

Develop a teaching and learning plan

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Planning with a defined focus on what students need to know, and how students acquire and demonstrate learning most effectively, can support evidence-based teaching practices. A well-structured and sequenced teaching and learning plan, developed and refined in collaboration with colleagues, supports students to achieve success in their learning.

This practice guide will help you understand how to:

- align learning content with curriculum requirements and achievement standards
- include meaningful, relevant and valued knowledge and skills
- plan to support students with acquiring, consolidating and applying their learning
- work individually and collectively to develop, review and refine a planned sequence of teaching and learning to meet a defined set of objectives
- apply assessment to monitor, evaluate and respond to the learning needs, progress and achievement of your students.

Develop a teaching and learning plan for the knowledge students will acquire (*Planning*) is one of the 4 phases of our [Teaching for How Students Learn](#) model of learning and teaching.

The **Planning** phase is interconnected with:

- **Enabling**, which focuses on responsive, respectful relationships in a culturally safe learning-focused environment
- **Instruction phase**, which focuses on managing students' cognitive load as they process and acquire new learning
- **Gradual release**, which focuses on maximising students' opportunities to retain, consolidate and apply their learning.

Enabling

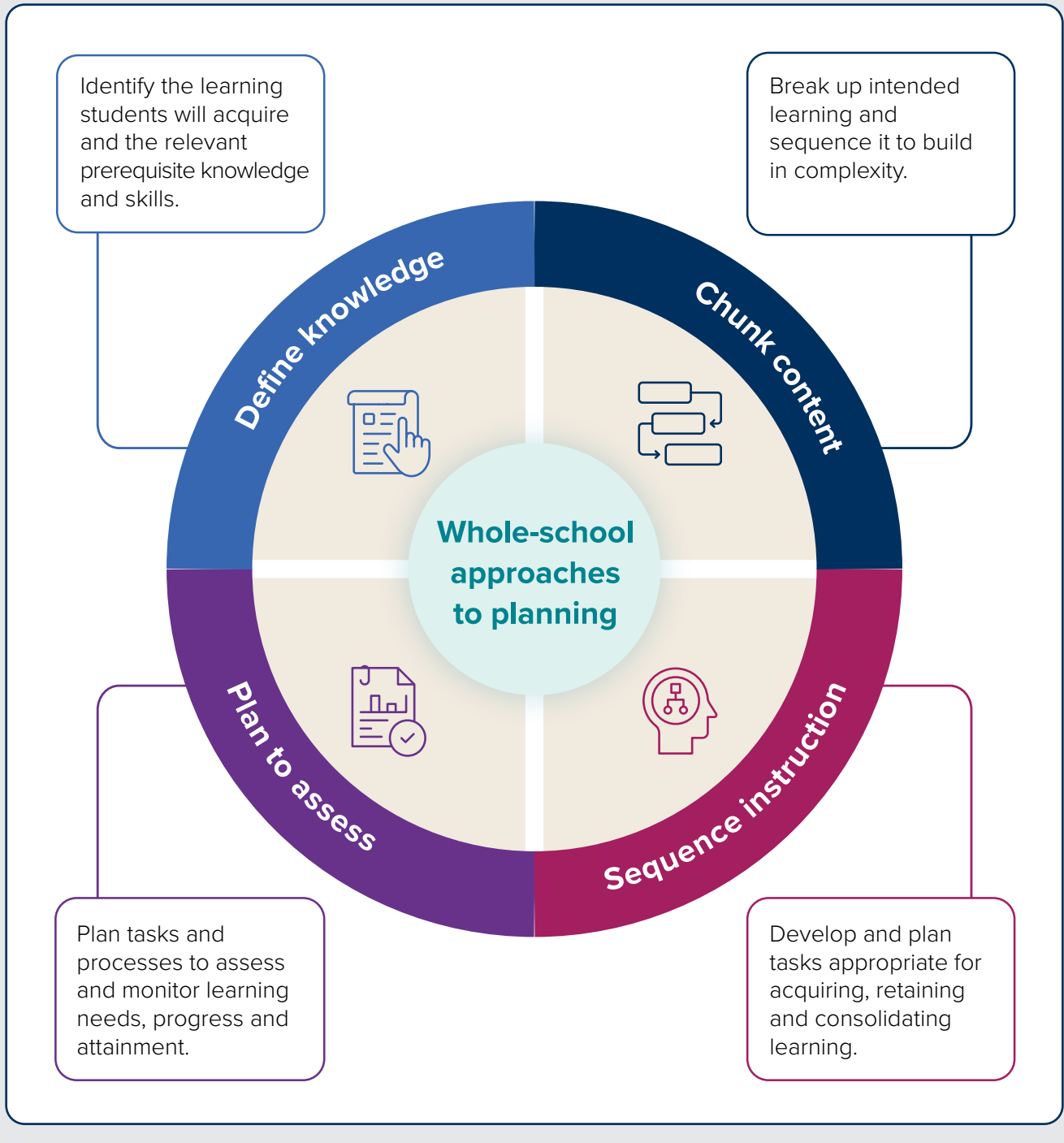
Planning

Instruction

Gradual release

This practice guide comprises the **4 interrelated practices** that make up the **Planning** phase of the **model** (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The 4 practices of the Planning phase



Understanding this practice

These lists demonstrate the focus and development of a teaching and learning plan, and potential misapplications in practice.



What it is

- Designing a logical, coherent sequence of content and learning activities that gradually build students' knowledge (factual, conceptual, procedural) and skills.
- Leveraging a whole-school approach and fostering collaboration to share high-quality instructional plans, resources and materials at the school and classroom level, to enact Australian Curriculum (or equivalent) requirements.
- Collaborating across year levels and learning areas to identify students' needs and aspirations while refining plans and materials to deliver sequential, cumulative and evidence-based instruction that supports diverse learning goals.
- A purposeful, systematic approach to monitoring progress and addressing students' learning needs during instruction.



What it isn't

- Starting from scratch each year with no consideration of students' prior learning or progress.
