

MENTOR HANDBOOK

12 | INSTRUCTION: IDENTIFYING THE LEARNING CONTENT

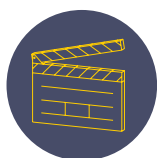
STUDY

KEY TAKEAWAYS FOR THIS MODULE

Your teacher can deliver more effective instruction by identifying the learning content if they understand that:

- > Learning is a change in pupils' capabilities or understanding that happens when pupils think hard.
- > Breaking learning down should make thinking manageable enough for pupils to experience a high success rate.
- > Identifying manageable steps is tricky, so teachers should check all pupils' key learning, and provide further support to ensure a high success rate.

Get yourself into a strong position to mentor your teacher by working through the following:



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SUMMARY BELOW:**

TEACHING CHALLENGE

Ms Stones wants to ensure pupils experience maximum learning in each lesson. She knows she needs to challenge pupils with new learning content but is unsure how to decide the right amount of content to do this. How could she identify and divide up content, and check if learning is taking place? How can she adapt others' plans for her own classes to achieve this?

KEY IDEA

Teachers can ensure pupils experience maximum learning by carefully identifying the content that pupils will think hard about at different points in a lesson, breaking this thinking down and checking learning along the way.

IDENTIFYING KEY THINKING IN A LESSON

Learning involves processes leading to a lasting change in pupils' capabilities or understanding – if nothing changes, arguably nothing has been learned (Sweller, 2016). As time in lesson is limited, Ms Stones needs to prioritise a manageable amount of content for her pupils to learn about. Learning takes place when pupils think hard about something (Coe, 2013) so Ms Stones should consider and carefully specify what she wants her pupils to think hard about in each lesson.

BREAKING DOWN LEARNING

Like all of us, pupils find new academic ideas difficult, and will often avoid thinking hard wherever possible (Willingham, 2009). Pupils may also avoid tasks where they fear they will be unsuccessful (Kluger & deNisi, 1996). Ms Stones can help her pupils by breaking learning down, making thinking more manageable.

When learning is manageable, pupils will achieve a higher success rate. Effective teachers break learning down to make it more manageable by:

- Introducing new material in small steps.
- Sharing models (including solved problems) to illustrate each step.
- Asking lots of questions and guiding pupils to practise each step successfully.

To support a high success rate, instruction should be aligned at different stages of teaching. For example, making sure that pupils practise the same material that has been introduced to them (Rosenshine, 2012). Therefore, when selecting the content pupils must think hard about, Ms Stones needs to consider, "what thinking do I want pupils to be successful with?" and "how can I break this thinking down to make success more likely?"

However, selecting appropriate steps is hard. Sometimes a step that will improve a final performance does not look like the final performance (Christodoulou, 2017). For example, a violinist might practise their scales to be fluent before attempting to improve at playing a piece, rather than just repeating the piece. Similarly, pupils might need to practise their vocabulary before attempting an essay. Ms Stones should seek support from her mentor and colleagues when breaking learning down into essential material – concepts, knowledge, skills and principles – that she wishes pupils to think about and remember.

Ms Stones wants to support a high success rate, so she also needs to understand how manageable pupils are finding the steps she has selected. However, predicting how manageable steps are can be uncertain. For example, how manageable a step is can depend on pupil prior knowledge (Willingham, 2009). Therefore, even if Ms Stones has carefully broken learning down, with

support from colleagues, she still needs to assess pupils to check how successful they have been with each step

CHECKING KEY LEARNING

Effective teachers regularly review learning, asking lots of questions which check pupil understanding (Rosenshine, 2012). The more precisely Ms Stones has identified what she wants pupils to be thinking hard about at various stages of the lessons, the more effectively she will be able to check for key learning. She needs to check the learning of as many pupils as possible.

Ms Stones wants to establish where all learners are in relation to the key content or steps she wants pupils to succeed at. An effective strategy for checking whole-class understanding of identified content is the use of 'exit tickets'. This is an end of lesson assessment that pupils need to be able to complete quickly and that teachers should be able to assess quickly. Getting every pupil to complete an exit ticket as a low-stakes assessment at the end of her lessons will help Ms Stones to gauge how successful pupils have been with these steps.

