

KATHY PATERSON

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THE  
**HOW**  
AND



OF  
**TEACHING**



Quick ideas for mastering any  
classroom situation effectively, efficiently,  
and enthusiastically

**THE  
HOW  
AND  
WOW  
OF  
TEACHING**

Kathy Paterson



Pembroke Publishers Limited

*Dedicated to Emma—she is  
the wow!*

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# 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

**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.**

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....*

## 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.

- demonstrate a skill poorly and incorrectly for a lesson in physical education, science
- emphasize that you will be discussing creative writing, then write a very basic sentence on the board (e.g., *The boy walks.*); ask students if they like it, and why/why not

## Riddle

Opening with a riddle gets minds working and students interested. It serves as a great conversation piece, and wakes up students' wonder, problem-solving, and collaborative work. Riddles encourage using alternate meanings of words, and searching for key words that will solve them.

Thanks to Jason Wyatt for this one.

1. Have the riddle posted large when students come into room, labeled Riddle of the Day.
2. Allow about 5 minutes of free talk to figure out the riddle.
3. Present the lesson objective and see if students can tie the riddle, or any part of it, to the objective. This might not always work, but it's stimulating and thought-provoking.

## The Delivery TRAIN

There is an acronym that can help you frame a lesson and save time in planning. The delivery of the lesson can be summarized and remembered by the acronym TRAIN. It reminds you that you are going to train your students, or, if a touch of humor gets you going, helps you of yourself as a train forging ahead with direction and purpose.

### T = Teach

Once students have become engaged, it is time for the purpose of the lesson to be revealed. This is the first step in lesson delivery, and in teaching. It consists primarily of sharing the lesson objective(s) in a manner students will understand and relate to. It is a summary of the knowledge, understanding, and/or skills students will have at the end of the lesson. There is considerable data available about lesson objectives, but perhaps the best thing to remember is that students must understand exactly what is expected of them. For example: *At the end of this lesson you will be able to make a \_\_\_\_\_, or understand \_\_\_\_\_, or solve \_\_\_\_\_.*

Lesson objectives will be based on the curriculum but broken down into manageable components for students. The objective could be an explanation of how the learning will be necessary for further learning to take place; e.g., *You need to understand how to \_\_\_\_\_ before we can move on to \_\_\_\_\_.* I will show you how. Take a few seconds to share your objectives with the students then move on to delivery the lesson.

**"The secret of genius is to carry the spirit of the child into old age, which means never losing your enthusiasm." — Aldous Huxley**

I cannot stress enough how important enthusiasm is to the main component of teaching, effective delivery of your lesson. Think back to any public speaker you have encountered—a professor, a spiritual leader, a politician. What made you tune in or tune out? The excitement and zeal of the speaker's voice, content, and general appearance make a world of difference.

# Chapter 2 Teaching the Curriculum

Teachers are always right, right? Wrong! It would be impossible to learn and retain all the curricular content teachers are expected to deliver. What teachers are masters at, however, is knowing how and where to find information, and being skilled at digging into that huge manuscript called curriculum and creating ways to effectively deliver it to students. I don't think anyone ever covers every single bit of a curriculum. Curricula are massive manuscripts with lots of room for teacher preferences, but the basic framework of them, the tenets on which they have been built, must be the basis of your units and lessons. It is your professional responsibility to follow the established curriculum. How you do that is usually left up to you, but you must always have it in the back of your mind when planning lessons and units.

1. Before the year begins, take time to familiarize yourself with the curriculum, even if it is the same one you've taught for years. You don't have to read it in detail—skim and highlight. The idea is to develop an awareness of what the curriculum includes and what the specific goal objectives are.
2. Depending on the format of your curriculum, it can be a good idea to photocopy sections and have loose sheets on your desk you can use like a checklist to mark completed portions.
3. Using pencil (so it can be erased later) write the dates beside finished sections of the curriculum. This helps you see at a glance exactly where you are.
4. At natural school breaks, like Christmas and spring break, take a bit of time to once again scan the curriculum, paying attention to areas not yet covered. Future plans should focus on covering these areas.
5. Some teachers develop a personal code for connecting specific lessons/units directly to the curriculum. For instance, *SS1.3* written beside a social studies lesson could indicate that the goals from the curriculum that were being covered by that lesson were in Social Studies part 1, section 3. This might seem a bit time-consuming but it certainly keeps you connected to curriculum.