- Following a rigid lesson plan that teaches content in isolation or uses the same format every lesson without adapting and responding to your students' learning needs and progress.
- Waiting for students to struggle before planning to learn about and meet their diverse needs, or overly relying on summative assessment, such as one-off tests or end-of-term or unit evaluations.
- Planning open and complex tasks that rely on students self-directing their learning before explicitly teaching foundational knowledge and skills with sufficient opportunities to practise.

The importance of developing a teaching and learning plan

Key points from the research

- A high-quality, knowledge-rich teaching and learning plan is:
 - selective about content delivered
 - coherent and connected across learning areas and stages
 - carefully sequenced so students can build on prior knowledge and skills to progressively deepen their learning in line with how students learn.¹
- Collaborating with colleagues to develop an accessible, shared repository of high-quality teaching and learning materials across all subjects drives consistency when applying instructional practices across classrooms, enhancing the learning experience of students.²
- Effective planning supports constructive alignment of:
 - intended learning (what students should know or be able to do)
 - instruction (the most effective activities that support this learning)
 - assessment (how achievement of the learning is demonstrated and measured).^{3, 4}
- Planning should consider the new learning students are expected to acquire, as well as the prerequisite language, knowledge and skills that must be activated, reviewed, consolidated and built upon.⁵
- Well-sequenced learning experiences enable students to build progressive understanding by accessing and applying increasingly complex content over time.^{6, 7}
- Effective instructional planning is underpinned by an awareness of how different experiences and tasks can assist and add value in different stages of the learning process.⁸
- Developing success criteria that break down each step towards achieving learning objectives can increase coherence during teaching and learning by:
 - making explicit teachers' expectations for student learning
 - guiding instructional and assessment decisions.^{9, 10, 11}
- Collaboratively planning the formative assessment methods teachers will use to gather and interpret information about student learning while it's taking place supports consistency in teacher assessment practices.^{12, 13}
- Identifying students with foundational knowledge gaps early and planning targeted intervention using evidence-based instructional practices can reduce the risk of gaps in achievement. Supporting students' learning needs involves:
 - implementing evidence-based instructional practices
 - identifying students requiring additional supports
 - monitoring the impact of this instruction and intervention.^{14, 15}

