

YouthBuild Global

Contractor for the U.S. Department of Labor

YOUTHBUILD EDUCATION TOOLKIT

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YouthBuild Global

Contractor for U.S. Department of Labor YouthBuild

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SECTION

01

Introduction

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01 Introduction

INTRODUCTION

YouthBuild staff can maximize participant learning and success while in active programming by integrating educational best practices that support academic and professional growth. YouthBuild programs should therefore implement educational models that integrate academic and employment skills whenever possible. These skills include:

- Critical thinking - including the ability to question information, analyze data and details, and evaluate tools and products for effectiveness and safety. Critical thinking skills support workforce readiness because they are key to problem-solving, designing new products, and assessing information.
- AI and digital literacy - including using AI to solve problems, assessing online content for bias, and being able to use common tools, like word processors and spreadsheets. To be competitive in the job market, participants will need experience with these high-demand skills.
- Teamwork and communication - including active listening, empathy, and conflict resolution. These skills will help YouthBuild participants to work well with coworkers, employers, and clients. Collaboration is an expectation in many careers.
- Executive functioning – including time management and organization. These skills are critical for attending appointments, meeting deadlines, establishing credibility, and delivering high-quality products on time.

Programs can support participant skill development by:

- Incorporating competency-based learning and problem-based service-learning models
- Teaching about and practicing digital literacy (including AI literacy) in the classroom
- Utilizing effective instructional strategies that incorporate multiple skills at once, such as reading, writing, and teamwork
- Providing instructors with the training and tools to develop effective instructional practices and structure a supportive classroom environment

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

- This toolkit will provide YouthBuild leadership and instructional staff with descriptions, tools, examples, and actionable resources that will prepare participants for today's education and career world.
- For instructional staff:
 - Use Section 2 curriculum models with program leadership to design or strengthen programming and improve participant outcomes.
 - Access Section 3 for ready-to-use resources: teaching tools, instructional strategies, lesson plans, and other resources.
 - Access Section 4 for more information about classroom design and best practices.
- For program leadership:
 - Section 2 provides information that program leadership can use to develop their YouthBuild program's education component or incorporate education across programming. Leadership can also use the knowledge and resources in Section 2 to support instructional staff members when creating rigorous and meaningful curricula.
 - Program leadership can direct instructional staff (including those outside of the education component) to seek specific and actionable educational tools in Section 3, including lesson plan resources on a wide variety of topics.
 - Leadership can reference Section 4 when supporting instructional staff with the development of effective classroom practices.

SECTION

02

**Curriculum
Design & Models**

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02 Curriculum Design & Models

INTRODUCTION

"Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."

– Proverb

YouthBuild programs must achieve ambitious outcomes within a limited timeframe. At the same time, programs are committed to creating learning environments where participants feel valued, capable, and supported as they prepare for the workforce and life beyond the program. To balance these priorities, programs need to adopt intentional education components with a comprehensive curriculum model that can:

- Guide the development of rigorous, standards-aligned academic content and ensure instruction is data-informed
- Create meaningful opportunities for YouthBuild participants to build academic knowledge alongside employability skills such as collaboration, problem-solving, and communication
- Foster a sense of purpose and relevance by connecting learning to real-world applications and career pathways
- Increase programmatic effectiveness and efficiency toward reaching measurable outcomes

While multiple instructional models can support this work, this toolkit focuses on two approaches that align well with the YouthBuild model: Competency-Based Education (CBE), also known as Competency-Based Learning, and Problem-Based Service Learning (PBSL). These models emphasize mastery, relevance, and the development of skills that prepare participants for long-term success as learners, workers, and leaders.

Competency-Based Education

SECTION 2.1

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INTRODUCTION

According to the [Institute of Education Sciences CBE Mastery Framework](https://ies.ed.gov/rel-southeast/2025/01/cbe-mastery-framework), “Competency-based education (CBE) is a personalized learning approach that provides a flexible and engaging learning environment in which progression is based on mastery of explicit learning objectives, or competencies, as demonstrated through evidence of student learning, rather than time spent in a course/topic.”¹

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast. *CBE Mastery Framework* (2023). <https://ies.ed.gov/rel-southeast/2025/01/cbe-mastery-framework>

For YouthBuild programs, competency-based education is particularly powerful because it reinforces a core belief: participants are capable, valued, and in control of their learning journeys. This model fosters learner agency, as participants engage more deeply when they set personalized goals, choose meaningful learning pathways, and demonstrate their knowledge in ways that are relevant and meaningful (Utah State Board of Education, n.d.)², which in turn strengthens critical thinking, problem-solving, and self-management skills. By prioritizing mastery, participant voice, and real-world skill development, a CBE model strengthens academic achievement while equipping participants to navigate career pathways, adapt to evolving challenges, and continue growing as lifelong learners and leaders.

What This Means for Instructors

Shifting to a competency-based model changes the instructor's role.

In a competency-based education model, instructors:	In a traditional classroom model, instructors:
Act as facilitators and guide skill development	Deliver instruction to students
Provide targeted feedback aligned to competencies	Assign grades based on completed assignments and tests
Support participants in setting goals and tracking progress	Follow a predetermined curriculum pace and sequence
Differentiate instruction to meet diverse learning needs	Often provide the same instruction, assessment, and pacing for all learners

BEFORE IMPLEMENTING CBE

CBE Key Terms

Competencies are the knowledge, skills, and abilities that participants need to successfully perform a task, job, or role. They describe what someone should be able to know and do, not just what information they have learned. In YouthBuild, competencies help staff identify, teach, and measure the skills participants need for academic success, employment, and personal growth.

Competency Examples	
• Communication • Teamwork • Critical Thinking • Leadership	• Professionalism • Digital Literacy • Creativity • Self-Awareness

Mastery is the ability to consistently demonstrate a competency at the level expected by the program. This means participants can apply their knowledge and skills in real-world situations—not just recall information or complete an assignment once. Evidence of mastery may come from projects, assessments, observations, work-based learning experiences, or other demonstrations of learning.

² Utah State Board of Education, “Utah’s Personalized, Competency-Based Learning (PCBL) Framework,” accessed March 29, 2026, https://schools.utah.gov/curr/pcbl/_pcbl_/UtahPCBLFramework.pdf

Skill progression describes the stages participants move through as they develop and demonstrate a competency over time. This toolkit defines progress as movement from **Emerging (1)** to **Developing (2)** to **Proficient (3)** and **Advanced (4)**, with **Proficient** and **Advanced** representing mastery because participants can consistently apply the competency independently and effectively. Not all participants will begin at Emerging (1); some may begin with Developing (2) or even Proficient (3) skills based on their prior experiences.

Competency Statements describe the specific knowledge, skills, and behaviors that participants should be able to demonstrate as they develop a competency. They help instructors define what success looks like and provide a clear target for teaching, learning, assessment, and participant reflection.

Competency statements focus on what participants can do, not just what content they have been taught. Strong competency statements make learning expectations transparent and measurable. Well-designed competency statements support rubric development, participant goal setting, progress tracking, and conversations about skill growth over time.

TOOL

Criteria for Strong Competency Statements

Use this tool to develop clear competency statements that define expectations, guide instruction, support assessment, and provide a roadmap toward mastery.

A strong competency statement:

- Focuses on observable actions that can be seen, heard, or measured.
- Uses clear, specific language rather than vague terms.
- Describes participant performance, not instructor activities.
- Can be assessed or demonstrated through assignments, projects, discussions, observations, or workplace experiences.
- Aligns with real-world applications in education, employment, and daily life.
- Reflects progression toward mastery, showing increasing levels of skill and independence.

Examples

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less Effective:
"Understands teamwork." | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More Effective:
"Collaborates with peers to complete tasks, contributes ideas during group discussions, and responds constructively to feedback." |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less Effective:
"Knows how to research." | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• More Effective:
"Locates information from multiple sources, evaluates source credibility, and uses evidence to support conclusions." |

Strong competency statements help participants understand what is expected, help staff assess progress consistently, and create a shared understanding of what mastery looks like.

Created with ChatGPT, human edit ³



³ PROMPT: Based on the competency-based education model we’ve discussed, please create a clear explanation of competency statements, including criteria for designing strong statements.

TOOL



Sample Competency Statements

The examples below illustrate how instructors can break competencies down into clear, assessable statements that define participant performance. Review them for ideas and guidance as you develop competency statements aligned to your program goals.

Critical Thinking

- **Understand:** A YouthBuild participant deconstructs and explains a situation or topic, asks relevant questions, and applies background knowledge.
- **Explore:** A YouthBuild participant gathers and evaluates multiple and/or varied sources for validity and relevance and analyzes information related to the situation or topic.
- **Synthesize:** A YouthBuild participant develops and refines ideas to create a logical conclusion that is justified with evidence.

Critical Thinking competency examples adapted from RiseUp Community School, Denver, CO

Reading is understanding written sentences, paragraphs, and figures in work-related documents on paper, on computers, or on adaptive devices.

Comprehension

- Locate and understand written information in prose and in documents such as manuals, reports, memos, letters, forms, graphs, charts, tables, calendars, schedules, signs, notices, applications, contracts, regulations, and directions.
- Understand the purpose of written materials.
- Comprehend the author's meaning and identify the main ideas expressed in the written material.

Attention to detail

- Note details and facts.
- Detect inconsistencies.
- Identify implied meaning and details.
- Recognize missing information.

Information analysis

- Critically evaluate and analyze information in written materials.
- Review written information for completeness and relevance.
- Distinguish fact from opinion.
- Identify trends.
- Synthesize information from multiple written materials.

Information integration

- Integrate what is learned from written materials with prior knowledge.
- Use what is learned from written material to follow instructions and complete tasks.
- Apply what is learned from written material to new situations.

CareerOneStop's Building Blocks Model provides a foundational guide to competency development. Tiers I, II, and III of the model, also known as the Foundational Tiers, include personal effectiveness, academic, and workplace competencies. This model suggests that these skills are the first, critical steps to workforce readiness, and that, without these skills, moving up to Tier IV and beyond may be irrelevant.⁴ Additionally, competencies in the Foundational Tiers are designed to apply across all industry competency models, ensuring relevance across career pathways.

Reading Competency examples taken from CareerOneStop's Building Blocks Model

WEBSITES THAT SUPPORT COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT

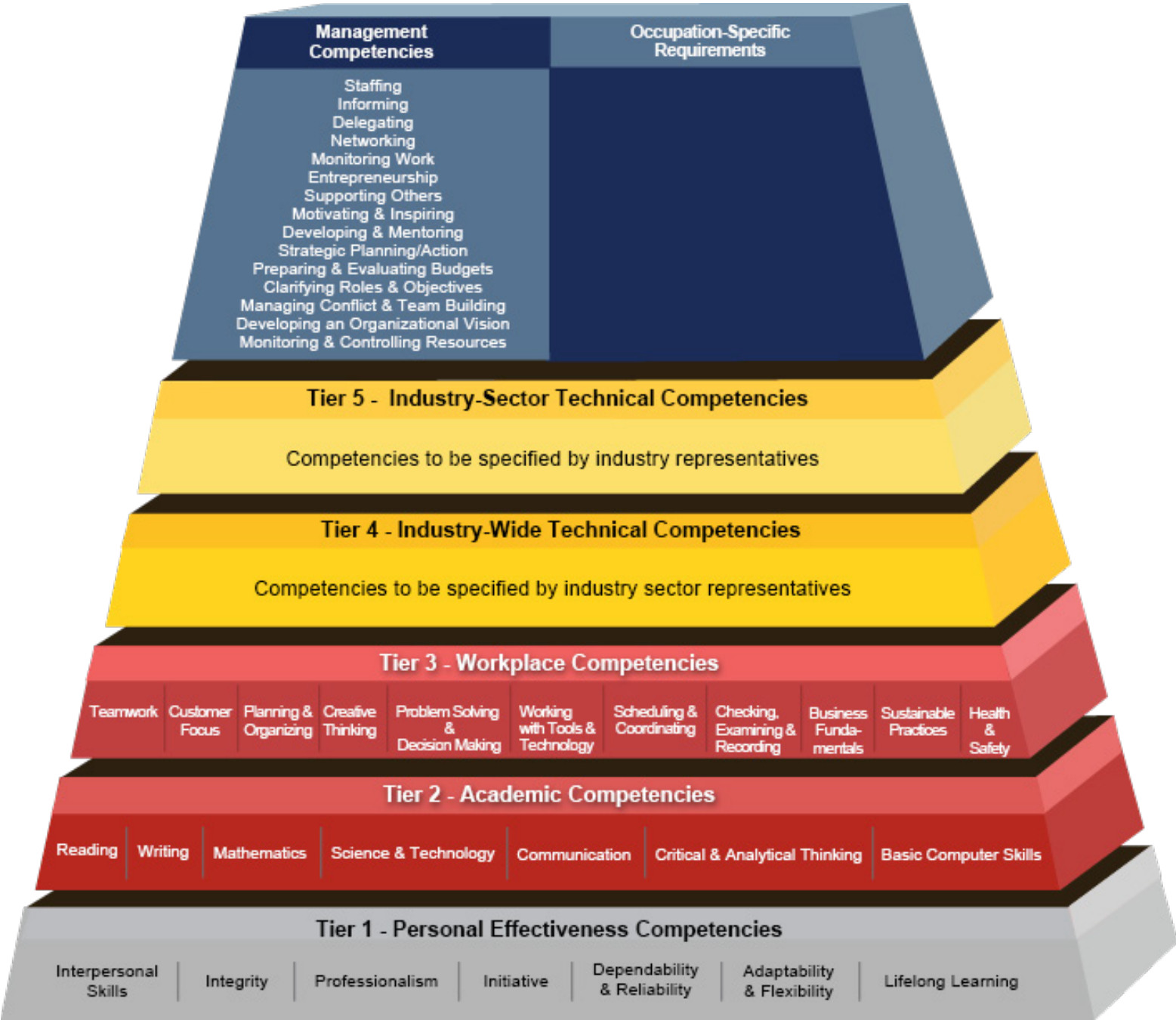
Instructors can find a list of online resources that have been developed and shared by The National Association of Colleges + Employers (NACE) members.

