



11 Tips for Lesson Planning

By Joe Paprocki

Planning and preparation are key to the success of any catechist. Here are 11 tips to help you with your lesson planning:

- 1. Long-Range Planning**—The lesson you are planning is only part of a larger plan for the whole year. Make sure you get a picture of the whole calendar year and see how much time you have to carry out what you hope to accomplish. Get a good feel for how this lesson can build off of the previous one and lay the foundation for the next.
- 2. Get to Know Your Text and Your Participants**—Get to know your textbook's philosophy, strategies, approaches, strengths, and weaknesses. Get a sense of the whole book and then zero in on a set of chapters or a unit to see how each lesson fits in with the whole. At the same time, get to know the participants in your group and how capable they are of handling the text as it is written. Make adjustments as needed.
- 3. Examine the Teacher Notes in the Catechist Manual**—A catechist manual is often a catechist's best friend. Most catechetical texts today have excellent catechist manuals that lay out the lesson much like a blueprint and offer step-by-step instructions. The more you familiarize yourself with the teacher notes, the better you will be able to implement your lesson and still leave room for spontaneity.
- 4. Visually Imagine Yourself Teaching the Lesson**—Use your imagination to visualize the lesson you are about to teach. Imagine every possible scenario and how you would react. Picture how much time each segment of your lesson is going to take. Keep a notepad nearby to jot down important thoughts or ideas that can now become part of your lesson. Write down a list of materials that you will need for certain situations. Imagine problems that might arise and visualize how you may best handle them. With this visualization complete, you will feel as though you've already taught this lesson once and are now building upon it.
- 5. Make Adjustments to Fit the Needs of Your Participants**—No lesson plan is ironclad and unchangeable. Once you've picked up the main focus of the lesson, think of your participants and their unique needs and make any necessary adjustments. You may have participants that are not very talkative, but the lesson calls for discussion. Perhaps you will need to make an adjustment and allow for some nonverbal form of expression. Whatever the case, the better you know your participants, the better you'll be able to make adjustments so that the lesson will be as effective as possible.

- 6. Know Your Learning Outcomes (Objectives)**—Know what your participants are supposed to be able to know and/or do as a result of this lesson. Don’t settle for the old “my objective is to cover chapter four” routine. Learning outcomes (sometimes referred to as “objectives”) are statements found in your lesson plan that state concretely and in measurable terms what it is that your participants should be able to know and do when the session is complete. Without these stated learning outcomes, you would never have any hope of knowing whether you’ve accomplished what you had set out to do.
- 7. Follow a Catechetical Process**—Think of your lesson as a movement: you want to move your learners from where they are to where Jesus wants them to be. St. Ignatius of Loyola described this as entering through their door but leaving through your door. This movement, called the catechetical process, involves four steps:
 - Engaging the life experience of the participant
 - Exploring the concepts to be taught (Scripture and Tradition)
 - Reflecting and integrating the concepts with the lived experience
 - Responding with a new way of living
- 8. Get Your Materials Ready**—Be sure that you have all the materials you will need to complete the lesson properly. There’s nothing worse than reaching a point in the lesson when you tell participants to cut pictures out of magazines only to find out that you don’t have scissors (or magazines). Visualizing the lesson ahead of time will help you see what materials you will need that perhaps were not listed in the instructor manual.
- 9. Have Plan B Ready**—By visualizing the lesson ahead of time, you may discover that what you’re hoping to accomplish may not work. Always have an option ready in case something falls flat or just isn’t working the way you had hoped.
- 10. Overplan**—When serving dinner, it is always better to have more food than not enough. Likewise, when it comes to your lessons, it is always better to prepare more than you think you’ll need. Until you learn how to effectively gauge your time, it is quite possible that what you think will comprise an entire session will only cover half of the allotted time. When this happens, panic tends to set in. On the other hand, if you have more material than you need, you can relax and decide how to adjust your next session to make room for what you didn’t accomplish in this session.
- 11. Pray**—Before you sit down to plan a lesson, take some time to pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Do your planning and preparation in a prayerful environment. Light a candle. Put on some instrumental music. Place a Bible on the table next to you. Dim the lights. Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide you, and to give you the help you need to be focused, loving, and creative.

For more great tips like these, visit Joe’s blog at
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