Planning practice: Define knowledge



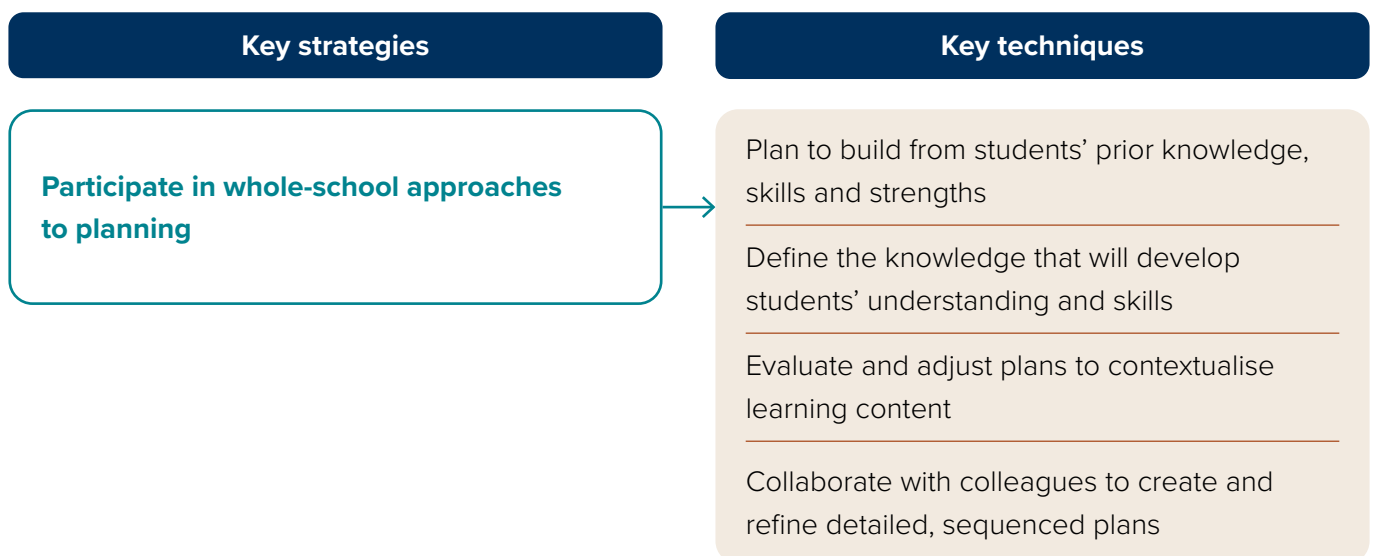
Identify the learning students will acquire and the relevant prerequisite knowledge and skills

Key strategies and techniques

This section describes key strategies and techniques (see summary in Figure 2) you can use to plan for:

- what your students will learn
- the relevant prerequisite knowledge and skills they will need.

Figure 2: Key strategies and techniques for planning what students will learn



Participate in whole-school approaches to planning

Plan to build from students' prior knowledge, skills and strengths

Build time into your planning to analyse your students' background knowledge and prior learning. Use student data from formative and summative assessment to establish what your students already know and have learned so you can build their knowledge year-on-year.

Data sources that can help you understand students' learning needs and plan potential next steps include:

- test results
- recent school reports
- writing samples
- any other available screening or diagnostic assessments.

[Planning practice: Plan to assess](#) discusses monitoring learning needs and progress in more detail.

Define the knowledge that will develop students' understanding and skills

It's common for leadership teams and curriculum leaders to develop whole-school scope and sequences that map what students are expected to know, understand and be able to do to meet specific national or state curriculum content descriptors or standards.

From there, you should define the knowledge and skills your students will acquire to progressively and systematically build their understanding. The sequence of lessons should be planned for students to make connections and demonstrate what they've learnt. Think about how you'll assess students' understanding of the content before more detailed planning. To start:

1. **Identify learning objectives.** Identify the curriculum students are expected to know and the knowledge and skills they'll need to demonstrate.
2. **Determine the acceptable evidence of learning.** Decide what students need to demonstrate to indicate that they've met, or are progressing towards meeting, these objectives. This involves designing assessment tasks that provide this evidence. When we front-end assessments in this way, students complete tasks that cover material they've already had the chance to learn.
3. **Plan teaching and learning activities that support students to acquire and demonstrate the knowledge and skills identified in the learning objectives.** This ensures you teach the necessary knowledge and skills throughout the lesson sequence.
4. **Incorporate formative assessment.** Regularly monitor and respond to learning progress.

([Planning practice: Chunk content](#) and [Planning practice: Sequence instruction](#) provide more information on sequencing and formative assessment.)

For example, the unit plan overview in [Table 1](#) shows how learning about cells will be applied to understand the causes and treatments of burns, and the life and work of a contemporary scientist.



