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Tried and True Methods of Course Design: Overview & Lesson Example

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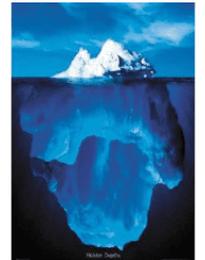
Designing Instruction for Learning; Tried and True Methods of Course Design: Overview & Lesson Example. By Judith Slapak-Barski, Ed.D.

Abstract

As we strive to find new models of student engagement in a post-pandemic educational landscape, it best to build upon proven methods and best practices. This paper provides a sample blueprint for course or lesson design that can be used in face-to-face, hybrid, or online courses, so that we can teach the way students learn best. The sample lesson provided is an applied example of integrating each of the steps delineated in Gagné's book, *The Conditions of Learning*, first published in 1965, identified the mental conditions for learning. These steps might be completed in one class meeting, in a whole month, or even a whole semester. It depends on the individual case.

Overview

As we set out to build our courses (whether an entire course or a single lesson, whether the course is face-to-face, hybrid, or online) we want to apply best practices so that learning can occur. Gagné's book, *The Conditions of Learning*, first published in 1965, identified the mental conditions for learning. These were based on the information processing model of the mental events that occur when adults are presented with various stimuli. Gagné and his colleague Briggs created a nine-step process called the events of instruction, which address the conditions of learning. Here's an overview, just the tip of the iceberg, to get us started.



Gagné & Briggs' "Events of Instruction" consist of the following:

1. Gain attention
2. Inform the learner of the objective
3. Stimulate recall of prerequisite learning
4. Present the stimulus material
5. Provide learning guidance
6. Elicit the performance
7. Provide feedback
8. Assess the performance
9. Enhance retention and transfer



Keeping the above stages in mind as you plan for a class session or online module will give your lesson plans a strong foundation.

Start with the End in Mind

Before we design instruction, we need to determine what our participants/students will be able to **think, do, or know** after our Learning Event. So we identify our Learning Objectives.

Let's use Backwards Design to come up with our Learning Objectives. Once we have those, we can design how we will accomplish them (using Gagné's 9 Events of Instruction). So first we decide what we want the students to learn. [Bloom's taxonomy](#) is a good resource for helping you articulate what you want students to learn.

Let's list a few (1-3) Learning objectives below (first one is done for you as an example):

1. *Students will be able to identify strategies for personal finance budgeting*
2. _____
3. _____

Learning Event

To help in the development and instruction of our courses, below I have charted Gagné's 9 Events of Instruction. This way we know what we will have to prepare/ do at every step, and by when. It all comes together on the last column of the chart below, where I have provided an applied example.

The following chart includes a description and explanation of each of the nine events, as well as examples of how an instructor may apply the Nine Events of Instruction (the intended audience for this Learning Event example is freshmen students). This plan applies to any medium (face-to-face, hybrid, or online instruction), and the topic is Personal Finance and budgeting.

Instruction (Gagné & Briggs)	What it does	How (some ideas you may use)	Some examples in a Lesson about <i>Financial Literacy</i>
1. Gain attention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a "hook (anticipatory set): Motivates instruction by focusing the learning task, its importance, or the prior knowledge/experience of the learners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stimulate students with novelty, uncertainty, and surprise. • Pose thought-provoking questions to students prior to class, to survey their opinion, or gain a response to a controversial question. 	Some ideas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As students come in, have a video playing in the background of "money raining" (an appropriate example here). • Announce: "Raise your hand (in the

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures the learners are ready to learn and participate in activities by presenting a stimulus to capture their attention. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have students pose questions to be answered by other students (you may ask for verbal answers, or use technology tools, such as clickers, etc.). • Lead an ice breaker activity: current news and events, case studies, YouTube videos, and so on. The object is to quickly grab student attention and interest in the topic (in online and hybrid courses, use the discussion board for this). current 	<p>face-to-face classroom or virtually) if you are happy with your bank account balance”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce: “Raise your hand if you often ask yourself ‘Where does my money go?’” • Ask: “Is anyone here rich? or broke?” Who is “in between”? Etc. <p><i>Note: “Ask”, “Announce”, etc... can all be done face-to-face or online in the LMS discussion board or using other tools.</i></p>
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Instruction (Gagné & Briggs)	What it does	How (some ideas you may use)	Some examples in a Lesson about <i>Financial Literacy</i>
<p>2. Inform students of the learning objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States the outcomes using observable verbs. • Allows students to organize their thoughts and prioritize their attention regarding what they are about to learn and do (it whets their appetite for the learning that’s about to occur). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe required performance -or model an example if possible. • Describe criteria for standard performance, or have learners establish criteria for standard performance by consensus. • Include course goals on assessment prompts so students can see the big picture (e.g. “Why are we doing this?”). • Include learning objectives in lecture slides, the syllabus, and in instructions for activities, projects, papers, and so on. To keep them in sight. 	<p>Examples of statements you may use:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announce: “Ok, today we will learn how to develop a personal budget based your actual income and expenses.” Or “today we are going to fix your wallet”, etc. • Explain: “This fits our course goal “Students will be able to identify strategies for personal finance budgeting.”

