



EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING

Getting Started: Writing Learning Targets

Excerpt from Leaders of Their Own Learning

Choose a Standards-Based Lesson with Which to Get Started

Learning targets are derived from a number of sources—from Common Core, state, or local standards, school-developed habits of scholarship, or content area program materials. Some teachers work in schools where they have the autonomy to choose which standards they will address during a given time frame. Some work in schools where curriculum maps have already been developed by school-based leadership teams. Still others work in schools where curriculum decisions are made at the district level. In any case, teachers can employ learning targets in their classrooms to engage students in tracking their learning. When first getting started with learning targets, teachers should choose a lesson that meets required standards, that can be completed in one session, and that can be assessed during that time frame.

Write Learning Targets for the Lesson

It makes good sense to start small. After choosing a lesson, translate the objectives for that lesson into manageable, assessable, and student-friendly learning targets. It is important not to try to cover too much ground with the learning targets, especially when just getting started writing them. It may not be wise, for example, for a second-grade teacher to attempt to create her first learning targets for a daily lesson for the entire Common Core State Standard W.2.1: *Write opinion pieces in which they introduce the topic or book they are writing about, state an opinion, supply reasons that support the opinion, use linking words (e.g., because, and, also) to connect opinion and reasons, and provide a concluding statement or section.* It would be more reasonable for her to choose one manageable and assessable component of this standard for which to create learning targets. For example, the teacher may decide that the most important place to start is for students to learn to form an opinion of a story they have read, supported by evidence. She may choose, “I can develop an opinion about my story,” followed by, “I can craft one sentence that describes my opinion of my story,” followed by, “I can support my opinion with one example from my story.” A well-designed lesson that identifies the learning target, builds students’ skills in forming opinions and citing evidence, and checks for their progress along the way and at the conclusion has a high likelihood of seeing most, if not all, students meeting the learning target during the lesson. For a teacher just getting started with learning targets, determining feasible and assessable lessons for which to build learning targets is an important foundation.

It is also critical that students are able to assess their progress during and at the conclusion of a lesson. This is a key component of student-engaged assessment. If the learning target in a ninth-grade English class is, “I can write a haiku poem that creates a vivid picture,” there should be time for students to assess their poem against established criteria for vivid language at the end of the lesson. If instead they turn it in to the teacher on their way out the door and do not return to it the next day, there is limited opportunity to engage students in assessing their own progress and making plans for improvement. The student-engaged part of the assessment is lost.

A common mistake that many teachers make when learning to write quality learning targets is writing a learning target that describes the task rather than the learning. For example, to say “I can make a poster about the ideal habitat of a polar bear” is much different than “I can describe the ideal habitat for a polar bear in a poster format.” The emphasis in the first learning target is on making the poster. In the second,

the emphasis is on learning about polar bear habitats. Though there is a time and a place for learning targets on craftsmanship and quality work, teachers must be clear about the learning they wish to assess. For more examples of common mistakes and pitfalls, see the “Common Challenges” section at the end of this chapter.

These targets were derived from the fifth-grade Common Core writing standard, W.5.2: *Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.*

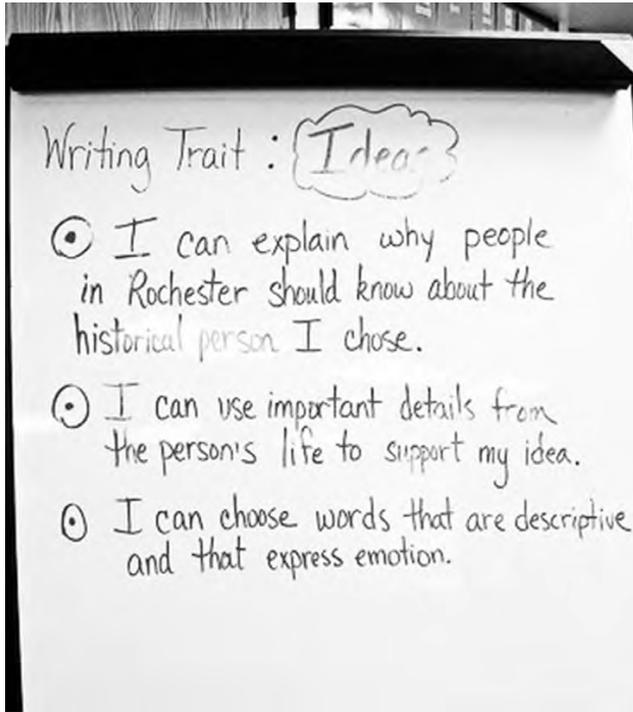


Table 1.1 contains examples of daily learning targets that are derived from standards and then contextualized in light of the specific curriculum content. For example, the learning target “I can describe historical events that affected the Sacco and Vanzetti case using a primary source text” links to the Common Core reading standard, RI.9–10.8: *Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.*

Table 1.1 Examples of Daily Learning Targets

Learning Targets for Younger Students	Learning Targets for Older Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can describe the differences between living and nonliving things. • I can explain my reasons for sorting and classifying insects. • I can find words I want to use in books, word walls, and word cards. • I can write words that send a message. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I can show two variable data on a scatter plot. • I can describe how photosynthesis and cellular respiration help an ecosystem maintain homeostasis. • I can describe historical events that affected the Sacco and Vanzetti case using a primary source text.