Table 1: Overview for a unit plan – Science: Cells

Understanding	Knowledge	Skills	Vocabulary
<p>Students will understand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> every living thing is made up of one or more cells the cell is the basic unit of structure and function a cell's organelles contribute to its function within a larger organism the mechanism of diffusion the role of diffusion in body systems, including the digestive and respiratory systems the causes and treatments of burns. 	<p>Students will know:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> cells are the building blocks of living things a cell is made up of a variety of organelles that contribute to its function the organelles that make up plant and animal cells that net diffusion occurs from areas of high concentration to low concentration the organs and tissues involved in the digestive and respiratory systems the compositions of inhaled and exhaled air key elements of the life and work of Dr Fiona Wood. 	<p>Students will be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> compare and contrast prokaryotic and eukaryotic cells identify a cell as prokaryotic based on its features identify plant and animal cells identify the net direction of diffusion of particles given a diagram explain the effect of various factors on diffusion identify the differences between risks and hazards in an experiment construct a table of values to display collected data define the structure and function of the digestive and respiratory systems answer questions accurately that require them to describe and explain an observation. 	<p>unicellular, multicellular, nucleus, prokaryotic cells, eukaryotic cells, organelle, cell membrane, cytoplasm, mitochondria, ribosome, endoplasmic, reticulum, Golgi apparatus, cell wall, chloroplast, chlorophyll, vacuole, photosynthesis, diffusion, passive organ, system, digestion, absorption, adaptation, cellular respiration, breathing, gas exchange</p>

Evaluate and adjust plans to contextualise learning content

Consider how you can reduce contextual and cultural barriers to learning for your students. You can help build an inclusive culture in your school that supports learning needs and celebrates cultural and linguistic diversity by knowing your students and developing teaching and learning plans where the diverse cultural identities of students are recognised and valued, along with individual strengths and needs. Critically review your teaching plan and materials to identify where goals, activities and resources could:

- incorporate diverse perspectives and reflect a diversity of cultural experiences
- support the diverse aspirations of all students in your class
- align with your community's values.



Collaborate with colleagues to create and refine detailed, sequenced plans

Whole-school curriculum planning defines the scope and sequence of learning and supports decision-making about the content covered each school year. Regularly developing, using and reviewing your school's scope and sequence ensures your teaching and learning plans:

- provide systematic teaching and effective revision of crucial knowledge and skills across year levels to build on learning from the previous year
- prevent unnecessary repetition of content and ensure concepts connect, in a coordinated way, across multiple learning areas and year levels
- create a vertical line of sight for all staff and a structured learning experience for students across classes and year levels.

Meet with colleagues to regularly review individual lessons – or series of lessons – and the progress students have made. These meetings should guide the flexible use and ongoing improvement of your school's scope and sequence and lesson plans.

