Essential Components Video Transcript

The first essential component is making sure that you have a clear and measurable student-focused learning outcome, and that all content and activities in the lesson support the achievement of that learning outcome.

Secondly, in order for learning to happen, the students must participate in four essential phases of instruction.

An introduction to the topic is very important so that students can access what they already know. This will help them connect existing knowledge and experience to any new knowledge they learn, and help you determine what they already know about the topic. It should also help to pique student interest in the topic.

You can think of this phase as 'warming up the brain." Telling stories or finding ways to relate the content to students' lives is a good way of engaging and motivating students.

The presentation of content is where the students interact with the new knowledge. This could be through a lecture, but it could also be through a reading, video or an experiential or other kind of activity.

Regardless of the instructional strategy you use to introduce students to the content, it should support the learning outcome and any extraneous or "nice-to-know" information should be kept to a minimum to help manage the cognitive load. In university teaching, the presentation of content is commonly the focus of instruction, particularly during class time. However, the following two phases of Practice and Application are equally, if not more important, in the learning process.

The Practice phase with new knowledge or skills typically starts out with focused tasks that move from simple to more complex as students develop their knowledge and skills through repetition and feedback. This may be achieved through modelling, guided analyses & problem solving and group activities.

However, the complexity of the practice activities is dependent on the level of learning identified in your learning outcome. Depending on your learning outcome, your practice activities may be limited to simple knowledge consolidation for lower-level learning outcomes or scaffold to more complex high-level thinking activities for learning outcomes that emphasize higher-level learning.

It's important to note that the emphasis of the practice phase should be on mastering new knowledge and skills, and NOT on integrating this new knowledge with or applying it to other course learning. This will come in the next phase.
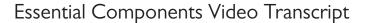
The research is clear on this: in order to learn, students must have several opportunities to practice new skills and knowledge, and this practice must be distributed over time. Practice activities might include: problem solving, reading summaries, discussion forums, student-generated questions, clicker questions, to name a few.

As the expert, you would know what types of activities would help students develop their skills.

In the Application phase of instruction, students engage in activities that integrate newly acquired knowledge and skills with previous knowledge to complete authentic tasks. These authentic application activities might take the form of role plays, scenarios, case studies or experiments depending on your discipline and should be appropriate to the level of learning identified in your learning outcomes. The goal is for students to practice using the new knowledge and skills in tasks that mimic real-world applications.

Your role as instructor and expert in the subject content is not only to deliver content, but also to determine what the best activities are to help students master the knowledge and skills and to design the learning experience accordingly. This principle is at the heart of instructional planning.

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Part of the design process also requires you to plan for and build in mechanisms to evaluate and give feedback to students on their learning at each phase of instruction. This is commonly referred to as formative assessment. As the instructor, you can use these mechanisms to make adjustments to instruction and determine if students are ready to move on to the next phase. Students use feedback to check their understanding and take corrective action. Without feedback, they can do neither.

Not all evaluation and feedback mechanisms have to be one-on-one- instructor to student. For example, Instructors can use technology tools such as clickers to instantly check the understanding of all students and give immediate feedback. Other online tools such as online quizzes can allow students to self-check and get immediate feedback on any incorrect answers. Students themselves can also provide feedback to each other with guided tasks. Your instructional goal, the type of knowledge, and the depth of learning you expect will determine the kind of feedback that is most appropriate.

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For assistance with any aspect of instructional planning, contact a learning expert at
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