*What* you teach will depend primarily on the curricula for established for your area. *How* you teach it is up to you. From content instruction, through helping your students develop and train their memories, to teaching spelling and grammar in their social-media driven world, you want to use methods that will engage students and make your job as easy as possible. The how will change and develop with practice, but this chapter includes some ideas to help you initially, or give you a boost if you are already experienced.

# Content Instruction

Content refers to the body of facts and knowledge you have to provide for students. The most common method of delivery of content is the lecture method. Think back to a time when you were a lecture recipient—at university, teachers’ professional day(s), in a meeting or church, for example. What sparked your interest? Or lack of interest? Did the speaker keep your attention or did your mind wander?

How can you be an attention-keeper when you have to impart facts to your class? The creation of a little wow in content instruction usually comes from using cues familiar to the students, from tying content to what they already know and what they need or want to know. Impress them with preparation, experience, knowledge, and expertise about the content, or, alternatively, with your enthusiastic desire to pursue with the students what you do not know. You want to wow them with your wit and awareness of their needs.

The lecture method can be effective if used appropriately, either as a brief minilecture, or as a concentrated, very focused discourse on a topic (usually for older students). However, there are other great ways to help students gain an awareness of, understand, and process content. In fact, as a good teacher, you will be using a variety of these methods of conveying content every day.

## Adding Wow to Lectures

### Start with a Handout or Chart

Providing students with an outline, either in the form of a handout or as a clearly visible chart, is a viable tool for increasing the effectiveness of a lecture-format lesson. This guides their thinking, cues them to important points, and lets them know the objective(s) of the talk. The handout can be an outline or in Q&A form. In the latter, concise questions lead students toward finding answers in the content of your talk. Answers should be short—even single words—so as not to take students’ attention from the rest of the lesson.

### Tie in to Student Interest and Desire

Know your students and start by letting them know how the information you are going to share is important, or has meaning for them. Tie the learning to what they already know, and to what they might need in their lives. Tell them what the personal benefits will be. For example, before a history lesson, point out how history has affected them today. Before a math lesson, remind them that they will require these skills to understand their salaries later in life (or their allowances now), or perhaps to someday acquire a job in technology.

### Start with a Mysterious Question

Start with a question that is both thought-provoking and a bit mysterious. For example, before a lesson on ecosystems, ask, “What would happen if pollution got so bad we were overrun with garbage everywhere?” or “Who has seen the Disney movie WALL-E?” or “If you turned on your tap and there was no water, what would you do?” The question will lead to your lesson objective. Be creative.

The task is to catch attention, not spend a lot of time answering the question. Older students who have been introduced to the idea of a rhetorical question will quickly learn to eagerly anticipate your rhetorical questions.

### Do the Unexpected

If you usually stand at the front of your class, move to a different part of the room and speak from there. Just this simple change will capture attention. Another change might include donning a hat or piece of clothing; I watched a teacher put on a single glove before talking about the industrial revolution and the consequent use of factories for retail production. Or you might turn off the lights and deliver in the dark, or use a pointer or stick to tap on your desk at pertinent points during your lecture.

### Mix It Up

Mix facts with common-sense details and questions as much as possible. *Talk less, discuss more*, is a good rule to follow. Mix in visuals, music, tactile elements—anything that will keep students constantly alert. Rely on the familiar theory of intermittent reinforcement by quizzing and praising students for listening at random points. Questions like these work well:

- What four words stood out in what I just told you?
- Think of one sentence that summarizes the facts so far and share with a neighbor.
- In your notes, jot down any words or thoughts you have so far.
- Write a good test question based on what I have just told you.
- I am going to give true/false statements about the information just shared. Put thumbs up to indicate *true* and thumbs down to indicate *false*.

Students love this last one. It is a unthreatening way to reinforce concepts and assess what has been learned.

### Be Authentic and Captivating

Think back again to a lecturer who caught and held your attention. Most probably their voice changed frequently and their body language morphed regularly. So, to follow suit, be enthusiastic. Talk quickly, then slowly. Talk loudly, then softly. Inject a bit of an accent here and there if you can. Give a few details in chant, sing-song, or rap. Move around the room. Lean, turn your back, cross your arms, sit on your desk, lift your hands high, snap your fingers, open your palms out. Keep moving!

