

The Religion Teacher's

Guide to Lesson Planning

With 250
Activities and
Teaching
Strategies!

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Introduction

“As the Father has sent me, so I now send you.”

—John 20:21

Lesson planning is one of the most common challenges I hear from DRE’s, department chairs, teachers, and catechists. Lesson planning can take up a lot of time and energy. Many people just don’t know where to start. Others quickly run out of ideas and begin to search the Internet for lesson plans and activities on a daily basis. It can become a very stressful experience. I wrote this e-book to help teachers and catechists take a new approach to lesson planning that will add value for the students while saving time for teachers.

We are experiencing a crisis in our Church today. The latest surveys from the [Pew Forum study](#) or [CARA reports](#) indicate that more and more Catholics are spiritually and religiously illiterate. This e-book is meant to assist teachers in fostering real learning in young people. The resources provided here will help teachers and catechists teach students what we believe. It is not, however, meant to be the absolute guide to all facets of catechesis. Lesson planning is only one part of many aspects of effective catechetical instruction in either Catholic schools or parish religious education programs. Lesson planning is a part of *theologiae secudae*, the study *about* God. *Theologiae prima*, the experience of God through prayer and liturgy, is beyond the scope of a lesson plan, though opportunities for prayer and reflection should certainly be included in every lesson. As the popular Latin phrase goes, *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the way we pray influences the way we believe). I have intentionally focused on the cognitive part of learning (the *credendi*) since that is what comes easiest in the classroom setting and what catechists and teachers seem to struggle with the most.

Faith formation cannot be confined to a lesson plan or set of teaching strategies. Faith formation is a part of a much bigger picture that must extend beyond the classroom. For a broader approach to religious education that includes but is not limited to lesson planning, please stay connected to *The Religion Teacher* (www.thereligionteacher.com) and look for more e-books in the future about other aspects of catechetical instruction with additional activities.

How to use this e-book and its tools

This e-book is filled with a lot of information and background that will be new to some readers and a nice reminder others. I would suggest that you skim down to the Resources section first and start using these tools right away. I have also provided checklists at the end of each section to help summarize the sub-steps you should take in creating a lesson. If you like your lesson planning system the way it is, I think you will

find the 250 activities and teaching strategies contained in the back of this book to be well worth using this e-book as a reference.

I used to spend hours writing lesson plans in my first couple of years of teaching. Part of why I wrote this e-book is to provide the readers with various ideas and suggestions that they can easily plug into their lesson plans at each stage of the planning process. The resources in the back of this e-book have categorized lists of lesson objectives, assessments, activities, and teaching strategies that research has proven to work.

If you want more explanation and advice based on the four steps described below, you can download and view additional support materials at *The Religion Teacher* at www.thereligionteacher.com/guide-to-lesson-planning-resources.

How to share it

If you find this resource valuable, please share it! Just direct people to this link: www.thereligionteacher.com/guide-to-lesson-planning. They will be able to download a free copy for themselves by entering their email into the form at the bottom of the page.

Thank you

It has truly been pleasure developing this resource for teachers and catechists. Your support and feedback is invaluable to me. I am available if you have any further questions or requests. Feel free to e-mail me at any time with questions or comments at jared@thereligionteacher.com. May the Holy Spirit inspire you, your lesson planning, and all the great work that you do for young people.

Jared Dees
The Religion Teacher

The Religion Teacher's Lesson Planning System

Step 1: Know the Topic (What should I teach?)

Take an appraisal of the material you have at your disposal. Learn your curriculum. Read the textbook. Organize the information. Focus on what is important.

Step 2: Create Lesson Objectives (What do I want them to learn?)

Begin with the end in mind. Think actively not passively. Encourage higher levels of thinking. Think ahead to an assessment.

Step 3: Determine the Assessment (How will I know they have learned it?)

Know what they have learned. Focus on mastery. If they fail, it is time to re-teach.

Step 4: Choose the PROCESS to Reach the Objectives (How will I get them there?)

Meet a variety of learning needs. Differentiate instruction. Use the PROCESS. Don't be predictable.

Step 1: Know the Topic (What should I teach?)

In order to decide what you should teach, you have to choose the most important information for a lesson. For religion teachers and catechists, this decision is informed primarily by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and then by diocesan, parish, or school curriculum or the textbook provided for the course of instruction. According to the *National Directory for Catechesis*, "Catechetical instruction in the Catholic school should be based on the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and thoroughly integrated into the curriculum and objectives of the school (NDC, no. 54.9b).

For teachers of other subjects, a curriculum or state standards are provided to help guide instruction and determine what should be taught. However, this is not always the case for religion teachers. In many dioceses and parishes, curricula and standards have been written for religious education, but very often a curriculum is not in place or if it is, catechists and teachers are not aware of it. The textbook, therefore, is often the core guide to instructional design. Many teachers and catechists will share my experience as a first-year teacher. I was given a textbook and told by my principal to "teach the book." In the United States, certain procedures are in place to ensure that catechetical materials and textbooks are written in conformity with the *Catechism* to ensure faithfulness to the teachings of the Catholic Church (see the [conformity list here](#)). Therefore, dioceses, parishes, and schools are not misled when they suggest teachers use textbooks as guides for their curricula. This is counterintuitive for teachers of other subjects who teach to standards set by their state or diocese, but catechists and religion

teachers should not be altogether upset. It is a simpler solution than asking new teachers and catechists to pull from multiple sources in developing a course.

Catholic high schools in recent years have seen a shift in this kind of thinking. The USCCB unanimously approved a document titled, the [*Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework for the Development of Catechetical Materials for Young People of High School Age*](#). This document has now become the guiding light for curriculum being developed in dioceses and schools as well as in the development of catechetical materials by textbook publishers. For this reason, the *Framework* is becoming an important document in making instructional decisions. It is meant to provide the “doctrinal elements” rather than a curriculum itself, but schools are using it as the guiding outline for the development of the six core courses it contains and its five suggested electives.

Every teacher and catechist should consult their principal, DRE, or department chair first regarding their curriculum. If there is a curriculum that teachers or catechists are responsible to use, then they should reference it first and then turn to the textbook for help in teaching to those standards. If a curriculum does not exist or is not in use, then the textbook should be used as the guide to designing instruction. If there is no curriculum or textbook, then consult with other teachers who can help you in designing your instruction and use the *Catechism* as your primary resource.

Unit Planning

Although this is a guide to lesson planning, I rarely plan stand-alone lessons. Each lesson plan should build towards a unit goal and a unit assessment. This means knowing a topic well enough to be able to plan a series of lesson objectives that lead up to a central unit objective. One way of framing the unit goal is by crafting a “central question” that guides a unit of instruction. These central questions are deep questions that require the understanding of multiple concepts to answer. These central questions encourage critical thinking.

A unit assessment should, of course, accompany the unit goal. This assessment extends beyond a simple test or even a test question. Essays are common unit assessments, but experienced teachers should attempt to assess student progress with authentic assessments or performance assessments. These complex project-like assessments measure a student’s ability to think critically about multiple parts of the many lessons leading up to the assessment. Unit planning can be challenging and time-consuming, but it increases student engagement and helps focus individual lessons for a larger purpose.

Pre-planning Preparation to Develop a Lesson

After you have taken an appraisal of the materials you have been given, you can begin to make specific decisions about developing your lesson plan. First, pre-read the chapter or lesson in the textbook or other catechetical resource you have at your disposal. Divide chapter into logical divisions with a common theme that can be turned into a lesson (see “Unit Planning” above).

Use the “Lesson Preparation Template” to take notes on the textbook or other catechetical resource to keep track of the main ideas for the lesson. Why should you take notes? Sometimes you need to teach yourself before you teach your students. You may have taken a class on something back in high school or college or read a book about it, but a refresher is always important. You should also familiarize yourself with the specific resource that your students will be reading so you know ahead of time how much is covered in the book. Completing the “Lesson Preparation Template” worksheet will help you keep track of important vocabulary terms, main ideas, questions, and critical thinking opportunities that relate to the lesson you are preparing.

Step 1 Checklist

- Consult your curriculum. Divide the standards into logical divisions that can be turned into units and lessons.
- Pre-read the chapter. Skim through to see the topics and look for logical divisions (this may already be divided for you in the text or the teacher’s manual) or correlations to your curriculum.
- Divide the chapter into parts that can be turned into rough lessons.
- Read the chapter or sections you have divided and fill in the “Lesson Preparation Template.”
- List all vocabulary terms and page numbers in the “Lesson Preparation Template.”
- List main ideas, statements, and facts that the text (or standards) put forth in the “Lesson Preparation Template.”
- Create questions or use the questions provided by the textbook to later insert into your assessments (quizzes, tests, or informal assessments).
- Create questions that require critical thinking that can be used for assessment or lesson development.

Step 1 Resources

- Lesson Preparation Template
- USCCB Doctrinal Elements of a Curriculum Framework
- Your Catholic Religious Education Curriculum

Step 2: Create Lesson Objectives (What do I want them to learn?)

Much of the work for step 2 is already accomplished. At this point you should have a list of vocabulary terms, main ideas, and questions that relate to a certain topic. Now we want to turn that raw information into actual student goals. Unfortunately, many teachers do not take this important step. Many of them jump straight to Step 4 and create a list activities and worksheets that relate to the chapter and section they are teaching. The number one mistake I see teachers and catechists making is focusing on what they are teaching rather than what students are learning. You must focus on learning goals before you choose the right learning activities. I will refer to these learning goals as lesson objectives, but they are also called learning objectives or learning goals.

Lesson objectives consist of three parts: SWBAT + learning verb + topic (read more about the three parts [here](#)). “SWBAT” is an acronym for “*Students will be able to.*” You may have used or seen teachers use “Students will” as well. I prefer “students will be able to” over “students will” because we want to establish a goal for what students will be able to do *after* doing some learning tasks. What students *do* is not as important as what students *will be able to do* based on the activities they carry out during the lesson. You will create a list of activities that students will do in Step 4, but in this step you will determine what students “be able to” do as a result of those activities.

