

Building Learning Paths With Students

Action Plan and Peer Feedback

Now's the time to take action as you apply the 5 planning keys to your unit or lesson plans. This guidance includes a worksheet and a completed sample action plan. After reviewing information and drafting your plan, you'll use the STAARs* of effective feedback and the suggested peer feedback strategy to receive input. You'll then apply feedback from your peers to improve your plan.

Choose how to use this guidance and worksheet in ways that best support your role and context.



Instructional coaches, specialists, and administrators

Practice applying the 5 planning keys to a unit or lesson plan so that you can model the skills with your teachers and learners. Or make plans for how you'll remove barriers for teachers and learners to successfully apply the 5 planning keys.



Teams or professional learning communities (PLCs)

Practice applying the 5 planning keys to one unit or lesson together to support each other through the process.

*STAARs: Strategic, Timely, Appropriate, Actionable, Right-Sized

Review

The 5 planning keys: What, why, and how

Use the 5 planning keys to inform your responsive unit or lesson plans and foster learning success.

1. Start with and return to *who*.
2. Examine large goals to make learning paths.
3. Anticipate variability and barriers.
4. Check assessment processes for quality.
5. Empower learners as partners.

Learning paths

This guidance focuses on examining large, particularly challenging learning goals, such as content standards, to create learning paths. Learning paths express the knowledge, content, and skills that students will demonstrate as they build up to, meet, and extend past the large, challenging goals.

In other words, learning paths lay out the success criteria for large goals in a way that illuminates the learning journey. When educators and students comprehend and actively use learning paths, it's easier to collaborate with students and make high-impact responsive teaching and learning decisions and actions.

Suggested use

Initially apply this guidance with one large, challenging learning goal that you'll use for an extended period of time—several weeks, a quarter, or a semester. Notice the valuable information revealed by going through this process with one large, challenging goal that you can apply to other learning goals. With practice, you can apply this process to more than one goal at a time, which supports both you and your students in shifting to habits that increase engagement and agile, responsive moves.

Action plan handout

A responsive-unit-or-lesson-planning approach

Identify a large, challenging learning goal (e.g., content standard) and the time frame, grade level, or group that this plan is for.

✔ Key 1 guidance: Start with and return to *who*

List the *who*—relevant learner context information and data that will inform planning for this unit or lesson. Outline ideas for how you'll use the learner context information and data to support all students' academic and social-emotional success.

✔ Key 2 guidance: Examine large goals to make learning paths

Use relevant rigor, complexity, and progression guidance to examine the learning goal for this unit or lesson. Use information from step 1 and the information revealed in the examination process to outline a learning path. If applicable, list associated goals and success criteria. Lastly, list the goal-aligned assessment processes that you'll use to practice, monitor, and certify success with the large learning goal.

Relevant information about the large goal rigor, complexity, or progression

Learning path for the large goal

Approaching: *Learners can . . .*

Meeting: *Learners can . . .*

Extending: *Learners can . . .*

Medium or small goal

Medium-or-small-goal success criteria

Student-made goals

Goal-aligned assessment processes

List the following:

- Classroom summative processes and tools to certify learning
- Planned formative processes and practice
- Possible in-the-moment formatives to practice or monitor learning

✔ **Key 3 guidance: Anticipate variability and barriers**

Use learner context information and learning evidence (data) to anticipate variability and proactively remove barriers that may arise with the learning goal. Use the information to list legally obligated and universal learning supports.

Plan for learning variability: Review students' unique strengths, needs, and interests relevant to the learning goal. This is a way to proactively plan for differentiation.

Proactively remove learning barriers: Consider engagement, representation, action, or expression options that students will need for success with the learning goal. These can include strategies such as scaffolding or extension.

