

Crafting and Using Learning Targets

Learning targets are the foundation of a student-engaged assessment system. Teachers translate required standards into learning goals for courses, projects, units, and lessons in language that students can understand and own. Teachers refer continually to learning targets during the lesson, check for understanding of learning targets, construct formative and summative assessments that match learning targets, and track students' progress toward targets. Students demonstrate their ownership of their learning by articulating the connections between learning targets and the work of the lesson, and by showing evidence of their progress toward meeting them.

A. Crafting Learning Targets

1. Teachers analyze their curriculum map (see also *Core Practice 2: Mapping Knowledge, Skills, and Habits of Character*). They unpack and discuss their standards with grade level peers in order to develop a deep and shared understanding of what the standards are asking students to know and to do.
2. Teachers analyze and discuss the discipline-specific ways of thinking expected by the standards for their subject area (e.g., classifying in science, valuing evidence in ELA, abstract reasoning in math) and can articulate how these ways of thinking support learning.
3. Teachers document and periodically review the alignment of standards, targets, and assessments as part of their curriculum maps.
4. Teachers translate their standards into high-quality learning targets that have the following characteristics:
 - a. Derived from national or state standards embedded in school or district documents such as curriculum maps and adopted program materials.
 - b. Written in student-friendly language and begin with the stem “I can...”
 - c. Measurable and use concrete, assessable verbs (e.g., identify, compare, analyze).
 - d. Specific, often referring to the particular context of a lesson, project, or case study.
 - e. Phrased to identify the intended learning, not the intended doing. That is, learning targets are phrased as statements about the skills or knowledge students will develop as opposed to what students will complete (e.g., “I can describe the ideal habitat for a polar bear” vs. “I can write a paragraph about the habitat of a polar bear”).
 - f. Phrased to identify the knowledge, reasoning or skill that matches the cognitive process demanded of students (e.g., “analyzing” or “creating”).
5. Teachers sequence daily learning targets that scaffold students' ability to achieve mastery of a standard. When sequencing targets, teachers consider the following questions:
 - a. How many lessons do students need to master the discrete skill, knowledge, or reasoning in this target?
 - b. What sequence of daily targets will build students' knowledge and skills over time, scaffolding students to mastery of a standard (or long-term target)?
 - c. What character targets are support the topic and tasks I'm asking students to do? For example, I can seek multiple perspectives in our discussion of civil rights; I can persevere to improve my work through multiple revisions)?
 - d. When should I use a character target alongside an academic target so that students have multiple opportunities for growth (e.g., I can be productive and focused when working independently; I can contribute to my classroom community by reliably doing my classroom job; I can speak and listen respectfully to my peers)?

B. Using Learning Targets in Daily Instruction

1. Teachers use learning targets to articulate specific learning outcomes for students. So that all students know the target they are aiming for and understand the criteria for success before independent practice. Teachers unpack the learning target with students by:
 - a. Guiding students to restate the target verb in their own words (e.g., analyze, explain, solve).
 - b. Identifying and defining academic or domain-specific vocabulary in the target.
 - c. Communicating how the target will be assessed before students demonstrate their learning in relation to the target.

2. Teachers sometimes pre-assess students' proficiency on the target as part of the “do now” activity in a lesson.
3. Teachers choose the optimal time to introduce learning targets during a lesson structure (see also *Core Practice 10: Planning Effective Lessons* and *Core Practice 11: Delivering Effective Lessons*).
 - a. In a workshop 1.0 lesson, this is typically at the outset of the lesson, or after a “hook” that builds excitement.
 - b. For a discovery-based lesson or workshop 2.0 lesson structure, this is typically after students have grappled with a problem or text, discussed their strategies, or raised questions and hypotheses.
4. Teachers refer to the target throughout the lesson by doing the following:
 - a. Explaining how daily learning targets are related to standards or long-term learning targets.
 - b. Pausing instruction or work time periodically to reorient students to the learning target and correct misconceptions or false starts.
 - c. Using checks for understanding to assess where students are in relation to the target.
 - d. Debriefing the learning in the context of the target at the end of the lesson.
5. Teachers ensure that students:
 - a. Can articulate the meaning and purpose of learning targets.
 - b. Regularly track their progress toward learning targets through quick checks, formative assessments, or target trackers.
 - c. Know where they are in relation to the target and what they need to do to get closer to meeting it.