Lesson objectives also need an action verb that can be assessed. It is not enough just to state that students will *learn* something or that you will *teach* something. With every lesson objective we should choose a verb that applies to a certain level learning. Educational theorists have developed “taxonomies” of these verbs to help educators encourage higher level thinking. The most popular taxonomy of verbs is [Bloom’s Taxonomy](#), developed by Dr. Benjamin Bloom. Bloom’s studies found that teachers were only asking students to think at the most basic levels. They were being assessed using only the traditional methods of multiple choice, matching, fill-in-the-blank, etc. that only challenge students to learn at the level of rote memorization. These teachers, therefore, only expect students to repeat back to them what they have taught. Things haven’t changed much in the last sixty years as teachers today continue to only challenge students at superficial levels. Instead, using a taxonomy helps teachers choose verbs that challenge students to think at higher cognitive levels and consider assessments that actually measure those verbs.

Personally, I always found Bloom’s six categories of thinking or the six levels of [Robert Marzano’s New Taxonomy](#) to be overwhelming and difficult to apply. This is a classic example of the “paradox of choice” in which there are just too many levels to consider and too many verbs to choose. It is important to approach education from a practical perspective rather than staying only theoretical. I use to find myself falling

back to the same objectives in my lesson plans: SWBAT explain, SWBAT compare and contrast, etc. For this reason, I developed a simple system based on these taxonomies called the Simplified Taxonomy. I've broken down many of the possible learning verbs into three categories: retrieval, comprehension, and critical thinking. For classic taxonomy enthusiasts these three categories correspond to Bloom's Taxonomy and Marzano's New Taxonomy in the following way:

Simplified Taxonomy	Bloom's Taxonomy	Marzano's New Taxonomy
Retrieval	Knowledge	Retrieval (Recognize, Recall, Execute)
Comprehension	Comprehension	Comprehension (Integrate, Symbolize)
Critical Thinking	Application Analysis Synthesis Evaluation	Analysis (Match, Classify, Analyze Errors, Generalize, Specify) Knowledge Utilization(Decide, Problems Solve, Experiment, Investigate)

The **Retrieval objectives** are expectations that students will be able to memorize and repeat definitions and lists, describe main ideas, or recognize concepts from a list. This is an important stepping stone to the other higher level thinking verbs. Students must be able to memorize certain facts before they can understand them or think critically about them. However, teachers and catechists must not stop here nor should they only assess in ways that expect students to repeat definitions or identify correct answers from a multiple choice list or matching section. Some examples of Retrieval objectives are:

- SWBAT identify the liturgical season of the Catholic Church.
- SWBAT define Magisterium.
- SWBAT label the major cities on a map of Israel at the time of Jesus.
- SWBAT list the Sorrowful Mysteries of the Rosary.
- SWBAT describe how Jesus was crucified.

The **Comprehension objectives** measure how much students can understand what they have learned. These objectives expect students to be able to summarize main ideas in their own words. Whereas a Retrieval objective might ask a student to be able to state the definition of Magisterium, a Comprehension objective would ask a student to explain its key functions. Some examples of Comprehension objectives are:

- SWBAT describe the key parts of each liturgical season of the Catholic Church.
- SWBAT describe the ways in which the Magisterium develops Sacred Tradition.
- SWBAT draw a map of ancient Israel at the time of Jesus.
- SWBAT illustrate the key parts of the crucifixion.

Critical Thinking objectives are not often implemented by religion teachers. These objectives ask students to take what they have learned about certain topics and think about them for themselves. In this way they either analyze main ideas or utilize their knowledge to create something new. The most common type of critical thinking objectives ask students to compare two things or categorize a number of things according to a certain criteria. Students can also create generalizations or predictions based on what they know about a certain topic. With enough time and commitment, students may also be able to use what they know to develop a strategy to overcome certain problems or create a criteria to analyze certain topics. These objectives are challenging and must follow the mastery of certain Comprehension objectives as a foundation. Some examples of Critical Thinking objectives are:

- SWBAT differentiate the liturgical seasons of the Catholic Church according to color, feasts, and purpose.
- SWBAT develop an argument in support of Sacred Tradition as a source of Truth that compliments Sacred Scripture.
- SWBAT sort cities of ancient Israel at the time of Jesus according to geographic region, type of population, language, and economic status.
- SWBAT create an analogy for the crucifixion using modern day capital punishment methods.

I would like to make a quick note about critical thinking and religion. When I refer to *critical* thinking, I do not mean it in the sense that students should be critical of the Church's teachings. I mean that students should have understandings of the Church's teachings that extend beyond basic iteration of catechetical definitions. This was the downside of the years of catechetical instruction based on the *Baltimore Catechism*. Today we are charged with the responsibility to have students memorize definitions, yes, but also encourage them to develop a greater appreciation for their faith. How else could they appreciate the mystery of God?

Making Decisions

One of the best tools contained in this e-book is the “Lesson Objective Key.” It provides relevant action verb stems that can be used to construct lesson objectives. I keep this on my desktop whenever I create lesson plans because it is a simple tool to help me craft lesson objectives. The other essential tool provided in this e-book package is the “Lesson Planning Template” and “Unit Planning Template.” These templates are designed to incorporate the three Simplified Taxonomy categories of Retrieval, Comprehension, and Critical Thinking as well as the Learning PROCESS (see pages 35-61). These two tools together are critical to the lesson planning process.

First, create a new lesson plan by filling-in the “Lesson Planning Template” with information about the lesson title, page numbers or section, and date. Using the notes you took on the “Preparation Template,” create a list of possible lesson objectives that would correspond to the information you have recorded. If there are many vocabulary terms that you have selected for students to learn in a particular lesson, then choose retrieval action verbs like “define” or “state” (record them in the (R) box). If you found a number of important main ideas, then you will probably want students to “summarize” or “explain” key parts of the lesson (record them in the (C) box). You might also see opportunities for critical thinking; these should be recorded in the (CT) box.

If you are new to forming lesson objectives, you might want to brainstorm a list of objectives related to a certain topic. List as many variations as possible. Once you have this list, select the objectives that are most relevant to your curriculum or unit and course plan and place them in your lesson plan.

Step 2 Checklist

- Create a new lesson plan from the “Lesson Plan Template” or “Unit Planning Template.”
- Using the notes in the “Lesson Preparation Worksheet,” create a list of all the possible lesson objectives that could correspond with the lesson.
- Check to ensure there are no missed opportunities for Critical Thinking objectives.
- Select the most important and relevant lesson objectives and record them in the “Lesson Plan Template.”

Step 2 Resources

- Lesson Objectives Key
- Lesson Planning Template
- Unit Planning Template

Step 3: Determine the Assessment (How will I know they have learned it?)

While many teachers neglect to craft relevant lesson objectives, even fewer teachers consider a variety of methods for assessment. Assessment is more than just a quiz, test, or essay. Assessments include a variety of methods used to measure student learning. It should not be only for judgment or assigning grades. In its most basic form, assessments are simple ways for a teacher to find out whether a student has mastered the objectives chosen in Step 2.

To make things easier on you, I have created a table called the “Assessment Key” with a variety of assessments to correspond with each set of action verbs from the Lesson Objective Key. These assessments are categorized into a variety of learning styles that I have adapted from Howard Gardener’s theory of Multiple Intelligences. Howard Gardener is another popular educational theorist who made a significant impact on instructional design. He studied how people learn and showed that all people favor certain learning styles which he called “Multiple Intelligences.” He categorized these styles as Spatial, Linguistic, Logical-mathematical, Bodily-kinesthetic, Musical, Interpersonal, Intrapersonal, Naturalistic, and Existential. When you hear the term “differentiated instruction,” people are usually referring to variety of teaching methods and assessments that cater to different multiple intelligences. Choosing a variety of assessments from a variety of learning styles will help meet students’ needs and avoid repetition of the same types of assessment over and over again.

Choosing Assessments

Using the Assessment Key, identify assessments that will correspond to the lesson objectives you chose in Step 2. If possible, try to differentiate instruction by offering multiple assessment methods or chose assessments that differ in style from other assessments from that day or previous days of a lesson. All of these assessments are described in the teaching strategies of this e-book on pages 35-61.

Step 3 Checklist

- Using the Assessment Key, choose an assessment that corresponds to the lesson objective you created in Step 2. Write the assessment next to the objective in your Lesson Plan.
- Try to differentiate instruction by selecting assessments that fit various intelligences and learning styles.

Step 3 Resources

- Assessment Key

Step 4: Choose the PROCESS to Reach the Objectives (How will I get them there?)

Here is where most teachers and catechists thrive. This is where you decide how you will teach the students new information and help them master the objectives you created in Step 2. In this step you will select the best teaching strategies and activities that will help students master the lesson objectives and prove their mastery through the assessments you chose in Step 3.

I like to think of learning as a process. We start with certain knowledge, we are introduced to new concepts, and then we organize the new information into what we already know. Occasionally, we are given the opportunity to think critically or apply what we have learned. In an educational setting we are usually assessed to ensure this process has taken place. An acronym I find helpful in determining the best methods for instruction is *PROCESS*.

P—Prior Knowledge

R—Receive New Information

O—Organize the New Information with the Prior Knowledge

C—Clarification and Critical Thinking

ESS—Assessment

The Learning PROCESS

Prior Knowledge is an important starting point in determining what to teach. There are a variety of teaching strategies to help students access the knowledge they already have and help teachers determine what new information will need to be taught. Some examples of teaching strategies that expose prior knowledge are KWL Charts, Chalktak, Mind-maps, and the Agree/Disagree Matrix.

Receiving new information is exactly as it sounds. Every time we learn something new, we encounter it in a certain format. We might hear it in a lecture, read it in a book, see it in a picture, watch it in a movie, hear it in a song, hear it from another person, or conclude it by thinking reflectively. You may see already why the multiple intelligences approach is so critical. This is why the Learning PROCESS Matrix on page 30 divides the 250 Teaching Strategies contained in this e-book into various learning styles. The learning style of the assessment you chose in Step 3 should determine some of the learning styles of the teaching strategies you use in your lesson plan.

Organizing new information is the encounter between prior knowledge and new information. Educational psychologists have shown that our brains comprehend concepts by connecting them with things we already know. This is the part of learning in which we learn by practicing new skills and organizing new information. Although the most basic form of organization is to simply take notes, various learning activities are available to help organize new information we receive with our prior knowledge.