Planning practice: Chunk content

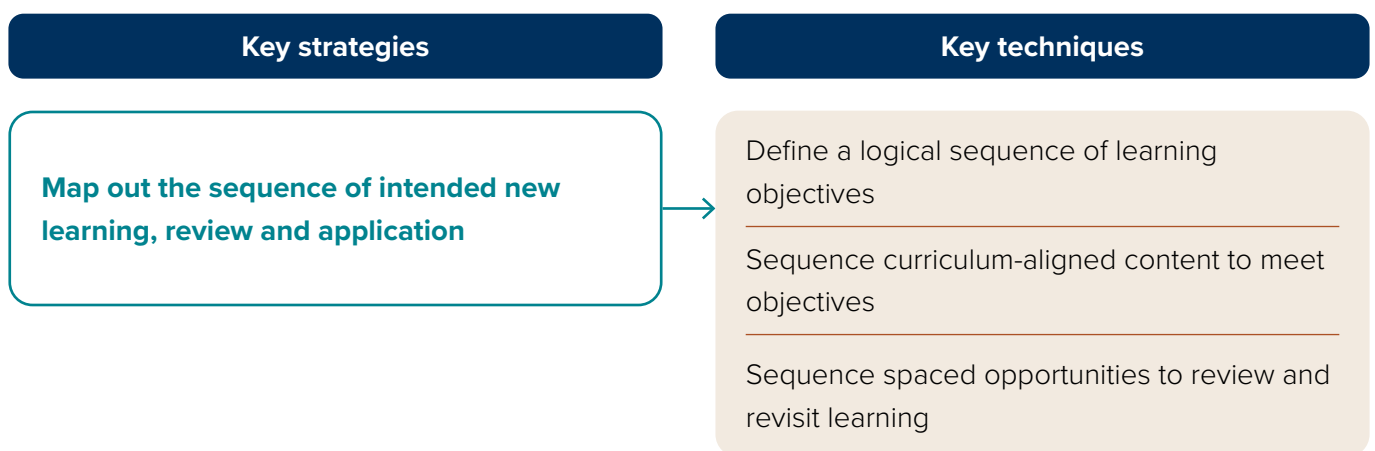


Break up intended learning and sequence it to build in complexity

Key strategies and techniques

This section describes key strategies and techniques (see summary in Figure 3) for planning to break up and sequence intended learning, to gradually build in complexity and support evidence-based practice during teaching and learning.

Figure 3: Key strategies and techniques for planning to break up and sequence learning



Map out the sequence of intended new learning, review and application

Define a logical sequence of learning objectives

Consult your school's scope and sequence for the factual, conceptual and procedural knowledge students will need to acquire. Define or update learning objectives in your own plans to ensure they're discrete, detailed and account for the instructional time available. Consider whether the learning objective is 'lesson sized' or if it needs to be broken down further over multiple lessons.

Make sure your learning objectives are supported by success criteria that will help students know when they've successfully reached them.

Sequence curriculum-aligned content to meet objectives

Use your school's scope and sequence to guide you in breaking up and sequencing content into manageable amounts that can be taught at an appropriate pace and in a meaningful order. Effective sequencing models organise content and tasks from simple to complex, concrete to abstract or general to detailed depending on the nature of the content.

Planning a logical and coherent sequence will support you with chunking content so students can learn step-by-step and process information in small, manageable amounts. It will also help students organise their knowledge as they work towards mastery, by making clear how each set of content relates within the sequence and to the wider learning area.

Simple to complex

Sequencing content to support the progression from simple to complex may include:

- **topical sequencing**, where a topic is taught to the level of understanding or competence necessary to go to the next level. (For example, learning about persuasive techniques before applying them to write a persuasive argument.)
- **spiral sequencing**, where students study the material in rounds, going deeper and broader each round. (For example, learning about the states of matter, applying that to learn about the water cycle, and applying that to learn about the processes of evaporation in salt manufacturing and desalination.)

Concrete to abstract

You can use the concrete-to-abstract sequence – or concrete, pictorial, abstract sequence – in planning, particularly in science and maths, where content is often hierarchical in nature. Plan a series of lessons or tasks that:

1. Start by using concrete objects – for example, manipulative objects, models or experiences to introduce new learning about an abstract concept or skill.
2. Transition to pictorial representation by fading concrete objects and replacing them with animations, diagrams or pictures.
3. Use numerals, letters, text or other abstract ways to represent concepts as students consolidate their learning.

General to detailed

Planning advance organisers (including concept maps, tree diagrams, Venn diagrams, flow charts, cycles and fishbone diagrams) can help you map out a sequence of content connected to a big idea. This helps students [organise knowledge](#) and make connections with what they know and have learned. To do this:

- Select an organiser to represent the learning content in or across a series of lessons.
- Plan to move from a general understanding of the big idea to seeing how detailed individual parts connect to it.
- Plan time to explicitly teach broader essential concepts before zooming in to elaborate on specific connected ideas.

Using this sequence to design instruction supports students in the guided and independent application stages of learning.

Sequence spaced opportunities to review and revisit learning

Sequence opportunities for planned, regular review in your teaching and learning plans – and allocate time to reteach where necessary. Plan to focus on learning that has happened recently (such as during the last lesson), as well as learning that occurred less recently (such as in the past week, month, term or year). By purposefully planning what you'll review and when, you can [optimise your students' cognitive load](#) within a broader sequence of learning. For example, you might use a template to plot out dedicated short periods of time for review across a unit of lessons. [Activities that support daily, weekly and monthly review](#) can be sequenced to provide students with varied opportunities to demonstrate their mastery. This also supports long-term retention.