### Other Approaches

Content delivery does not have to be boring. How you deliver it makes a world of difference to how students hear and accept it, and consequently makes your job easier. Giving a monologue to students is not the only way to impart facts. Approaches are limited only by your own imagination.

## Use Technology

Have students do online research after you have provided key prompts, questions, or cues. (Avoid random web surfing.) Then have them share their findings, acting as the teachers of their peers.

## Project Approach

In order to complete a project, students need to research content and show mastery over that content. Students are actively involved in their own learning. Usually projects are used alongside other teaching strategies and approaches; the projects complement the other methodologies. The project approach entails selection of topic, collection of data, presentation and culmination of project.

1. Introduce a topic of study related to your curriculum and objectives.
2. Discuss the topic and break it into manageable project goals. In other words, if the curriculum goal is *study of community*, help students break this into manageable components, such as service jobs, retail, wholesale; or the baker, the meat shop, the beauty parlor, etc.
3. Assign specific projects to individuals or pairs, taking personal interest into account. One experienced teacher had most of her students wanting to do projects on the same topic. No problem. Rather than trying to force students into areas of less interest, she allowed several similar projects, then used them for a comparative analysis at the end.
4. Allow class time for projects, but encourage at-home involvement too.
5. Set a due date and stick to it.
6. Be alert to chances (teachable moments) to teach skills from other areas (e.g., math, literacy) during the development of the projects.

## Gaming

There are many online educational games available. Your job is to select the one(s) that promote content learning in the areas of your curriculum. The new educational version of Minecraft is a good example. Students do not need encouragement to play these games, and they learn content while honing tech skills. Just be sure to identify your goal or objective and share it with students. In other words, tell them what you expect them to learn.

## Virtual Field Trip

You appreciate the value of field trips, but are also aware of their cost in dollars, as well as time and energy. So why not take a virtual field trip? A virtual field trip combines the best of technology with the natural curiosity of students, and no one ever has to leave the classroom. Follow the formula for computer research: research; gather and compile data; prepare and present.

1. Define clearly, for yourself and for students, the objective of the virtual field trip. There may be several objectives. List them concisely and discuss in class.
2. You will have already formed a list of available resources (museums, art galleries, public speakers, other classrooms around the world, etc.). Select the resources you want your students to use and make them visually apparent on charts, posters, hand-outs, etc.



3. Discuss with students how to take a virtual field trip.
4. Discuss time management. Tell students how long they will have to gather data, compile information, prepare final projects.
5. Let them go to work. Stick to time schedules. This encourages consistent work in whatever area students are in.

### Incomplete Content

This is a content-retrieval strategy in which students are provided with partial information and encouraged to complete the content through whatever means you, or they, choose. Resources might include text books, library resources, Internet sites. The idea is to stimulate interest by sharing part of the subject, theme, or problem, and having students seek the missing components. The appeal is like reading or watching a cliff-hanger. Not all content material is conducive to this approach, but when it is, it can be very effective.

1. Share the basic lesson content objective(s) For example, “We are going to learn about how frogs help the environment. They are extremely important to us for many reasons, and they are disappearing at a rapid rate. There are specific reasons for this.”
2. Add a touch of mystery or interest. For example, “I am going to tell you about their sensitive skin, then you are going to find out how and why they are disappearing.”
3. Send students off to find locate the missing information, record it, and bring it back to class.
4. Share the findings so that content has been covered completely.

### Teacher’s Sick Day

Teachers, like parents, are not allowed sick days. You put on your teacher face and work no matter how you are feeling. You are a consummate actor and you play your part, but once in a while, fake it! Tell students you need a teacher’s sick day, and you want them to teach each other. Once you get them involved, circulate and enjoy your sick day.

1. Specifically write the lesson objective in the form of a descriptive sentence that delineates exactly what content the lesson should involve. For example, “In math today we need to focus on the meaning of the word *variables* in algebra, as opposed to the term *arbitrary number*. Then we need to understand how arithmetic and algebra are both the same and different. There are two concepts here.”
2. Divide the class into pairs. Each partner assumes responsibility for researching and teaching one concept to the other partner.
3. Discuss where students will look for the content, how they will remember and/or record it, and how they will teach it.
4. Follow specific time constraints, depending on the amount of content to be covered.
5. Students are usually very good at this so there is no need for debriefing, but you can check by using brief quiz questions or a whole-class Q&A.