- [The University of Montana's Career Readiness Competencies flyer](#) contains a list of competencies with descriptions.
- This [University of Tampa course syllabus](#) shows how instructors can incorporate competencies into weekly course units.
- [The University of Tampa's Career Readiness Mapping Journal](#) incorporates competencies into student success planning.

⁴ Taken from CareerOneStop, *Competency Model Clearinghouse: Building Blocks Model*, <https://www.careeronestop.org/CompetencyModel/competency-models/building-blocks-model.aspx>, accessed March 29, 2026.

CareerOneStop’s Competency Model Clearinghouse online provides a [Building Blocks Model](#) as well as links to industry-specific competencies (such as Food and Beverage Service, Commercial and Industrial Construction, and Fundamentals of Health Care).

Generic Building Blocks Competency Model



Other resources:

- [Utah’s Personalized, Competency-Based Learning Framework](#)
- The Core Collaborative blog post—[Competency-Based Learning: A Pathway to an Equitable, Rigorous Education](#)

GETTING STARTED

CBE First Steps

- Programs that aren't quite sure if they want to overhaul their entire education component can preview CBE implementation by applying it to one class, such as language arts, job-readiness training or leadership development.
- Programs can also begin by exploring competency-based education resources, sample competency frameworks, and assessment rubrics available through educational organizations, workforce development partners, and online repositories. Reviewing how other programs define competencies, measure mastery, and document participant progress can help staff better understand CBE in practice. These resources can also serve as a starting point for adapting competencies and rubrics to align with program goals, participant needs, and desired learning outcomes.
- Program leadership and staff should consider the benefits and challenges of implementing a CBE model. While competency-based education can support individualized learning and workforce relevance, successful implementation requires clear competencies, staff training, progress-tracking systems, and participant support as they develop self-management skills. Programs should carefully assess these operational requirements before implementation.

TOOL



CBE Implementation Considerations: Addressing Common Challenges

1. Develop Clear, Measurable Competencies

CBE depends on well-defined competencies and performance criteria. Translating existing curricula into measurable competencies will take deliberate thought, time, and collaboration.

Considerations:

- Aligning competencies with HSE/HSD requirements
- Integrating workforce and employability skills
- Creating consistent mastery criteria across instructors

2. Balance Flexibility with Program Requirements

YouthBuild participants often have varying attendance patterns, academic levels, and life responsibilities. While CBE offers flexibility, programs must still meet grant, credentialing, and reporting requirements within a set amount of time.

Considerations:

- Maintaining academic rigor
- Meeting program timelines and performance goals
- Coordinating instructional and workforce schedules

3. Instructor Training and Mindset Shifts

Staff may need professional development and ongoing support to transition from traditional instruction to a facilitator role.

Considerations:

- Supporting learner agency and self-directed learning
- Providing individualized feedback
- Designing assessments that align with a competency-based model

4. Integrating Academic and Workforce Learning

Connecting learning to real-world skills requires intentional planning. Staff will need training and time to develop or redesign curricula and program materials.

Considerations:

- Aligning competencies with industry expectations
- Coordinating classroom and construction/workforce activities
- Documenting competency attainment across multiple learning environments

5. Tracking Individualized Progress

Because participants learn at different rates, instructors must monitor progress for each individual rather than managing a single class pace.

Considerations:

- Increased recordkeeping and documentation
- Need for progress-tracking systems
- Ensuring participants understand their next learning steps

6. Supporting Participants Who Need Structure

Not all participants are immediately ready for the increased responsibility that CBE can require.

Considerations:

- Building executive functioning skills
- Teaching goal-setting and self-monitoring
- Providing scaffolding for learners who struggle with self-direction

7. Assessment Design

CBE requires assessments that demonstrate mastery rather than simply measuring seat time or assignment completion.

Considerations:

- Creating authentic performance tasks
- Ensuring consistency across instructors
- Determining what level of performance constitutes mastery

Created with ChatGPT, human edit ⁵

⁵ PROMPT: ChatGPT, help me design a CBE implementation tool for program staff. Using what we've already created regarding CBE, please suggest up to 10 challenges that programs should consider before implementing a CBE model.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Program Name: Compton YouthBuild

Location: Compton, CA

Lead Organization: EntreNous Community Empowerment

Compton YouthBuild partners with the YouthBuild Charter School of California (YCSC) to deliver a competency-based diploma program for YouthBuild participants. Using this model, Compton YouthBuild is able to provide participants with learning opportunities that are organized around demonstrating skill mastery rather than seat time.

YCSC structures courses around three core competency areas: humanities, STEM and culture. For each area, YCSC staff have collaborated to develop clear competency rubrics that describe what mastery looks like. (Use the [humanities competencies and STEM competencies rubric](#) for reference.)

YouthBuild participants can demonstrate their learning through CAPs (Community Action Projects), which are school-wide, community- and service-based experiences. During these projects, participants identify real issues in their communities and design comprehensive solutions, thus applying academic skills in meaningful, real-world contexts.

CAPs anchor the CBE model by requiring participants to apply their learning to real community issues. These projects build both academic skills and civic engagement, reinforcing the relevance of education beyond the classroom.

Compton YouthBuild's Co-Executive Directors shared some of the benefits of implementing competency-based education at their site. A competency-based model allows participants to work at their own pace. If a student needs more time to demonstrate their mastery of a topic, they can resubmit projects or coursework until they succeed.

This model also fosters participant involvement because competency-based course content can be hands-on and individualized. Participants can, “focus on things that matter to them.” For example, a participant who is a parent can demonstrate mastery through a project on childcare. Participants care about the materials they prepare in competency-based education courses.

Competency-based education assessments are often naturally project-based. Rather than relying on traditional tests, participants demonstrate understanding through applied work that shows depth of knowledge. As one Co-Executive Director noted, “The more interested the student is in the topic, the more competency they will demonstrate.”

While the CBE model is flexible, it is not unstructured. Program leadership noted that a competency-based education component benefits from well-trained instructors. Instructors must

scaffold course information so that all participants can gain the knowledge, practice, and support needed to reach mastery.

Why This Worked:

- **Clear rubrics to define mastery**

By using competency rubrics, both instructors and participants share an understanding of expectations that keep learning focused on learning outcomes rather than just completion.

- **Flexibility paired with accountability**

Participants can revise and improve their work while still being held to a consistent standard of mastery. This balance maintains rigor and supports persistence.

- **Relevance drives engagement**

When participants care about what they are producing, the quality of their work improves.

- **Instructor capacity matters**

The model depends on skilled instructors who can scaffold effectively. This includes breaking down competencies and providing targeted feedback.

CBE DESIGN & IMPLEMENTATION

Putting CBE into Practice in YouthBuild Programs

The sections below outline the key components of a strong competency-based education model—from defining competencies to designing instruction and assessing mastery.

To support implementation, the following checklist presents these concepts as actionable steps. Programs can use the checklist as a planning, reflection, or continuous improvement tool while building a CBE model that values participants and prepares them for real-world success.

TOOL



Implementing CBE: From Vision to Practice

This checklist will help programs move from understanding competency-based education to implementation.

1. Build Understanding and Buy-In

- ☐ Facilitate discussions with leadership, staff, and partners about the benefits and challenges of a CBE model
- ☐ Align the CBE approach with program values, outcomes, and workforce goals
- ☐ Clearly define what “competency” and “mastery” mean within your program
- ☐ Provide initial and ongoing staff training on CBE principles and practices
- ☐ Identify a point person or team to lead implementation and troubleshoot issues

2. Define Scope and Rollout Plan

- Set a realistic timeline with clear phases (pilot → refine → expand)
- Identify which classes, content areas, or cohorts will begin first

3. Identify and Define Core Competencies

- Select 3-4 high-priority competencies (e.g., communication, critical thinking) aligned to:
 - Academic skills
 - Workforce readiness
 - Program values (e.g., teamwork, responsibility)
- Write clear, measurable competency statements
- Ensure competencies are relevant to real-world and career contexts
- Validate competencies with instructors and, if possible, industry partners

4. Develop Clear, Usable Rubrics

- Create rubrics for each competency with defined performance levels
- Use student-friendly language so participants can understand expectations
- Include examples of what mastery looks like at each level
- Calibrate scoring across staff to ensure consistency
- Revise rubrics based on staff and participant feedback

5. Align Curriculum and Instruction

- Use backward planning to align lessons, projects, and assessments to competencies
- Design learning activities that allow multiple ways to demonstrate mastery
- Embed real-world, hands-on, and project-based learning opportunities
- Integrate reading, writing, and math into all content areas where possible

6. Build Systems for YouthBuild Participant Ownership

- Create tools for participant progress tracking (e.g., dashboards, portfolios)
- Incorporate regular self-assessment and goal-setting routines
- Teach participants how to interpret rubrics and feedback
- Provide structured opportunities for reflection on learning and growth

7. Instructional Supports

- Use scaffolding strategies to support learners at different levels
- Provide differentiated instruction based on individual needs
- Incorporate explicit instruction of executive functioning skills (e.g., time management, organization)
- Ensure pacing flexibility so participants can progress at different rates

8. Provide Ongoing Feedback and Assessment

- Deliver frequent, specific, and actionable feedback to participants
- Use formative assessments to guide instruction and support
- Allow multiple opportunities for participants to demonstrate mastery
- Track progress toward competencies consistently across instructors
- Hold regular data reviews to identify trends and needed supports

9. Monitor, Reflect, and Improve

- Gather feedback from participants, staff, and partners
- Analyze outcomes (completion, skill gains, engagement, credential attainment)
- Identify implementation challenges and barriers
- Adjust competencies, rubrics, and instructional practices as needed
- Share successes and lessons learned across the program

10. Sustain and Scale

- Integrate CBE into onboarding for new staff
- Build ongoing professional development around CBE practices
- Align CBE with case management and job developer services
- Document systems and tools for consistency
- Plan for expansion across the full program

Created with ChatGPT, human edit ⁶

Designing Competencies

Aligned to CBE Checklist Section 3: Identify and Define Core Competencies

YouthBuild program staff should begin by selecting competencies. To ensure focus and usability, programs should prioritize a small set of core competencies (typically 3–4). Strong competencies reflect program values, employer expectations, and academic goals. For GED or HiSET programs, competencies should emphasize academic skills as well as transferable skills such as problem-solving, communication, and persistence.

Next, staff collaborate to draft strong competency statements (see [Criteria for Strong Competency Statements](#) and [Sample Competency Statements](#) tools to support development). Developing competencies collaboratively builds staff ownership and ensures consistent implementation. When all staff understand and reinforce competencies, this creates a more coherent and supportive learning experience for participants.

TOOL



YCSC Agents of Change Humanities Competencies

YouthBuild Program: Compton YouthBuild

Location: Compton, CA

Education Partner: YouthBuild Charter School of California

1. Command of Language

a. Reading/Literacy

⁶ PROMPT: ChatGPT, can you take my notes for “implementing competency-based education checklist” and turn them into a clean list, framing bullets as actionable items and suggesting anything I may have left out?

- b. Vocabulary (determine meaning from context, word roots)
- c. English Conventions (grammar)

2. Theoretical Frameworks

- a. Apply to various disciplines for literary & historical analysis

3. Close Reading of a Text

- a. Infer meaning and make connections to personal lives
- b. Connect writing to other disciplines
- c. “Response to Text” (literature, social studies, science, graphs/visuals)
- d. Identify writer and intended audience, identify bias, and develop an analysis with guiding theoretical frameworks

4. Critical Media/Digital Literacy

- a. Identifying credible sources and different types of sources
- b. Analysis of Media
- c. Ability to Create New Media or Counternarratives

5. Writing Process

- a. Research
- b. Style (MLA, APA citation) conventions
- c. Prewriting: Note-taking, Outlines, Brainstorms
- d. Editing/Revise/Reflect

6. Essay Writing

- a. Response to the topic/prompt
- b. Understanding and use of the passage/source provided
- c. Quality, depth, and clarity of thought
- d. Organization (Development & Support)
- e. Sentence structure and command of language
- f. Grammar, usage, and mechanics
- g. Types of Essay: Narrative, Argumentative, Expository Essay

7. Communicating a Message

- a. Writing a speech
- b. Presenting/Public speaking
 - i. Using appropriate language conventions (code-switching)
 - ii. Citing research
 - iii. Using various media
 - iv. Effectively engaging an audience

TOOL



YCSC Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) Rubric

YouthBuild Program: Compton YouthBuild

Location: Compton, CA

Education Partner: YouthBuild Charter School of California

When the STEM competencies below are assessed in an Authentic Performance Task (APT), use this rubric.