Planning practice: Sequence instruction

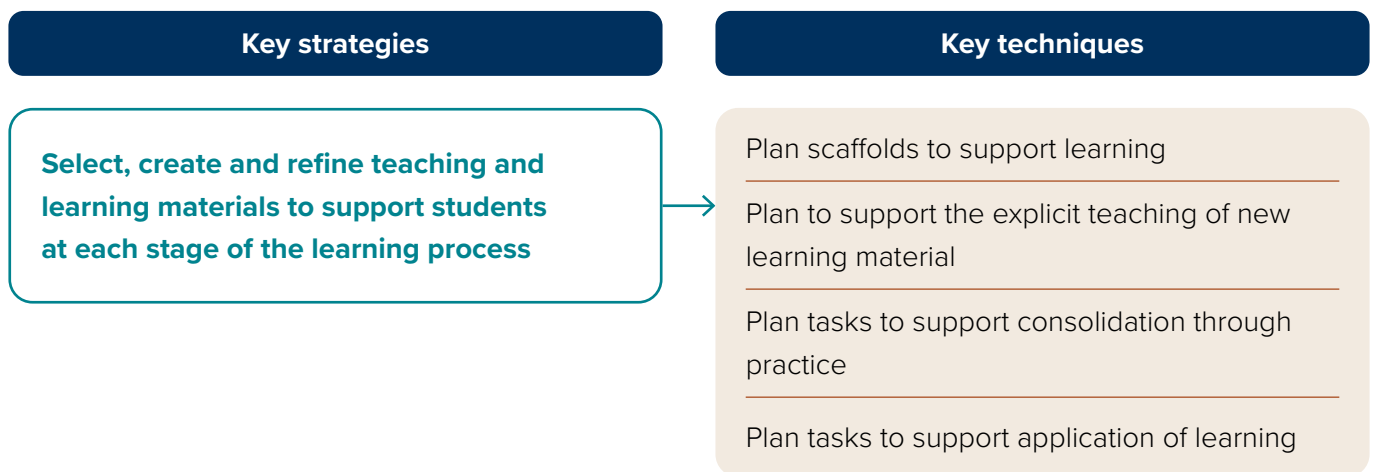


Develop and plan tasks appropriate for acquiring, retaining and consolidating learning

Key strategies and techniques

This section describes key strategies and techniques (see summary in Figure 4) for planning tasks to ensure your students can acquire, retain and consolidate their learning across each stage of the learning process and demonstrate mastery by applying their learning.

Figure 4: Key strategies and techniques for planning learning



Select, create and refine teaching and learning materials to support students at each stage of the learning process

Plan scaffolds to support student learning

Scaffolding is the process of providing students support – also known as scaffolds – so they can successfully complete learning tasks and achieve learning objectives. Scaffolds can be designed during planning (planned scaffolding) and made available alongside just-in-time supports during lessons (contingent scaffolding). Plan for how you'll intentionally provide and then gradually remove scaffolds over time to support students' growing confidence and self-efficacy.

Plan to support explicit teaching of new learning material

Plan and prepare to explicitly teach new learning content with:

- supporting information and prompts to retrieve prior learning students might need to complete the task at hand
- concrete explanations, examples and analogies you'll need as you explicitly introduce and explain new content
- learning tasks that match and support the sequence of objectives in your lesson or unit, and a clear outline of the steps for students to follow
- processes for the procedural or metacognitive skills you could teach students to draw on to complete the task.

Critically review any learning materials you access to ensure they align with the objectives in your plan and will support effective, explicit teaching.

Plan tasks to support consolidation through practice

Review the sequence of learning activities to revisit and review. When planning, choose or develop tasks that will support retention and consolidation of learning through guided and independent practice. Consider tasks designed to support fluent recall so students can be ready to apply what they're learning to increasingly complex or unfamiliar tasks over time. Planning opportunities to equip students with skills that support effective study and revision routines can also support greater independence as students learn to regulate their own learning over time.

Plan tasks to support application of learning

Plan tasks that will require students to recall and apply their learning to unfamiliar or complex tasks with increasing independence once they've consolidated the relevant prerequisite knowledge and skills through practice. Design tasks that will provide opportunities to draw out students' deeper understanding as they progress to mastery.

Planning and designing tasks for application of learning may include:

- planning tasks that require students to apply their learning using higher-order thinking – for example, analysis, synthesis and evaluation tasks
- planning tasks that encourage students to apply their knowledge, make connections, rethink ideas, reflect, generalise and transfer their learning to new situations. Incorporate generative tasks – such as summarising, mapping and self-testing – to support learning, foster success and strengthen students' self-efficacy.