**Aristotle said that in order to teach you must first understand. Students teaching students is a perfect demonstration of this truth.**



# Training and Encouraging Memory

**Memory is the personal journal you carry with you everywhere you go. Since you cannot erase it or leave it behind, you might as well try to keep it sharp and useful.**

Recall a failed attempt to remember a name, where you put your keys, what time an appointment was scheduled for. When you do remember, what you feel is a perfect example of wow. Think of the excited feeling, the rush, that accompanied that wow. This is what you help students experience by assisting them with memory enhancement. Students get excited when they work on memory development. They are thrilled when they can remember important facts, skills, and concepts. They are encountering an impressive wow factor, and you will be sharing it with them.

## Memory Basics

There are two forms of memory. The first is short-term, sometimes called working memory, which consists of encoding, storage, and retrieval. The second is long-term memory, responsible for storage of information over long periods of time. In the classroom, you are mostly concerned with short-term memory and its three components.

Despite the convenience and easy accessibility of information on the Internet, students today have more to remember than ever before; I don't think anyone would argue this point. And many of them struggle with short-term memory, which makes teaching even more difficult. There are memory basics you can teach to help your students develop and enhance their memories.

- Discuss memory in class. Talk about how it helps us, and how we actually can improve its functioning. Drawing memory to students' attention when you begin helps them focus on memory-related tasks thereafter. This is called priming the memory and is a useful strategy in all teaching.
- Plan specific minilessons that stimulate memory. (See page 33.)
- Remind students when they need to turn on their memories specifically. For example, before memorizing mathematical facts like multiplication tables, say "Turn on the memories. Think and remember."
- Use memory priming tasks at lesson onset, or whenever you specifically want students to remember. This is especially important when giving directions. Some students will remember the last direction but forget how to get started.

## Giving Directions

By following the process outlined here, you can help students to be ready to remember when directions are given. They quickly become an integral part of every good teacher's repertoire.

### GET ATTENTION

If students are not totally tuned in to you, giving directions can be both useless and frustrating. In order to stimulate short-term memory so they can encode, store, and quickly retrieve all the directions in the correct order, they first need to give you their full attention. Use whatever tricks you can to get this.

#### VARY MODALITY

Give directions verbally and visually. Students should be able to hear and see the directions.

#### CHECK UNDERSTANDING

Immediately check for understanding by asking several students to repeat the directions back to you. If the directions are still a bit unclear, or if you are not convinced of their complete understanding, ask a student to explain the directions for the class.

#### USE EXAMPLES

It may seem superfluous to say, but sharing just a couple of examples of what you expect can make the world of difference, especially for students struggling with short-term memory. They see the finished product; that can stimulate memories.

### Memory Enhancement Techniques

The techniques and tips shared here may not be new to you, but some of the how-to suggestions for incorporating them in your teaching may be. In any event, every teacher needs reminding occasionally. Our memories, too, always need honing and enhancing. Let's teach students how to improve their memories. There are several tricks and techniques that seem to work well with students of all ages. Remember to let them know that these are for memory improvement. Drawing memory to their minds frequently serves to increase awareness of the importance of focusing and remembering when important content is being shared.

#### Skim It First

Teach students to first take a quick look at any page of content they are hoping to store in memory, even if it is a page of basic math facts. They must get a general idea in their minds of what is to come. Looking at titles, headings, footnotes, etc. helps the brain prepare to remember.

#### Learn and Learn and Learn Again

The name of this technique refers to the idea of overlearning a concept or piece of knowledge. Most of us learn by repeating a few times, then assuming the tidbit of information has moved into long-term memory. Good on you, if this is the case for you. What works best for most of us, and certainly for students, is learning and learning again. Learning occurs only if knowledge is in long-term memory. One way to see if this has happened is to test students on a learning several weeks after sharing it with them. If they know it as well as they should, continue on. If they are stumbling, then they have to relearn. The trick is to make the relearning interesting for them, not like boring repetition.

1. Introduce the strategy of overlearning. Explain that this will help students remember not only school facts, but also whatever they need to remember in the rest of their lives.