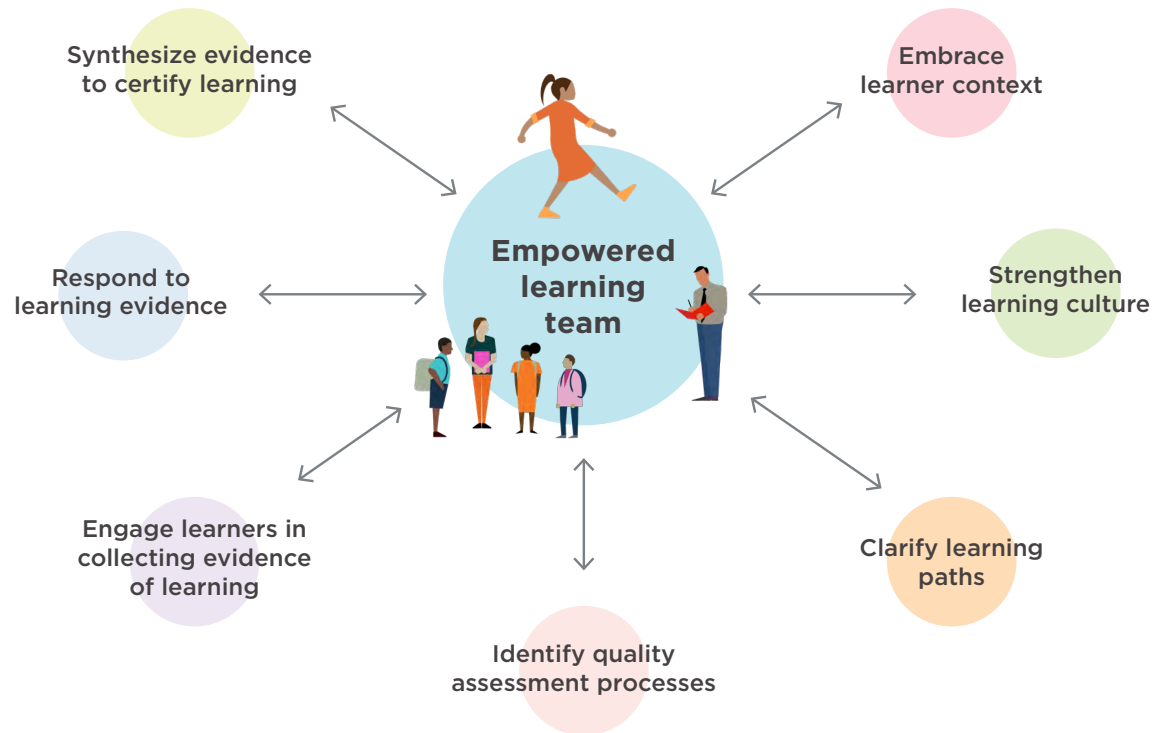
If needed, use variability, options, and additional learning support information to adjust or update your plans in step 2.

✔ **Key 4 guidance: Check assessment processes for quality**

Select the most relevant quality guidance—the best fit for learner context, learning goals, and learning path—to check assessment processes for quality before using them with students. Use the quality guidance to note any needed adjustments or revisions.

✔ Key 5 guidance: Empower learners as partners

Use the information in keys 1-4 to craft the responsive unit or lesson plan details on the next page. Include how you'll use responsive learning cycle practices in the beginning, middle, and end of the unit or lesson. Consider what you may need to do before or throughout the unit or lesson to empower learners as partners during the entire learning journey.



Check that your plans are responsive and that they empower learners as partners.

Before starting the unit or lesson:

Throughout the unit or lesson:

Beginning of the unit or lesson:

Middle of the unit or lesson:

End of the unit or lesson:

Respond and reflect

Use the responsive teaching and learning plan that you crafted. In partnership with your students, respond to learning evidence (e.g., learning evidence data and student information). Reflect on and note adjustments to inform next plans.

STAARs of effective feedback¹



Strategic

Focuses attention on the intended learning; celebrates strengths and provides guidance for next moves



Timely

Occurs during the learning with an opportunity to apply the feedback



Appropriate

Builds on at least partial understanding of the skill or concept; if the learner is confused or lost, the feedback isn't helpful and intervention is more appropriate



Actionable

Provides guidance but doesn't do the thinking or acting for the learner; builds self-efficacy



Right-sized

Provides guidance that the learner can reasonably consume and act on in the given time and opportunity

Peer feedback strategy

Take time to pay close attention to your peers' action plans. Using the following information, try to frame your feedback in terms of what's working (stars) and possible next steps (stairs).

Stars

Success feedback options

- Identify what's working.
- Describe a feature or quality.
- Point out an effective use of a strategy or process.

Stairs

Next-step feedback options

- Identify a correction.
- Describe a feature or quality needing work.
- Suggest a strategy or process.
- Offer a reminder.
- Ask a question.

Completed action plan: An ELA example

A responsive-unit-or-lesson-planning approach

Identify a large, challenging learning goal (e.g., content standard) and the time frame, grade level, or group that this plan is for.