Planning practice: Plan to assess

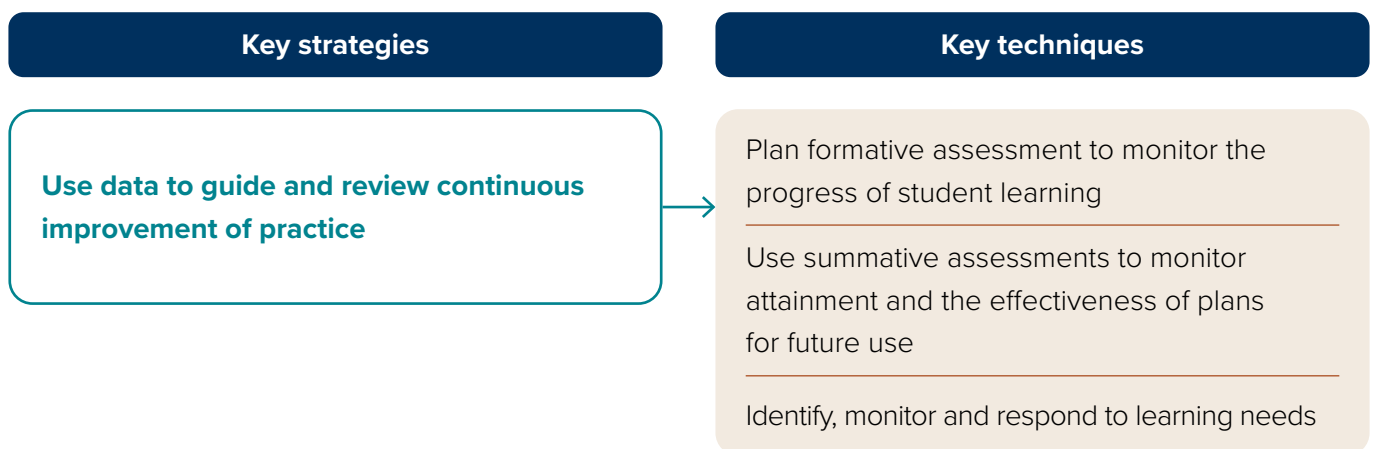


Plan tasks and processes to assess and monitor learning needs, progress and attainment

Key strategies and techniques

This section describes key strategies and techniques (see summary in Figure 5) you can use when planning tasks and processes to assess and monitor your students' learning needs, progress and attainment.

Figure 5: Key strategies and techniques for planning to assess and monitor learning



Use data to guide and review continuous improvement of practice

Plan formative assessment to monitor progress of student learning

Planning for formative assessment helps you understand what your students know and can do, identify any gaps in their learning and responsively adapt your teaching during a lesson. Formative assessment can inform your on-the-spot adjustments and help you reflect on what you might need to adjust the next time you teach the lesson.

Plan to use frequent checks for understanding when introducing new content and before moving on, rather than waiting until the end of a lesson or sequence of learning.

You can also plan ahead for additional examples, models and explanations that may help address common misconceptions and scaffold common challenges so you're ready to respond to struggles promptly.

Exit slips are an easy way to gather formative assessment data after a lesson or sequence of learning. They can help students retrieve information and commit it to their long-term memory. You can design exit slips as part of your planning and incorporate them into lesson plans to:

- check progress against learning objectives and success criteria
- plan instruction, guidance, practice opportunities and feedback for subsequent lessons.

Use summative assessments to monitor attainment and the effectiveness of plans for future use

Use summative assessments to evaluate student learning progress and achievement against curriculum outcomes and achievement standards. This typically occurs at the end of an instructional sequence, offering clear evidence of whether students have successfully learned the intended content and skills, and after students are explicitly taught the content that will be assessed to demonstrate their learning (see Planning practice: Define knowledge).

Plan ahead with any [adjustments for students who require targeted support](#) to access and complete summative assessment tasks. Planning and providing support through accommodations (such as audiobooks, text-to-speech technology and visual supports, including diagrams and flow charts) is preferable to modifying assessment content that might lower expectations.

Summative assessments can also serve a formative purpose, evaluating the impact of your planning and teaching over an extended period, such as a lesson sequence, term or year. Results of summative assessment can offer insights into how effectively your teaching and learning plan supports student learning. This information can guide you in making improvements to lesson design, sequencing and practices.

