

DESIGNING LESSON MATERIALS FOR SUCCESS

Implement *Double Planning*

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DOUBLE PLAN:

As you create lesson materials, plan for what you and your students will be doing at every step.

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**, or plan for what they and their students will do each step of the way. The most concrete example of such planning—a T-chart lesson plan in which the teacher details her actions on the left side and what students should be doing on the right—is a helpful way to *Double Plan* when you're a beginning teacher, but it isn't the only (or maybe even the best) way. In fact, it was in the

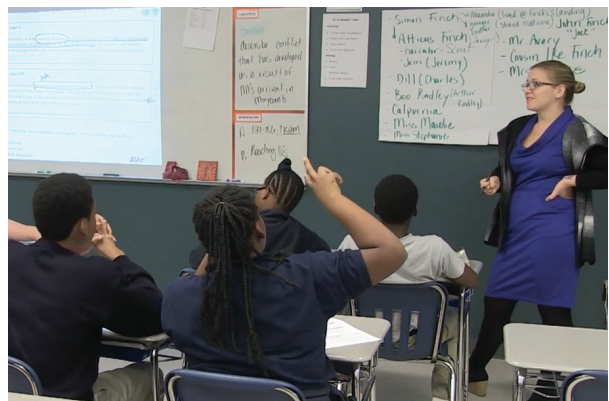
course of reviewing lesson materials from top teachers that I realized that many of them *Double Plan* in an entirely different format: packets.

A 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. 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.

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 sanitization of brutality 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. 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.

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 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—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.

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.

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 shortchange 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. The same holds true for your 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.

SEE IT IN PRACTICE

Maggie Johnson's *To Kill a Mockingbird* packet

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. 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. Check out 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.

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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. 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 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 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 students up 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.

PLANNING AHEAD WILL PAY OFF

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.

REFLECTION AND PRACTICE

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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and adapt it to their own teaching. Teaching is the best and most important work in our society. Those who do it deserve to experience their work as a journey of constant growth and learning. That, after all, is what we wish for our students.

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