

THE PERFECT LESSON

Revised and
Updated

Third Edition

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Chapter 1

The perfect lesson in simple stages: meeting the new criteria and delivering progress in learning

Schools cannot be judged as ‘outstanding’ for overall effectiveness unless the ‘quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding.’

Ofsted, *School inspection handbook* (2015): 37

There is no one, magic formula or set structure for the ‘perfect’ lesson but the steps here will give you some ideas on how to develop your own version of the very best learning experiences for your class.

Step 1. Know what they are looking for

How can you ensure, in the brief time an inspector (or other observer) is in your classroom, that it is clear that your pupils ‘typically’ make great progress, achieve their full potential and exhibit the attitudes and behaviours of great learners daily?

Sharing the criteria for success is essential for any learning experience. If you (or your students) do not know what they are expected to strive for, how do you (or they) know they have achieved success? So, with this in mind, the Ofsted 2015 grade descriptors for outstanding teaching, learning and assessment are shown below:

Outstanding (1)

- Teachers demonstrate deep knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. They use questioning highly effectively and demonstrate understanding of the ways pupils think about subject content. They identify pupils' common misconceptions and act to ensure they are corrected.
- Teachers plan lessons very effectively, making maximum use of lesson time and coordinating lesson resources well. They manage pupils' behaviour highly effectively with clear rules that are consistently enforced.
- Teachers provide adequate time for practice to embed the pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills securely. They introduce subject content progressively and constantly demand more of pupils. Teachers identify and support any pupil who is falling behind, and enable almost all to catch up.
- Teachers check pupils' understanding systematically and effectively in lessons, offering clearly directed and timely support.

- Teachers provide pupils with incisive feedback, in line with the school's assessment policy, about what pupils can do to improve their knowledge, understanding and skills. The pupils use this feedback effectively.
- Teachers set challenging homework, in line with the school's policy and as appropriate for the age and stage of pupils, that consolidates learning, deepens understanding and prepares pupils very well for work to come.
- Teachers embed reading, writing and communication and, where appropriate, mathematics exceptionally well across the curriculum, equipping all pupils with the necessary skills to make progress. For younger children in particular, phonics teaching is highly effective in enabling them to tackle unfamiliar words.
- Teachers are determined that pupils achieve well. They encourage pupils to try hard, recognise their efforts and ensure that pupils take pride in all aspects of their work. Teachers have consistently high expectations of all pupils' attitudes to learning.
- Pupils love the challenge of learning and are resilient to failure. They are curious, interested learners who seek out and use new information to develop, consolidate and deepen their knowledge, understanding and skills. They thrive in lessons and also regularly take up opportunities to learn through extra-curricular activities.

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- Pupils are eager to know how to improve their learning. They capitalise on opportunities to use feedback, written or oral, to improve.
- Parents are provided with clear and timely information on how well their child is progressing and how well their child is doing in relation to the standards expected. Parents are given guidance about how to support their child to improve.
- Teachers are quick to challenge stereotypes and the use of derogatory language in lessons and around the school. Resources and teaching strategies reflect and value the diversity of pupils' experiences and provide pupils with a comprehensive understanding of people and communities beyond their immediate experience. Pupils love the challenge of learning.

Ofsted, *School inspection handbook* (2015): 48–49

Inspectors are looking for *typicality* in teaching, not the one-off brilliant lesson. They will check whether or not the lesson they are seeing is typical for the teacher by talking to students and looking at their books. This is a very good reason to make sure that what you are delivering each and every day is helping children progress.

Searching for the 'x' factor: what are the magic ingredients that will make your teaching outstanding and demonstrate the high quality of provision in your school?

Key ingredients for success, based on the descriptors above are:

- All the pupils, particularly those who have the greatest needs, are making rapid and sustained progress.
- Able children experience appropriate opportunities to really challenge themselves and fulfil their potential.
- Teachers have very high expectations of all pupils and enable them to learn exceptionally well across the curriculum and this includes modelling and promoting the core skills of literacy and numeracy in all subjects.
- Teachers are constantly checking understanding, giving powerful feedback and intervening with impact on pupils' progress and learning. Pupils are responding to the feedback given and consequently making more progress.
- Imaginative teaching strategies are used to engage and motivate pupils on a regular basis – not just for observations. This is evidenced by their positive attitude to learning.

Consider these, too, as essential elements of outstanding lessons and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development (SMSC):

- Developing independent and resilient learners.
- Using classroom assistants effectively so that they can help pupils make exceptional progress in your lesson.

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- Assessment is used as an integral part of developing progress in learning. Children's work will demonstrate this and show how they respond to feedback.
- Challenging the most able learners to work at full capacity.
- Using technology to make an impact on learning.
- Effective collaborative learning and peer review.
- Effective classroom management to create behaviour and attitudes that really enhance learning for everyone.
- Sharing the criteria for success to enable pupils to have ownership of and commitment to their own learning.