Clarification and Critical Thinking is the level of learning that truly helps us master concepts. When we can engage with what we have learned by clarifying certain details or applying new information to real situations or new experiences, then we can really start to master concepts.

Assessment was covered in Step 3 and it is an essential part of the learning process. Assessment needs to be in place in order to determine whether new information was actually received or organized in memorable and accurate ways. It can also be an opportunity to apply new information in ways that require critical thinking. Keep in mind that assessment will provide a measurement of how well the students received and organized what was taught.

Think of the last time you had to learn something new. How did you follow this same learning PROCESS? For example, I recently spent some time learning about investing for retirement. With degrees in history, theology, and education, I had virtually no prior knowledge about the stock market, 401(k)'s, IRA's, and mutual funds (P). So I borrowed books from the library, listened to podcasts, read blogs, and received lots of new information related to retirement investing (R). I took notes on the things I found most important in books and I saved articles from blogs with particularly helpful information to reference later. In the process, I had acquired new knowledge and organized it into the knowledge I already had about investing (O). Then came time to choose investments and apply what I had learned (C). I picked my investments trying to keep a diversified portfolio and now I measure the success of those investments to make sure I made good choices (ESS). If performance looks bad, then I adjust my allocations until I achieve consistent success. I can think of countless examples of following this same process when learning new things. We must keep this process in mind when we design our instruction. We need to help students organize new information that we teach them with prior knowledge they already have, then encourage them to think critically about what they have learned while assessing them along the way.

Choose Your Teaching Strategies

There are 250 teaching strategies and activities in this e-book organized by both learning PROCESS and learning style in the “Learning PROCESS Matrix” on page 30. Use the matrix and the teaching strategy descriptions to develop a plan to get students to learn new concepts and think critically before your assessment of their progress. A best practice is to try to line up teaching strategies with a learning style that correlates to the way the students will be assessed. For example, if students are going to be asked to draw a picture as a form of assessment, the students should receive and organize the new information in visual ways. Teacher manuals provided by textbook publishers usually provide a variety of activities that should be incorporated as well, so don’t forget to reference them as you are choosing activities.

I always start class with some form of bell work. [Bell work activities](#) save time and get students focused as soon as they walk in the door. This is why the Lesson Planning Template and Unit Planning Template already include bell work under the Learning Activities. These templates also include a space for some form of prayer to open the class. This is not likely to be the only time for prayer, but it is important habit to form that the students will begin to expect.

Next, choose some activity that will help students access prior knowledge if you haven’t already planned for this in the bell work. Choose the format in which students will receive new information and how students will organize this new information. For example, if you plan to lecture, how will the students engage with your direct instruction? Will they take notes on plain notebook paper? Will you provide a handout like skeleton notes for them to follow? Teachers too often overlook this thought process and just assume that students should be accountable for whatever they were taught. This is why the PROCESS boxes next to the Learning Activities in the Lesson Plan Template are so important. Checking these boxes as you record learning activities helps you to make sure each mode of the learning PROCESS is carried out. Where appropriate, provide students with the opportunity to think critically about the lesson after comprehension has been mastered.

Make sure that as you record learning activities you always keep the lesson objectives and assessments in mind. Every moment you plan should be helping students work towards mastery of those objectives. If all else fails and your planned activities go miserably, adjust and use different teaching strategies to help students meet the objectives. The reason so many teaching strategies are included in this e-book is that there are countless ways to get students to master the same objective. As teachers and catechists become more experienced, they are able to adjust on the fly and teach to objectives instead of sticking to lesson plans that won’t work. You can never plan completely for the lesson because you never know how the students will actually receive it. You can prepare for troubleshooting, but students are always unpredictable.

The Conversion PROCESS

The Learning PROCESS addresses cognitive development, but the acronym is just as effective for the affective domain and faith formation. We are called to continual conversion and re-evangelization throughout our lives. This is why the word *conversion* is at the center of the process by which our faith is formed. Consider this acronym:

- P—Prior Experience
- R—Receive God’s Grace
- O—Openness to God’s Grace
- C—Conversion
- ESS—Witness

We all come to an encounter with God with **prior experiences** that frame our encounters with grace. Grace can be received in many forms. As St. Ignatius and Jesuit spirituality teach us, God can be found in all things. In a particular way, we **receive grace** through the sacraments, but we also encounter grace in other people, through the proclamation of the Gospel, in reading the Scriptures or spiritual writings, in quiet meditation, in music, in movement, in nature, and so on. It is the task of the catechist to give students the opportunity to receive grace from many sources, but is also important to help students become open to receive grace.

“Conversion begins with an **openness** to the initial proclamation of the Gospel and the sincere desire to listen for its resonance within” (NDC, 17B). This openness can be encouraged through the development of virtue, meditative practices, constant prayer, and frequent reception of the sacraments.

After this encounter with grace, one can experience *metanoia*, **conversion**. “This is crucial: we must be converted—and we must continue to be converted!” (Go Make Disciples: A National Plan and Strategy for Catholic Evangelization in the United States, no. 14) Having had this conversion we are also called to witness our faith to others. The idea of witness is an important one in the life of the Church. The earliest saints were called *martyrs*, which comes from the Greek word meaning “**witness**.” These holy men and women felt so strongly about their faith that they were witnesses on their last days. All Christian faithful are called to take up their cross and witness their faith. This is the call of the catechist. “If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23).

Step 4 Checklist

- ☑ Select the Learning PROCESS teaching strategies that relate to the objectives and record them under Learning Activities in the Lesson Planning Template
- ☑ Choose strategies and activities that correspond to the assessment learning styles
- ☑ Make sure each time students receive new information (R), a planned way to organize this information is prepared as well (O)
- ☑ Select activities that will encourage critical thinking (C) and place them in the Lesson Planning Template appropriately
- ☑ Write the lesson assessments in the appropriate place in the list of Learning Activities.
- ☑ As you find or create handouts or presentation materials, record the things you will need to gather or copy in the Materials Needed section of the Lesson Planning Template

Step 4 Resources

- Teaching Strategies Matrix
- Lesson Planning Template
- Unit Planning Template

Resources

The Religion Teacher's One-Page Guide to Lesson Planning

Lesson Preparation Template

Lesson Objectives Key

Assessment Key

Lesson Planning Template

Unit Planning Template

Teaching Strategies Matrix

The Religion Teacher's List of 250 Activities & Teaching Strategies

Lesson Preparation Template

Chapter:		Section/Pages:	
Terms, People, Places			
Main Ideas		Questions/Activities	
Critical Thinking Opportunities			

Lesson Objectives Key

The Simplified Taxonomy
<p>Retrieval</p> <p>SWBAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize/Identify from a list... • State/Recall the definition of.../Define... • Name/List the three...of... • Label... • Describe who, what, where, when...
<p>Comprehension</p> <p>SWBAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarize... • Paraphrase... • Describe the key parts of... • Describe the ways in which... • Depict/illustrate/draw...
<p>Critical Thinking (Analysis/Knowledge Utilization)</p> <p>(Analysis)</p> <p>SWBAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast... • Differentiate... • Categorize/Classify/Organize/Sort... • Create an analogy/metaphor for... • Critique/Revise/Analyze...errors/problems/misunderstandings/ • Create a generalization... • Make a prediction • Create a rule/principle/criteria for... • Defend/Develop/provide evidence for/support an argument for... • Form a conclusion... <p>(Knowledge Utilization)</p> <p>SWBAT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select the best way to... • Rate the...according to a criteria... • Develop a strategy to... • Test the idea that...

Assessment Key

Multiple Intelligences Key: (L)-Listening (Oral), (R)-Reading, (W)-Writing, (VP)-Visual (Pictures), (VV)-Visual (Video), (Mo)-Movement, (Mu)-Music, (Ir)-Interpersonal, (Ia)-Intrapersonal

Retrieval	Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize/Identify from a list... 	Multiple Choice (W) True or False (W) Matching (W) Dog Paddles (Mo)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State/Recall the definition of.../Define... • Name/List the... • Label... • Describe who, what, where, when... 	Fill-in-the-blank (W) Crossword Puzzle (W) Short Answer (W) Oral Response (L) Exit Cards (W) Pair Check (Ir)
Comprehension	Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Summarize... • Paraphrase... • Describe the key parts of... • Describe the ways in which... • Explain why/the meaning of... 	Short answer (W) Oral response (L) Outline (W) Directed Paraphrasing (L) Accelerated Reading (R) Exit Cards (W) Concept Wheel (VP) CROWN (W) 3-2-1 (W) Essays (W) One Sentence Summary (W) One Word Summary (W) Newspaper (W) Meaningful Sentences (W) Minute Papers (W) Alphabet Summary (Ir) Checklist (Ia) Self-Assessment (Ia) Self-Correction (Ia) Chants/Cheers (Mu) Raps (Mu) Songs (Mu)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depict/illustrate/draw... • Diagram... 	Cartoons (VP) Collages (VP) Comic Strips/Books (VP) Continuum (VP) Concept Maps (VP) Diagram (VP) Diorama (VP) Drawing (VP) Fishbone (VP) Flow Charts (VP) Ideatoons (VP) Mind Maps (VP) Picture Mapping (VP) Posters (VP) Storyboarding (VP)
Critical Thinking (Analysis/Knowledge Utilization)	Assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compare and contrast... • Differentiate... 	Venn Diagram (VP) Triple Venn Diagram (VP) Comparison Matrix (VP) Grab Bag (Mo)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categorize/Classify/Organize/Sort... • Apply a criteria • Rate the...according to a criteria... 	Short answer (W) Oral response (L) Outline (W) Concept map (VP) Line-Up (Mo) Mind Map (VP) Relate Table (VP) Word Chain (W) Value Line (Mo)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create an analogy/metaphor for... 	Short answer (W) Oral response (L) Forced Analogy (L) Exit Cards (W) Minute Papers (W)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critique/Revise/Analyze...errors/problems/misunderstandings/ 	Peer Editing (Ir) Peer Questioning (Ir) Exit Cards (W) Minute Papers (W)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a generalization... 	Short answer (W) Oral response (L) Generalization matrix (VP)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a prediction 	Short answer (W) Oral response (L)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a rule/principle/criteria for... 	Short answer (W) Oral response (L) Wanted ad (W)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defend/Develop/provide evidence for/support an argument for... • Form a conclusion • Take the position of... 	Argument Outline (W) Debate (Ir) Devil's Advocate (Ir) Discussion Board (Ir) Essay (W) Fishbowl Discussion (Ir) Four Corners (Mo) Position Paper (W) Letter Writing (W) RAFT (R) Point Counterpoint (W)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select the best way to... • Develop a strategy to... 	Decision-making Matrix (VP) Decision-making Chart (VP) Position Paper (W)

