Lesson Structure and Pacing

7 Essentials in Lesson Structure and Pacing

1. Create a Sense of Urgency. The true art of pacing lies in creating a sense of urgency and also not leaving your students in the dust. Think diligent pace but not frenetic. This pacing feels just right to most learners in the room.

Using a timer on your desk can help create that "we are on the clock" feeling -- while moving steadily ahead proving ample wait/think time along the way. If a teacher question is asked of the whole group, don't expect an answer the first second or two, or three. Count to five when asking those particularly challenging questions. Sometimes we need to slow down in order to move the learning in the room forward.

2. Make Goals Clear. One way to avoid a clunky lesson pace is to make sure the learners know exactly what they are learning and doing for the day. "Our mission today is to discover... . We will be doing this by... ." Keep students focused as you transition from one learning activity to another, announcing how much closer they are to accomplishing the day's goal.

3. Have Smooth Transitions. Speaking of transitions, good ones demonstrate purposeful pacing and knowing next moves. Be thinking two steps ahead of the next activity, and begin setting up for the next activity without finishing the last. While students are completing one piece of the learning, pass out any materials, set up the projector, or have instructional notes in place so that there's little to no dead time between one learning activity to the next.

4. Be Sure Materials Are Ready. Doing this will let you keep the flow going. Have handouts, markers, scissors, and construction paper all in place. Many teachers create small supply containers of materials that include glue stick, scissors, highlighters, sticky notes, etc. and place it in the center of each collection of desks or team table. Each group can elect a Supplies Captain who keeps inventory and rounds up contents at the end of class time.

Photocopying can be the bane of the teacher's day. Do you really need to have the quiz or the writing prompt on individual copy paper? Can it be displayed on the projector screen instead? Can there be just one copy on the group table for all to look at? (Less passing out and collecting saves time and keeps the focus on the task at hand.)

5. Present Instructions Visually. This helps keep that pace uninterrupted. For each set of instructions, write them ahead of time on the board or have a slide in your PowerPoint or Prezi. If you are relying on giving oral directions only, think of those students that have poor listening skills: "What are we doing again?" What do we do after this?" The energy and time you take to make the instructions visible will pay off.

6. Check for Understanding. Taking time to see where your students are during the lesson and adjusting accordingly means formative assessments play a key role in pacing.

Pair and share creates energy in the room following direct instruction. Keep it in short spurts, breaking up every five to seven minutes of new information with "turn and talk with your elbow partner." Walk around the room and listen in to gauge understanding. These pauses for students to talk with each other can be as brief as 45 seconds. Also, use non-verbal quickies like fist to five to see where students are and assess if more time or re-teaching is needed.

7. Choose Most Effective Type of Teaching. How will I get this new information to my students? Teachers must ask themselves this question continually when lesson planning. Sometimes new information is so new that students need to first see a visual representation and then require some information directly from their teacher to think about. Other times, it's best to set up a situation connecting to student schema and then group work to follow. Deciding the instructional mode (direct, student-centered, or facilitation) can be as important as choosing the content.

When that pacing seems off, is it time to switch the mode of delivery? Do they need a mini-lecture to clarify some misconceptions? Might a re-energizing activity be necessary, like a choral reading or class A-Z line up? Use a variety of activities with different formats to keep that flow and rhythm in the room.

How do you set up lessons so they flow? What pacing tips might you like to offer up that work well with your students?
Teach Like A Champion
By Doug Lemov

Every Minute Matters

Every Minute Matters and reward students for their hard work with a high-energy review of all they’ve learned or with a challenge problem. Keep a series of short learning activities ready so you’re prepared when a two-minute opportunity emerges: at the end of class, in the hallway, while waiting for buses. A walk to the bathroom is a perfect time for a vocabulary review. Packing up backpacks at the end of the day is a great opportunity for reading aloud to the students from an inspiring novel. There’s no better way to keep kids from getting off task while lining up for lunch than by peppering them with multiplication problems and mental math. Getting out to the bus to go home? Have every student think of an adjective to describe the bus.

You can always be teaching.

There are roughly twelve and a half-hours of “last few minutes” during each of perhaps six classes in each school year.

Assessment and Pacing

Formative assessments- Check for understanding and then do something about it.

In many cases, teachers will stick to the lesson plan without any change based on formative assessments. Formative assessments should be used to guide and pace your lessons. By knowing where the students are, you can decide how much time to continue to spend, or whether it is time to move on with the lesson. Plan for what you will do if they get the information, and what you will do if they don’t. This will help you to not be “stuck” with the plans you have made, but to be more flexible in advancing the class or giving remediation as needed. Use the link below to find 56 creative ideas for formative assessments in your classroom.

http://www.edutopia.org/groups/assessment/250941

What About Closing A Lesson

Closing a lesson is vital for student understanding. When closing a lesson, the learning target should be reviewed with the student to ensure mastery. Reasons for learning may be reviewed along with the future use of the skill. Closing the lesson provides the student with an understanding of what was accomplished and gives a structure to the school day. For more information on closing a lesson:

https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/tips-on-closing-a-lesson

Teacher Talk by Hallie Ross

“Closure of a lesson is circling back the learning to the main objective. Whether through questioning, an exit ticket, a quick summary, or more, you are planting the final seed in your students’ understanding of the objective and determining what’s on their mind when they leave the classroom.”