Questions & Defining Problems

- 5** Learners formulate their own questions or hypotheses (if/then statements) to evaluate empirically testable questions.
e.g., Ask questions to determine relationships, including quantitative relationships, between independent and dependent variables.
Ask questions that can be investigated within the scope of the school laboratory, research facilities, or field (e.g., outdoor environment) with available resources and, when appropriate, frame a hypothesis based on a model or theory.
- 4** Learners formulate their own questions or hypotheses (if/then statements) but it is not a testable empirical question
- 3** Learners use teacher-guided questions or hypotheses (if/then statements) to evaluate empirically testable questions.
- 2** Learners use teacher-guided questions or hypotheses (if/then statements) and do not evaluate empirical testable questions.
- 1** No questions or hypotheses developed.



Models

- 5** Learners construct and revise models to explain phenomena and discuss the limitations and precision of the model.
e.g., Develop and/or use a model (including mathematical and computational) to generate data to support explanations, predict phenomena, analyze systems, and/or solve problems.
- 4** Learners construct models and explain phenomena, but they cannot revise models based on new evidence.
- 3** Learners construct models but do not provide a key to explain the models.
- 2** Learner uses models provided by the teacher. Learner uses explanation provided by teacher.
- 1** No models constructed and/ or explained.



Investigations

- 5 Learners develop original procedures and protocols to plan and conduct a full investigation to produce data that serve as the basis for evidence.
e.g., decide on types, how much, and the accuracy of data needed to produce reliable measurements and consider limitations on the precision of the data (e.g., number of trials, cost, risk, time), and refine the design accordingly.
- 4 Learners plan and conduct a full investigation, using support and scaffolding provided by the teacher/lab report. The students make some choices.
- 3 Learners plan and conduct a partial investigation, using support and scaffolding provided by the teacher/lab report. Students make few choices.
- 2 Learners plan and conduct a partial investigation, but all procedures and protocols come directly from a teacher/lab report.
- 1 No investigation is completed.



Interpret & Analyze Data

- 5 Learners independently represent and analyze data to identify patterns, trends, or relationships. They interpret data in light of models and theories.
e.g., Analyzing data in 9-12 builds on K-8 experiences and progresses to introducing more detailed statistical analysis, comparing data sets for consistency, and using models to generate and analyze data.
- 4 Learners independently represent and analyze data to identify patterns, trends, or relationships. However, the learner cannot interpret the data in light of models and theories.
- 3 Learners are guided on how to represent and analyze data to identify patterns, trends, or relationships. No interpretations of data.
- 2 Learners explicitly use teacher-guided responses or regurgitated texts to represent the analyzed data. No interpretations of data.
- 1 No data analyzed and no interpretation completed.



Construct Explanations & Design Solutions

- 5 Learners construct their own explanations for STEM phenomena and develop a design prototype for an evidence-based solution.
e.g., Design, evaluate, and/or refine a solution to a complex real-world problem, based on scientific knowledge, student-generated sources of evidence, prioritized criteria, and trade-off considerations.
- 4 Learners construct their own explanations but cannot design a prototype for an evidence-based solution.
- 3 Learners are guided by teachers on how to use evidence to construct science explanations and cannot design a prototype for an evidence-based solution.
- 2 Learners require teachers to give explicit explanations in order to create models to explain science phenomena.
- 1 No constructed explanations or designed prototypes.



Obtain, Evaluate, and Communicate Information

- 5 Learners can independently analyze evidence (often in the form of data) and formulate own conclusions/ explanations.
e.g., Evaluate the validity and reliability of and/or synthesize multiple claims, methods, and/or designs that appear in scientific and technical texts or media reports, verifying the data when possible.
- 4 Learners can independently analyze evidence but cannot formulate their own conclusions/explanations.
- 3 Learners are guided to specific pieces of analyzed evidence to draw conclusions and/or formulate explanations.
- 2 Learners are directed on how to analyze evidence and regurgitate the conclusion/ explanation from text.
- 1 No evidence, analyzed, or conclusions drawn.



Engage in Arguments from Evidence

- 5 Learners adequately describe content and layout to be used to communicate and justify their conclusions and explanations.
e.g., Evaluate competing design solutions to a real-world problem based on scientific ideas and principles, empirical evidence, and/or logical arguments regarding relevant factors (e.g. economic, societal, environmental, ethical considerations).
- 4 Learners are able to communicate arguments but require teacher provided content or layout.
- 3 Learners rely on teacher provided content and/or layout to make their argument.
- 2 Learners regurgitate content and/or layout that teacher provided
- 1 No argument given rooted in evidence.



Tools

- 5 Learners are sufficiently familiar with the tools appropriate to their course to make sound decisions about when each tool might be helpful, recognizing both the insights to be gained and its limitations.
e.g., tools: beakers, graphing calculators, etc.
- 4 Learners are familiar with tools appropriate for their course to make sound decisions about when each of these tools might be helpful.
- 3 Learners are guided by the teacher to select tools appropriate for their course, making sound decisions about when each tool might be helpful, recognizing both the insights to be gained and its limitations.
- 2 Learners are given and used tools by their teacher that are appropriate for their course to make sound decisions.
- 1 No STEM tools are used.

This rubric is based on the information from Appendix F of the Next Generation Science Standards © 2011, 2012, 2013 Achieve, Inc. & Math Habits of Mind Strategies

Designing Assessment Rubrics

Aligned to CBE Checklist Section 4: Develop Clear, Usable Rubrics

Clear rubrics are essential for both YouthBuild course content development and participant self-monitoring. Clear rubrics help staff to select topics and design course materials for skill practice and progress toward mastery.

While rubric language should be student-friendly, rubric measures also create an opportunity for staff to expose students to employer language and develop vocabulary skills. Staff should use a variety of action verbs in the rubrics and pre-teach them to YouthBuild participants.

For more complex competencies and rubrics, such as the collaboration rubric shared below, instructors can select one or two aspects of each competency characteristic. For example, a project used to practice collaboration might focus on “Interacting Effectively with Others”--Aspect A (asking questions), and “Being Part of a Team” –Aspect D (organization).

TOOL

Competency Rubric Examples

Resource Origin: RiseUp Community School
Location: Denver, CO

Review the following examples for ideas for rubric designs.

Collaboration: Collaboration means...

Quality 1: Interacting Effectively with Others

Suggestions for Evidence:

- *Video of student group conversations*
- *Peer or teacher evaluation of student group interactions*
- *Student self-reflection/self-assessment of student group evaluations*

1- Emerging • Asks questions but may be off topic or based on limited understanding. (A) • At times addresses others without kindness. (B) • May speak when others are speaking. (C) • Unable to merge group ideas into common approach to the task. (D)
2 - Developing • Making progress toward proficiency. For example, may ask general questions to clarify understanding of speaker’s point of view. • Making progress toward proficiency. For example, addresses others with a tone of respect, with minor lapses.

- Making progress toward proficiency. For example, shares “airtime” by allowing others to speak but may occasionally take over conversation
- Making progress toward proficiency. For example, listens to ideas of others and attempts to arrive at a common approach.

3 - Proficient

- Acknowledges and helps clarify the ideas of others by asking probing questions.
- Addresses others with respect. Responds to different ideas and works to resolve problems with productive discussion.
- Shares “airtime” and takes great care not to interrupt.
- Listens with interest to the ideas of others to arrive at a successful common approach.

4 - Advanced

IN ADDITION,

- Invites and encourages other group members to contribute.
- Shows appreciation for positive and constructive feedback.
- Honestly and accurately reflects on team and individual performance within that team.

Quality 2: Being a Part of the Team

Suggestions for Evidence:

- *Student project plan with dates and record of completed work*
- *Group member evaluations on timeliness of student work*
- *Feedback forms or google doc edits that one student gives to another or uses to improve own work*

1- Emerging

- Struggles to explain what success will look like for the team’s task. (A)
- Completes individual tasks but may turn in work late or incomplete. (B)
- Feedback is given to others but may not be constructive (ex- “good” or “bad”). (C)
- Needs extensive support from team members or teacher to organize task materials. (D)

2 - Developing

- Making progress toward proficiency. For example, can generally describe what success looks like for the team’s task, but may lack ability to be specific.
- Making progress toward proficiency. For example, completes individual tasks on time, but may need some prodding or reminding from group members.
- Making progress toward proficiency. For example, provides and accepts some constructive feedback to team members when prompted by teacher.
- Making progress toward proficiency. Makes relatively successful attempt to remain organized independently, with only occasional issues.

3 - Proficient

- Can clearly and specifically explain what success looks like for the team’s task.
- Completes individual tasks on time and with acceptable quality.
- Provides and incorporates positive and constructive feedback to/from team members without prompting.
- Keeps task materials complete and organized independently.

4 - Advanced

IN ADDITION,

- Works to ensure all group members are aware of tasks to complete.
- Actively encourages and motivates others to attain high level of achievement.
- Supports others to complete any necessary work to ensure the team's success.

Quality 3: Fulfilling Group Roles and Responsibilities

Suggestions for Evidence:

- Documentation of student roles within a group along with a description of how those roles were determined
- Student work calendars with outlines of reflections and next steps for individual and team
- Student/group task lists with narrative comments
- Video evidence of group debrief or planning sessions from the day
- Peer review/evaluation

1- Emerging

- Struggles to describe the short- and long-term tasks of the team's work. (A)
- Has trouble self-monitoring and needs direction from team members and teacher. (B)
- Has difficulty describing the roles and responsibilities of each team member. (C)
- Is resistant to suggestions from team members. (D)
- May be intimidated by large projects and is unable to generate a list of smaller tasks. (E)

2 - Developing

- Making progress toward proficiency. Can generally describe short- and long-term tasks of the team.
- Making progress toward proficiency. For example, monitors individual progress but is less aware of team next steps.
- Making progress toward proficiency. Can describe own role in detail and describe general responsibilities of each team member.
- Making progress toward proficiency. For example, can recognize own strengths and take on tasks accordingly to develop additional skills.
- Making progress toward proficiency. Can list tasks to divide project work but work may not be shared fairly or completely.

3 - Proficient

- Can clearly and specifically describe the short- and long-term tasks and purpose of the team's work.
- Monitors progress of team's efforts and is aware of team needs and next steps.
- Can clearly and specifically describe what roles and responsibilities each member of the team is expected to perform and how they are connected.
- Can effectively take direction from others and can help support other group roles based on individual strengths and assets.
- Can create a detailed task list that divides the project work reasonably among the team.

4 - Advanced

IN ADDITION,

- Works to ensure all team members understand the short- and long-term tasks.
- Provides helpful feedback to team on progress.
- Can identify the best ways for the team to work together and stay organized.
- Team member(s) select roles based on self-identified areas of growth or development.
- Identifies and partners with key team members for success of the project.

Critical Thinking: A YB Participant can...

Quality	1 - Emerging	2 - Developing	3 - Proficient	4 - Advanced
1 – Define the Problem	Identifies the problem or topic and begins to describe what it is about with support.	Describes the problem or topic in their own words and includes some key details.	Clearly explains the problem using relevant details and sets clear boundaries for what needs to be addressed.	Clearly and thoroughly explains the problem, including its context and limits, and considers multiple perspectives.
2 – Asks Questions to Guide Thinking	Asks simple questions about the problem or topic with support.	Asks relevant questions that help build understanding of the problem.	Develops purposeful questions that guide investigation and uncover important information.	Generates thoughtful, open-ended questions that deepen understanding and lead to further inquiry.
3 – Gathers and Evaluates Evidence (Accuracy & Bias)	Begins to check if information is relevant, accurate, and/or fair with support.	Gathers 2-3 pieces of evidence. Questions whether information is relevant, accurate or biased, though may need support to fully explain.	Gathers evidence from multiple sources. Evaluates evidence for relevance, accuracy and bias and explains whether sources are trustworthy.	Gathers evidence from multiple, credible, and timely sources. Carefully evaluates and compares sources for relevance, accuracy and bias and clearly explains which are most reliable and why.