Lesson Planning Template

Objectives		Assessment				
R						
C						
CT						
Day 1						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
Day 2						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
*Materials Needed						
-						

Unit Planning Template

Unit Summary/Rationale:			
Unit Goal		Unit Assessment	
SWBAT			
LP#	Objectives	Dates	Standards
LP1	SWBAT		
LP2	SWBAT		
LP3	SWBAT		
LP4	SWBAT		
LP5	SWBAT		

LP1: _____

Date: _____

Objectives		Assessment				
R						
C						
CT						
Day 1						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
Day 2						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
*Materials Needed						
-						

LP2: _____

Date: _____

Objectives		Assessment				
R						
C						
CT						
Day 1						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
Day 2						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
*Materials Needed						
-						

LP3: _____

Date: _____

Objectives		Assessment				
R						
C						
CT						
Day 1						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
Day 2						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
*Materials Needed						
-						

LP4: _____

Date: _____

Objectives		Assessment				
R						
C						
CT						
Day 1						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
Day 2						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
*Materials Needed						
-						

LP5: _____

Date: _____

Objectives		Assessment				
R						
C						
CT						
Day 1						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
Day 2						
Time	Learning Activity	P	R	O	C	ESS
	BW:					
	Prayer:					
HW						
*Materials Needed						
-						

Teaching Strategies Matrix

Learning Style	Prior Knowledge	Receiving New Information	Organize New Information	Clarify, Critical Thinking	Assess
	P	R	O	C	ESS
Direct Instruction Listening Oral	20 Questions Advanced Organizer Anticipation Guide Chalktalk Daily Outline Entrance Cards Inventory Questioning Known-to-Unknown KWL Chart KWL Chart PROP Advance Organizer	10 + 2 (Ten Plus Two) 5 + 1 (Five Plus One) Audio recording Cueing Deduction Didactic Instruction Discovery Teaching Exaggeration Examples Guest Speakers Illustrated Talks Induction Inverted Pyramid Jokes Lecture Listening Center Non-examples PowerPoint Prezi Overhead Notes Podcasts SLANT Slideshow Socratic	2 Column Notes 3 Column Notes Acronyms Chants, Cheers Chunking Clustering Concept Fan Concept Map Conflict Chart Context clues Continuum Copying Cornell Note Taking Debriefing Fishbone Flash Cards Forced Analogy Guided Discussion Guided Questioning Important Details Mind-maps Mnemonics Muddiest Point Note-taking	Authentic Questions Analogies Facilitative Questioning Forced Analogy Grab Bag Idea Spinner Inquiry Jumbled Summary Knowledge Awards Negative Brainstorming Open Q & A Paraphrasing Reciprocal Teaching Stump the Teacher Value Clarification Discussion Yes, No, Maybe So	Authentic Questions Author's Chair Didactic Questions Directed Paraphrasing Dog Paddles Forced Analogy Generalizing Jeopardy Justifying Thumbs Up or Down

		Questioning SMARTBoard Storytelling Transparencies	Outline Posture PowerPoint Slides Skeleton Notes Summarizing		
	P	R	O	C	ESS
Reading	Expectation Outline Knowledge Rating KWHL Chart KWL Chart Possible Sentences SQ3R Wordsplash	Case Studies Dramatic Reading Most Important Word Pair Reading Popcorn Reading Silent Reading Webquests	APPARTS Cause and Effect Concept Map Conflict Chart Context Clues Highlighting Mind Map Outline Reading Guides SQ3R	Concentration Paragraph Shrinking Predictions RSQC2 Relay Summary RAFT	(See writing)
	P	R	O	C	ESS
Writing	Crawford Slip Writing Entrance Card KWHL Chart KWL Chart LINK True or False Write-Pair-Share	Journal	Argument Outline Concept Cards Concept Map Dialectic Journal Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA)	Argument Outline Cubing Essays Forced Analogy Free Association Free Write and Share DEFENDS Discussion Board ELVES Guided Writing Inquiry Newspapers PMI	3-2-1 Argument Outline Crawford Slip Writing Crossword Puzzle CROWN Exit Card Essays Fill-in-the-blank Generalizing Justifying Letter Writing Listing Meaningful

				Point Counterpoint Pros and Cons Similarities and Differences Want Ads Word Chain	Sentences Minute Papers Newspapers One Sentence Summary One Word Summary Point Counterpoint Position Paper Role Personification Word Chain
	P	R	O	C	ESS
Visual (Pictures)	Posters Unknown Objects	Cartoons (Reading) Guided Imagery Models Posters	Casual Mapping Copying Fishbone Flow Charts Keyword Memory Method Spider Map Storyboarding Timelines	Cartoons Collages Comic Strips/Books Comparison Matrix Continuum Concept Maps Diagram Diorama Drawing Fishbone Flow Charts Ideatoons Mind Maps Picture Mapping Posters Storyboarding Venn Diagram Triple Venn Diagram	Cartoons Collages Comic Strips/Books Comparison Matrix Continuum Concept Maps Diagram Diorama Drawing Fishbone Flow Charts Ideatoons Mind Maps Picture Mapping Posters Storyboarding Venn Diagram Triple Venn Diagram

	P	R	O	C	ESS
Visual (Videos)		Computer simulation Films Focused Imagining		Dramatization Newscast Reader's Theater	
	P	R	O	C	ESS
Movement	Four Corners Value Line	Carousel Brainstorming	Dance Hand Gestures	Ball Toss Corners Dance Forced Choice Four Corners Grab Bag Line-Up Model Building Value Line	Dog Paddles Grab Bag Line-Up Hand Gestures
	P	R	O	C	ESS
Music		Written Music	Chants, Cheers Raps Songs	Chants, Cheers Raps Songs	
	P	R	O	C	ESS
Interpersonal	Agree/Disagree Matrix Agreement Circles Quickdraw Quicktalk Quickwrite Think-Pair-Share	Apprenticeships Carousel Brainstorming Cascade Construction Spiral Discussion Web Interviews Jigsaw Listen-Think-Pair-Share Mentors	Inside-Outside Circle Learning Centers Note cards Pair Check Popsicle Sticks Talking Chips	Affinity Cascade Debate Debriefing Devil's Advocate Discussions Discussion Board Dramatization Fishbowl Panel Discussions Paragraph	Alphabet Summary Devil's Advocate Discussion Board Fishbowl Pair Check

		Message Board Think-Pair-Share		Shrinking Partner Discussion Peer Editing Peer Questioning Plays Prediction Pairs Share-Pair Circles Six Hat Thinking Skits Socratic Discussion	
	P	R	O	C	ESS
Intrapersonal	Journaling		Learning Log	Blog Journaling Diary Weblogs	Checklist I Can Statements Self-Assessment Self-Correction

The Religion Teacher's List of 250 Activities & Teaching Strategies

Enjoy this list of 250 activities and teaching strategies. Use the alphabetical navigation bar at the top of each page to find activities that you are looking for.

2 Column Notes: Have students fold their notebook papers in half (“hotdog-style”) or draw a vertical line through the middle of the papers. Label the left column “Topic” and the right column “Notes.” Some variations could include main idea-details, opinion-proof, problem-solution, vocabulary-definition, etc. When students return to these notes to study, they should fold the paper in half and mentally or verbally elaborate on the topics in the left column before checking their answers in the right column. Try this sample [2 Column Notes worksheet](#).

3 Column Notes: This note-taking strategy is similar to the 2 Column Notes, but includes an added column to add personal opinions, observations, and thoughts that relate to the topic. You might have students label their columns Main Idea, Details, and Observations. Try this [3 Column Notes worksheet](#).

3-2-1: Writing activity where students write 3 key terms or phrases from the day’s lesson, 2 things they would like to learn more about, and 1 concept they have mastered. You might consider other variations off of this keeping the 3-2-1 model.

5 + 1 (Five Plus One): This direct instruction or lecture technique suggests that teachers present for five minutes then have students discuss or reflect for one minute. The cycle repeats for the duration of the lesson. See also 10 + 1.

10 + 2 (Ten Plus Two): This direct instruction or lecture technique suggests that teachers present for ten minutes then have students discuss or reflect for two minutes. The cycle repeats for the duration of the lesson. See also 5 + 1.

20 Questions: A discovery teaching technique that starts with a statement, activity, image, video, or activity that students experience for the first time. Teachers give students the opportunity to ask twenty yes or no questions in an attempt to identify the purpose of the item in question.

Acronyms: Memorable words in which each letter stands for something that is being learned is an excellent memory tool. For example, PROCESS is an acronym for Prior knowledge, Receiving new information, Organizing new information, Clarification and Critical thinking, and Assessment.

Advanced Organizer: Advanced organizers are agendas that give students an idea of what they will be learning that day or during a lecture.

Affinity: In this brainstorming activity, all members of a group write responses to a question on a note card or slip of paper. The notes are spread across a shared table or desk. Group members, then, silently find the similarities between the ideas and group them with other notes. After it appears that the notes are arranged in an agreed upon organization, group members can talk and discuss their responses.

Agree/Disagree Matrix: This handout will help students take a stance on select statements and issues before and after the lesson.

Agreement Circles: Students stand in a circle. The teacher reads a statement and those who agree with the statement step into the circle. Students should be able to support their choice to step into the circle.

Alphabet Summary: Assign each student a letter of the alphabet and have them come up with a word that relates to the topic of the lesson.

Analogies: A critical thinking skill where students can give an example of something similar to the topic of the lesson to help describe its meaning and significance.