Ms Stones' assessment may pick up that pupils are not yet secure in their thinking about a particular step, for example if several pupils incorrectly answer a question or there is a common misconception or error in an exit ticket. If the success rate drops, Ms Stones should provide further support, for example breaking the learning steps down further in the next lesson.

NUANCES AND CAVEATS

One approach to breaking learning down could be to set steps which pupils can already easily do, to ensure success. However, setting easy work might suggest the teacher has low expectations, which is likely to negatively affect pupil confidence and motivation (Coe et al., 2014). Furthermore, if pupils are not set challenging enough tasks, they will not learn as much.

SELECT

Before you observe, first select a **DEVELOPMENT AREA** to focus on. Next, familiarise yourself with the **FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREAS**, as you will zoom in on one of these during your observation. Finally, craft a **PRECISE TARGET** when you observe your teacher (examples are provided below).

DEVELOPMENT AREA	FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA	EXAMPLE PRECISE TARGETS
Identify learning content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher, with the support of a colleague, identifies the key knowledge and skills that they want pupils to understand and think hard about within the lesson, and ensures tasks cause pupils to do so. > Teacher, with the support of a colleague, identifies which knowledge and skills need to be taught or referred back to in the lesson depending on whether it is new or prior knowledge. 	<p>If your teacher is...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Not doing it at all: With the support of a colleague, review lesson resources to identify the key knowledge and skills that pupils will need to acquire in order to achieve the learning goals and ensure these are covered in the lesson. > Doing it but needs some improvement: With the support of a colleague, review lesson resources and ensure each of the tasks in the lesson is focused on the knowledge and skills needed to achieve the learning goals. > Doing it well, but needs some stretch: With the support of a colleague, review lesson resources and adapt tasks so they better align with the knowledge and skills in the learning goals, causing pupils to think hard about them.
Making learning manageable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher, with the support of a colleague, decides on the knowledge and skills to cover or introduce in a lesson and ensures they are manageable for pupils. > Teacher, with the support of a colleague, plans to ensure knowledge and skills build in order to ensure the content is manageable and deepens pupils' understanding over time. > Teacher breaks down key knowledge and skills needed for a task into steps to make learning manageable. 	
Exit tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Teacher carefully frames to pupils what exit tasks are and what their purpose is so that pupils know they are low stakes and support their learning. > Teacher plans the content of the exit task so that it efficiently checks pupils' understanding of the key knowledge and skills from the lesson, specifically assessing for misconceptions and gaps in understanding. > Teacher plans how to address information from the exit tasks in the following lesson. 	

RECORD YOUR THINKING HERE

DEVELOPMENT AREA	FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA	EXAMPLE PRECISE TARGETS
(select before observing)	(select whilst observing)	(select/write whilst observing)

OBSERVE

Consider the following questions based on a short (approximately 15 minute) observation of your teacher.

What was your teacher's **previous** target? Are they meeting it? How do you know?

For the **DEVELOPMENT AREA** you are focussing on for this observation, what is your teacher already doing well?

Next, go to the previous page and select a **FOCUSED DEVELOPMENT AREA** to further zoom in on. Then select (from the examples) or write one **PRECISE TARGET** (bite-sized action) to coach your teacher on. You can choose to stick with the previous target if your teacher have not made enough progress yet.

How will you model the target to your teacher to show them what good looks like? What questions will you ask to check your teacher understands the model? For example, 'How it is different from your current practice?', 'What impact might it have on your practice and pupils?', 'What links can you see between the model and the module principles (below)?'

Reminder: Your model should help your teacher develop their ability in some of the following:

- > Identify essential concepts, knowledge, skills and principles of the subject and provide opportunity for all pupils to learn and master these critical components.
- > Plan formative assessment tasks linked to lesson objectives and thinking ahead about what would indicate understanding.
- > Structure tasks and questions to enable the identification of knowledge gaps and misconceptions.

Next, meet with your teacher to work through the 'Feedback' stage of instructional coaching. See the guidance on the feedback stage in the appendices of the Mentor Handbook for support.

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