teaching is being handled by teacher training and/or experience. However, the how of the profession often is not as evident; although experienced teachers will have developed many teaching techniques already, they might also sometimes need the motivational boost fresh ideas can provide. Since wow comes naturally with bold and original how, it, too, can easily be lost.

The job of teaching today is more important than ever before because teachers provide the humanity that technology can never supply. Thus, teachers need hands-on toolboxes filled with readily usable how-to ideas that will quickly enable them to do everything in the classroom, from opening a lesson to closing the day, and do it with such ease, confidence, and pizzazz that the wow factor is always evident.

Teaching how-tos don't come automatically with an education degree. Neither do they remain stagnant; they continually require updating, reviewing, and refining. This is why teachers attend conferences and professional development days, which are great shots in the arm. But these resources are intermittent and you, the teacher, still need to deal with the day-to-day teaching and managing of your classroom. This book will help you do that and save you considerable time and effort.

In this book, you will find a cornucopia of ideas—practical and concrete suggestions, in easy-to-use point form—to facilitate teaching throughout the year. With the variety and freshness of these ideas, the wow factor will ever be present. In addition there are hints, quotes, and How-to-Wow summaries to keep you moving ahead with poise and pride. The chapters address various aspects of teaching—lesson planning, teaching the curriculum, teaching strategies, strategies for life and living, and other teaching responsibilities—by outlining the how and then focusing on particular ways to increase the wow factor.

Without new ideas, teaching can be overwhelming, inordinately time-consuming, and most certainly less effective. Even those of you who have been in the profession for years may find yourself in a rut; you need some fresh wowful ideas, some new how-to-teach hints. Given the amount of time you need and want to spend with your students, and the fast pace of our world today, there is little left for researching, collecting, or experimenting with ideas that don't work. This book does the work for you.

Teaching is fun! Allow me to help keep it that way.

**Teaching is much more than a profession; it is a lifestyle. And teachers are among the privileged few who have been allocated the responsibility of protecting the past and preparing for the future.**

# Chapter 1 Lesson Planning

Every teacher has had the disappointing experience of a lesson that bombs. For whatever reason, students either were not engaged or simply didn't get it. Changing a less-than-effective lesson into one that roars can move teaching from mediocre to wow!

## Starting and Stopping a Lesson, and Everything in Between

Not all lessons are pre-planned; many are spontaneous teachable moments. For prepped lessons, concise, snappy, attention-getting beginnings; enthusiastic deliveries; and succinct, recapping closings are the tenets of good teaching. A good lesson opening will not require a lot of pre-thought or a lot of time at the lesson onset, but will help ensure the success of the lesson. Similarly, an organized, engaging delivery of the information, as well as a definite closing, will help both you and your students to be successful

### Beginning a Lesson

Not every lesson will have a motivating opening; teachers are extremely busy and often have to rely on what is suggested by teachers guides or curricula. However, if you want to make a lesson truly memorable, a snappy opening will help you do that. When you begin your career as a teacher you will not have the time to assemble your own personal list of effective openings. In truth, seasoned teachers don't have time to create new or original openings, and often depend on old favorites. The following list can help you expand your repertoire of lesson openings.

#### Question

Ask a pertinent question, the answer to which will lead directly to the upcoming lesson. Avoid questions that lead to yes/no responses and allow a few minutes to discuss all responses before directing students to your lesson objective. Some examples:

*Who has watched the night sky?*

*If you have ever run into trouble at/when/during... Raise your hand if you have.*

*What would you do if...?*

*Raise your hand if you've ever seen/thought/felt/wondered/heard....*

**When Napoleon Bonaparte said that "why" and "how" are words so important that they cannot be too often used, he was alluding to the power of questioning.**

## Visual

Share an engaging picture or other visual. Display it for a few moments before saying anything, allowing students time to formulate their own ideas, then ask a leading question or simply invite discussion. Some visuals you can use:

- photograph
- computer image
- screen saver
- calendar page
- poster
- cartoon

## Anecdote

Students love stories—real or imaginary—especially if they involve you! They have a natural curiosity about their teacher and will listen intently to any recounting of your adventures. These can be entirely made-up or factual (depending on how much personal information you care to reveal). The more humorous the story, the more motivating it is for students. They enjoy seeing their teacher as a real person. Of course, the anecdote can be about anyone, but the closer the main character is to the students, the better. The yarn should, of course, lead to your lesson objective. Examples include:

- a tale about losing something for a lesson on organization
- a tale about a strange plant growing in your garden for a lesson on ecosystems
- a tale about a dream you had about anything related to your topic

## Object

Be creative; look around your home and/or room with a critical eye for any object that is both interesting and easily manipulated and stored. Hold the object out for all to see and remain silent for a few moments to allow students to think about why you are displaying it. You can then ask them directly why they think you are showing the object or ask a leading question that directs thinking to your lesson objective. A supply of viable objects you keep in your desk for instant use might include

- a pencil for a lesson about trees
- a piece of fruit for a lesson in science, health, social studies
- a small figurine or toy for a lesson in social studies or whatever the figure represents
- any classroom item, such as a stapler, for a lesson in science, art, etc.
- a string of beads for a lesson in math
- a small purse or bag for a lesson in science, or creative writing (“What’s hidden inside?”)

## Action

Students of all ages need to move! Ask students to stand up without giving a reason, then lead them through a series of movements you can relate to your lesson objective. In fact, even if you cannot directly connect the actions to your lesson, you can force the connection by saying something like “Now that we’ve

**“We see in order to move; we move in order to see.” — William Gibson. This summarizes beautifully the objective of this strategy. In moving, students see the lesson’s intention.**

shaken off some restless energy, we are going to take a look at...” Possible movements:

- *Shake every body part* for a science lesson on compounds
- *Stretch high/low* for a lesson on math measurement
- *Run on the spot* for a lesson in health, history
- *Clap high/low/to the side* for a lesson on writing (applauding a good author)
- *Wrap arms around body tightly and wiggle* for a science lesson on cocoons

### Inaccurate Analogy

Share a quick, ridiculous yarn about something you present as being the same as, or similar to, something related to your lesson objective, but for which the relationship is obviously wrong. For example, you might say “We all know that an apple is a lot like our heads, right?” as a lead to a lesson about various fruits and vegetables and classification. When students disagree, you can readily lead the discussion to what apples are really *like*. Possible analogy ideas include

- Comparing a specific animal to some inanimate object for a science lesson
- Comparing verbs to nouns (“We know that verbs are just like nouns.”) for a lesson in reading/writing
- Comparing mathematical concepts to painting a picture (“We use numbers to create a colorful picture.”) for a lesson on addition/subtraction/multiplication/division

### Silly Sentence

**“If people did not sometimes do silly things, nothing intelligent would ever get done.” — Ludwig Wittgenstein**

Similar to the inaccurate analogy, a silly sentence is amusing because of either its content or the way it is delivered. As teachers, we should always be willing to mix a little silly into every day. Think of a sentence related to your lesson objective and say it in the silliest way possible:

- Make it a tongue-twister and invite students to repeat it.
- Sing it like opera, in country-music style, or as rock or rap.
- Mix up the order of the words and invite students to make sense of what you are saying.
- Delivery it in a chanting manner while marching.
- Drum on your desk while speaking.
- Clap, shake your hands, or wave your hands in the air after each word in the sentence.

### Open-Ended Statement

Tell students you are going to play a quick word game. The word “game” always catches attention! Invite them to shout out quick endings to sentences that relate to your lesson objective but could be completed in various ways. After a couple of minutes of this, repeat the sentences with correct endings and see how close the students got to the truth. For example, open-ended statements for a lesson on summarizing:

When we put ideas together we end up with a \_\_\_\_\_ (*summary*)

Key points can be made into a \_\_\_\_\_ (*summary*)

Things you read for information or pleasure can be \_\_\_\_\_ (*summarized*)  
A short form can be called a \_\_\_\_\_ (*summary*)

### Word-Connect Game

As always, the word “game” is motivating and can lead quickly to your lesson objective. Tell students you are going to “bat words around as if they were ping-pong balls.” Offer a word and have them spontaneously throw back whatever words first come to mind. Of course, the words you present will all be related to your lesson objective. After a few minutes of the game, go back to your list of words and explain how they connect to the lesson.