Anticipation Guide: This reading strategy encourages students to self-assess their opinions about a text before (to activate prior knowledge and encourage interest) and after (to encourage critical thinking) reading it.

APPARTS: Strategy for reading primary documents. APPARTS is an acronym for Author, Place and time, Prior knowledge, Audience, Reason, The main idea, and Significance. Discuss each aspect of the document with the students or have them write a description of each topic and share it with the class.

Apprenticeships: Also known as mentorships, students can be paired up with other students or adults to encourage learning new tasks or procedures.

Audio recording: As iPods and MP3 players become increasingly popular, teachers might consider recording a lesson and sending/posting the file for students to listen to when they are on the go. This is a great idea for review.

Authentic Assessment: Also known as performance assessments, this type of assessment involves students completing meaningful tasks that call for a developed understanding of material to complete. These assessments are usually done at the end of the unit and after the test.

Authentic Questions: Questions that students ask out of genuine curiosity for a topic. Though these questions can often be deliberate attempts to get a teacher off topic, the questions and discussions they spark can be excellent teachable moments.

Author's Chair: A creative way of asking students to present something they have written at the front of the class.

Ball Toss: To add a little fun and excitement, use a soft ball (or rolled-up sock) to designate the single person that is able to speak. When another person wants to participate, they can raise their hand and wait for the ball to be passed to them. The teachers should also request the ball to speak.

Blog: Class blogs can be excellent ways for you to share ideas and progress with students and for students to share ideas with each other.

Bluff: This is a fun review game that challenges students to take a chance on answers they're not sure they know. Students are divided into teams and stand to answer questions asked to their team. A team scores the number of points equal to the number of teammates standing if the student who is called on answers correctly. For more detailed directions, read this description of [Bluff](#).

Carousel Brainstorming: Create a series of stations around the room. Each station should be focused on a specific topic and have a word or phrase, question, short reading, or picture to incite discussion. Divide the class into groups and assign each of them to a station. They will spend a predetermined amount of time at each station during which they will discuss the topic and record their ideas on a large paper or poster board. At the final station, have each group select the 2-3 best ideas from their station.

Cartoons: Drawing cartoons can be a creative way for students to activate prior knowledge, demonstrate reading comprehension, or show understanding.

Cascade: The teacher will teach something to a group of students. This group of students would, in turn, teach it to another group of students. That group could continue the teaching process and so forth until it cascades down to the rest of the class.

Case Studies: Providing real-life situations to which students can apply knowledge is an excellent way to encourage critical thinking. Create relevant situations or pull from real life events to pose for students to consider, analyze, and discuss.

Casual Mapping: This is a form of concept mapping in which cause and effect is illustrated.

Cause and Effect: Identifying cause and effect is an important thinking skill in which a pattern can be found showing a relationship between two or more events.

Centers: Elementary teachers love to use centers to provide a variety of activities, integrate multiple subjects, and encourage intrinsic motivation. Students are divided into groups and assigned to certain centers or stations around the room where games, crafts, and other creative activities are placed to help students organize, practice, and clarify lessons.

Chalktalk: Write a word or phrase on the board. Give a few students markers (chalk) to write words or responses that they associate with the word or phrase you proposed. Once they have finished, they can give the markers to another student. Warn them that there is no talking during the activity, only writing. Have the students without markers copy what students write on the board and write their personal thoughts to ensure that it stays quiet.

Chants, Cheers: Chants and Cheers are effective for the same reason that the Psalms are so memorable. Create a chant, cheer, or song to help students remember certain key definitions or main ideas.

Charts: It can be helpful to create a chart or grid that may help students organize the information they are reading or hearing in specific ways.

Checklist: Typically used as a self-assessment tool, checklists provide a series of to-do's or procedures that will help students accomplish a certain task.

Chunking: It is cognitively easier to remember things that are "chunked" or "bunched" together. This is why phone numbers and social security numbers are broken apart in sets of three and four (555-555-5555). This is one reason why the Rosary is such an excellent catechetical tool. We memorize essential events in the life of Christ and Mary through chunking them in the mysteries of the Rosary.

Class Grid: This comes in handy for larger classes. Divide your seating chart into four quadrants (you don't necessarily need a chart) by drawing two lines dividing the paper up. Make check marks or dashes each time you call on a student in that part of the room. This will ensure that you are calling on students in each part of the room and not just the front (or side).

Clustering: This is a note-taking and brainstorming technique that connects a cluster of ideas to one central concept. See Mind Mapping, Concept Maps.

Collages: Artistic representations of concepts or stories using magazine clippings and photographs that can be used to show comprehension.

Comic Strips/Books: Students can create comic strips as a way of artistically representing understanding of key events or topics.

Comparison Matrix: This chart compares a series of things according to various categories. The categories typically go in the left column while the items being compared are listed in the top row at the top of each column. Students must fill in the boxes to show similarities and differences.

Computer simulation: Interactive visual representations of events or places on the computer that can help students visualize what cannot be seen.

Concentration: Students match pairs of cards that may have a name and a definition or a picture and a title. All cards are placed face down and students must match the correct cards and keep them as points.

Concept Cards: In this reading strategy, students are given (or choose) certain vocabulary words. Whenever they encounter the word as they read, they must write the word and the sentence in which it appears in the text on the same side of an index card. After they are finished reading, they should write the definition of the word on the blank side as well as some characteristics, examples, or new sentences using the words.

Concept Fan: Similar to a Concept Map, but more linear, Concept Fans are graphic organizers used for problem-solving. Three or more solutions are written to "fan" out or radiate out on lines stemming from a problem. From there, students can take step back to a broader view of the problem and create a series of other solutions.

Concept Map: Possibly the most popular format for brainstorming. Start with a concept and write it in the middle of the paper. Write a few concepts related to the main concept in circles that surround it. Then create additional subtopics in circles surrounding the supporting concepts. See also Mind Maps.

Construction Spiral: Very similar to think-pair-share, this brainstorming technique is a three-step process in which students record their thoughts on a piece of paper, share them in a small group, then the groups' ideas are listed on the board.

Context clues: Students should be trained to use context clues that help reveal the meaning of certain words within a text. Completely new words can be understood by examining their function in a sentence and through discussion of other adjoining words that are more familiar.

Continuum: Students take a series of words, phrases, people, or events and arrange them in a continuum based on a set criteria.

Copying: Copying is possibly the most popular form of note-taking, yet often the most ineffective. Students copy overhead notes or PowerPoint slides or listen and write down what the teacher says in their notes.

Cornell Note Taking: Similar to the 2 Column Notes strategy, the Cornell Note-taking system is divided into three boxes: main ideas in the left column (the "cue column"), details in the right column, and a summary in a box at the bottom. Some educators suggest using taking notes based on the "Five R's": Record, Reduce, Recite, Reflect, Review. The summary portion is key to the system. Consider using this sample [Cornell Note-taking Graphic Organizer](#).

Corners: Teachers or catechists should post four responses to questions such as strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree in the four corners of the room. Students must stand in a corner that corresponds to their response to certain opinionated statements. Teachers should then ask students to justify their responses to the class.

Crawford Slip Writing: This brainstorming technique is used to help a group create a number of ideas or solutions to a problem fast. Students should be given a stack of slips of paper. Each student should write as many ideas or solutions down on their slips of paper. Collect the papers as a class or a group and discuss similarities in the ideas and some of the unique thoughts.

Crossword Puzzle: Crossword puzzles are fun ways to use fill-in-the-blank or direct questions to complete a puzzle. Clues to some answers can be found using the intersection of words in the puzzle.

CROWN: CROWN is an acronym that stands for,

Communicate what you learned.

Reaction to what you learned.

Offer a one sentence summary.

Where could you use this?

Note how well you did today.

Responses should be written on a blank sheet of paper and collected at the end of the day.

Cubing: Cubing is a pre-writing cube that encourages critical thinking. On the six sides of the cube should be written the following: describe it, compare it, associate it, analyze it, apply it, argue for/against it. Teachers roll or throw the cube like dice and have students respond according to the side facing up.

Cueing: Teachers can use clues to let students know that certain information is especially important and should be remembered. This could be as simple as an announcement to students that “this will be on the test!” or highlighted text in a slideshow presentation.

Daily Outline: A form of advanced organizer in which the teacher outlines an overview of the day’s lesson on the board or in a handout including a list of the work that will need to be done in class or as homework.

Dance: Dances can be excellent memory techniques as well as ways to creatively demonstrate understanding of certain concepts.

Debate: There are many forms of debate in classroom or catechetical settings. In whatever form, debates can be excellent ways to encourage student to take stances on issues and support them with meaningful facts and evidence.

Debriefing: It is often important to take some time at the conclusion of an activity or lesson to discuss what and why students did certain things. This can sometimes be the most important time for clarification of learning objectives and better organization of knowledge.

Deduction: Direct instruction technique that suggests teachers start with general ideas and move toward more specific ideas about a certain topic during a discussion.

DEFENDS: A writing strategy acronym that stands for Decide, Examine, Form, Expose, Note, Drive, and Search. As in, Decide on a position; Examine the reason for the position; Form a list of supporting points to explain each reason; Expose the position in the opening sentence; Note the reason and supporting points; Drive home the position in the concluding sentence, and Search for errors by proofreading.

Devil's Advocate: As the teacher/catechist, try to defend a statement that is outrageous or controversial. Make the students really believe that you mean what you say and they will be much more likely to discuss and debate. Rehash the discussion afterward.

Diagram: Various visual representations of certain concepts that can be found in books or created separately.

Dialectic Journal: A variation of the 2 Column Notes in which quotes or text are written on one side and reflections and reactions are written on the other.

Diary: Reflection technique in which a person records daily experiences and thoughts.

Didactic Instruction: This is the most common form of direct instruction in which teachers tell students what to think about a certain topic.

Didactic Questions: Direct instruction technique that is commonly used by teachers as a short formative assessment. It involves asking a question with a specific answer and having students respond at random.

Diorama: These are three-dimensional scenes that students can create to summarize events in a miniature model. Dioramas are classically created using shoeboxes.

