

Balancing Instructional Elements










Description

Most learners can cope with only a few challenges at a time. The chart below outlines key factors to consider when designing a learning activity. Limiting the number of factors that are challenging in any particular lesson allows students to focus on the knowledge and skills that are most critical. It's important to achieve a balance between low and high challenge characteristics in your lessons. Lessons that rely solely on activities with characteristics from the Low Challenge column may be too boring, while those that are in the High Challenge column will frustrate most students.

Purpose

This structure is designed to help teachers plan instruction so that the information and the activities provided stay within the *Instructional Zone* of what students can handle. That is, students should be engaged in a level that is slightly above their current level of proficiency but should not be overwhelmed by both new information and new tasks.

The Teaching Learning Continuum

Factor	From Low Challenge		To High Challenge
Context	Familiar		New
Task	Highly Structured		Minimally Defined
Process	Highly Facilitated		Independent
Content/Concepts	Concrete		Abstract
Prompts	Visual		Print-Based
Teacher Explanation	Hands-On Demonstration		Theoretical
Vocabulary	Common/Everyday		Somewhat Sophisticated
Sentence Structure	Simple		Complex

What to Do

Use the chart below to plan or analyze a lesson to see where it fits on the teaching/learning continuum.

Teaching/Learning Continuum Planning Analysis

Consider all elements of your lesson (see left hand column). Describe each element and rate it from low challenge (1) to high challenge (5). Make sure you have a balance of challenging and not so challenging activities and provide *Scaffolding* for tasks and activities that are important but may be difficult for students. If you have a multi-level class, you may need to increase the challenge level for a more proficient group and reduce it for less proficient learners (in which case you would fill out separate charts for each group).

Factor	Description	Low Challenge	Rate the Challenge Level	High Challenge
Context		Familiar	1 2 3 4 5	New
Task		Highly Structured	1 2 3 4 5	Minimally Defined
Process		Highly Facilitated	1 2 3 4 5	Independent
Content Concepts		Concrete	1 2 3 4 5	Abstract
Prompts		Visual	1 2 3 4 5	Print-Based
Teacher Explanation		Hands-On Demonstration	1 2 3 4 5	Theoretical
Vocabulary		Common Everyday	1 2 3 4 5	Somewhat Sophisticated
Sentence Structure		Simple	1 2 3 4 5	Complex
Total Rating				