Learning goal: “Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.”²

Time frame: 3-week unit in September

Grade level: 7th-grade ELA

✓ Key 1 guidance: Start with and return to *who*

List the *who*—relevant learner context information and data that will inform planning for this unit or lesson. Outline ideas for how you’ll use the learner context information and data to support all students’ academic and social-emotional success.

- *There are 123 students total: 28 to 34 students in each section, mostly 12- and 13-year-olds.*
- *Just over half the students are female, and the rest are male; no students identify as nonbinary.*
 - *It’ll be important to choose texts and activities that don’t feel too gendered.*
- *Based on the beginning-of-year survey, diverse student interests include sports, music, video games, quiz bowl, outdoors, and computers.*
- *Roughly 10% of the students receive Special Education services.*
 - *Reminder: Review IEPs to see how I’ll support these students to reach IEP goals.*
- *Roughly 5% of the students are active English Learners, while about 15% are either monitored or former English Learners.*
 - *Most of these students are exposed to Spanish at home (one student speaks Vietnamese), though few of them have academic proficiency in their home language. All will benefit from support in understanding the material (comprehensible input) and in producing language in speaking and writing activities.*
- *Because the students are developing their social-emotional capabilities, they’ll need a safe learning environment with predictable and familiar routines. They’ll need to know that they can take risks and make mistakes.*

- *At their age, the students have an increased awareness of groups that they identify with and groups that they identify as pertaining to “others.” They need practice navigating complicated social interactions and clarifying their own perspective, while seeing others’ perspectives as valid and valuable.*
- *Reading comprehension (Lexile®) is incredibly varied; a few students score in the 400–500 range, some in the 600–800 range, and many in the 900–1100 range.*
 - *I’ll need to embed strategies to make content comprehensible (frontloading important concepts, practicing key academic vocabulary, providing frequent checks for understanding). I’ll also need to ensure that students with higher reading comprehension may dominate class conversations and hinder others’ learning. Balance and equitable participation will be important.*

✔ Key 2 guidance: Examine large goals to make learning paths

Use relevant rigor, complexity, and progression guidance to examine the learning goal for this unit or lesson. Use information from step 1 and the information revealed in the examination process to outline a learning path. If applicable, list associated goals and success criteria. Lastly, list the goal-aligned assessment processes that you’ll use to practice, monitor, and certify success with the large learning goal.

Relevant information about the large goal rigor, complexity, or progression

Text complexity considerations: *I want to support students in reading grade-level texts (925 to 1185 Lexile), while also pulling in elements of cultural competence and critical consciousness to address social-emotional needs. One good candidate for the whole-class novel for this unit is *Return to Sender* by Julia Alvarez. Although the reading level is just below the grade band (by 30 Lexile points), this unit is placed at the beginning of the year, so it’s a starting point for increasing quantitative complexity over the course of the year.*

Achievement level (performance descriptors) information: *On the state ELA assessment, students will be prompted to show that they can summarize central ideas, themes, and key events using relevant details from the text. Retelling a basic sequence of events and summarizing central ideas and themes with some support lead up to success. A way that students can show how they can extend past the “meeting” level is by being able to thoroughly summarize ideas, themes, and key events with details from the text, including references to characterization and plot development.*

Learning path for the large goal

Approaching: *Learners can . . .*

Learners can retell a basic sequence of events and summarize a central idea, theme, or key event using some supporting ideas or relevant details from the text.

Meeting: *Learners can . . .*

Learners can objectively summarize a central idea, theme, and key event using relevant details from the text to analyze its development over the course of the text.

Extending: *Learners can . . .*

Learners can objectively summarize a central idea, theme, and key event using details from the text to analyze its development over the course of the text, including references to characterization and plot development.

Medium or small goal

Unit-specific goal (medium): Learners can objectively summarize themes and use relevant details from the texts we read in class to analyze theme development.

Lesson-level goal (small) examples:

- *Learners can write an objective summary of the text (or a piece of the text).*
- *Learners can craft a theme statement that reflects an analysis of the text.*
- *Learners can use details from the text to support their theme analysis.*

Medium-or-small-goal success criteria

A quality checklist that supports students' success with objective, text-based summary and analysis:

- *Expressed in my own words*
- *Includes summary sentences, theme statement, analysis sentences, and textual support*
- *Only includes textual details that relate to the development of a theme*
- *Only includes information from the text (does not include opinions)*
- *Includes formal transition words and phrases*

Student-made goals

My 7th-grade students have personal interests and aspirations related to increasing their independence and being taken seriously by adults. We can discuss and explore how the skills of objective, text-based summary and analysis are ways to show maturity, expertise, and critical thinking. Adults often respond positively to these skills by allowing more independence and taking the ideas seriously.