Directed Paraphrasing: Students can show comprehension by orally paraphrasing concepts to the teacher or the class. This is sometimes called putting students "on the spot."

Directed Reading Thinking Activity (DRTA): While reading, students are asked questions that activate prior knowledge and allow them to make predictions.

Discovery Teaching: Direct instruction technique that involves an activity, manipulative, or some other attention grabber that introduces a topic. Teachers then encourage a student to reach certain conclusions and understand certain concepts about a topic through discussion. For an example, see 20 Questions.

Discussion Board: Online discussion boards can be used to encourage student interaction about a topic or to check responses to questions online outside of class.

Discussion Web: Similar to the basic think-pair-share activity, a discussion web starts with individual students, then expands to pairs, then pairs join another pair, then groups share their thoughts with the entire class.

Discussions: Class discussions include open-ended questions that are posed to students. Teachers should guide discussions and respond when clarification is needed, but students should be encouraged to share what they feel is pertinent to the conversation.

Dog Paddles: This quick assessment technique requires students to have paddles labeled with two possible responses to questions. For example, the paddles might be labeled “yes” or “no” or more specific responses like “Matthew” or “Luke,” “Sacraments at the Service of Communion” or “Sacraments of Healing,” etc.

Double Cell Diagram: Double cell diagrams are concept maps in which two ideas are compared. Supporting ideas that are similar connect to both items being compared while differences are listed on the outside.

Dramatic Reading: An oral reading technique that works well with the Bible. Students are assigned roles from an excerpt of the Bible (Jesus, Mary, Moses, the lost son, etc.). The teacher reads the text as the narrator but when the text reads “Jesus said...” or “Moses said...” then the student should join in as a dramatic reader.

Dramatization: Students act out roles from a story or historical event. Provide guidelines to ensure that they act out the important parts of the story.

Drawing: Drawing is an excellent way to allow students to show comprehension through the creation of visual images or representations of knowledge.

ELVES: This brainstorming acronym stands for Ease, make Lists, Vary the lists, Eureka, and Select.

Entrance Cards: Excellent bell work technique in which students must answer a certain question to “enter” the class.

Essays: One of the most common forms of critical thinking assessments, essays typically are evaluated based on a student’s ability to form an argument and support it in writing.

Exaggeration: Exaggeration can be used in a presentation to highlight important concepts.

Examples: When introducing a topic or concept, presentations should include multiple examples to which a concept can be applied or which illustrate and prove certain concepts.

Exit Card: Exit cards are used to encourage quick responses to questions that are given to the teacher or catechist as the students “exit” the class. Have students share half-sheets of paper or use predesigned cards or tickets that can be used by the students for writing their responses.

Expectation Outline: A pre-reading strategy where students skim through the assigned reading and write down questions they expect to answer or outline statements that correspond to the reading. Have them return to their outline during the reading to either answer, correct, or fill-in what they written. See also KWL Charts.

Facilitative Questioning: Using a pre-determined list of questions, teachers ask open-ended questions that encourage critical thinking or emotional reflection about certain topics. The intent of the questions is to encourage students to come up with their own solutions to problems.

Fill-in-the-blank: More challenging than a multiple choice or matching question, fill-in-the-blank statements require students to recall words or phrases that fit into the context of certain statements.

Films: Using excerpts from films can be a great way to differentiate instruction using a medium that students enjoy. Make sure viewing guides are provided for lengthy use of video in class.

Fishbone Diagram: A graphic organizer that helps students visualize concepts and details or causes and effect with details that correspond to certain events or concepts. It is similar to a mind map, but resembles the bones of a fish. Try this sample [Fishbone Diagram](#) with your students.

Fishbowl: Select a group of students to sit in the front of the room in chairs arranged in a half-circle facing the class (shaped like a bowl). Pose questions to the students in the front of the room and allow them to discuss. The rest of the students in the audience may raise their hands to pose a question or take the place of a student “in the fishbowl” but they may not speak or engage in the discussion while at their desks. Note that this often requires that the students have learned/researched a lot about a topic before they can have a meaningful discussion such as this.

Flash Cards: This is the most popular way to take notes on vocabulary terms. On one side of the note card, students write the name of the term or concept. On the other side they write definitions or details about the topic. You may have students draw pictures with the word or phrase to help job their memories and connect to prior knowledge.

Flow Charts: Flow charts are similar to timelines in that they are sequential, but this graphic organizer is used to display a series of cause-and-effect events or topics.

Focused Imagining: Teachers lead students through guided reflections to help them form mental images about a certain concept or story.

Forced Analogy: Teachers randomly select a word and students are asked to create an analogy that compares this term with a vocabulary term.

Forced Choice: A small number of choices or responses are placed throughout the room. Students must examine each choice and stand next to their choice while being prepared to justify their decision.

Formative Assessment: This type of assessment is meant to provide teachers with the ability to check understanding and adjust instruction before moving on to the next lesson objective. This type of assessment is key to mastery learning.

Four Corners: See Corners.

Free Association: Brainstorming technique in which students list everything that comes to their mind when they hear certain words or sentences or see certain images.

Free Write and Share: Students are given a topic or a piece of writing, picture, or video and they must respond by writing everything they can think of about a certain topic until they run out of things to write.

Generalizing: Generalizing is a critical thinking skill in which students take a set of information and create ways of describing them and their similarities. Generalizations show the ability to categorize and classify information.

Grab Bag: Fill a bag with a conglomeration of objects related to the lesson. At the end of the lesson have students draw an object out of the bag and explain how it relates to the lesson to assess comprehension and encourage critical thinking.

Guesstures: This review game is based on the popular family game Guesstures®. Students are given vocabulary words and they must act them out for other team members to guess the word. For more detailed directions, read this description of [Guesstures the Review Game](#).

Guest Speakers: Look for experts on a certain topic and invite them to join your class for a short presentation and question and answer session. These speakers can be a local pastor or priest or members of the local community. Technologically savvy teachers should consider using [Skype](#) to bring speakers into the classroom through video.

Guided Discussion: Teachers guide discussion with leading questions that ask students to interpret the information they have learned and react to what other students have said.

Guided Imagery: Teachers guide students to visualize a series of images that relate to a certain topic.

Guided Questioning: Teachers guide students with a series of questions that offer clues about the lesson or reading then become less revealing as comprehension increases among the class. This is a form of scaffolding.

Guided Writing: Teachers encourage responses to certain questions, statements, topics, or issues through guided writing.

Hand Gestures: Various hand gestures can be used to show understandings. This could be as simple as a thumbs up or thumbs down or a number of fingers. Hand gestures can also be used as a part of songs or dances as a memory tool (i.e. "Here is the church; here is the people...")

Highlighting: Highlighting is a popular way to mark important information on a page of a book. Make sure you help students recognize that the purpose of highlighting is to help in reviewing the information so only highlight the information that is most important to remember.

“I Can” Statements: Write a statement on the board that corresponds to the lesson objective. Have the students self-assess their understanding of the statement or question showing you if they can understand with a smiley face or frowning face.

Idea Spinner: The teacher creates a spinner/spindle marked with four sides labeled Explain, Summarize, Predict, and Evaluate. The teacher simple spins the spinner and has students respond either verbally or in writing.

Ideatons: This brainstorming and problem-solving technique in which students draw ideas on index cards then combine them with other students’ ideas to spark discussion. With the cards laid out, students can choose the best options or common solutions.

Illustrated Talks: A form of presentation that includes charts, graphs, diagrams, or photographs related to a certain topic. Theology teachers often use religious artwork or architecture as the foundation of their illustrated talks.

Important Details Mind-maps: By adding the keyphrase “important details” to mind maps, teachers encourage students to only record the most important details in their mind maps rather than everything they read, recall, or brainstorm.

Induction: The opposite of deduction, induction starts with specific facts or ideas that are used to generate more general principles and conclusions.

Inquiry: In this method, students solve problems by generating possible solutions or hypotheses then test them by doing additional research.

Inside-Outside Circle: Students should form two circles, one inside the other, that face each other. Give them a set amount of time to quickly quiz each other then rotate the circle by any number of people and have the new partners quiz each other.

Interviews: One way to assess students is to interview them orally through an exchange of question and answer. Students can also interview other people related to a certain lesson topic to gather more detailed information and present to the class.

Inventory Questioning: This form of questioning activates students' prior knowledge and helps them assess their own opinions or beliefs about certain topics prior to a lesson.

Inverted Pyramid: A presentation or writing technique in which the most important information is presented first, followed by less important information in order of importance.

Jeopardy: Based on the popular TV gameshow, Jeopardy games award points at increasing levels with increasing difficulties in a set of five or six categories. There are numerous PowerPoint templates on the Internet that can be used for Jeopardy.

Jigsaw: This is a form of cooperative learning in which students divide into groups to research or learn about a certain aspect of a topic. Then the join members of other groups that researched different topics and combine their research like jigsaw puzzles combining to form a puzzle.

Jokes: Teachers often use humor to grab students' attention during a lecture and to keep them listening.

Journaling: Providing students with the opportunity to reflect through writing is a classic technique in religious education. Students should have a specific notebook for journaling in order to look back and reflect on the reflections at a later date. These notebooks could be easily checked for effort as a grade throughout the semester, but try to ensure that what they write in their journals will be kept personal.

Jumbled Summary: The teacher presents a selection of randomly ordered vocabulary words or phrases and asks the students to assemble them in a logical order and make connections based on their understanding of the lesson.

Justifying: When students take a stance on an issue, they should be able to justify their opinions with evidence and support. This can be done both verbally and in writing.

Keyword Memory Method: This is a mnemonic device in which students break apart phrases by the words they contain. For example, let's say they are trying to remember the phrase "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen" from Nicene Creed rather than the Apostles Creed. Students might visualize first the number one, with a father standing on top of it making clouds and a globe with one eye covered.

Knowledge Awards: At the end of a lesson or unit, students are given the opportunity to vote to give an award for the most useful (or important) piece of knowledge they learned.

Knowledge Rating: A pre-reading strategy where students rate their understanding of certain terms or concepts from a reading assignment. You can provide students with a list of words or concepts or have them find them on their own. You may also use an actual rating system or rubric to rate their understanding.