# Chapter 3 Teaching Strategies

## How-to-Wow Teaching Strategies

- Familiarize yourself with a variety of strategies.
- Connect a chosen strategy to your lesson objective.
- Prepare all that is required for that strategy.
- Introduce the strategy and the objective to the class.
- Remain open-minded. Other strategies may slip into play. Go with it.
- Close by summarizing and pointing out how the strategy used facilitated learning.

Are you are a lecturer? Or perhaps a discussion leader or a ready questioner? Do you prefer students to work individually or in groups? These are indications of your teaching style. Your style will depend on what is natural and easy for you; it is a reflection of your personality. On the other hand, strategies are learned and developed over time. For strategies to be effective, a variety of ideas, methods, tips, and suggestions must be integrated. This chapter will suggest an assortment of strategies and supply cues and clues to implement them. Keep in mind that teacher-led strategies will become independent-learning strategies and life strategies for your students, and that the more and varied your strategies are, the more you are training independent learners.

Literally dozens of teaching strategies have developed over the years, been popular, then slipped into obscurity. Recall the 1980s excitement about “open classrooms in circular schools”? How well did that strategy work? What strategies you use today will depend on your personal style, your familiarity with a variety of different strategies, and your skill in using them effectively. By choosing the right strategy for specific learning, you are paying attention to detail to create something meaningful and memorable for your students. The strategy should have distinctive appeal. The right strategy will capture students’ attention and incite their interest and curiosity, creating that important wow factor for both you and your class.

A strategy is a way to teach, and you will develop ones that work for you if you haven’t already. As a rule, they are blueprints configured by you in advance, with the hope of reaching specific objectives. A good teaching strategy is as much choosing what not to do as it is choosing what you will do. As a framework of what to do, it is comforting reassurance that what you are doing as a teacher is wise, premeditated, and proven to be effective. Thus, using a strategy takes away some of the gray area of how-to in teaching. There is no way to teach without using strategies (even lecturing is using a strategy, albeit a rather boring one), so having an awareness of some of the most popular ones, as well as suggestions for their use, can be helpful.

There are what I refer to as grand strategies, those that incorporate the entire class for a considerable amount of time—more than one lesson, perhaps even an entire unit. Then there are the everyday strategies, the smaller, daily activities that slip under the umbrellas of the grand strategies and work within them. You can use several of these lesser strategies in a single lesson. Each strategy in this chapter is described in practical terms, and a simple step-by-step version of how to use it is included.

# Grand Strategies

## Cooperative Learning

This is essentially the formation of groups in which members work together for a shared result. Group work is so familiar to teachers that it has been listed first. Many other strategies can be incorporated into the realm of cooperative learning or group work. Within this framework, students learn from each other.

Why group work?

- Students gain cooperation and sharing skills.
- Students learn from each other.
- Students are engaged in face-to-face activities, which promotes healthy interaction.
- Students are held accountable for each other, as the group is given a single evaluation.
- Students get practice in both good listening skills and good questioning techniques.
- Students experience delegation of responsibility.
- Students gain experience in interpersonal and social interaction.

**"It is literally true that you can succeed best and quickest by helping others to succeed."**  
— Napoleon Hill

## Forming Groups

It is important to be able to establish groups quickly. If you are grouping for specific skill instruction, assign students to groups and quickly tell students what part of the room to move to. In many cases it is good to group students randomly, maintaining a variety of personalities and abilities in each group to ensure maximum learning from peers. Tell students that groupings are going to be random. Any of the following work quickly and efficiently:

- counting off: the tried and true method of quick group formulation. If you constantly change your starting point, groups will not always be the same. Rather than numbers you can group from a list pertinent to recent learning, such as *Canada, Russia, China, India, Mexico* and have students repeat in order; all the *Canadas* form one group, and so on.
- using first letters of names
- name length: e.g., names with 4 or fewer letters, with 5 to 7 letters, etc.
- drawing items; e.g., sticks, colored toothpicks, colored or numbered pieces of paper, etc.
- word cards: random draw of words where groups of words mean the same thing (e.g., *cold, chilly, frozen, icy, frigid*); students group with their synonyms
- playing cards: group by color, suit, or number/face of cards
- word puzzles: words pertinent to classroom activities or studies on index cards are cut into as many parts as you want groups. For example you could cut *ecosystem* into *eco, sy, st, em*; students group according to the complete words.