Use summative assessment alongside formative assessment to support reporting to students and their families on student learning progress and achievement. Avoid using summative assessment in isolation to determine how student learning is progressing. Instead, consider results alongside a wider set of classroom-level data to inform overall evaluations. Reliable assessment is clear, aligned with its purpose, and is fair and inclusive, enabling all students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

Identify, monitor and respond to learning needs

A [multi-tiered system of supports](#) framework can support your school in implementing evidence-based instructional practices across all learning environments. It can also help you identify students requiring more targeted supports, while monitoring the impact of instruction and intervention.

Meet regularly with all relevant staff to consult, interpret and plan next steps informed by data from your schools' schedule (e.g., yearly/semesterly/termly, and on enrolment) of universal and diagnostic screening. This data can support you in identifying, planning for, responding to and monitoring students' changing learning needs.

Use data from:

- **universal screening** at the cohort level to understand a student population's literacy or numeracy skills, compared to the level expected for their age and grade. This will give you a clear indication of students across the cohort who may benefit from targeted supports.
- **diagnostic assessments** to inform intervention and how you might use scaffolds in your classroom when delivering the year-level curriculum. Diagnostic assessments should be conducted with students who fall below the defined benchmark – as measured by universal screening tools – to identify the specific skills that may require intervention.

Work together with colleagues and use various forms of data to inform your ongoing planning. Identify and monitor the learning progress of students receiving targeted supports, considering how they can be supported during whole-class instruction, and how they're responding to any intervention. Use this data to determine whether you should add or continue any intervention, modify it, fade it out or remove it altogether.

For more information, see AERO's practice guide, [Planning: Supporting Students' Diverse Needs](#).

Developing your practice*

Consider what's informing your current practices, expectations and beliefs. Use these questions to reflect, make a plan to develop your practice and seek feedback to monitor the impact for your students.

- When developing a teaching and learning plan, how can you collaborate with your colleagues to determine what students need to revisit and review before new content is introduced at the start of the year?
- How do you develop a sequence of learning that aligns with what students need to know and do? What learning activities will support students to acquire, retain and consolidate this learning? How will students demonstrate their learning?
- How do you use a sequence of learning to create lesson plans to support effective instruction, including:
 - teaching vocabulary, facts, concepts and specific skills
 - aligning what will be taught with learning objectives and success criteria
 - integrating learning materials and content that reflects diverse histories, cultures and identities
 - optimising students' cognitive load and providing opportunities for revisiting and reviewing what has been taught previously
 - planning for scaffolds and inclusive opportunities for all students to access the learning objectives
 - including objectives for students to apply their learning as they consolidate and build mastery
 - checking for understanding and providing feedback?
- How do you evaluate teaching and learning programs using evidence from student assessment data to inform planning?

*Reflexive practice (reflexivity) is a process that critically examines personal attitudes, values and biases, with a view to becoming a more self-aware and effective teacher. Through reflexive practice, teachers, educators and school leaders can appraise and evaluate how their behaviours and ideas influence their teaching and learning.¹⁶

Further reading

Coe, R., Rauch, C. J., Kime, S., & Singleton, D. (2020). *Great teaching toolkit: Evidence review*. Cambridge Assessment. <https://evidencebased.education/great-teaching-toolkit-evidence-review/>

This review provides a clear and comprehensive summary of the evidence base on effective teaching practices that have the biggest impact on student learning. It offers insights on defining the knowledge your students will learn and advice on planning relevant and sequential tasks and assessment activities.

Mccrea, P. (2015). *Lean lesson planning: A practical approach to doing less and achieving more in the classroom*.

This book offers a structured, efficient and evidence-based approach to planning. It focuses on applying evidence from cognitive science to support effective lesson design, including setting clear learning objectives and using formative assessments.

Endnotes

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- 13 Brooks, C., Burton, R., van der Kleij, F., Ablaza, C., Carroll, A., Hattie, J., & Neill, S. (2021). Teachers activating learners: The effects of a student-centred feedback approach on writing achievement. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 105(September), Article 103387. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103387>
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- 16 Australian Education Research Organisation. (2024). *Cultural responsiveness in education*. <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/summaries-explainers/research-summaries/cultural-responsiveness-education>