Known-to-Unknown: An approach to instruction in which a teacher begins with information that a student knows and proceeds to the unknown while drawing upon prior knowledge.

KWHL Chart: Similar to the KWL Chart with an added column labeled “How I will find out...” Have students write everything they know about the topic they are studying under the K column, everything they want to know under the W column, and strategies for how they will find the answers to their W questions under the H column. Leave the third column (the L column) blank to come back to afterwards to write what they learned. This can be used as either a pre-reading activity or at the start of a lesson. Try using this sample [KWHL Chart](#).

KWL Chart: Use a pre-created KWL Chart or have students create a KWL chart by folding their paper as if they were sending a letter. Have students write everything they know about the topic they are studying under the K column and everything they want to know under the W column. Leave the third column (the L column) blank to come back to afterwards to write what they learned. This can be used as either a pre-reading activity or at the start of a lesson. Try using this sample [KWL Chart](#).

Learning Centers: See Centers.

Learning Log: Students record what they have learned or what they still do not understand as a form of self-assessment and to inform the teacher about what needs to be revisited.

Lecture: The most common and basic form of direct instruction which involves a single presentation on a topic by the teacher accompanied with note-taking by the student.

Letter Writing: Whether it is actual letter writing or role-playing writing a letter to an historical or imaginary person, this can be an excellent way to encourage critical thinking and assess understanding about a certain topic. Students could write a letter to the bishop of their diocese or they could write a letter to St. Paul from the perspective of the Corinthians, for example.

Line-Up: A group activity that is meant to assess understanding of cause and effect or encourage them to make predictions. Groups of students are given large cards or papers with concepts or events and they must line up in the correct order.

LINK: An acronym that stands for List, Inquire, Note, Know. List and Inquire encourages prior knowledge, while Note encourages proper organization of new concepts.

Listen-Think-Pair-Share: Similar to Think-Pair-Share only students are asked to focus on their listening skills before responding to questions and sharing their ideas with a partner. Once partners have shared ideas, they present them to the rest of the class.

Listening Center: A center or designated part of the room in which students can listen to audio presentations or resources related to various topics.

Listing: From memory, students should be able to recall lists of concepts.

Matching: Like Multiple Choice questions, matching questions ask students to identify the correct answer from a list of many possible choices that sometimes allow students to use a process of elimination to determine the correct answer.

Meaningful Sentences: Create and provide meaningful sentences with vocabulary words to help students understand word meanings or have them construct meaningful sentences with a set of vocabulary words as an assessment.

Mentors: Students pair up with members of the school or community to learn specific skills or ideas. New teachers also take on mentors and experienced teachers take on mentees to encourage professional development and emotional support.

Message Board: An online tool that allows students and teachers to post messages or ideas for the entire class on the Internet in programs like [Moodle](#). Students can then respond to one another there.

Mind Maps: This is one of the most popular brainstorming techniques in the world. It is also a great way to summarize information hierarchical categories. Write a concept in the middle of the paper then draw lines out to supporting ideas or evidence that also have additional details in circles around them.

Minute Papers: On a scrap sheet of paper, give students 60 seconds (or just a little more) to summarize the day's lesson or ask questions that they still have at the end of the day.

Mnemonics: Various techniques that help people remember or memorize words, names, phrases, or prayers.

Model Building: Building three-dimensional models can be a great way to promote hands-on learning in which students visually show what they have learned in some way. See also Diorama.

Models: See Model Building.

Most Important Word: In this reading strategy, teachers give students a list of the most important words to consider while reading. Then after the reading assignment is completed, the teacher discusses with the students other words that are the most important. This can also be a group brainstorming assignment.

Muddiest Point: Asking students to identify the "muddiest point" is a creative way of asking them to identify the concept they understand the least.

Multiple Choice: The classic multiple choice questions ask students to identify the correct answer from a list of possible choices.

Negative Brainstorming: Instead of brainstorming a list of solutions to a problem or supporting ideas to a concept, students work in groups to brainstorm ideas and solutions that are non-examples or oppose the concept.

Newscast: Students show their understanding of certain topics by creating a newscast either in radio form or television form about events or concepts they have learned.

Newspapers: Having students take on the role of newspaper journalists and editors allows them to creatively summarize events. With less time, have students create descriptive headlines related to the day's lesson.

Non-examples: Just as examples are important in illustrating concepts, non-examples are even better tools to help students organize and categorize topics in their minds.

Note-taking: Though this takes many forms, note-taking is most often considered any way in which a student records new information on paper or in a computer.

Note Cards : Use popsicle sticks or note cards with the students' names on them to call on students randomly. This will keep students listening to the questions if they know they might be called on to answer. You can also use these to make sure all of the students have participated in a certain day.

One Sentence Summary: A quick assessment that asks students to write a sentence to summarize the lesson of the day or answer a specific question. This is also called a "gist sentence."

One Word Summary: Have the students choose or provide for them a word that summarizes a lesson. Then, have the students write 2-3 sentences supporting the selection of that word.

Open Q & A: Students are given the opportunity to ask questions to the teacher or guest speaker about anything that sparks their curiosity or needs clarification. Setting some boundaries for discussion is always important with young people.

Oral Response: This is a very common way for teachers to check understandings during direct instruction. Teachers ask questions and students answer orally.

Outline: Whether students create a formal outline or a list of main ideas and bullet points, outlining is an excellent skill that will help students categorize information. The classic format for an outline is I, A, 1, a, i, ii, b, 2, B, II, III

Overhead Notes: Used by teachers in previous decades, overhead projectors allow teachers to present notes, images, or writing on a large screen.

Pair Reading: In groups of two, students read out loud to one another in alternating turns.

Pair Check: Students check their answers or responses in an assignment with a partner or series of partners.

Panel Discussions: Students sit in the front of the room and act as experts on a certain topic. They can present what they know and then field questions from the other students who are at their desks. Instruct the “experts” to improvise if they don’t know the answer.

Paragraph Shrinking: While Pair Reading, one student reads a paragraph and the other summarizes the main idea of the paragraph in their own words. The students should alternate as readers and summarizers.

Paraphrasing: A comprehension thinking skill in which students must put a concept in their own words either orally or in writing.

Partner Discussion: Students work in pairs to discuss certain topics or responses to questions.

Peer Editing: Students exchange papers, essays, or assignments with a partner and they edit each other’s work by giving feedback with comments, changes, or suggestions.

Peer Questioning: Students ask questions of other students during presentations or group work.

Performance Assessment: A performance assessment is an authentic assessment usually taking place at the end of the unit that calls for deep understanding and adequate skill to complete a certain meaningful task. This type of assessment extends beyond the usual multiple choice test or essay and asks students to think critically about the subject matter.

Pictionary Vocabulary: This review game is based on the classic game Pictionary®. Students are divided into teams. One representative from a team draws the meaning of a vocabulary word and the other members of the team must identify it. For a more detailed description, read this description of [Pictionary Vocabulary](#).

Picture Mapping: A form of mind mapping for visual learners in which pictures are used to map out ideas or stories rather than words and phrases.

Plays: Students act out stories or scenarios in groups to show comprehension. It is important to add an additional form of assessment or reflection to this to ensure each member of the group thinks deeply about the play and can summarize the purpose of how they presented the information.

PMI: An acronym that stands for Plus, Minus, Interesting. Students list positive, negative, and other interesting aspects of an idea or solution. They likely share their lists in groups then with the rest of the class.

Podcasts: One of the most popular ways to consume audio content today are podcasts. There are numerous podcasts about various topics. Point students to podcasts related to your lesson or create your own recording and post it online.

Point Counterpoint: Students take sides of a particular issue, developing arguments for and against it in a number of different formats including essays, verbal debates, and lists.

Popcorn Reading: A popular form of in-class reading in which students take turns reading. When they finish a paragraph they say “Popcorn—Name” (inserting a student’s name) indicating that that student will continue reading where they left off.

Popsicle Sticks: Use popsicle sticks or note cards with the students’ names on them to call on students randomly. This will keep students listening to the questions if they know they might be called on to answer. You can also use these to make sure all of the students have participated in a certain day.

Position Paper: A form of essay in which students take a position and support it with evidence.

Possible Sentences: Create a list of key terms and phrases from a reading. Provide students with a list of these terms and have students use two words or phrases to create possible sentences they might come across during their reading. Afterwards have them evaluate the relatedness of their sentences.

Posters: Visual learners will enjoy making posters that summarize particular topics related to the lesson. These posters can be used in class presentations and are excellent in group settings.

Posture: In order to maximize the students’ receptivity of a lecture, teachers should teach, model, and encourage good posture. Good posture will increase students’ awareness of what is being taught.

PowerPoint: The most common form of direct instruction uses a program developed by Microsoft called PowerPoint®. The program allows teacher to create slideshows with notes and images for presentations. Microsoft PowerPoint® and other similar programs

allow teachers to print out copies of their slides as handouts. Students can add additional notes to the slides based on what the teacher describes in reference to the slides. [Google Docs](#) and [Zoho.com](#) also have slideshow applications that have a growing popularity among teachers.

Prediction Pairs: Students sit in pairs as the teacher reads from a text. Periodically the teacher will pause and ask the student to make predictions about what will happen next with their partner

Predictions: An essential reading skill in which students make educated guesses about what will happen next in a story or about the point of a lesson or reading.

Prezi: One of the interesting alternatives to PowerPoint® presentations is from a website, [Prezi.com](#). I have written about this and created a brief example of this program [here](#).

PROP Advance Organizer: A structured form of an advanced organizer based on the acronym PROP or Prior knowledge, Relationships, Organization, Plan. The teacher describes for the students the knowledge they should have, the relationships with that prior knowledge and what they will learn, the organization of the information, and the plan for instruction.

Pros and Cons: Students create a list of ideas for or against opinions, positions, statements, beliefs, etc. They can generate these individually or in groups. This is an excellent first step towards a class debate.

Quickdraw: Students are given a short amount of time (less than a minute) to draw everything they know about a certain topic using only symbols and no words. Give them the opportunity to share and explain their drawings with a partner and time-permitting with the class.

Quicktalk: Students work in pairs to share everything they know about certain topics in under a minute. This is a great way to review before a quiz.