Instruction (Gagné & Briggs)	What it does	How (some ideas you may use)	Some <i>examples</i> in a Lesson about <i>Financial Literacy</i>
3. Stimulate recall of prior learning (or experience)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourages students to build on previous knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and relate those to the topic at hand. Helps students make sense of new information by relating it to something they already know or something they have already experienced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask questions about previous experiences. Ask students about their understanding of previous concepts. Ask students about their conclusions drawn based on previous experiences. Have students incorporate prior learning into current activities. 	<p>Examples of questions you may ask:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “What was your latest purchase?” What were your last 5 purchases (item and dollar amount). Write them down Was that a “want” or a “need” purchase? What is your first memory of money? What were you taught about money while you were growing up? Remind students that financial choices are just as personal as choosing a romantic partner or career path; we aren’t judging, we are simply helping them to make these assessments for themselves.

Instruction (Gagné & Briggs)	What it does	How (some ideas you may use)	Some <i>examples</i> in a Lesson about <i>Financial Literacy</i>
4. Present the content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizes and groups content in meaningful ways, provides context, and provides explanations after demonstrations. Allows instructor to show and explain the material to students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teach by presenting multiple versions of the same content (e.g. video, demonstration, lecture, podcast, group work, pair work, readings, activities, projects, multimedia, and others (if you must lecture, do it 	<p>Show students how to calculate income minus expenses. Model this on your shared excel sheet on Google drive, or projected on the board:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After watching you, have students look

		<p>in small chunks when possible, and provide frequent opportunities to check for understanding).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide clear explanations and use frequent examples and/or diagrams. • Use a variety of media to engage students in learning and welcome their participation at appropriate times. • Model and demonstrate frequently. • Incorporate active learning strategies to keep students involved. • Check for understanding often. Adjust instruction and re-teach if necessary. • Provide access to content on LMS (Canvas, Blackboard, etc.) so students can access it outside of class • In face-to-face courses, integrate the use of LMS or external APPS for class responses (such as Poll Everywhere, or Kahoot) to keep students engaged during content presentation. 	<p>at their bank statements or credit card transactions and plug in their own numbers in the different columns.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate the Excel formulas for addition and subtraction. Ask students to do the same in their sheets. • Ask them to differentiate between “wants” and “needs” using budget expense categories and highlighting or color coding. • Have students brainstorm ways to increase income or to reduce expenses (maybe some “wants” can be cut (at least temporarily) to allow for “needs” to be met. <p>Ask students to <i>volunteer</i> to share examples with the class (be mindful of privacy issues), and have the group provide feedback and suggestions.</p>
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Instruction (Gagné & Briggs)	What it does	How (some ideas you may use)	Some <i>examples</i> in a Lesson about <i>Financial Literacy</i>
<p>5. Provide “learning guidance”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides students with instructions on how to learn, such as guided activities or common pitfalls. • Advises students of strategies to aid them in learning content and of resources available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following instruction, provide instructional support as needed – i.e. scaffolding that can be removed gradually as the student learns and masters the task or content: Answer questions, discuss, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for volunteers to share their excel sheet on the board and have the instructor and students provide feedback. • Ask classmates to suggest ways to