1. Tell students their job is to respond as quickly as possible to your word cue by saying out loud (not shouting) the first word that comes to mind, then responding in the same way to the words said in response.
2. Model by offering “red” as the cue, to which you model responses: “apple,” then “fruit,” then “banana.”
3. Point out the connection between the words, and how one word led naturally to the next.
4. Provide cue words related to the lesson objective.
5. Stop the dialogue after a few minutes and debrief by looking at the connections.

For example, words related to a lesson on mathematical fractions might include

- *parts*
- *pies*
- *divide*
- *reducing*
- *whole*
- *cutting*

Examples of words related to a language arts lesson might include

- *write*
- *protagonist*
- *setting*
- *conclusion*
- *simile*

Examples of words related to a social studies lesson might include

- *community*
- *history*
- *friendship*
- *responsibility*
- *laws*

### Teacher as Actor

This is a form of the game charades. In this game, you are the actor. Simply act out a scene/situation/person that relates to your lesson. All teachers are, by the very nature of their profession, actors. You are aware of your audience, you know how to project and hold the attention of your audience—you are an actor! But

**“Never miss a good chance to shut up.” — Will Rogers**

if you feel uncomfortable handling this, secretly (in the hall, in writing) invite a student to do the acting for you.

1. Tell students an actor is going to portray a scene for them and they are to guess what is going on. They must not speak until the actor is finished.
2. Silently act out your lesson objective scene.
3. Debrief and connect the scene to your lesson objectives.

The following are possible examples of scenes to act:

- become a character from history for a lesson in social studies
- be a plant “growing” for a science (biology) lesson
- use fingers and body parts to illustrate mathematical concepts
- run on the spot for a lesson in health or physics
- be an animal for a science lesson
- act like a robot or automaton for a coding lesson

### Joke

**I encourage the purchase of an actual book. Of course there are many jokes available online, but nothing beats a book for convenience and quick access.**

Anything that starts with a quick joke is a winner. One-liners work the most effectively; for example, *What do you get when you plant kisses in the ground? Tulips!* This joke could easily open a science lesson, a health lesson, a math lesson (e.g., *If I plant 6 seeds and get 2 tulips from each, how many tulips do I have?*), or any lesson relating to feelings (humor), etc. Find a good children’s joke book; I like *Highlight’s Best Kids’ Jokes Ever*.

### Planned Mistake

This is one of my favorite ways to open a lesson, as it requires no preparation or even pre-thought on the part of the teacher. Simply select a small part of your upcoming lesson and offer it to students in an obviously incorrect manner. As teachers, we are very aware that mistakes and failures are instructive. Only by trying to learn from mistakes can we move forward toward success. This is an important truth to reinforce with students all the time, and this particular lesson-initiating strategy helps to do that while it motivates for the upcoming goal. Students will be quick to point out the mistake, and you go from there. One teacher I know (Jason Wyatt) likes to start a science lesson with a bald-faced lie and an invitation to students to prove him wrong. He once created a company called Carbon Cycle and told his students it was a bicycle company whose use of composite carbon monobonded fibre in the construction of their frames makes the bikes stand up to the rigors of BMX racing. Some of his Grade 7 students believed it because they trusted information that “sounded smart and used big words.” The class spent a double block disproving the teacher’s statement and discussing the importance of critical thinking and fact checking. So you might want to try an absolute lie, or even a slight mistake:

- spell/say/read/enunciate a word incorrectly for any language arts lesson
- write a math problem on the board and solve it incorrectly
- make an incorrect verbal statement about your lesson objective. For example you might say, “Today we are going to take a look at ecosystems, just like nurses and doctors do in their work,” or “We will be looking at color blending in art, to create muffins.” The more ridiculous the statement, the better.