Quickwrite: Students are given less than a minute to write everything they know about a certain topic.

RAFT: This strategy is used to analyze stories according to an acronym that stands for Role of writer, Audience, Format, and Topic. Students analyze stories based according to these four characteristics as a post-reading activity. This is also a helpful tool in creating a piece of writing.

Raps: A popular form of expression since the 1980's, raps can be fun ways to remember important information or can be created by students to summarize lessons as an assessment.

Reader's Theater: Students work together in groups to summarize a reading assignment in the form of a play.

Reading Guides: It is often a good idea to create a reading guide with questions to be answered or sentences to be completed as students read. These can be a simple list of questions or more visual worksheets for the students to complete.

Reciprocal Teaching: Students work in groups and take turns acting as the teacher on certain topics. This is an excellent way to review a lesson or prepare for a quiz or test.

Relay Summary: Students break up into groups usually according to rows. The student in front is given a piece of paper and writes one sentence that summarizes the reading then passes it back to another member of the group. That student adds another sentence and passes it on. This continues until everyone has contributed a sentence.

Role Personification: Students take on the role of a specific person or character in a story and respond to questions and make statements based on how that person would respond. This can be carried out in group discussions or by recording thoughts on paper.

RSQC2: This summarization strategy is an acronym that stands for Recall, Summarize, Question, Comment, and Connect. Students Recall and list the key points, Summarize them in a paragraph, write some Questions they still have, Connect what they have learned to the lesson objective, and write a Comment as a personal response.

Rubrics: These assessment scales are meant to provide students and teachers with guidelines for scoring many types of assessments.

Self-Assessment: A technique using a variety of tools or simple question and answer that encourages students to reflect on their performance or mastery of concepts or skills.

Self-Correction: Students check their own work or correct themselves while performing a particular skill.

Share-Pair Circles: See Inside-Out Circle.

Short Answer: Short answer questions require students to respond to questions and show comprehension of concepts in a few sentences.

Silent Reading: Students read an assignment individually and quietly during class.

Similarities and Differences: A basic form of comparison in which a student lists the similarities and differences between two topics.

Six Thinking Hat: A discussion technique in which certain students are asked to take certain perspectives on a discussion according to the color hat that they are given.

White hat = information, facts, data

Red hat = feelings, emotions, instincts

Black = judgmental, critical

Yellow = positive attitude, benefits, optimistic

Green = creative, growth

Blue = overview, decision, agenda, thinking about thinking

Skeleton Notes: Skeleton notes are pre-created handouts that have missing parts of sentences. Students must fill-in the missing blanks as they listen to a lecture or complete a reading.

Skits: Another word for plays, skits are short dramatic representations of a certain story or scenario.

SLANT: SLANT stands for Sit-up, Lean forward, Activate your thinking, Note important information, track the talker. Introduce this topic and constantly point to and remind students of it when they stop listening or slouch in their seats.

Slideshow: Form of lecture that involves slides of notes and images using PowerPoint or alternative methods of presentation.

SMARTBoard: An increasingly popular form of technology that is revolutionizing slideshow presentations. The ability to write on the screen and save the writing allows teachers to save what they would have previously erased off of a whiteboard/chalkboard, expand on PowerPoint slides, fill-in worksheets with students, and pre-prepare notes and activities before class.

Socratic Discussion: Also called Socratic Seminars, these discussions are designed after the way Socrates taught. Essentially teachers pose a perspective of an issue and allow students to discuss and debate freely while the teacher remains silent. When it becomes appropriate the teacher steps in to offer essential insight and to steer the discussion towards the argument and thesis that he or she is trying to support.

Socratic Questioning: Form of questioning initiated by the teacher that encourages student to think critically about statements they have made. Questions usually have students take a stance on statements, draw conclusions, give support, consider some consequences, or consider the questions themselves. This is an excellent method for children to think critically about their faith and challenge their own opinions and ideals to strengthen their personal faith.

Songs: Songs can be excellent ways to remember new information or for students to show understanding of a certain topic in a creative way.

Spider Map: This graphic organizer is similar to a Mind Map or Concept Map except the supporting ideas and details are written on lines instead of inside circles.

SQ3R: Reading strategy where students Survey, Question, Read, Recite, Review. Use this sample [SQ3R worksheet](#) as a guide.

Survey—Have students preview the title, pictures, graphs, or captions, then read the first and last paragraph of the article. Make a list below of the main points or objectives you find.

Question—Have students write questions based on their survey of the text.

Read—Have students read and answer the questions they wrote down as they read.

Recite—Have students look over their questions and be able to recite the answers without looking them up.

Review—Have students summarize what they wrote.

Storyboarding: A visual way to represent a series of events in a reading or lecture. Storyboarding is something movie producers use to develop films. Storyboards are a series of pictures that represent how a story plays out.

Storytelling: People of all ages love stories and find them much easier to remember than facts. Stories can be used to illustrate certain points or add a level of depth to concepts and mysteries that need to be pondered. This is why Jesus used images and stories in his parables.

Stump the Teacher: A fun form of review or preparation for a new lesson in which students are able to ask any questions related to the topic of the lesson or chapter in an attempt to “stump” the teacher.

Summarizing: Summarizing is a great way to review notes and organize them in a way that is memorable. Often there is an organizing principle that can be used to recall the main ideas and details in one’s notes.

Talking Chips: Distribute poker chips or tickets that can be used to participate in class. This will make sure that certain students do not dominate the discussions.

Think-Pair-Share: Give the students some time to formulate their answers to questions by working on them individually (“think”), then discussing their responses with a partner (“pair”), and finally sharing with the class what they discussed (“share”).

Thumbs Up or Down: This is a quick way to check understanding during a lecture. Teachers pause at various moments during a presentation and ask students to put their thumbs up if they understand or their thumbs down if they are unsure. This works well if a list of questions are prepared and asked during the lecture (especially if these questions will be asked later in a quiz or test).

Tic-Tac-Know: This review game is based on the classic game tic-tac-toe, only to earn a square, students must answer a question correctly. This game works well when students are on teams with their row. For more detailed directions, read this description of [Tic-Tac-Know](#).

Timelines: Timelines consist of a line with incremental dates and lines indicating a date and an event that corresponds to that date.

Transparencies: Clear plastic sheets that can be used on overhead projectors. Teachers can make copies of worksheets on transparencies and complete them with the students or write on blank transparencies when lecturing to be able to save and share with students as review or for students who were absent.

Triple Venn Diagram: Similar to a Venn Diagram, which compares two topics, a Triple Venn Diagram compares three topics with similarities between all three topics in the middle of all three circles and similarities between two topics in the intersection between two circles. Differences go in the part of circles that is separate from the others.

True or False: Statements are presented to the students to evaluate whether they are true or false. One way to truly assess comprehension is to have the students rewrite false statements or circle the parts of a statement that make it false.

Unknown Objects: Teachers display objects that are relatively foreign to the students and ask them to make educated guesses about what it is and what it does. They may ask yes or no questions or write a description that predicts what it is in their notes.

Value Clarification Discussion: In general, this method of moral education asks open-ended questions with no right answer to help students take stances on issues and recognize what values they already have in their thoughts.

Value Line: The class or a group of students position themselves along a spectrum (usually 1-10) of agreement with certain issues. Students are then put into groups with other students who differed in their opinions and make list of shared opinions and beliefs. They can also make a list of similarities that only two of them have in common, three of them, four, or as many members that there are in the group.

Venn Diagram: This is the most popular way to compare two topics. Two intersecting circles are labeled according to the two topics. Students list the similarities in the middle inside the intersection of the two circles and the differences in parts of the circles that do not intersect.

Want Ads: Having students create Want Ads or Help Wanted Ads challenges them to show the characteristics of certain people or types of people they are studying.

Weblogs: See blogs.

Webquests: These e-learning activities became very popular when the Internet first began to be used by teachers and students. They usually involve a certain problem for which students go on a quest to find solutions. In my opinion, they have [become increasingly unpopular](#) as the Internet evolves.

Word Chain: The teacher proposes a certain category and states a word in that category. The students must then add another word within that category that begins with the last letter of the word the teacher offered. Then another student must add another word to the chain, and so on. For example if the category is Books of the Old Testament: IsaiaH, HoseA, AmoS, Song of SongS, etc.

Write-Pair-Share: This variation off of Think-Pair-Share invites the students write a response, then share it with a partner, then offer it to the class.

Written Music: The written music in a hymnal, for example, can be an excellent resource for new information and perspectives on God and the Church.

Wordsplash: Assemble a collection of keywords for a certain reading assignment. Arrange the words on a piece of paper or on a projector in a random way. The random arrangement makes the collection of words a wordsplash. Consider using www.wordle.net to create the wordsplash. Have students make predictions about what they will be reading based on the wordsplash.

Yes, No, Maybe So: The teacher writes a vocabulary term or concept on a note card or piece of paper. The students must ask questions about the topic on the cards to which the teacher can answer “Yes,” “No,” or “Maybe so.” Once a student thinks they know the answer they can make a guess. Students can also play this game in groups between students.

ZAP!: ZAP! is a fun review game in which groups of students take turns reading and responding to questions written on cards pulled from a bucket or bag. When the wild card (ZAP! card) is pulled, the student who pulled it loses all of their points. For more detailed directions, visit this longer description of [ZAP!](#).

About the Author



Jared Dees founded *The Religion Teacher* in March of 2009 in hopes of providing religion teachers and catechists with resources and advice for effectively evangelizing young people. His primary goal has been to provide practical resources that teachers can easily use and implement.

Jared works as the Adolescent Catechetical Specialist at [Ave Maria Press](#). He develops high school religion textbooks and other catechetical materials for teens and teachers in Catholic schools and parish religious education programs. Jared has taught religion at both the middle school and high school level, led and directed numerous retreats, and continues to volunteer as a catechist at his parish.

He studied history and religion at Miami University (OH) and then went on to earn his Master's in Education from the University of Notre Dame through the [Alliance for Catholic Education \(ACE\)](#) program. He will soon complete a Master of Arts in Systematic Theology at Notre Dame as well. Jared, his wife Jennifer, and their daughter live in South Bend, Indiana.

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