

**Table 1.1** Examples of Daily Learning Targets

Learning Targets for Younger Students	Learning Targets for Older Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I can describe the differences between living and nonliving things.</li><li>• I can explain my reasons for sorting and classifying insects.</li><li>• I can find words I want to use in books, word walls, and word cards.</li><li>• I can write words that send a message.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• I can show two variable data on a scatter plot.</li><li>• I can describe how photosynthesis and cellular respiration help an ecosystem maintain homeostasis.</li><li>• I can describe historical events that affected the Sacco and Vanzetti case using a primary source text.</li></ul>

## Using Learning Targets

### Introduce the Learning Target(s) to Students at the Best Point in the Lesson

In most lessons, the learning targets are shared with students at the start of the lesson and then referred to throughout as teachers and students assess progress. Some teachers have students read the targets aloud, restate them to a classmate, or discuss them in small groups or as a class to ensure that they understand what they are aiming for. As students become more sophisticated with using learning targets, they may wish to critique or revise them. Teachers can choose to collaborate with students in revising them to be more clear, compelling, or measurable, and even in creating new learning targets. The process of sharing and discussing learning targets provides meaningful learning opportunities, especially for building key vocabulary. For example, in the accompanying video, we see Jon Exall's sixth-graders at the Odyssey School spend several minutes grappling with the term *primary source documents* before they start working toward the learning target "I can use primary source documents to develop introductory understanding and introductory research questions for our first immigration case study."



Watch video: "Students Unpack a Learning Target and Discuss Academic Vocabulary"

For some lessons, it is better to hold off on sharing learning targets with students until partway through the lesson. For lessons that open by engaging students with a mystery text—a provocative piece that stimulates interest and generates questions—or by enabling students to grapple with a new math concept or

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experiment with scientific or artistic materials, it may be best to delay revealing the learning targets so that students will not be constrained in their thinking or discoveries. After discussing the ideas that emerge, the learning targets can be introduced to frame the next steps of work.

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## Case Study

### Finding the Right Time to Introduce a Daily Learning Target in an Algebra II Class at the Springfield Renaissance School in Springfield, Massachusetts

Just as they do every day, students in Hilary Ducharme's eleventh-grade algebra II class come into the room and get right to work grappling with new problems, which are written on the board. Today Ducharme has asked her students to FOIL a series of problems, multiplying terms within parentheses in a particular order (first, outer, inner, last). A quiet hum settles on the room. Students are working together in groups while Ducharme walks around taking attendance and checking in with individual students. As students finish, several of them walk to the board and write their solutions.

Students pull out their homework, a problem set with one of four long-term learning targets for the semester written at the top: "I can construct quadratic models to solve problems." Below that is the supporting learning target that Ducharme introduced to students the previous day: "I can find the zeroes of a quadratic function by completing the square." Students complete a reflection form about what was easy and challenging for them about the homework and then they check their "complete the square" solutions using the quadratic formula. This leads into a lively classwide debate about the pros and cons of using "complete the square" versus the quadratic formula. "I like to have them take a stand like that," Ducharme says. "It increases their engagement. Suddenly they are speaking passionately about quadratic models!"

It isn't until about thirty-five minutes into the class that Ducharme points out the new daily learning target to the students: "I can identify and factor a difference of two squares." She brings them back to the FOIL problems they had done in the first ten minutes of class. As they explore the patterns in the solutions, awareness begins to dawn on the students. They see that their solutions to those problems have put them well on their way to the conceptual understanding they need to meet the new learning target.

Ducharme is strategic about when she introduces students to the daily learning target. She doesn't think it's a good use of time to introduce the learning target before her students have had a chance to do some grappling on their own. She says, "It will be meaningless to them unless they've had some experience with it." In this case, Ducharme knew that the students should be able to see the patterns based on the rules

they have already learned about quadratics. “This is the fourth year I’ve taught these learning targets,” Ducharme says, “and by now I’ve had enough experience to know how to build students to those ‘aha’ moments.”

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### **Develop Techniques to Check for Student Understanding**

In order for students to assess their progress toward meeting their learning targets, teachers must build in checkpoints along the way. For example, in the accompanying video Jason Shiroff employs several checking-for-understanding techniques as he probes his fourth- and fifth-graders’ understanding of transition phrases while unpacking a learning target with them.



Watch video: “Students Unpack a Learning Target”

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Even well-written learning targets will contribute little to engaging, supporting, and holding students accountable for their learning if they are not referred to and used actively during the lesson. In addition to frequent checks throughout a lesson, the end of a lesson is also an important moment for checking for understanding. A well-constructed debrief will enable students to reflect on their learning, returning to the day’s learning targets to assess their progress.

There are a wide variety of techniques to check for student understanding and progress toward learning targets during the course of a lesson and at its conclusion. Among the possible strategies are the following:

- Hand signals (e.g., fist-to-five; thumbs up, down, or sideways; high, middle, or low)
- Written checks (e.g., whiteboards, exit tickets, guided practice)
- Verbal checks (e.g., cold-call questions, class go-arounds)
- Progress charts (e.g., students posting sticky notes, dots, checks, or initials)
- Peer check-ins (e.g., pair-shares, peer critique, small-group check-ins)
- Quick quizzes, written or verbal
- “Clicker” technology (e.g., computer-projected responses from all students)

See chapter 2 for more extensive discussion of these techniques.

Building in checkpoints along the way ensures that students understand the material and gives the teacher the opportunity to address learning gaps.

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