## Working in Groups Using GAIN

It's true that not all students work as well in groups as others. But when you look at the big picture, unless one is planning to live as a hermit, the ability to work within the confines of a group is a mandatory human skill. Providing students

Share this acronym with students and make it visible throughout group time. Use the word *GAIN* to indicate that they gain a great deal from helping and working with peers.

with in-class group work is a teaching strategy that works on many levels. To make group work succeed, you need to begin by getting attention, then establishing a few rules. You can follow the steps of GAIN: Get ready; All must contribute; Individuals do what they are best at; Notes kept at every stage.

1. Get ready: form your group and bring necessary materials for the project.
2. All group members must contribute. Share the work. Be cooperative.
3. Individuals do what they are best at doing.
4. Notes must be kept at every stage of your work so that you can quickly return to it another day.

A little pre-teaching of how to work in groups goes a long way. Before you get students into groups, discuss as a class what makes for a good group experience and what doesn't, then summarize these points quickly for them as soon as the groups are together. A visual of group-work *dos* and *don'ts* can be a helpful reminder too.

Effective group work must be guided and shaped. It isn't a time for the teacher to sit aside and mark papers or plan lessons. You need to be visible and in control at all times, even with older, more self-sufficient students. Follow these steps for perfect group management.

1. Determine exactly where each group will get together.
2. Clearly communicate each group goal or objective. Make these visible as well as auditory.
3. Have decided which method you will use to group (see page 51).
4. Have all necessary materials on hand at each group station.
5. Tell students when to start. Remind them when it is close to stop time. Provide a ten-minute warning.
6. Monitor by circulating constantly. Be visible.
7. Provide a rubric for evaluation of the group's work. This will reflect the goal of the group. Give this to students as a guide for work.
8. Provide a group checklist for students to use to keep a running record of who did what. Students quickly learn to divide up the work and can initial beside the roles they choose. Keep these checklists as a teaching tool to track which students continually choose the same role so you can encourage variation in what students do.

## Inquiry-Based Instruction

### How-to-Wow Inquiry-Based Instruction

- Present the problem or situation.
- Discuss possible ways to proceed.
- During individual work time, check for appropriateness of pursuits.
- Review, share, debrief.

In this teaching strategy, students are encouraged to learn by doing. This paradigm has teachers as facilitators; students are explorers and seekers. It is an excellent strategy when incorporated with other learning strategies, but on its own it has presented some difficulties. There are different types of inquiry but, for the purposes of this book, I have simplified them by considering inquiry as a single strategy. The pros and cons of isolated (i.e., not mixed with other strategies) inquiry instruction are laid out here:

#### PROS

- Students are engaged in the learning process.
- Students explore topics of interest deeply and learn from experiences.
- Students take ownership of their own learning.

## CONS

- Testing and evaluation for progress is difficult.
- It is almost impossible to measure the creativity and critical thinking required of the strategy.
- Teamwork is important to this strategy, and not all students like to work, or work well, in groups.
- The lack of structure can be disruptive, especially for some students; this creates a difficult teaching/learning situation.

**"Doubt comes in at the window when inquiry is denied at the door." — Benjamin Jowett**

Although at first glance there seem to be more cons than pros, many teachers make inquiry work well. However, since it has been shown that inquiry-based instruction is best integrated with many other strategies, that is the focus assumed here. In this way you can better reach all students and offer many game plans for life in the process. To be effective, inquiry-based instruction must take into consideration students' needs and curiosities, at the same time as sticking to the mandated curriculum. This can be a tough road to follow, and may be feasible for only specific subject areas. However, as a teacher, you know that progress is born from doubt and inquiry, so encouraging inquiry is a part of your professional obligation. So, let's use the inquiry method in the best way(s) possible.

1. Explain the problem to students, making sure they all understand it. Clearly speak it, write it, review it, and ask them for clarification. (Use the tips for clear directions on page 32.)
2. Have each student make their own plan. Tell them the plan can be written, illustrated, jotted in point form, graphed—as long as it is understandable to them and can be followed and reviewed. For many students, creating a list of steps is the easiest plan.
3. Have students list their resources: where/whom/how they will pursue and research their topics.
4. Find a way to review each student's plan of attack before they go any further. You might choose to have a five-minute interview with each student, on a rotating basis, carried out while the class is otherwise involved. Keep it short. All you are doing is determining if the student is on the right track and has a good idea regarding resources.
5. Tell students to proceed with the first part of their plans and move as quickly or slowly as they need through the steps as they carry out their individual plans.
6. Encourage students to continually look back and evaluate as they move forward with their plans.
7. Share finished projects with you or peers.