Goal-aligned assessment processes

List the following:

- Classroom summative processes and tools to certify learning
- Planned formative processes and practice
- Possible in-the-moment formatives to practice or monitor learning

Summative:

- *Theme summary and analysis writing sample*

Formative:

- *Reading check-ins and games*
- *Using provided summary and analysis examples in pairs or small groups to explore what success looks like*
- *Structured class discussions about character development in the novel*
- *Writing workshop exercises to chunk the summary and theme analysis tasks into parts like theme statement, evidence, and explanation of evidence*
- *Practicing theme summary and analysis with partners, using peer revision, and engaging in self-assessment*

In-the-moment formatives:

- *Four Corners, for students to express perspectives about characters and plot*
- *Give One/Get One, for students to build on each other's theme statements*
- *All Hands Up, to check character, plot, theme, or other understanding*

✓ Key 3 guidance: Anticipate variability and barriers

Use learner context information and learning evidence (data) to anticipate variability and proactively remove barriers that may arise with the learning goal. Use the information to list legally obligated and universal learning supports.

Plan for learning variability: Review students' unique strengths, needs, and interests relevant to the learning goal. This is a way to proactively plan for differentiation.

Proactively remove learning barriers: Consider engagement, representation, action, or expression options that students will need for success with the learning goal. These can include strategies such as scaffolding or extension.

Many students speak Spanish at home, so class discussions can benefit from these students sharing their experiences with two (or more) languages. Reading comprehension may be a struggle for some. Language (both receptive and productive) will need to be supported so that students understand the events of the novel and can talk and write about their analysis.

I'll use sentence starters and sentence frames that show what this kind of academic language (summary and analysis) looks like, which will support all students, including those who have a language processing IEP and those who are emergent bilingual.

If needed, use variability, options, and additional learning support information to adjust or update your plans in step 2.

✓ Key 4 guidance: Check assessment processes for quality

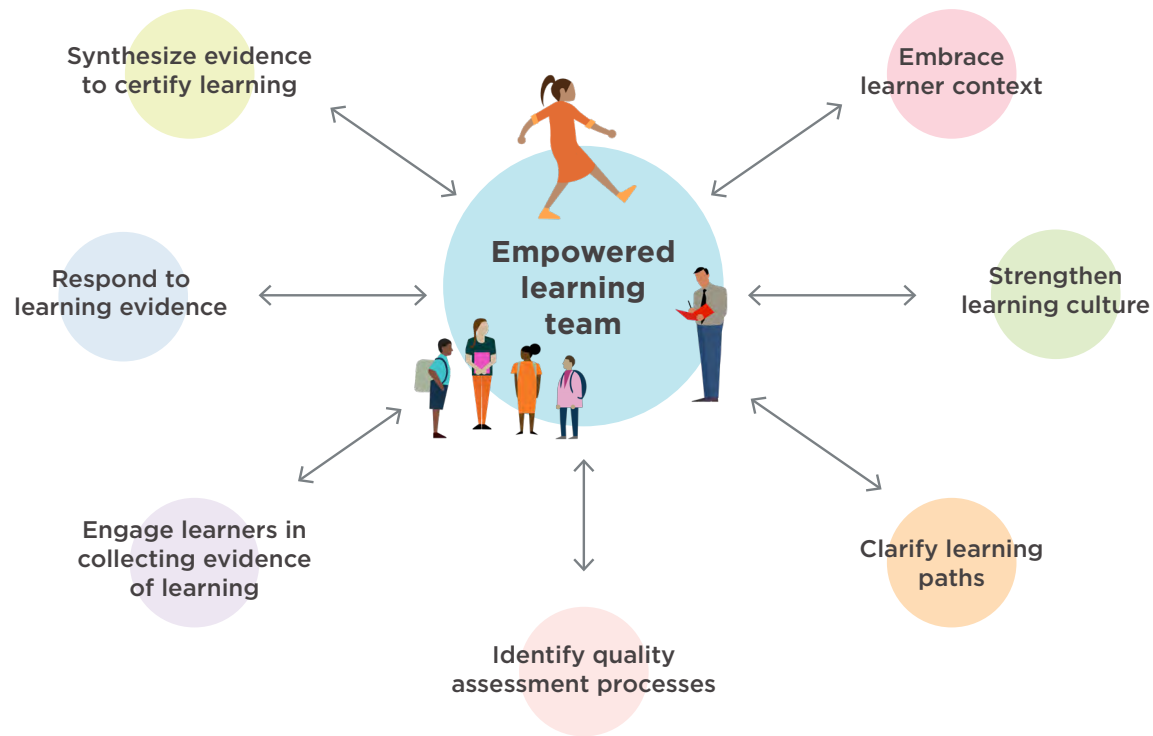
Select the most relevant quality guidance—the best fit for learner context, learning goals, and learning path—to check assessment processes for quality before using them with students. Use the quality guidance to note any needed adjustments or revisions.