4 – Uses Evidence to Support a Claim	Begins to use evidence to support an idea or claim with support.	Uses evidence to support a claim, though connections may not always be clear or strong.	Selects relevant and accurate evidence that clearly supports a claim or stance.	Selects strong, credible evidence and clearly explains how it supports the claim, including addressing other viewpoints.
5 – Organizes Thinking and Evidence	With support, begins to organize ideas or information.	Organizes ideas in a basic way that shows some logical order.	Organizes evidence and ideas into a clear and logical structure.	Organizes evidence strategically to build a clear, logical, and effective line of reasoning.
6 – Draws and Explains Conclusions	With support, states a conclusion related to the problem or topic.	Provides a conclusion that connects to the problem.	Draws a clear and supported conclusion based on evidence.	Draws a well-reasoned conclusion, clearly explains the thinking behind it, and may suggest next steps or implications.
7 – Reflects on Thinking	With support, begins to describe how they approached the problem.	Describes some of the steps used to think through the problem.	Explains the reasoning process and choices made to reach a conclusion.	Reflects on their thinking, evaluates its strengths and limits, and considers how it could improve.

Adapted from RiseUp Community School Critical Thinking rubric

TOOL

Rubric Development Tips

Purpose

Use this tool to create competency rubrics that clearly define expectations, support consistent assessment, and help participants understand what progress and mastery look like. Strong rubrics focus on observable evidence of learning and provide meaningful feedback for growth.

DO

Focus on Observable Behaviors

Describe what participants can **demonstrate, produce, explain, or perform.**

Example Rubric Entry:

✓ "Uses evidence from multiple sources to support conclusions."

Define Clear Performance Levels

Differentiate performance levels with specific descriptions of increasing skill and independence.

Example Rubric Entry:

Developing	Proficient	Mastery
Identifies information from one source.	Evaluates information from multiple sources.	Synthesizes information from multiple sources to develop evidence-based conclusions.

Use Language that is Participant-Friendly but Builds Workforce Vocabulary

- Write descriptors participants can understand and use to monitor their own progress.
- Explicitly teach and discuss key rubric vocabulary (e.g., collaboration, initiative, accountability) so participants understand the language used to describe performance expectations.
- Use a variety of clear action verbs (e.g., analyze, evaluate, collaborate, organize, synthesize, communicate) to describe participant performance.

Ask:

"Based on this description, would a participant know what they need to do to improve?"

"What vocabulary terms should I pre-teach so participants can use the rubric independently?"

Focus on Growth Toward Mastery

Show progression from emerging skills to advanced application.

Example:

✓ Recall information → Analyze information → Apply information independently

Use Rubrics as Learning Tools

Review rubrics with participants before, during, and after assignments. Require participants to use rubrics to support self-reflection and goal setting.

DON'T**Don't Use Vague Terms**

Avoid words that cannot be directly observed or measured.

✗ **Instead of:** "Understands teamwork"

✓ **Use:** "Collaborates with peers, contributes ideas, and completes assigned responsibilities."

Don't Assess Multiple Skills in One Criterion

Keep each criterion focused on a single competency or skill.

✗ **Instead of:** "Communicates effectively and demonstrates leadership and professionalism"

✓ **Use:** Separate criteria for Communication, Leadership, and Professionalism.

Don't Define Performance Levels by Effort Alone

Rubrics should assess demonstrated competency, not just participation or effort.

✗ **Instead of:** "Tries hard" or "Participates most of the time"

✓ **Use:** "Consistently contributes relevant ideas and responds constructively to feedback."

Don't Make Mastery Perfection

Mastery means consistent, effective application of a competency—not flawless performance.

Remember:

✓ Mastery = Demonstrates the competency independently and consistently.

✗ Mastery ≠ Never makes mistakes.

Don't Include Criteria Unrelated to the Competency

Avoid grading unrelated behaviors unless they are separate competencies.

Example:

If assessing Reading, avoid including punctuality, attendance, or dress code in the reading rubric.

QUICK RUBRIC DEVELOPMENT CHECKLIST

Before using a rubric, ask:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Does each criterion align to a competency? ☐ Are the skills observable and measurable? ☐ Are performance levels clearly differentiated? ☐ Can participants understand the language? ☐ Does the rubric describe growth toward mastery? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☐ Does the rubric assess performance rather than effort alone? A strong competency rubric makes expectations transparent, promotes consistency, and helps participants see a clear path toward mastery. |
|--|--|

Created with ChatGPT, human edit⁷

⁷ ChatGPT, based on our previous discussions of CBE and [these examples] of competency rubrics, can you design a "do's and don'ts" style tool for CBE competency rubric development? This tool will be for educators learning to implement a CBE model for the first time.

Designing & Aligning Course Materials

Aligned to CBE Checklist Section 5: Align Curriculum and Instruction

In a competency-based education model, instruction is intentionally designed to help participants practice and demonstrate mastery of the desired competencies. This requires a shift from activity-based teaching to outcomes-based planning.

In this way, Competency-Based Education aligns well with project-based learning. A project-based learning approach creates opportunities for instructors to design coursework containing high-interest topics, multiple modalities, hands-on and/or real-world experience, and content exploration choices for YouthBuild participants. This allows participants to apply academic skills in meaningful, real-world contexts while building employability skills.

In the math unit example provided, participants will develop critical thinking skills by applying them to a real-world scenario: How do you select the best phone plan? At the same time, participants will practice a key algebra skill, solving and graphing linear equations.

In this example, critical thinking competencies from the rubric are applied to math. Participants work toward mastery by defining a problem, gathering and evaluating evidence, selecting evidence to support a claim, and drawing conclusions. Learning objectives and lesson activities are then designed to align with these competencies.

Finally, assessments are developed to measure whether competency-based objectives have been met, using the Critical Thinking Rubric to evaluate the level of mastery demonstrated in participant work.

Critical Thinking Competency and Matching Assessment:

Competency	Assessment
Define the Problem	Written Problem Statement
Gathers Evidence	Participant-generated tables and graphs
Evaluates Evidence	Participant explanation (verbally or in writing) of reliable evidence/sources
Uses Evidence to Support a Claim	Data chosen for project
Draws and Explains Conclusions	Participant Final Recommendation Project

Example Unit Plan

Unit Title: Finding the Best Phone Plan: Solving Real-World Problems with Linear Equations

Unit Theme / Real-World Connection:

Students use linear equations to model and solve real-world problems while developing critical thinking skills like evaluating evidence, explaining reasoning, and drawing conclusions.

Subject Area: Math **Instructor:** ----- **Unit Length:** 2 weeks (7-10 class periods)

Learning Objectives:

- Students will be able to:
 - Define a real-world problem using clear details and constraints
 - Represent situations with linear equations
 - Gather and evaluate information (numbers, graphs, context)
 - Use evidence to support a solution
 - Explain and justify conclusions clearly

Standards / Competencies: (Common Core State Standards, Workforce competencies, etc.)

- Solve linear equations in one variable
- Analyze and represent real-world situations using equations

Critical Thinking Competencies:

- Defines the Problem
- Gathers and Considers Evidence
- Evaluates Evidence (accuracy & bias)
- Selects Evidence to Support a Claim
- Draws and Explains Conclusions

Learning Activities:

- Days 1–2: Launch + Problem Framing
- Days 3–4: Build the Math Model
- Days 5–6: Evidence & Reasoning
- Days 7–8: Make a Claim
- Days 9–10: Performance Task (Culminating Assessment)

Description

- Present a real-world scenario: *“You are comparing two phone plans to decide which is the better deal.”* Students will identify the problem, ask questions, and define what matters (cost, usage, etc.)
- Students will: write linear equations for each plan, identify variables (cost, minutes, etc.) and graph or create tables
- Students will compare plans using tables and graphs. Then, they will evaluate: 1.) Is the data accurate? What assumptions are we making?
- Students answer: “Which plan is better and why?” Work must include an equation, evidence, and an explanation.
- FINAL TASK: “Best Plan Recommendation”: Students can choose to create either a written explanation OR a presentation. They will define the problem, show equations, use evidence (tables/graphs), justify their choice, and address at least one other possible viewpoint

Assessments:

Skill/Evidence

- Defines Problem (Written Problem Statement)
- Evidence Gathering (tables, graphs)
- Evaluation (explanation of reliable evidence/sources)
- Evidence Selection (chosen data)
- Conclusion (final project)

Materials/Resources:

- Project description
- Computers/Tablets
- Links to phone plans
- Slide deck
- Presentation materials
- Portfolios

Reflection: What worked? What didn’t?

Implementation: Supporting Participant Growth Toward Mastery

Aligned to CBE Checklist Sections 6–7: Ownership and Supports

Implementing CBE requires more than redesigning curriculum. It requires intentional instructional practices that support participants as they build skills, confidence, and independence. The strategies below help ensure that all participants, regardless of starting point, can make meaningful progress toward mastery.

Scaffolding

- To guide YouthBuild participants through the competency-based skills progression (emerging -- developing -- proficient -- advanced) (see [CBE Key Terms](#) for more information), instructors should utilize scaffolding techniques within each lesson.
- There are several ways that instructors can provide scaffolding support for students in a CBE model. Some examples of scaffolding techniques are:
 - Thinking/discussion demonstrations (e.g. think-alouds)
 - Activate prior knowledge
 - Pre-teach vocabulary
 - Use visual aids (e.g. graphic organizers, models)
- Scaffolding practices support participants as they engage with new ideas and skills. For example, scaffolding during the math project might look like this:
 - Instructor activates participant prior knowledge during the introduction of linear equations by referencing variables or equations used in previous lessons. Alternatively, the instructor can ask students to share examples of times they've had issues with the cost of their phone plans or of other times they've had to make a choice based on cost, like where or what to eat, types of transportation to use, etc. to connect to students' problem solving prior knowledge.
 - Instructor uses think-aloud during phone plan research mini-lesson so that students can see how he/she asks questions to evaluate information. Instructor may say something like:
 - *This plan seems like a good value, but what else do I need to consider? Are some important pieces of information missing? How is the website spinning information to try to hook me as a consumer?*
 - The instructor provides **visual aids**, such as templates, graphic organizers and models, to show participants what their final products should look like.

Ongoing Feedback (Instructor and Peer)

- Instructors can support participant growth by building in opportunities to provide guided feedback. Feedback should be constructive and tied to the competency rubrics and course objectives and delivered with clear and actionable steps that the participant can implement. While instructor feedback is useful, peer feedback can also be a productive tool that allows both the participant giving feedback and participant receiving feedback to learn.
- Instructors can create feedback forms that either contain the actual competency rubric (see instructor feedback example) or forms that contain questions and guidance for providing competency and skill-based feedback (see peer feedback example).

TOOL

Instructor Feedback Example

Resource Origin: RiseUp Community School
Location: Denver, CO

Critical Thinking: A YB Participant can...

	1 - Emerging	2 - Developing	3 - Proficient	4 - Advanced
1 – Define the Problem	Identify the problem or topic and begin to describe what it is about with support.	Describe the problem or topic in their own words and include some key details.	Clearly explain the problem using relevant details and set clear boundaries for what needs to be addressed.	Clearly and thoroughly explain the problem, including its context and limits, and consider multiple perspectives.

Instructor Feedback for Written Problem Statement

CURRENT COMPETENCY LEVEL: 2

Dear student, you were clearly able to describe the problem in your own words. Great! I noticed that you also completed the sentence stem “To investigate this problem, I will…” with “compare two phone plans.” To move up to Competency Level 3, please “set clear boundaries for what needs to be addressed.” For example, you can complete two additional sentence stems: “I will focus on…” and “I will not focus on…” These sentence stems will help you to include information about what details ARE important to the problem and what details ARE NOT.

Adapted from RiseUp Community School, competency feedback form

TOOL



Peer Feedback Example

Resource Origin: RiseUp Community School

Location: Denver, CO

Best Phone Plan Math Project: Peer Feedback

Name: _____

- Presenter(s):

- According to the presenter(s), what is the problem?

- What phone plans were compared in the presentation?

_____ and _____

- What types of content did you see in this project? (Circle all that apply.)

Text

Equations

Graphs

Calculations

Tables

Other: _____

- I agree / disagree with the presenter(s) claim because: (provide evidence from the project)

- What is one question you have for the presenter(s) based on this project?

- The presenter(s) can improve their project by (check all that apply):

- Adding more content, such as: explanation images data calculations

- Correcting or editing their content, specifically: _____

- Fixing spelling and grammar errors

- Adding / changing _____ because it is:

unclear

incorrect

missing

messy

Adapted from RiseUp Community School, Peer Feedback Form

Explicit Instruction of Executive Functioning Skills

- Because YouthBuild participants work at their own pace and present evidence from their own work to self-grade in a CBE model, they will need explicit instruction and support to develop time management and organization skills.
- Some materials and forms to support students as they develop executive functioning skills include:
 - o Class syllabi with lists of assignments and evidence
 - o Binders or portfolios with Table of Contents forms
 - o Binder or portfolio dividers
 - o Areas within class to store printouts of materials (such as bins, milk crates, labeled shelves, lockers, etc.)
 - o Scheduling time into lessons or days for students to select, file, organize and review competency evidence

TOOL



Portfolio Organizing Form

MATH PORTFOLIO
TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 1. Written Problem Statement
Competency: Defines the Problem
- 2. Visual Representation of Data (tables, graphs)
Competency: Gathering Evidence
- 3. Written Source/Evidence Explanation
Competency: Evaluation
- 4. Best Phone Plan: Final Project
Competencies: Evaluation & Conclusion

Flexibility and Timing

- Balance flexibility with structure by recognizing that, while competency-based models allow time for mastery, YouthBuild programs operate within fixed timelines.
- Set clear schedules and project deadlines to establish expectations and keep participants on track.
- Build in dedicated independent work time so participants who need additional time can continue working toward mastery beyond regular class periods.