	<p>In other words, help students learn how to learn. Note: With learning guidance, the rate of learning increases because students are less likely to lose time or become frustrated by basing performance on incorrect facts or poorly understood concepts.</p>	<p>demonstrate skills or solve procedural problems).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Model varied learning strategies – e.g. mnemonics, concept mapping, role playing, visualizing • Use examples and non-examples – examples help students see what to do, while non-examples help students see what not to do. • Provide real-life context in the form of case studies (for concrete real-world application), visual images (which assist in making visual associations), and analogies and metaphors (which use familiar content to help students connect with new concepts). 	<p>increase income, or to reduce expenses (maybe some “wants” can be cut (at least temporarily) to allow for “needs” to be met.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask a volunteer to edit their excel sheet according to feedback received, and project on the board for all to see. Once done, ask all students if it is better now and why. Expand: What purpose do we want our budget to serve? How often should we update it? Is it a place for goalsetting or simply recording expenses and income?
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Instruction (Gagné & Briggs)	What it does	How (some ideas you may use)	Some examples in a Lesson about <i>Financial Literacy</i>
<p>6. Elicit performance (guided practice)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows students to apply what they have learned, to reinforce new skills and knowledge, and to confirm correct understanding of course concepts. • Provides formative assessment opportunities – e.g. written assignments, individual or group projects, oral presentations. • Can facilitate student interaction through peer-review activities – e.g. ask deep-learning questions, have students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students to apply what they are learning in group, pairs, or individual projects and activities, written assignments, lab practical exercises, and so on. • Scaffold high-stakes assessments with smaller activities so students can practice and receive feedback after each step, before turning in something for a larger grade. • Design performance assessment quizzes and tests – i.e. test students in ways that allow them to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students to review their own excel sheet. • Ask students to pair up and brainstorm strategies for meeting personal financial goals through increasing income, reducing expenses, and accruing savings. • Have a class discussion on the main ideas discussed, issues encountered, challenges, and solutions they came up with. • Ask students to identify a goal for their personal finances.

	<p>collaborate with their peers, facilitate practical laboratory exercises.</p>	<p>demonstrate their comprehension and application of course concepts (as opposed to simple memorization and recall).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign students the task of keeping a weekly log of all expenses and income (using an App or an Excel sheet) and see if their initial projection matched their actual expenditures. • Assign a Reflection Essay on the process from beginning to end, what they learned, and what changes they intend to make in terms of their personal finance practices.
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Instruction (Gagné & Briggs)	What it does	How (some ideas you may use)	Some <i>examples</i> in a Lesson about <i>Financial Literacy</i>
<p>7. Provide feedback</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides feedback of students' performance to assess and facilitate learning and to allow students to identify gaps in understanding <i>before it is too late</i>. • Allows you to give students feedback on individualized tasks, thereby correcting isolated problems rather than having little idea of where problems and inconsistencies in learning are occurring. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide <i>detailed and timely feedback</i> on assignments showing students what was done correctly, what must be improved, and include explanations. Utilize rubrics when possible. Give <u>formative feedback</u> on smaller assignments as well as <u>summative feedback</u> on larger assessments. • Utilize tools such as Turnitin or change tracking in a word processor to quickly give feedback to large audiences. • Provide feedback to discussion boards in online courses. • Utilize peer-evaluation and self-evaluation or self-assessment methods. • Reteach if necessary. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide your own written feedback individually to each student privately. • Ask students to give feedback as a group by projecting one student's work on the board (previously removing any identification information) and ask for the class to provide their feedback (you can do this orally, openly, or through a voting app (anonymous) with pre-made questions). You can repeat this system with a few samples of different students. • <i>Remember the adage: Praise in public and admonish in private</i>

Instruction (Gagné & Briggs)	What it does	How (some ideas you may use)	Some examples in a Lesson about <i>Financial Literacy</i>
<p>8. Assess performance: Test whether the expected learning outcomes have been achieved on previously stated course objectives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps students identify content areas they have not mastered. <p>Note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Before assessment, provide Closure (this is not an official step in Gagné’s Events of Instruction, but very important): <i>Closure is always done by the instructor.</i> This is where the teacher restates and summarizes the concepts just taught, bringing the lesson to a teacher-directed conclusion, so that students transition back to the beginning of a lesson with reflection on what they have just learned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that students have practiced and received feedback prior to high-stakes assessments. Make sure to administer pre- and post-tests to check for progression of competency in content or skills before final assessment. Embed formative assessment opportunities throughout instruction using oral questioning, short active-learning activities, or quizzes Utilize a variety of assessment methods including exams/quizzes, written assignments, projects, and so on. Implement a variety of assessment methods to provide students with multiple opportunities and media to demonstrate proficiency Utilize rubrics when grading activities that are not standard exam and quiz questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assign a final draft of their revised budget, featuring feedback received from instructor and peers. Assign students the task of living within their newly-composed-budget for a week, in real-life, and tracking each expense and income. Ask them to compare their projected expenses and income vs. their actual recorded figures and draw conclusions.

