

The Transitions Curriculum

Lesson Instructions

The Transitions Curriculum skill-building lessons are designed with a consistent format. We have found that this consistency increases teaching effectiveness, as well as builds student confidence. Each lesson begins with the *Transition Objective* and *Relevance to Successful Transition*, which provide background information for the teacher. Next, the lesson is organized into steps that describe each activity, starting with a focus statement that students use for the *Update Journal*. This is followed with a sharing activity called *Convene Roundtable* and then *Advance Organizer*, that tells students what they will learn. Starting with Step 4, several steps describe specific instructional activities. Lessons conclude with directions to *Evaluate Outcomes* and a *Connecting Activity*. Included at the end of the lessons are *Key Words*, followed by *Materials & Preparation* guidelines. Lessons contain a list of *The U.S. Department of Labor's SCANS Skills* (Secretary's Commission on Achieving the Necessary Skills), that are infused into the lesson. Also, each unit has a scope and sequence matrix that identifies the SCANS skills for each lesson, including basic academic skills and other employment competences. A more detailed discussion of the SCANS skills is included in the Scope and Sequence section.

Transition Objective

This is a formal objective describing the major purpose of the lesson. This statement tells the teacher what students are expected to learn. In addition, the objective can form the basis for IEP and Transition Plan goals and activities. The objective sets an expectation for student achievement. Although the achievement of objectives will vary among students, it is important to convey the assumption that every student will succeed in reaching the outcome.

Relevance to Successful Transition

This is a statement of the overarching philosophy of the lesson. In this section, basic information about the lesson topic is provided for the teacher. This information presents the lesson with a focus that relates the lesson content to relevant current and future events.

Update Journal

Update Journal is completed in the first few minutes of class. This allows students a time to mentally prepare for the lesson. Students make an entry in their journal (paper/electronic) using the journal topic that is provided. Topics for this activity are related to the lesson; however, the teacher may wish to occasionally create a new one. It is important to provide time for this activity, which gives students an opportunity for personal growth through reflection.

Convene Roundtable

Designed as an anticipatory set for each lesson, the *Roundtable* provides a format for students and teachers to share feelings, experiences and concerns in a non-threatening group setting. In the *Roundtable*, students sit in a circle or other arrangement that creates an open and participatory atmosphere. The teacher reveals the topic in the form of an unfinished statement, called a starter, such as "When I think about going to a job interview, I..." To start, the teacher will model the response by completing the statement. Students then will take turns by repeating the starter and adding their own ending.

The sentence starter serves as a prompt and focuses the students' thinking on the content of the lesson. It may take several lessons for students to become comfortable with the *Roundtable*. Over time the *Roundtable* will become routine and participation will be spontaneous. As students

develop confidence to speak out and state their opinions, feelings and beliefs to the group, the responses will become more interesting and revealing.

During the *Roundtable*, some students may elect to pass. At the end, give students who have passed another opportunity to participate. Encourage students and let them know that there are no wrong answers. Create an atmosphere of respect and acceptance. Over time, help each student gain the confidence to participate. Provide prompts when needed by giving students a cue or having them repeat someone else's statement. Encourage participation while at the same time recognizing that students are at varying stages of readiness for new activities.

Use the *Roundtable* to teach and model active listening skills, such as eye contact, positive facial expressions and open body posture. Talk about and encourage these behaviors among students to create a supportive and cooperative learning environment.

In the future, the teacher may want to include the students in the development of *Roundtable* rules. However, certain guidelines have been found to be effective. Use these guidelines as rules until the students settle into a comfortable routine.

Examples of *Roundtable* rules are:

- Everyone follows the established rules.
- One person speaks at a time.
- Everyone looks at the person who is talking.
- Everyone models respect for each other.
- No put-downs through words or body language
- Each person repeats the starter and finishes the sentence.
- Only teachers may comment during the activity.
- Students may not use the name of another person when sharing.
- Students who break the rules may need to leave the group.

With consistent use of the *Roundtable* students will:

- Develop empathy and understanding within the group
- Develop improved appreciation of differences in the opinion and interests of others
- Increase the number of positive, caring interactions
- Feel safe and secure in the classroom environment
- Become better listeners and group participants
- Better understand their own opinions and thoughts, as well as those of their peers
- Become more accepting of different cultures

Advance Organizer

This is a statement that tells students what will happen that day. Telling students what they will learn and do is essential as this opens the part of the brain that accepts and processes new information, much like opening a document on a computer. A suggested *Advance Organizer* is provided for each lesson; however, it is not necessary to use the provided statement verbatim. For example, the statement can be shortened or personalized by the teacher to accommodate individual style.