Assessing Mastery

Aligned to CBE Checklist Section 8: Provide Ongoing Feedback and Assessment

In a competency-based model, assessments measure what participants can do, not just what they know. Effective assessments provide multiple opportunities for participants to demonstrate mastery in meaningful ways.

These practices reinforce the idea that participants are capable of growth and can reach high expectations through feedback, revision, and persistence.

Assessment Best Practices:

- Design meaningful, measurable opportunities for participants to demonstrate mastery (e.g., projects, portfolios, presentations, exhibitions).
- Use competency rubrics during assessment to determine whether participants have demonstrated mastery.
- Incorporate structured self-assessment by allowing participants to provide evidence in varied formats (e.g., written reflection, project, portfolio), and require a staff conference to review and confirm final self-assessment decisions.

TOOL



Portfolio Assessment Guide (CBE Model)

Use this guide to structure, evaluate, and provide feedback on participant portfolios. A strong portfolio clearly demonstrates mastery through intentional selection of work, reflection, and alignment to expectations.

Components of a Strong Participant Portfolio:

1. Portfolio Title

- Is specific and purposeful (not generic like “My Work”)
- Helps the reviewer immediately understand the context of the portfolio
- **Strong Portfolio:**
 - Title is descriptive, relevant, and aligned to learning goals
Example: “Community Housing Solutions Project” instead of “Final Portfolio”

2. Introduction to Competencies and Mastery Criteria

- Clearly defines relevant competencies and performance levels (e.g., Emerging, Developing, Proficient, Advanced)
- Describes what mastery looks like in observable, measurable terms
- **Strong Portfolio:**
 - Competencies are explicitly stated and consistently referenced throughout artifacts and reflection
 - Clear connection between competencies and real-world application
Example: “Data Analysis,” “Written Communication,” “Collaboration”
 - Demonstrates work at the Proficient (or higher) level for each competency
 - Evidence clearly matches defined mastery criteria—not just completion of tasks

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Example: “Data Analysis,” “Written Communication,” “Collaboration”
 - Demonstrates work at the Proficient (or higher) level for each competency
 - Evidence clearly matches defined mastery criteria—not just completion of tasks

3. Artifacts (Evidence of Learning)

- Includes multiple, varied artifacts that demonstrate mastery
- Artifact examples:
 - Research summaries
 - Data charts or graphs
 - Written proposals or essays
 - Presentation slides or multimedia
- Artifacts are **intentional and relevant**, not just a collection of all work completed
- Demonstrates mastery (at proficient or higher) by comparing artifacts to rubric
- Emphasizes mastery as a process, not a one-time submission
- **Strong Portfolio:**
 - Each artifact clearly aligns to at least one competency
 - Work shows growth, rigor, and revision (not just first drafts)
 - Includes brief context or description explaining the purpose of each artifact
 - Demonstrates real-world relevance and application
 - Feedback is clearly incorporated into updated work
 - Final portfolio represents the participant’s highest level of performance, not first attempts
 - No extraneous or unrelated work included—everything serves a defined purpose

4. Participant Reflection

- Participant reflects on:
 - What they learned
 - Strengths and challenges
 - How their work demonstrates mastery
- Reflection connects specific artifacts to competencies
- **Strong Portfolio:**
 - Reflection is thoughtful, specific, and honest (not surface-level)
 - Uses concrete examples from artifacts as evidence
 - Shows awareness of growth and next steps
 - Clearly explains how and why competencies were met
 - Reflection explicitly references how artifacts demonstrate mastery

5. Portfolio Organization & Presentation

- Requires a clear, logical structure for the portfolio (e.g., sections, labels, navigation)
- Includes brief descriptions or context for each artifact
- Emphasizes professional and audience-appropriate presentation
- **Strong Portfolio:**
 - Well-organized and easy to navigate
 - Artifacts are clearly labeled and introduced with purpose
 - Presentation is polished, professional, and appropriate for sharing beyond the classroom

Overall Indicators of a Strong Portfolio

- Purposeful and well-organized
- Clearly aligned to competencies throughout
- Demonstrates depth of understanding and skill application
- Includes meaningful reflection and evidence of growth
- Shows readiness for real-world or next-level learning

Instructor Evaluation Criteria: Rubric-Based Evaluation

- Instructor uses a clear, competency-aligned rubric
- Provides:
 - Scores for each competency
 - Specific, actionable feedback; for example:

Strengthen evidence *"You described your teamwork skills well, but your portfolio would be stronger if you included a specific example of a group project and explained your role and contributions."*

Provide more detail *"You reached a reasonable conclusion, but I don't see enough evidence showing how you arrived at that conclusion. To strengthen this artifact, explain the facts, data, observations, or experiences you used to support your decision and how they influenced your thinking."*

Improve organization *"Your presentation included strong examples, but they were difficult to follow. Consider organizing each competency section using a consistent format: competency, evidence, reflection, and future goal."*

Increase reflection *"This artifact shows your perspective on the issue, but a Critical Thinking Level 3 typically includes consideration of other viewpoints or factors. Consider adding a reflection that explains other perspectives you considered and why you ultimately chose your final approach."*

- **Strong Evaluation:**
 - Evaluation focuses on evidence of mastery, not just completion
 - Feedback is specific and tied directly to competencies
 - Instructor identifies opportunities for revision or improvement
 - Participant understands how to improve or deepen learning

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit ⁸

⁸ PROMPT: ChatGPT, create a portfolio assessment guide for instructors implementing a competency-based education model. The guide should include bullets or sections for the following portfolio assessment components: • Portfolio Title – based on class or project • Competencies – determine 2-3 competencies to assess • Artifacts – provide opportunities for participants to demonstrate mastery through coursework evidence, such as research summaries, data charts, written proposals, or presentation slides • Student Reflection – participants should reflect on learning, project strengths and challenges, and how evidence reflects competencies mastery • Rubric-Based Evaluation – instructor provides rubric score and notes or conference opportunity for discussing. The guide should be in a list format and should emphasize what a strong participant portfolio assessment looks like. Suggest anything I may have missed.



Finding the Best Phone Plan

Directions: Act as a smart consumer trying to choose the best phone plan. Your job is to analyze multiple phone plan options and make a recommendation using math and evidence. You may work with a partner or independently. Partners must both have copies of all documents and evidence. You may share your presentation materials.

Goal: This project is not just about getting the right answer; it's about: Thinking clearly, using evidence, and explaining your reasoning like a problem-solver.

Critical Thinking Steps:

1. Define the Problem

- What are you trying to figure out?
- What information matters?
(e.g., cost, usage, etc.)

2. Create a Math Model

- Write **linear equations** for each phone plan
- Identify variables
(e.g., number of months, cost per month)

3. Gather Evidence

- Use: Table, Graphs, Calculations

4. Evaluate Your Information

- Is your math correct?
- Are your comparisons fair?
- What assumptions are you making?

5. Make a Claim

- Choose the best plan
- Support your answer with clear evidence

6. Explain Your Thinking

- Show how your math connects to your answer
- Explain why your choice makes sense

Final Product: You will create ONE of the following:

- Written explanation that includes equations and visuals (1–2 pages), OR
- Presentation with a poster or visual report

Final Product Checklist	
✓ A clear explanation of the problem	✓ A clear claim (your choice)
✓ At least 2 phone plans modeled with equations	✓ An explanation of your reasoning
✓ Evidence (tables, graphs, or calculations)	✓ Consideration of another possible choice

CBE ALIGNMENT WITH EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE READINESS

Competency-Based Education for a GED or HiSET Program

To understand how a competency-based education model can support GED or HiSET attainment, instructors can align YouthBuild education goals with the transferable workforce skills participants should acquire while in the program.

HSE instructors can use test content and skills (like reading and math) as guidance for competency development by reframing them as transferable skills. “Can a participant solve a linear equation?” becomes, “Can a participant apply problem-solving principles to find the correct answer?” Participants still learn how to solve linear equations, but now academic skill development aligns with the boarder goal of transferable skill development and competency-based education.

GED/HSE instructional staff may need to restructure class schedules to support a competency-based model. While direct subject-area instruction remains essential, instructors can incorporate independent study time to allow participants to self-pace their learning. This approach enables participants who need additional practice in areas such as math or language arts to focus their efforts, while also allowing those who have demonstrated mastery to move on to new competencies.

- **PRO TIP:** To adopt a competency-based education mindset, adjust thinking:

Traditional Mindset	CBE Mindset
This participant passed the US history assessment because they got 22 out of 25 questions right.	This participant demonstrated mastery of critical thinking in US history because she came to a logical conclusion based on the reading material and backed up her idea with evidence (critical thinking competency).
This participant completed the language arts reading passage but only received 3 out of 5 points on the comprehension question worksheet	This participant completed the worksheet, but he still needs more practice to confidently identify the main idea (reading competency).

TOOL



Competencies that Align Test-Taking Skills with Workforce Readiness Skills

1. Applied Reading & Information Processing

Participants can read, interpret, and use written information to complete tasks, solve problems, and make decisions.

Key Skills Included:

- Reading comprehension (informational texts, instructions, workplace documents)
- Identifying main ideas, details, and evidence
- Interpreting charts, graphs, and tables
- Following multi-step directions

Why it works:

GED/HiSET Skills	Workforce Application
Core reading & data interpretation	Reading and interpreting manuals, emails, and safety instructions

Sample Performance Indicators:

- Accurately summarizes key points from a text or document
- Uses written instructions to complete a task without assistance
- Extracts relevant data from charts/graphs to answer questions

2. Written Communication for Purpose

Participants can clearly express ideas in writing for different audiences and goals.

Key Skills Included:

- Grammar, sentence structure, organization
- Writing for specific purposes (email, explanation, argument)
- Editing and revising

Why it works:

GED/HiSET Skills	Workforce Application
Extended response writing	Writing emails, reports, and other documentation

Sample Performance Indicators:

- Writes clear, organized responses with supporting details
- Adapts tone and format for different contexts (formal/informal)
- Revises writing based on feedback

3. Problem Solving (Quantitative Reasoning)

Participants can use math and logical reasoning to solve real-world and test-based problems.

Key Skills Included:

- Basic math operations, algebra, and data analysis
- Estimation and checking for reasonableness
- Applying math to real-life scenarios (budgeting, measurements)

Why it works:

GED/HiSET Skills	Workforce Application
Solving math word problems	Everyday problem-solving and decision-making

Sample Performance Indicators:

- Selects appropriate strategies to solve math problems
- Explains reasoning clearly (not just answers)
- Applies math skills to real-world situations

4. Critical Thinking & Decision-Making

Participants can analyze information, evaluate options, and make informed decisions.

Key Skills Included:

- Analyzing arguments and evidence
- Comparing options and outcomes
- Drawing logical conclusions

Why it works:

GED/HiSET Skills	Workforce Application
Reasoning across all subjects	Applying problem-solving skills and adapting to challenges

Sample Performance Indicators:

- Evaluates multiple solutions and justifies choices
- Identifies bias, assumptions, or weak reasoning
- Uses evidence to support conclusions

5. Self-Management & Professional Habits

Participants can manage time, behavior, and responsibilities to meet goals.

Key Skills Included:

- Attendance, punctuality, task completion
- Time management during tests
- Goal setting and progress monitoring
- Organization and preparedness
- Managing test anxiety

Why it works:

GED/HiSET Skills	Workforce Application
Persistence and study habits	Reliability and accountability on the job

Sample Performance Indicators:

- Completes tasks, such as projects, within time constraints
- Comes prepared with required materials
- Tracks and reflects on personal progress

6. Learning Strategies & Persistence

Participants can learn independently, use feedback, and persist through challenges.

Key Skills Included:

- Study strategies (note-taking, reviewing, practice)
- Asking for help appropriately
- Growth mindset and resilience

Why it works:

GED/HiSET Skills	Workforce Application
Long-term preparation	Continuous learning for ongoing workplace opportunities and advancement

Sample Performance Indicators:

- Uses multiple strategies to understand new material
- Seeks support when needed
- Persists through difficult tasks without giving up

Created with ChatGPT, human edit⁹



⁹ PROMPT: ChatGPT, based on what you know about workforce-readiness skills and competencies and also the test taking skills that participants will need to pass the GED or HiSET, please generate a list of competencies that would be a good fit to cover both these skill areas.

CBE for Programs with Education Component Partnerships

YouthBuild programs that use an outside education partner to provide education component instruction can take the following steps to move toward a CBE model:

- Meet with the education partner to introduce CBE, model benefits, program alignment opportunities, and goals
- Provide partner leadership and instructors with competency rubrics
- Invite partners to YouthBuild program staff CBE trainings when launching the CBE model
- Start small by requesting that partners align one unit or one project with CBE

Alternatively, for programs that utilize online curriculum, instructional staff can use competency-based education for other internal classes, such as job-readiness training (JRT Competencies) or leadership development (YouthBuild Leadership Competencies).

