

Why We Include Lesson Aims

Teacher Tips by Ronald L. Nickelson

The coming cap-and-gown season, with its bestowed diplomas and degrees, takes me back to two of my own graduations. In high school, I walked across the stage, convinced that I was just about the smartest guy in the world. In contrast, when I walked across the stage for my college graduation just four years later, I felt small and knew I had a lot to learn.

You can probably guess the reasons behind the change in my mindset, but here are two worth highlighting.

Practical Realizations

First, college exposed me to a much wider world. It expanded my comprehension of knowledge bases, disciplines, and expertise. For every new thing I learned, I realized that there were dozens more I did not know. Another way to say this is that in college, **I knew that I didn't know**, whereas in high school, **I didn't know that I didn't know**.

The second reason for my change in mindset wasn't apparent to me at first; it snuck in, remaining subconscious for several years. But when I began teaching Bible classes, it quickly emerged.

Dawning Awareness

After a few classes, my wife mentioned that my teaching style (note the singular) was suboptimal. She was bold enough to tell me a truth that no one else would: my teaching was too much like preaching, and my preaching was too much like teaching. I always presented material in the same in-between way.

Later, I was privileged to attend the Air Force's "Academic Instructor School" at Maxwell AFB, AL, as a reservist. The class relentlessly stressed that good teaching begins with proper lesson objectives. They taught that different objectives require different approaches. For example, students often catch knowledge easily through a

lecture format. Comprehension, on the other hand, requires students to grapple with the material personally. That usually leads to the need for activities that help students summarize, question, or predict outcomes. Those types of activities require time to reflect, write, converse, or ask questions—not just listen. Further, if an aim points toward application, students need space to problem solve or relate the lesson to their lives.

I came to terms with the fact that my one-style approach needed an overhaul.

Lesson Aims

Every week of *Standard Lesson* begins with three lesson aims (objectives). In short, the editors of the volume have determined the direction of each lesson for you. But as a teacher, you must still work through those aims with wisdom and discernment, asking yourself, *Which teaching method is most suited to achieving this objective?* Each aim has a slightly different goal. The first aim focuses on knowledge, the second on comprehension, and the last leads learners into application.

The Right Method

Start with the end goal in mind: the achievement of each lesson's aims must determine the teaching method(s) you employ. A few methods to consider include lectures, case studies, problem-solving exercises, and discussions. *Standard Lesson* offers varied ideas for classroom facilitation. Consider utilizing the discussion questions, lesson visuals, activities found on the Involvement Learning Pages, and exercises available as Activity Pages, which you can download.

What methods do you employ regularly in your teaching? What new methods may God be nudging you to try? May God faithfully guide your preparation. May you find great joy and contentment in your learning, planning, teaching, assessments, and adjustments.