I used the assessment empowerment guidance to check the end-of-unit theme analysis prompts for quality so that it was easier to plan formative assessment processes that built up to success with the summative tasks. Here's what I need to do:

- *I need to put the large learning goal (content standard) and the unit learning goal on the assessment materials so students can see how the actions of the assessment are related to the learning goal and not just random busy work. I can include the learning path information on the assessment materials and then cue the students to use the information to self-assess, which is another way to help ensure the learning goal and success criteria are clear.*
- *I'll work with our learning support specialist to review the prompts for inclusivity, accessibility, and bias considerations. I'll use the specialist's input to refine the prompts and to provide legally obligated and universal learning supports.*

✔ Key 5 guidance: Empower learners as partners

Use the information in keys 1-4 to craft the responsive unit or lesson plan details on the next page. Include how you'll use responsive learning cycle practices in the beginning, middle, and end of the unit or lesson. Consider what you may need to do before or throughout the unit or lesson to empower learners as partners during the entire learning journey.



EXAMPLE

Check that your plans are responsive and that they empower learners as partners.

Before starting the unit:

- *Use low-stakes community-building games and exercises to learn each other's names, build trust, and get comfortable with routines for peer feedback.*
- *Conduct a student survey to determine learners' attitudes toward literature and writing, as well as relevant interests.*

Throughout the unit:

- *Continue routines established at the start of the year, such as weekly circle-up discussions to attend to social-emotional needs and promote respectful interaction.*
- *Use strategies for equitable participation with varied grouping configurations, such as four corners, rotating partners, and numbered chairs.*

Beginning of the unit:

- *Introduce the context of the novel and the author's biographical information.*
- *Introduce the learning path, summary and theme analysis quality checklist, and examples of summary and analysis.*
- *Start reading the novel together using learning supports (e.g., scaffolds, extensions).*

Middle of the unit:

- *Continue reading, with a gradual release of scaffolds.*
- *Direct partner, group, and then whole-class discussions to practice expressing summary and theme analysis.*
- *Have a theme statement workshop to elicit feedback from both peers and educator (providing adequate time for students to act on feedback).*
- *Learn how to cite textual evidence using mini-lessons and practice.*
- *Work on partner, small-group summary and analysis drafting practice, feedback, and self-assessment.*

End of the unit:

- *Produce independent theme summary and analysis rough draft and final draft.*
- *Perform final self-assessment.*

Respond and reflect

Use the responsive teaching and learning plan that you crafted. In partnership with your students, respond to learning evidence (e.g., learning evidence data and student information). Reflect on and note adjustments to inform next plans.

The book's story resonated with so many students for different reasons, so I'd say it was a hit! The content of the novel was appealing because it provided various perspectives that learners could each identify with. Through the analysis of those perspectives, students gained a greater sense of understanding and empathy for the different groups represented in class. This supported the work revolving around community building and respect that we started.

Many of the supports that I embedded throughout the unit were effective and met the needs of students, especially those with limited language ability. Students especially appreciated the language supports for speaking and writing activities. Summarizing each chapter turned out to be more difficult for them than I anticipated, so I included additional supports and guidance to help them complete those pieces of writing. In response to student feedback, I may need to keep revising the quality checklist to make it even more streamlined and clearer.

EXAMPLE

Endnotes

1. Jan Chappuis, *Seven Strategies of Assessment for Learning*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2015), 95.
2. National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (Washington, DC: NGA Center for Best Practices and CCSSO, 2010), <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy>.

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