YouthBuild program staff can provide competency goals and rubrics within other areas of YouthBuild programming and require one-on-one check-ins with participants to discuss competency progress and evidence.

Note: Staff will need to provide participants with training to self-monitor and track evidence. An organization's competency can support participants as they work to develop these independent skills.

Problem-Based Service Learning

SECTION 2.2

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INTRODUCTION

Problem-Based Service Learning (PBSL) is an instructional model that engages participants in meaningful, real-world work by integrating problem-solving with community action. Participants investigate complex, realistic issues, apply academic knowledge and skills, and develop actionable solutions that address identified community needs. This process builds critical thinking, communication, and lifelong learning skills¹ while fostering strong youth voice, leadership, and engagement.

¹ S.S. Ali, "Problem Based Learning: A Student-Centered Approach", 2019, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1212283.pdf>

In practice, participants research community problems, design and implement solutions, and reflect on their impact, connecting classroom learning directly to real-world outcomes.

Programs can also use this model in tandem with Competency-Based Education (CBE) when they have designed competencies that participants can demonstrate through project development.

Problem-Based Learning Principles

1. Participant learning is self-directed, with the instructor serving as a guide
2. Learning happens in small groups
3. All groups and participants must contribute to the process
4. Participants learn collaboration and executive functioning skills like motivation, teamwork, and engagement as part of the process
5. Participants access materials in a variety of modalities, such as data, photographs, and articles, to solve the problem. ²

Service-Learning Principles

1. Project curriculum is rooted in the community, including opportunities to analyze community data, seek community voices and consider multiple perspectives, and pursue real community outcomes
2. Participants can act as community stewards and practice professionalism and communication skills.
3. Participants engage with the community. This could look like community-based research, direct service, project-based work, or advocacy and policy work.
4. Reflect on service-based experiences to determine participant and community ³outcomes.

IMPLEMENTING PBSL

Putting PBSL into Practice in YouthBuild Programs

The sections below outline the core components of problem-based service learning—from identifying meaningful community problems to facilitating projects and assessing impact. To support implementation, the following checklist translates these ideas into actionable steps. Programs can use this tool to plan, launch, and refine PBSL experiences that center participant voice, build real-world skills, and create meaningful community impact.

² S.S. Ali, “Problem Based Learning: A Student-Centered Approach”, 2019, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1212283.pdf>

³ Adapted from Texas A&M University Center for Teaching Excellence, *Bridging Classrooms and Communities: An Introduction to Service-Learning*, [Bridging Classrooms and Communities](#), accessed March 31, 2026.

TOOL



Implementing PBSL: From Planning to Impact

This checklist helps programs move from understanding Problem-Based Service Learning (PBSL) to implementing participant-driven, skill-building, and community-centered projects.

1. Program & Instructor Readiness – Before developing a project, programs should:

- ☐ Train staff in PBSL facilitation (not just instruction—coaching, questioning, guiding)
- ☐ Build staff buy-in and shared understanding of PBSL goals and outcomes
- ☐ Establish flexible scheduling structures (e.g., extended project blocks, field time)
- ☐ Anticipate potential resource needs (transportation, materials, community partner access, technology)
- ☐ Get approval to pursue projects from program leadership and other key stakeholders

2. Identify Meaningful Community Problems

- ☐ Engage participants in identifying real community needs (not hypothetical problems)
- ☐ Consult with community partners to validate relevance and impact
- ☐ Ensure problems are relevant and meaningful to participants
- ☐ Ensure problems are achievable within program timelines

3. Align to Standards & Competencies

- ☐ Map project tasks to academic standards (GED/HiSET/diploma subject areas)
- ☐ Integrate workforce-readiness competencies (communication, teamwork, problem-solving)
- ☐ Embed thinking skills (analysis, evaluation, decision-making)
- ☐ Identify measurable learning outcomes
- ☐ Make learning goals and competencies transparent to participants (“what you’re learning and why”)

4. Project Planning

- ☐ Prepare project-aligned instructional materials (academic + workforce + life skills)
- ☐ Co-create a project plan with participants (voice and choice matter)
- ☐ Break project into clear phases (research, planning, execution, reflection)
- ☐ Establish timelines, milestones, and deliverables
- ☐ Assign roles and responsibilities within teams
- ☐ Anticipate risks and barriers (and plan contingencies)
- ☐ Build in checkpoints for feedback and adjustment

5. Facilitation (Instructor Role)

- ☐ Shift from direct instruction to guided facilitation
- ☐ Use questioning strategies to promote critical thinking
- ☐ Provide short, targeted lessons when participants get stuck or need a new skill (mini-lessons tied to project needs)
- ☐ Monitor group dynamics and intervene when needed
- ☐ Model problem-solving and professional behavior
- ☐ Normalize struggle and iteration as part of the learning process

6. Teach Collaboration Skills Explicitly

- ☐ Establish and teach communication norms (active listening, respectful dialogue)
- ☐ Model and practice teamwork strategies
- ☐ Define roles within groups (leader, recorder, presenter, etc.)
- ☐ Address conflict resolution directly
- ☐ Provide tools (protocols, sentence stems, team agreements)
- ☐ Assess collaboration using rubrics

7. Assessment & Evaluation

Participant Learning

- ☐ Align assessments to competencies and make rubrics visible to participants
- ☐ Assess academic skill development (reading, writing, math)
- ☐ Evaluate workforce competencies (reliability, teamwork, communication)
- ☐ Use multiple assessment formats (presentations, products, reflections)
- ☐ Include self- and peer-assessment

Project Impact

- ☐ Measure community impact (who benefited, how, and to what extent)
- ☐ Gather feedback from community partners
- ☐ Evaluate project quality and effectiveness

8. Reflection & Continuous Improvement

- ☐ Build in structured reflection throughout
- ☐ Use reflection prompts tied to skills and experiences
- ☐ Facilitate group debriefs after key milestones
- ☐ Document lessons learned for future cohorts

9. Showcase & Celebration

- ☐ Provide opportunities for participants to present their work publicly
- ☐ Invite community partners, staff, and peers
- ☐ Highlight both process and outcomes
- ☐ Celebrate growth, not just final products

10. Sustainability & Program Integration

- ☐ Build ongoing relationships with community partners
- ☐ Create systems to repeat or scale successful projects
- ☐ Integrate PBSL into core program structure (not a one-off activity)
- ☐ Train new staff in PBSL practices

Designed and formatted with ChatGPT, human edit ⁴

⁴ PROMPT: ChatGPT, here are my notes for an "implementing problem-based service learning education checklist" for YouthBuild programs. Can you take the notes and turn them into a clean list, framing bullets as actionable items and suggesting anything I may have left out?

Program and Instructor Preparation

Aligned to PBSL Checklist Section 1: Program & Instructor Readiness

The success of a problem-based service learning model depends on the preparation, flexibility, and skills of the implementing program staff. Instructors will need facilitator skills to guide participant group work as well as effective assessment methods to evaluate participant success.

To set a PBSL model up for success, programs must invest time and energy into instructor preparation, resource gathering, staff training, and schedule alignment. Additionally, instructors must nurture personal flexibility and agility to adapt to student interests and community needs. While specific lesson materials might not be reusable, instructors can use project processes, templates, and timelines repeatedly to reduce workload.⁵

Seek Meaningful Community Problems

Aligned to PBSL Checklist Section 2: Identify Meaningful Community Problems

The success of a PBSL project depends on selecting a problem that is both meaningful and actionable. Effective problems will be complex; they should reflect real challenges in the community that require critical thinking and collaboration to address.

Most importantly, participants must feel connected to the issue. When participants care about the problem, they are more engaged, persistent, and invested in the outcome. Programs should balance relevance with feasibility by selecting problems that:

- Matter to participants and their communities
- Can be addressed within program timelines
- Offer opportunities for real impact

Instructors should use their existing knowledge of the issues affecting the young people in the community, as well as the insights of participants, to identify community issues that will inspire them to act.

PRO TIPS:

- Remember: YouthBuild participants must care about the community issue for the project to succeed.
- Tap into YouthBuild participant interests and experience to determine high-interest topics to guide problem-based service learning. As early as YouthBuild Orientation, staff can conduct surveys or lead group discussions about community issues and needs that impact participants.
- Connect with existing youth leadership or policy councils to determine community-based problems on which to focus.
- Contact community partners for ideas prior to surveying participants to have a sense of existing needs and available resources.

⁵ Amoa-Danquah, P., & Carbonneau, K. J. (2025). A Systematic Review of Reviews on Problem-Based Learning and Its Effectiveness. *Current Issues in Education*, 26(2). <https://doi.org/10.14507/cie.vol26iss2.2293>

Ideas of PBSL Topics

1. Food Insecurity in Urban Neighborhoods

Driving Question: How can we improve access to healthy, affordable food in our community?

Student Action: Map food deserts, partner with local food banks, start a school-based pantry or community garden.

2. Public Transportation Access & Equity

Driving Question: How well does public transportation meet the needs of residents in our area?

Student Action: Survey riders, analyze routes/timing, present recommendations to city transit officials.

3. Youth Mental Health Awareness

Driving Question: How can we reduce stigma and increase access to mental health support for teens?

Student Action: Design peer campaigns, create resource guides, host student-led workshops.

4. Housing Affordability & Homelessness

Driving Question: What are the root causes of housing instability in our city, and how can youth help?

Student Action: Interview local organizations, create awareness campaigns, organize supply drives with purpose (not just charity).

5. School-to-Workforce Pipeline Gaps

Driving Question: Are students in our community prepared for local job opportunities?

Student Action: Interview employers, identify skill gaps, propose internship or training programs.

6. Community Safety & Violence Prevention

Driving Question: What factors contribute to unsafe conditions in our neighborhood, and how can they be addressed?

Student Action: Analyze data, partner with community groups, design youth-led prevention initiatives.

7. Digital Divide & Technology Access

Driving Question: Who in our community lacks access to reliable technology, and how can we help close the gap?

Student Action: Run tech literacy workshops, refurbish devices, advocate for better internet access.

Created with ChatGPT; human edit ⁶

⁶ PROMPT: ChatGPT, can you suggest 10 examples of problem-based service learning topics that could be addressed by high school aged students in urban settings?

Connecting to Academic Standards and Competencies

Aligned PBSL Checklist Section 3: Align to Standards and Competencies

Instructors can refer to curriculum standards guides and competency rubrics. Include opportunities across multiple subject areas, such as math, reading, and writing, as well as collaboration and executive functioning skills, such as time management and organization. Write learning objectives that align academic and problem-based service-learning goals.

Connecting to Academic Goals:

- Write learning objectives
- Design project descriptions and rubrics
- Determine scaffolding and differentiation opportunities
- Identify collaboration skills
- Design project assessment plan

Project Planning

Aligned to PBSL Checklist Section 4: Project Planning

To accommodate the participant-led, real-world manifestation of PBSL, instructors may find it most effective to frame PBSL units as projects.

PRO TIP:

Pre-Project Reminder – Do these things before curriculum planning:

- o Provide training, foster PBSL model buy-in, and enlist staff support (including leadership)
- o Request necessary permissions from program leadership and involved partners
- o Investigate community needs and potential partnerships
- o Identify possible funding sources or in-kind donation opportunities
- o Anticipate project barriers
- o Consider any safety risks or design a safety plan based on the project's unique elements

TOOL



Sample Participant Project Planning Template

NOTE: Programs do not need to implement every phase at full scale initially. Start with a simplified project and expand as staff and participants build confidence.

Skills applied:

- **Academic Skills:** Research & informational reading, writing (problem statements, reflections), and data analysis
- **Executive Function Skills:** Planning, task initiation, time management, and organization
- **Workforce Skills:** Teamwork, communication, accountability, and problem-solving

PHASE 1: DISCOVER & DEFINE THE PROBLEM

Goal: Identify a real, meaningful community problem

Step 1: Community Exploration

Key Questions:

- What issues do you see in your community?
Who is affected?
Why does this problem matter?

Participants will...

- Conduct observations
(neighborhood, school, online research)
- Interview at least 1–2 people
(community members, peers, staff)
- Gather basic facts or data

Create: *Problem Brainstorm List*

Step 2: Select & Narrow the Problem

Which problem is:

- Realistic to address?
- Important to your group?
- Possible to impact in your timeframe?

Participants will...

- Vote or reach consensus
- Narrow to one clear issue

Create: Final Problem Statement

Example (GED-level writing): *"Many students in our program do not have reliable access to healthy meals after school, which affects their energy and focus."*

PHASE 2: INVESTIGATE & UNDERSTAND

Goal: Understand root causes, not just symptoms

Step 3: Research the Problem

Key Questions:

- What causes this issue?
- What solutions already exist?
- What barriers prevent solutions?

Participants will...

- Conduct online research (articles, statistics)
- Interview stakeholders (teachers, organizations)
- Identify root causes

Create: *Research Notes + Key Findings*

Step 4: Identify Stakeholders

Key Questions:

- Who is impacted?
- Who can help solve the problem?

