

One Sentence Lesson Plan



DESCRIPTION

The *One-Sentence Lesson Plan* helps professors organize their lectures more efficiently, into three areas:

WHAT: the content or skill

HOW: the method, tool, or activity

WHY: the purpose



TEMPLATE

Students will be able to _____
(accomplish outcome X)

by _____,
(using method Y)

so that _____.
(they will be helped in Z way)



EXAMPLE

Students will be able to explain the concept of supply and demand by comparing prices for concert seats online, so that they see why organizations charge different prices for the same product/service.



RELEVANCE

Professors juggle a lot: teaching, grading, department meetings, office hours, research, writing, consulting, and other professional obligations. That leaves little time to plan lectures. So, what ends up happening? Instructors outline what they want to cover—major concepts, questions to ask, video links to show, and/or reminders to share. This approach, however, can undermine focus. Moreover, it overly emphasizes teaching and content, rather than **students and learning**.

Enter the *One-Sentence Lesson Plan*.

Professors can use this heuristic to define the WHAT, the HOW, and the WHY, by asking:

- **WHAT** should students know or be able to do by the end of class?
- **HOW** will students reach this goal?
- **WHY** are students learning this?

All student-centered lessons require these three elements—regardless of the course, the discipline, the student body, or the institutional setting. Without defining the WHAT, instructors can easily cover too much or go off topic. Without spelling out the HOW, teachers may not have a clear sense of how to get students involved, which will make it hard for students to internalize the content. And without articulating the WHY, professors can easily overlook the broader connections that motivate students to learn more.

The *One-Sentence Lesson Plan* forces professors to clarify their intentions to both students and themselves. In the end, this planning technique can provide some measure of accountability.



TOP THREE TAKEAWAYS

1

The One-Sentence Lesson Plan can systemize the oftentimes random way professors plan their lecture, by distilling it into the three most important parts—the WHAT, the HOW, and the WHY. It keeps professors focused as well as accountable.

2

The WHY is the most important (yet overlooked) part of the *One-Sentence Lesson Plan*.

When students understand WHY they're learning a topic, they will more likely "buy into" it (1). For instance, let's take the previously mentioned concept of supply and demand. It can sound abstract and boring if simply defined ("Supply and demand is an economic model of price determination in a market that postulates..."). However, when professors say that understanding this concept can help students see why concert seat prices vary widely, for instance, students will feel more connected and motivated to learn about it. The purpose is not always obvious to them.

Ultimately, articulating the WHY forces professors to be more student-oriented. They will more likely think, *How do I tie the topic back to students' lives? Or How can I make this topic meaningful?*

Emphasizing the WHY also elevates the *One-Sentence Lesson Plan* above a typical lesson objective, which usually centers on the WHAT (e.g., Students will be able to identify the three major causes of the Civil War).

Although the WHY is not always easy to find (e.g., What is the purpose of learning binomial distribution?), the very struggle to define it can foster a valuable, student-centered mindset in teaching. Sometimes, the WHY is simply "to build necessary thinking skills" or "to help students better understand and describe the world." It is up to professors to articulate this purpose explicitly and creatively.

3

The WHY can also help professors figure out how to open (and close) lectures with impact.

Imagine if instructors started the class by asking: "Have you ever tried to buy concert or airline tickets online and checked back only to find the price has gone up?" Activating prior knowledge will motivate students to learn more about supply and demand and make it easier to anchor new information (2). Content on its own, however, rarely drives that kind of desire. By figuring out the purpose first, professors can more easily come up with the opening hook.



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