Instruction (Gagné & Briggs)	What it does	How (some ideas you may use)	Some examples in a Lesson about <i>Financial Literacy</i>
<p>9. Enhance retention and transfer</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepares students to apply information to personal contexts. This increases retention by personalizing information. 	<p>Provide opportunities for students to relate course work to their personal experiences when designing essays and projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask students to compare their projected expenses and income vs. their actual recorded figures and draw conclusions.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide opportunities for discussion in small groups or using a discussion board. • Allow students to reflect on what they have learned and how they will use that knowledge or those skills in the future. • Have students create a reference for their future selves that summarizes what they have learned. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After attempting to live within their newly-composed-budget for a week, in real-life, and track every expense and income, assign a final report delineating where they started, what did they change, and how did they manage. • Have students present their budget to the class and discuss whether or not they succeeded in living within the means of that budget, met their personal finance goal, and share lessons learned. • Encourage students to continually add to their personal budgets and revise financial goals quarterly.
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OK! Ready?

Now let's build your own Learning Event by filling out the form below, based on your Learning Objectives:

Rewrite your LOs (Learning Objectives) below:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Please complete the worksheet below, detailing how you will meet those LOs.:

9 Events of Instruction (Gagné & Briggs)	What it does	How will you do it? Jot your ideas here
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<p>1. Gain attention: Obtain students' attention so that they will watch and listen while the instructor presents the learning content.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides a "hook (anticipatory set): Motivates instruction by focusing the learning task, its importance, or the prior knowledge/experience of the learners. • Ensures the learners are ready to learn and participate in activities by presenting a stimulus to capture their attention. 	
<p>2. Inform students of the learning goals objectives</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • States the outcomes using observable verbs. • Allows students to organize their thoughts and prioritize their attention regarding what they are about to learn and do. 	
<p>3. Stimulate recall of prior learning: Encourage students to build on previous knowledge or skills.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps students make sense of new information by relating it to something they already know or something they have already experienced • Stimulates prior knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to the topic at hand. 	
<p>4. Present the content: Show and explain the material you want students to learn.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Makes use of strategies to present and cue lesson content to provide more effective instruction. • Organizes and groups content in meaningful ways and provides explanations after demonstrations. 	
<p>5. Provide "learning guidance": Provide students with instructions on how to learn, such as guided activities or common pitfalls.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advises students of strategies to aid them in learning content and of resources available. In other words, help students learn how to learn. • With learning guidance, the rate of learning increases because students are less likely to lose time or become frustrated by basing performance on incorrect facts or poorly understood concepts. 	
<p>6. Elicit performance (practice): Allow students to apply knowledge and skills learned.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows students to apply what they have learned to reinforce new skills and knowledge and to confirm correct understanding of course concepts. • Provides formative assessment opportunities – e.g. written assignments, individual or group projects, presentations • Can facilitate student interaction through peer-review activities – e.g. ask deep-learning questions, have students 	

	collaborate with their peers, facilitate practical laboratory exercises	
7. Provide feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides timely feedback of students' performance to assess and facilitate learning and to allow students to identify gaps in understanding before it is too late. • Allows you to give students feedback on individualized tasks, thereby correcting isolated problems rather than having little idea of where problems and inconsistencies in learning are occurring. 	
8. Assess performance: Test whether the expected learning outcomes have been achieved on previously stated course objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps students identify content areas they have not mastered. <p>Note:</p> <p>Before assessment, provide Closure (this is not an official step in Gagné's Events of Instruction): Closure is always done by the instructor. This is where the teacher restates and summarizes the concepts just taught, bringing the lesson to a teacher-directed conclusion, so that students transition back to the beginning of a lesson with reflection on what they have just learned</p>	
9. Enhance retention and transfer	Prepares students to apply information to personal contexts. This increases retention by personalizing information.	

Summary

Once you have prepared course goals and learning objectives, Gagné's nine events of instruction can help you build a framework to prepare and deliver instructional content while considering and addressing conditions for learning. Learning goals and objectives will help situate the events in their proper context. The nine events of instruction can then be modified to fit both the content and students' level of knowledge.

Selected Resources

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Selected Resources