Participants will...

- Create a stakeholder map containing:
 - Affected group
 - Helpers/allies
 - Decision-makers

Create: *Stakeholder Map*

PHASE 3: PLAN THE SOLUTION

Goal: Design a realistic, actionable service project

Step 5: Brainstorm Solutions

Key Question:

- What are possible ways to address this problem?

Participants will...

- Generate at least 3 ideas
- Evaluate:
 - Impact
 - Is it realistic?
 - Resources needed

Create: *Solution Options List*

Step 6: Select One Solution + Define the Plan

Project Action Plan Key Questions:

- What are we going to do?
- Who will it help?
- Where will it happen?
- When will it happen?
- What resources do we need?
- Who is responsible for what?

Participants will...

- Choose best solution
- Answer project plan questions

Create: *Project Action Plan*

PHASE 4: PREPARE & BUILD

Goal: Get ready to implement

Step 7: Assign Roles

Examples:

- Project Manager
- Outreach Coordinator
- Materials Manager
- Data/Documentation Lead

Participants will...

- Assign group roles
- Determine group work agreements

Create: *Team Roles Sheet + Signed Agreements*

Step 8: Create Materials

Participants will...

- Design (examples):
 - Flyers
 - Social media posts
 - Scripts
 - Supplies list

Create: *Project Materials*

Step 9: Practice & Finalize

Participants will...

- Run through the plan
- Identify risks or challenges

Create: *Final Checklist*

PHASE 5: IMPLEMENT THE PROJECT

Goal: Take action in the community

Step 10: Carry Out the Project

Participants will...

- Execute the plan
- Track participation and results

Create:

- *Community Activity or Outcome*
- *Service Log (who, what, how many, impact)*

PHASE 6: REFLECT & EVALUATE

Goal: Turn experience into learning

Step 11: Reflect Individually + As a Group

Guiding Questions:

- What did we accomplish?
- What challenges did we face?
- What would we do differently?
- What did we learn about the issue?

Participants will...

- Reflect on outcomes with peers
- Reflect formally in writing

Create: *Reflection Responses*

Step 12: Measure Impact

Questions:

- Who was helped?
- How do we know?
- What evidence do we have?

Participants will...

- Compile project data

Create: *Impact Summary*

PHASE 7: SHARE & CELEBRATE

Goal: Build confidence; highlight growth, effort, and impact

Step 13: Present the Project

Options (examples):

- Presentation
- Video
- Poster
- Community showcase

Create: *Final Presentation*

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit ⁷

⁷ ChatGPT, please take this research [...] on problem-based service learning and then design a template for the steps that a class group (high school or YouthBuild-aged) would take to plan, create, and implement a service learning project.

Acting as Facilitator

Aligned to PBSL Checklist Section 5: Facilitation (Instructor Role)

In a PBSL model, instructors shift from delivering content to facilitating learning. This requires guiding participants through complex tasks, supporting collaboration, and helping them develop both academic and professional skills.

To successfully implement a problem-based service-learning model, instructors must fully understand their roles as group facilitators and prepare accordingly. “Facilitators who provide clear guidance, foster collaborative environments, and manage group dynamics effectively can mitigate issues such as poor communication, absence of mutual support, and unresolved conflicts among group members. These challenges emphasize the importance of skilled facilitators and supportive educational environments in maximizing the benefits of PBL.”⁸

It may be uncomfortable for instructors to hand the reins over to participants when implementing their first problem-based service-learning project. Anticipate that this process will be messy, and mistakes will be made. Instructors should reframe mistakes and challenges as part of the learning process. Instructors can pause implementation to address challenges and should intentionally plan time into the unit for regular process assessment and reflection.

Instructors should coach YouthBuild participants as they take on new or unfamiliar leadership roles. Participants may need explicit instruction or guidance with communication skills, professionalism, stress management, self-regulation, and teamwork. They will need opportunities to practice and reflect upon these skills throughout the PBSL process. Additionally, participants may need models and demonstrations for: calling or meeting with community partners, designing community-facing written materials, or using social media safely and responsibly.

Instructors can guide participant-led work by:

- o Asking open-ended questions
- o Asking follow-up questions
- o Challenging participants to explain ideas in detail
- o Summarizing group ideas to provide clarity

Explicitly Teach Collaboration Skills

Aligned to PBSL Checklist Section 6: Teach Collaboration Skills Explicitly

Instructors can support effective group work by embedding collaboration skills instruction in project activities.

⁸ Amoa-Danquah, P., & Carbonneau, K. J. (2025). A Systematic Review of Reviews on Problem-Based Learning and Its Effectiveness. *Current Issues in Education*, 26(2). <https://doi.org/10.14507/cie.vol26iss2.2293>

Instructors should:

- Establish group work norms with participants
- Prioritize team building activities early in the project
- Assign and clearly define group roles
- Promote equal participation and accountability
- Demonstrate conflict resolution and self-regulation techniques
- Model collaboration self-reflection techniques⁹

PRO TIP: Refer to the Collaboration Competencies Rubric in the CBE section for examples of collaboration skills and skill development.

PARTICIPANT ASSESSMENT & EVALUATION

Assessing Participant Learning and Project Impact

Aligned to PBSL Checklist Section 7: Assessment & Evaluation

To assess the project's learning impact, instructors can compare project outcomes to the learning objectives. Ask questions like: How well did each participant demonstrate mastery of the objectives? Be sure to use competency rubrics, such as executive function or collaboration, to assess participant growth as well. Instructors should encourage participants to assess their own learning through the project. Providing reflection sheets with guiding questions can help participants think critically about the outcomes of the project.

Participant Project Reflection Questions

- On a scale from 1-5, 1 being very low and 5 being very high, how would you rate the effectiveness of the project? Explain your rating.
- What was your role in implementing the project?
- On a scale from 1-5, 1 being very low and 5 being very high, how would you rate your participation in the project? Explain your rating.
- What skills and knowledge did you need to implement this project?
- What is one new skill or piece of information that you learned?
- If given the opportunity to do this project over, what would you do differently? Why?

PBSL RESOURCES

PBSL Websites

National Youth Leadership Council:

This website contains resources on service learning projects, including k-12 service learning standards.

⁹ Amoa-Danquah, P., & Carbonneau, K. J. (2025). A Systematic Review of Reviews on Problem-Based Learning and Its Effectiveness. *Current Issues in Education*, 26(2). <https://doi.org/10.14507/cie.vol26iss2.2293>

[PBLWorks \(Buck Institute for Education\):](#)

Register for free to receive access to many free sources, including PBL research and project design rubrics. Some resources, such as trainings, require a fee.

[DoSomething.org:](#)

This website has toolkits and projects as well as access to an active online community.

PBSL Project Example from YouthBuild Practice: Community Dinner Project

This project was designed and implemented by a YouthBuild Global staff member while working at YouthBuild Evansville and is shared as an example of effective practice.

YouthBuild participants in Indiana planned and hosted a community dinner to strengthen relationships with residents in a nearby housing complex.

The project emerged after program staff recognized that many local residents were unfamiliar with YouthBuild participants and the program itself. In response, staff and participants identified a potential solution: hosting a holiday dinner to foster connection, build trust, and create opportunities for positive interaction.

Before launching the project, the program's GED instructor secured approval from the housing complex's Housing Authority leadership to advertise the event and use on-site space. Staff also conducted an inventory of available resources, identifying an event room with a commercial kitchen as a suitable venue. Once the project was deemed viable, participants— supported by instructor guidance—took the lead in planning and implementation.

What Participants Did:

- Worked in teams to plan and execute the event
- Created advertising and outreach materials
- Developed and managed an event budget
- Planned the menu
- Prepared food for the event
- Set up and cleaned event spaces before and after the dinner
- Engaged with community members during the event
- Represented YouthBuild as program ambassadors
- Reflected on personal growth, community impact, and career-relevant skills

Outcomes

Both staff and participants identified the event as a success. In addition to building meaningful relationships with community members, participants strengthened key skills, including writing, math, collaboration, and executive functioning.

The project also provided opportunities to practice communication, problem-solving, and professional behavior in a real-world setting.

Tips for Implementation:

- Expect participant engagement to fluctuate during different phases of the project. For example, more introverted participants may need additional support during activities involving interaction with unfamiliar community members.
- Emphasize that skill development occurs through the process, not just the final product. The experience does not need to be perfect for meaningful learning to take place.
- Remain flexible and prepared to adapt to challenges and roadblocks that arise during the problem-based service learning process.

TOOL



Example Project Plan - Community Dinner Project

Guiding Question: How can we work together to plan and carry out a meaningful holiday event that serves our community while building skills for college, careers, and life?

Materials Needed

- Lesson planning template and project timeline
- Sample budgets and grocery ads
- Calculators or spreadsheet access
- Art supplies or digital tools for invitations
- Menu planning templates
- Access to grocery store (real or simulated)
- Reflection journals or digital reflection tools

Objectives

- Demonstrate planning and organizational skills by managing a multi-step project
- Apply budgeting and financial literacy skills to plan a community meal
- Practice professional communication through written invitations and group collaboration
- Develop teamwork, leadership, and accountability skills
- Connect academic skills to real-world college and career applications
- Reflect on service, community impact, and personal growth

Learning Goals

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- Plan and manage a multi-step project from beginning to completion
- Apply budgeting and financial decision-making skills in a real-world context
- Communicate professionally with peers and community members
- Collaborate effectively in teams with shared responsibility
- Demonstrate leadership, accountability, and adaptability

Process

- Reflect on personal growth, community impact, and career-relevant skills
- Project Launch & Purpose Setting
- Team Roles & Planning
- Invitations & Communication
- Menu Planning
- Budgeting & Grocery Planning
- Implementation Preparation
- Reflection & Evaluation

Facilitators' Notes

- Emphasize process over perfection
- Focus on learning and collaboration.
- Support student voice and choice in decisions.
- Use guiding questions rather than giving answers.
- Incorporate reflection throughout, not just at the end.
- Highlight transferable skills connected to college, careers, and life.
- Adapt the scope based on time, group size, or whether the dinner is simulated or fully implemented.

Reflection and Continuous Improvement

[Aligned to PBSL Checklist Section 8: Reflection & Continuous Improvement](#)

Reflection is a critical component of PBSL and should be embedded throughout the project— not just at the end. Reflection helps participants connect their experiences to skill development, deepen their understanding of the issue, and recognize their growth.

Structured reflection can include:

- Individual written responses
- Group discussions
- Guided prompts tied to competencies or standards

Reflection also supports program improvement. Staff can use participant feedback and project outcomes to refine future PBSL experiences.

TOOL



Example Participant Reflection Form

YouthBuild Problem-Based Service Learning (PBSL)
Participant Reflection Form

Project Title: _____

Part 1: Project Understanding & Impact

1. What problem did your group work to address?

2. Who did this project impact, and how?

3. What evidence do you have that your project made a difference?
(e.g., number of people served, feedback, observations)

Part 2: Your Role & Contribution

4. What was your role in the project? Include any specific tasks you worked on

5. On a scale of 1–5, how would you rate your participation?
(1 = very low, 5 = very high)

Rating: ____

Explain your rating:

Part 3: Skills & Learning

6. What skills did you use during this project? (Check all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Communication | ☐ Organization |
| ☐ Teamwork Problem-solving | ☐ Reading/Writing |
| ☐ Time management | ☐ Math/Data |
| ☐ Leadership | ☐ Other: _____ |

7. Choose ONE skill from above. How did you demonstrate or improve this skill?

Part 4: Challenges & Growth

8. What was the most challenging part of this project?

9. How did you respond to that challenge?

10. What would you do differently if you did this project again?

Part 5: Reflection & Future Application

11. What did this project teach you about your community?

12. What did this project teach you about yourself?

13. How can you use what you learned in a job, school, or real-life situation?

Part 6: Overall Reflection

14. On a scale of 1–5, how effective was your project overall?
(1 = not effective, 5 = very effective)

Rating: ____

Explain your rating:

Cross-Program Integration of Academic Instruction

SECTION 2.3

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INTRODUCTION

Cross-program integration of academic instruction means intentionally embedding reading, writing, math, critical thinking, and related academic skills into all areas of YouthBuild programming, including construction, job readiness, leadership development, supportive services, and community service. Rather than teaching academic skills only in a classroom setting, staff reinforce and apply these skills through authentic program activities. This approach helps participants see clear connections between academic learning and real-world tasks while providing opportunities to practice and strengthen skills across multiple contexts.

EXAMPLES:

Math Integrated into Construction

While framing a wall, participants calculate area, perimeter, and material quantities (e.g., how many studs are needed based on spacing). Instructors reinforce math concepts such as measurement, fractions, and estimation in real time, helping participants see how math directly affects accuracy, efficiency, and cost on the job site.

Literacy Integrated into Job Development

During the job readiness training class, the instructor guides participants through a close reading of a job posting. Participants annotate for key qualifications and other important details. Then they write a resume or cover letter tailored to the specific job posting. This builds reading comprehension and writing skills while directly preparing participants for employment.