Instructional Activities

Instructional Activities will vary from lesson to lesson. Many types of activities are used throughout each unit. Activities are designed to match the topic and objective of each lesson. Examples of activities include direct instruction, cooperative learning, debate, role-play, games, imaging, self-assessment, off-campus visits, speakers and other activities that encourage higher level thinking skills. Most lessons include an interactive activity to reinforce the importance of working together. Lesson activities also promote academic and personal growth by incorporating core curriculum and life skills.

You may notice that the first few lessons take longer than the suggested time. Once you are accustomed to the format, it will be easier to stay within the estimated timelines. Although the activities are valuable and are there for a purpose, it is important not to miss those spontaneous teachable moments. Sometimes student interest and enthusiasm will create a window of opportunity that is more important than accomplishing every activity in that lesson. In this case, you may want to extend one activity and shorten or omit another, using your best judgment.

Evaluate Outcomes

The *Evaluation Statement* provides a daily assessment of student learning for the teacher and student. The evaluation statement gives the teacher an opportunity to evaluate the need for additional activities and instruction for individual students. Participating in the *Evaluation Statement* also reinforces retention, giving students an opportunity to rehearse and hear from other students the key concepts of the lesson. As with the *Roundtable*, the *Evaluation Statement* is an excellent tool for building positive communication skills among the students.

To use the *Evaluation Statement*, the teacher will introduce the statement and have students quickly give a response. Unlike the *Roundtable*, it is not necessary for students to repeat the statement. In this activity, students will share an answer that is related to what they have learned in the lesson. This is different from the *Roundtable*, where students are sharing personal feelings and thoughts.

Connecting Activity

This section is reserved for out-of-class activities that will enhance the lesson and provide opportunities for students to extend and practice transition life skills in relevant environments outside of school. Most of the *Connecting Activities* are experiential, allowing flexibility in reading and writing requirements so that students with limited academic skills can succeed with minimal support. *Connecting Activities* also provide an opportunity for you to make assignments more challenging for academically inclined students. Emphasizing follow-through of these activities is critical so that students may have many opportunities to apply new skills in the real world.

Key Words

A list of words that will be introduced and used in the lesson is provided in this section. Some of these words will be repeated in other lessons, others are included as the Key Words for only one specific activity. Vocabulary building is important for our students and will build their confidence and enhance their future success.

We recommend the six-step process to "Better Vocabulary Instruction" by Robert Marzano (2009) involving the following steps:

1. Provide a description, explanation or example of the "key word."
2. Ask students to restate your description in their own words.
3. Ask students to draw a picture or symbol representing the key word.
4. Ask students to engage in activity to make the key word real and meaningful by comparing and relating to previously learned key words.

5. Have students review and discuss key words with each other on a regular basis.
6. Have students participate in games using the key words (e.g., Charades, Scrabble or Bingo).

Materials & Preparation

This section provides a snapshot of the materials and specific preparation needed for the lesson. By referring to this section at the beginning of the week, the teacher can prepare for the next set of lessons with minimum effort. Preparation activities include locating examples (personal or fictional stories to support the lesson) and becoming familiar with the content and supplementary material in the lesson.

The teacher preparation section also specifies materials that must be prepared and technological arrangements that must be made before the lessons, including copying handouts, preparation of overheads, equipment needed, room arrangements, preparation of visual aids and arrangement of speakers, field trips and parental permission. Teachers who are prepared not only have more successful and enjoyable lessons, but also model good work behaviors for their students.

We are aware that rapidly changing technology continually provides more and better instructional devices and that the selection and availability of media and presentation equipment differs from school to school. What may be considered state of the art today can quickly become outdated. Currently, presentation equipment such as wireless tablets, LCD projectors, projection cameras and interactive whiteboards are replacing marker boards and overhead projectors, soon these also be replaced by new technologies. We encourage you to use your most effective technology as it becomes available and substitute current technology where we may have employed outdated media terms.

SCANS Foundation Skills

The SCANS foundation skills were developed by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). This commission published a study entitled, "What Work Requires of Schools: A SCANS Report for America 2000," summarizing the kinds of skills and competencies youth must have to enter and succeed in today's workplace (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991). Foundation skills were clustered into three groups: Basic Academic Skills (reading, writing, math, listening and speaking); Thinking Skills (critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, visualizing, knowing how to learn and reasoning); and Personal Qualities (responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management and integrity/honesty).