So, how can you make sure that you demonstrate the above when being observed or inspected? Practice! You need to be relentless in your efforts to improve achievement for all. Establishing a culture in your classroom where learning is valued and expectations of self and others are habitual and high will mean that anyone walking into your classroom will immediately know that you are a very effective teacher. The following chapters will give you much more detail on how to do this. However, first consider the remaining steps towards the 'perfect' lesson and then dip into the other chapters as you need them.

Make sure that your pupils know that observers may come into lessons to see how they are learning and that they should feel free to chat about what happens in your classroom – they are the best advocates of your teaching and will be keen to explain how you help them!

Step 2. Be present and in control, right from the start

Set up the learning environment

The relationships you have with your students are the most important aspect of setting up your learning environment. You need to be the very best learner in the class and demonstrate this by displaying that same thirst for knowledge and love of learning that inspectors expect to see from the pupils.

‘Pupils are confident, self-assured learners. Their excellent attitudes to learning have a strong, positive impact on their progress.’

Ofsted, *School inspection handbook* (2015): 52

Students should expect to start work as soon as they come into the classroom, without you directing them. This strategy should cover the time it takes for all the students to arrive. It neatly shows how you are completely and effortlessly in control and makes a great impression on that extra (Ofsted) visitor.

Always make a prompt start – especially for early arrivers. Get the students into the habit of self-starting in every lesson by setting little challenges, questions or tasks on the board that they *know* they are expected to get on with. These can be anagrams, puzzles, true or false statements, recaps of the

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previous lesson(s), unexpected questions for debate, music challenges and so on. Reward effort for these tasks as part of your reward-and-sanction classroom policy.

It is a good idea to have music on as students come in and are getting on with these tasks (see Nina Jackson's *The Little Book of Music for the Classroom* for some suggestions). Then, when you switch the music off the students know it is time for the lesson proper to start.

While the students are completing the tasks, circulate, smile, greet them individually by name and make them feel welcome. You could get the students to assess each other's work, if appropriate.

This will mean that you can start the main part of the lesson when *you* are ready and useful work is already taking place. It will be obvious to any observer that your pupils are in the habit of starting learning as soon as they walk through your classroom door.

Outstanding *behaviour for learning* requires an exceptionally positive climate in the classroom where all the pupils want to learn, ask questions and support each other unconditionally in making great progress.

Step 3. The starter that primes them for learning

Your first learning activity should stimulate curiosity and open-mindedness and prepare the brain for learning. This can be random or linked to the subject.

Engaging the emotional brain makes your class curious and attentive.

A starter can be a Thunk, a curiosity or a challenge of some sort.

A Thunk

This is a question (from Ian Gilbert's *The Little Book of Thunks*) that has no right or wrong answer but which makes you think. They prepare students to be open-minded and consider various options. For example:

- If you always got what you wished for would you always be happy?
- Can you point to where the sky begins?
- What has the most freedom – an ant or a school child?
- Is a person who has a face transplant still the same person?
- Which is heavier, an inflated or deflated balloon?

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Students can think of the next question or make up their own Thunks as part of the starter.

A curiosity

For example:

- A box – students have to guess what the contents are.
- A wig or hat – someone can try it on and guess the character it belongs to.
- A message in a bottle – students have to guess the message and who sent it.

A creative challenge in pairs

For example:

- What was the first pop song you ever heard and the one you heard most recently?
- What are the three most popular babies' names today and which three will be most popular in 2020?
- Guess the most common and least common food that everyone in the class had for breakfast.

Work for, party with or send to the jungle

A fun task that helps students understand personal preferences. Which would you do with the following famous names and why?

THE PERFECT LESSON

A revised and updated version of Jackie Beere's bestselling *The Perfect (Ofsted) Lesson* (ISBN 978-178135088-1) covering the latest Ofsted inspection framework.

The Perfect Lesson is designed to help teachers deliver great learning in the classroom, every lesson, every day, whether they are being observed or not. Here, Jackie Beere shares her expertise and experience in a practical, down-to-earth way; it is as much about world-class quality in teaching and learning as it is about surviving an inspection.

Many different teachers have successfully implemented the strategies offered here and adapted them to suit their different styles, personalities and classes. With *The Perfect Lesson*, you can be confident of revealing your school in the best possible light and, who knows, you may even enjoy the process!

"A concise, practical approach to delivering the perfect Ofsted lesson."


Julie Summerfield, Head Teacher, Horndean Technology College

"Jackie demystifies what makes that elusive outstanding lesson for Ofsted into a really positive experience for both students and teachers."

Ranjit Samra, Head Teacher, Southam College

Jackie Beere has taught in both primary and secondary schools and later became head teacher of Campion School in Northamptonshire. As one of the first Advanced Skills Teachers leading and implementing innovative teaching and learning strategies nationwide she was awarded the OBE in November 2002 for services to education. Since 2006 she has been training teachers and school leaders in the latest strategies for learning and developing emotionally intelligent leadership.

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