**Use the inquiry strategy together with other teaching strategies, such as whole-class discussion or group work, for best results.**

## Portfolio Development

Portfolios are usually a collection of materials gathered for proof of accomplishment, and sometimes can be presented online as digital or e-portfolios. But as a classroom strategy, a portfolio is a hard-copy collection of student tasks and gatherings related to a specific topic. The final product is generally a source of student pride and, consequently, filled with the wow factor. Gathering the elements for this type of portfolio is both engaging and motivating for students once they clearly understand what is expected. Using the portfolio strategy can help students develop an understanding of what portfolios are and how they can be



#### How-to-Wow Portfolio Strategy

- Choose and discuss a topic or theme.
- Choose a receptacle.
- Share a model portfolio.
- Hand out student checklists.
- Review resources.
- Allow class time; do periodic checks.
- Share.

helpful in the future. For this kind of portfolio, students will gather items and/or pieces of work related to a topic of study, a random selection of student-chosen best pieces of work in any subject, or a selection of literacy-based work—whatever you want it to be.

With this strategy, you need to have a goal in mind; e.g., everything related to our animal study in science, all the writing you do from now until the end of the year, etc. Discuss with students what kinds of things can go in the portfolio, as well as what sort of container they might want to use—binders, scrapbooks, photo albums, art books—and any number of odds and ends, such as stickers and ribbons. Of course, if a flat folder container is used, the student will be limited to two-dimensional (flat) objects. With younger students, shoe boxes are preferable, as much of what students want to include will be three-dimensional.

What sorts of things can go into a student portfolio? If the portfolio has no theme and is a collection of students' work, any and all of the following can be included. If there is a theme, the following can still be used as long as they can be fitted to the theme in some way:

- journal entries: very important—student's daily log regarding the portfolio
- artwork
- awards or certificates
- clippings from magazines or newspapers
- photos
- tests, quizzes
- writing examples
- questions with answers
- interviews
- charts and illustrations

#### Why use the portfolio strategy?

- Students take ownership over their own learning.
- Students are motivated: they collect and reflect within their own interest frames.
- The end products are useful for evaluation purposes.
- The portfolios can be ongoing, and be developed at the same time as other strategies are being used.
- Portfolios are great communication devices for parents and teachers.
- Portfolios are fun!

If you use the portfolio strategy, setting it up carefully will enable students to move ahead on their own with relative ease. It's true the creation of portfolios can be daunting and can take a lot of teacher time and effort, but this doesn't have to be the case. If you keep it simple and use the following steps, you can make the portfolio strategy work for you.

1. Introduce the idea by sharing a finished or partly finished portfolio. The use of a model is very important.
2. Provide an outline of steps for students to follow. It might look like this:
  - a. Find a shoe box or other similar box (or a folder, binder, etc.). Label it with the defining topic.
  - b. Write your name on the portfolio.

A shoebox portfolio created by younger children is an excellent display for parent viewing or even full-school viewing. The boxes can be presented on tables in the hall or in the classroom, where other classes can be invited to see the amazing collections.

- c. Start by putting little things that relate to the defining topic in your box/folder.
  - d. Write a short story/sentence/paragraph about each item, explaining why you chose it.
  - e. Keep your portfolio at home/at your desk/on the shelf/etc.
3. Have a class discussion about what sorts of items might go into the portfolio.
  4. Begin immediately: the first step before collection begins is a written description or illustration (for younger children) of what the portfolio is all about. This will be the first thing to go into the portfolio; this constitutes the portfolio theme.
  5. Proceed with a lesson specifically related to the portfolios. For example, if your portfolios are science-based, dealing with ecosystems of the Alberta natural foothills region, teach a lesson based on the core element of topic.

## Learning Logs for Reflection

A learning log, like a diary or journal, is personal writing done by the student in response to everyday school experiences. The difference from the point of view of the teacher is, however, that while a journal or diary is private and the child can rightfully decide not to share, a learning log is designed to be shared with the teacher and used for support and learning. They are collections of personal responses, brief summaries of what has been learned, difficulties, achievements, and evidence to support claims. They show evolution of knowledge and confidence over time.

As a strategy, learning logs can be used as reflective tools for both student and teacher. This strategy can work with all ages; however, it becomes more efficient once students can write well. Younger pre-readers can still create learning logs using diagrams and drawings in response to teacher-posed questions. Students use learning logs to record notes following specific lessons throughout the day. Learning logs should be factual, largely objective (i.e., less emotional content), and concise. They can be strictly related to a particular course or to learning in general. It has been found that the best results from learning logs come when there is some structure provided, when there are questions that students can choose to answer, for example:

- What did I learn in \_\_\_\_\_ (subject)?
- Why was it interesting or not interesting?
- What did I have trouble with?
- What do I need help with?
- What am I looking forward to in \_\_\_\_\_ (subject) in the future?
- Do I like/dislike this class? Why?

If you have decided to use learning logs in your classroom, there are a few thoughts to keep in mind.

1. Decide whether the log is to be subject-related or general.
2. Create a few sample entries as a model. Share them with the class.
3. Provide the journals.
4. Discuss together the list of possible guide questions. Chart them or have them easily available.

Sharing a learning log you made yourself (create one for anything new you have learned; make it humorous as well as serious) is an excellent motivational tool. Students love to see what their teacher has done.



5. Allow students time immediately for personal reflections on how the logs might proceed.
6. Remember to regularly allow time for entries.
7. Since these are learning logs, set up times for individuals to share with you so that together you can follow up where necessary.

## Whole-Class Discussion

Group discussions are an integral part of life. In the classroom, they are a strategy that provides students with an audience for ideas and allows them to hear and reflect on the ideas of others. Unfortunately, in most group discussions, there are a few students who like to take over and a few who remain silent. As an open-minded teacher you need to accept this situation, but at the same time try to steer the discussion to include everyone—not an easy task. It might be helpful to share the following quote and discuss its meaning.

“Discussion is an exchange of knowledge. Argument an exchange of ignorance.”  
— Robert Quillan

All teachers know the importance of whole-class discussion, but sometimes getting it to play out smoothly is easier said than done.

1. Start by creating a classroom of fairness and respect. If you talk with your class about this and model it, students will follow.
2. Establish a few discussion rules. They might look like this:
  - No put downs.
  - Let others talk too.
  - Ask questions of each other.
  - Listen carefully.
  - No interrupting.
  - Anyone can choose to pass; i.e., not answer or speak when asked.
3. Conduct a trial discussion about a topic of common interest.
4. Always have in mind a few productive questions that will get students thinking if/when conversation stops. Your job as mediator is to keep things going.
5. Stop after a few minutes and evaluate. Ask students how they felt it went. Express your own feelings about it.
6. Model summarizing concisely what was discussed. Tell students that in the future you will expect them to summarize themselves.
7. The next time you want to have a class discussion, remind students of the rules and the trial discussion. Tell them, “This is a real discussion. Play your part well.” Often, if students are reminded you are having a discussion, as opposed to merely chatting, they will become more aware and serious.

## Interdisciplinary Instruction

For this strategy, the teacher creates lessons and involves students in such a way that products and activities are related to more than one subject. In other words, science concepts can be included in the reading skills discussion, or a counting game can be used in physical education. You are asking yourself, “Don’t all

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This remarkable book shows you how you can do almost everything better and add some WOW to all subject areas. Based on extensive classroom practice, *The How and Wow of Teaching* is full of simple ideas for improving classroom instruction in reading, writing, and math, as well as for building life skills and social-emotional learning.

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**Kathy Paterson** taught K–12 students for more than 30 years and worked with touring groups of students involved in original drama productions. A former instructor at the University of Alberta, her honors include being selected as Teacher of the Year. Among her numerous books for teachers, Kathy’s *3-Minute Motivators* is an international bestseller. Kathy lives in Edmonton, Alberta, where she shares her unique ideas with groups of teachers and volunteers in Edmonton Public Schools. Her granddaughter Emma is the wow of Kathy’s life and a daily reminder of the joy that comes from teaching and learning.

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