• Academic Integration Best Practices

- o Provide training for non-academic staff (e.g., construction, career services) on how to incorporate reading, writing, and math into their work with participants. This can include attending DOL YouthBuild Technical Assistance events, partnering with instructional coaches or consultants, leveraging the program's education instructor to lead trainings, and learning from peer programs with strong integration models.
- o Ensure all staff have access to lesson plans and activity ideas that already incorporate academic skills into construction, job readiness, and leadership activities. Create a shared resource bank to make these materials easy to find and use.
- o Provide planning time for staff to develop classes together and adapt lessons. Integration should be intentional, so staff need time to align academic skills with program activities.
- o Be deliberate about naming the academic skill being used (e.g., "This is measurement and estimation" or "This is professional writing"). This helps participants recognize and transfer their skills.
- o Regularly highlight how reading, writing, and math connect to success in construction, employment, and leadership. Make these connections explicit so both staff and participants understand the purpose behind skill development.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Integrating Academic Skills Across Programming

Program Name: LearningWorks YouthBuild

Location: Portland, ME

Instructional staff at LearningWorks YouthBuild in Portland, Maine, developed a project-based approach to integrate HiSET reading, writing, and math instruction into their culinary arts pathway. Rather than treating education and workforce training as separate components, staff intentionally integrated academics into career pathways to answer the common student question: “Why do I need to know this?”

LearningWorks YouthBuild’s Program Director, who was the academic instructor during the project’s development, noted that she wanted their education component to demonstrate its real-world, real-life value. She recalled asking herself, “How do I integrate [academics] so that it doesn’t feel like, ‘you just have to learn this for a test?’” She also wanted to align coursework with a key LearningWorks YouthBuild goal: providing participants with opportunities to explore and appreciate their identities. Integrating education and culinary arts became the answer; a way for students to apply academic and workforce skills in meaningful, real-life contexts.

LearningWorks culinary arts and academic instructors worked closely to develop **The LearningWorks YouthBuild Cookbook**, a collection of recipes that represent participants’ meaningful food memories from their childhoods, creating a bridge between identity and skill-building. The project connects food preparation practices to the foundational academic skills that make food prep possible. Through this process, students engaged in:

- **Writing Skills:**

Prewriting, sensory description, drafting, revising, and publishing recipes

- **Math Skills:**

Measuring ingredients, understanding fractions, and working with volume and weight

- **Critical Thinking:**

Translating memory into clear, replicable instructions

- **Culinary Arts Skills:**

Food preparation, presentation, and reflection on outcomes

Students also visited local grocery stores to deepen their understanding of measurement and cost, and ultimately prepared their recipes in a community kitchen while a photographer documented the process.

Partnerships and Evolution

LearningWorks collaborated with community partners when initially launching this project, including a storytelling-focused nonprofit, a professional photographer, and a local publisher to print the actual cookbooks. LearningWorks staff have continued to implement the project with cohorts for over six years, although now staff and participants utilize online tools and websites, such as Canva and Snapfish, to complete the project. In 2026, YouthBuild alumni returned to present their author bios at a LearningWorks event, demonstrating continued growth in communication and leadership.

Why This Worked

- **Clear Relevance to Real Life**

Writing, math, and critical thinking were directly tied to topics relevant to participants: food, memory, and identity.

- **Strong Cross-Component Collaboration**

Academic and culinary instructors co-designed and co-owned the project. This alignment ensured that both sets of skills were effectively integrated.

- **Authentic Final Product**

Publishing a real cookbook with photographs and community sharing provided participants with the opportunity to create something lasting.

- **Strategic Use of Community Partners**

Community partners provided expertise and resources, especially during the initial implementation, that helped ensure the project's success.

- **Sustainability and Adaptability**

The program evolved its tools and processes over time without losing the core structure, allowing it to continue for over six years.

- **Alignment with Program Outcomes**

The project supported measurable success. Strong HiSET attainment rates reflect the effectiveness of this integrated approach.

Implementation Tips

1. Use your YouthBuild program's mission, values, and goals to drive cross-program integration.
2. Work with all staff prior to integration to develop skills, promote collaboration, and build buy-in.
3. Create projects that result in real, shareable products to motivate participants and reinforce the importance of academic and workforce readiness skills.

YOUTHBUILD EDUCATION TOOLKIT

SECTION

03

Tools, Instructional Strategies, and Resources

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03 Tools, Instructional Strategies, and Resources

INTRODUCTION

In addition to the education models described in Section 2, there are a myriad of instructional resources available to support YouthBuild instructors as they work to provide effective educational programming.

What is effective educational programming?

- High-interest and relevant
- Rigorous and challenging
- Thoughtful and supportive
- Practical
- Empowering

This section will contain teacher tools, instructional strategies and resources for instructional staff, including information about foundational education practices like writing a lesson plan or structuring a unit. It also includes information about AI: How instructors can use it to increase efficacy and lessons that support AI knowledge and skills development for YouthBuild participants. These resources support an effective education component's ability to generate participant academic gains in a timely manner, leading to measurable skill gains, education credential attainment, and ultimately employment. Additionally, participants gain transferable skills that they can apply across all areas of their lives.

TEACHER TOOLBOX BEST PRACTICES

Instructional staff can strengthen content delivery and impact by utilizing key teaching skills. These foundational skills include collecting YouthBuild participant needs and interests, structuring units, setting objectives, writing lesson plans, and conducting ongoing learning assessments.

Techniques for Getting to Know Students

Instructors can build rapport with participants by incorporating techniques to learn more about them early in the program.

- o Pre-testing allows instructors to target identified skill gaps and save time by focusing on content that YouthBuild participants need to know rather than reviewing what they already know.
- o Use participant surveys to learn more about participants' personalities, interests, and learning preferences.

TOOL



YouthBuild Participant Learning & Interests Survey

Directions: This short survey will help your instructor learn more about you. There are no right or wrong answers. Your answers will help us support your learning and make YouthBuild a place where you feel comfortable and successful.

1. What are one or two things you liked about school in the past? Why?

2. What are one or two things that made school difficult or frustrating for you before?

3. Did anything happen in school in the past that changed how you feel about learning or being in class?

4. What types of school activities do you enjoy the most?

Examples: hands-on projects, group work, reading, art, building things, using technology

5. What types of school activities do you enjoy the least? Why?

6. When learning something new, what helps you the most?

Examples: step-by-step help, seeing an example, working with a partner, practicing on your own

7. When schoolwork feels difficult, what helps you keep going?

8. What hobbies or activities do you enjoy outside of school?

9. Is there anything you would like your instructors to know so they can help you learn better?

TOOL



Common Lesson Planning Pitfalls

1. Poor Time Management

- Activities run too long or end too early
- No buffer time for discussion, questions, or reteaching
- Key objectives rushed or skipped

Fix: Plan in chunks (10–20 minute blocks) and prioritize what participants must learn vs. what's optional.

2. Lack of Movement or Engagement

- Students sitting passively for long periods
- Over-reliance on lecture or worksheets
- No opportunities for hands-on or collaborative learning

Fix: Build in movement every 15–25 minutes (pair work, stations, physical response).

3. Cognitive Overload (Too Much Information)

- Trying to cover too many concepts in one lesson
- Introducing multiple new skills at once
- Not allowing time for practice

Fix: Focus on 1–2 core objectives. Depth beats coverage.

4. Unclear Instructions or Explanations

- Directions are vague or overly wordy
- Modeling is missing or incomplete
- Participants are unsure what success looks like

Fix: Use “I do → We do → You do” and show a clear example of a completed task.

5. One-Size-Fits-All Instruction

- Lesson targets only one ability level
- No scaffolding for struggling learners
- No extension for advanced learners

Fix: Plan at least one support (sentence frames, guided steps) and one extension (challenge problem, application task).

6. Lack of Relevance

- Content is disconnected from students' lives, goals, or career pathways
- No explanation of “why this matters”
- Skills taught in isolation

Fix: Explicitly connect lessons to jobs, real-life decisions, or YouthBuild projects.

7. Insufficient Practice Opportunities

- Not enough time for students to apply the skill
- Practice is rushed or skipped

TOOL



YouthBuild Participant School Reflection

Directions: Take a few moments to reflect on what school has been like for you. Use the questions below to write a one- to two-page reflection that tells **your** story. Be as detailed as possible.

1. What was your school experience like? (My school experience was...)
2. How have you grown since you were last in school? (I know that I've grown because...)
3. What types of classes and classroom experiences and activities work for you? (My favorite types of activities are... I know I learn best when...)
4. What negative experiences might come back to haunt you? (In the past, I know I've struggled when... I've made bad decisions when...)
5. What will you do differently this year? (This year, I hope... At YouthBuild, I will...)

This is your chance to:

1. Take on the things that challenge you in school.
2. Explore a success-oriented school mindset.
3. Tell your school story.

PRO TIP: When using this school reflection early in programming, it can be helpful to encourage participants to write in paragraphs and to reassure them that their current skill level is okay. Instructors can use these responses as a pre-assessment to understand where participants are as writers and to guide their development throughout the program.

TOOL



Online Personality Tests

Instructors can use free online surveys to spur discussions and gain additional insight into participants' skills and personalities.

Online personality tests are not scientifically valid and may reflect bias, so instructors should preview them to ensure accuracy and appropriateness before use. Instructors should clearly state that these surveys are not official assessments and that results are meant for reflection, not scientific conclusions.

PRO TIP: Encourage participants to reflect on their survey results. Do they feel like a good fit? If not, why not?

The [Big Personality Test website](#) contains multiple free personality tests. Remember to always preview tests for accuracy, relevance, appropriateness and potential bias.

TOOL



Workforce Skills Surveys

Use online workforce skills surveys to help participants understand what employers are looking for and to identify the skills they already have. Two helpful options include:

- Explore work-related interests using the [O*NET Interest Profiler](#)
- Complete the [CareerOneStop Interest Assessment](#)

TOOL



Assessing Participant Academic Readiness

Instructors need to have a clear picture of participants' academic readiness early in programming. Use your program's adult basic education tests, like the TABE or CASAS tests, to get an initial snapshot of participant skill levels.

Instructors can also use reliable high school equivalency (HSE) practice tests early in a cohort to determine YouthBuild participant readiness levels and to direct academic content development. A reliable test will have HSE test-style questions, testing and timing directions, and an answer key/score predictor.

GED

GED practice tests can be found in the following locations:

- GED Ready tests can be found online on the **website** – [GED Marketplace™ Online Platform](#)
 - o Note that a YouthBuild program will need to purchase licenses to use the GED ready tests from this online location
- GED preparation books—including pretest hardcopies (or print-ready versions). Titles include:
 - o Kaplan GED Test Prep
 - o Princeton Review GED Prep
 - o McGraw-Hill Education GED Test Prep
 - o REA GED Test Preparation guides

The [official GED website](#) contains free preview tests and study guides as well. Instructors can download:

- Sample test questions
- Subject study guides
- Formula sheets and reference sheets
- Extended response guidelines

Additionally, local libraries may provide GED test prep services and access to people that live within their city or county. Contact your local library for available resources in your area.

HiSET

HiSET practice tests can be found in the following locations:

- Several free [HiSET practice tests](#) can be found online.
- HiSET preparation books—including pretest hardcopies (or print-ready versions). Titles include:
 - o The Official Guide to the HiSET Exam (2nd Edition)
 - o Kaplan HiSET Exam Prep
 - o Mometrix HiSET Prep Book (2025–2026)

The official HiSET website contains free preview tests as well. Instructors can access:

- Sample test questions
- Test testing tips

Structuring Units

Instructors can deliver rigorous, in-depth course content that promotes higher-order thinking by organizing learning into well-structured units. By planning key components in advance—such as instructional strategies, lesson plans, ongoing formative assessments, and summative assessments—instructors can ensure that instruction aligns with intended learning goals.

It is a best practice to use the “backward design” approach to unit development. To use this approach, an instructor begins planning with the end goals in mind: What should YouthBuild participants be able to do by the end of the unit? These goals determine the unit’s objectives. From there, an instructor can determine which activities will introduce and address the objectives. Finally, the instructor will design an assessment that allows participants to demonstrate their mastery of the unit objectives.

TOOL



Unit Plan Template

Unit Title: _____

Unit Length: _____

Learning Objectives: *What will students be able to do?*

Students will be able to:

Standards / Competencies: *(CCSS, Workforce competencies, etc.)*

Learning Activities:

Description

Materials/Resources:

Assessments:

Reflection:

TOOL



Unit Plan Example: AI Literacy

Unit Title: AI Literacy: Using AI for Work, School, and Life

Unit Length: 2 weeks (8–10 class sessions)

Learning Objectives: *What will students be able to do?*

Students will be able to:

- o Explain what AI is and how it is used in everyday life
- o Use an AI tool to complete a practical task (email, summary, or job search)
- o Evaluate whether AI-generated information is accurate or biased
- o Write and revise prompts to improve AI responses
- o Identify appropriate vs inappropriate uses of AI in school and work

Standards / Competencies: (CCSS, Workforce competencies, etc.)

GED Skills:

- R.2: Determine central ideas and summarize
- R.6: Evaluate reasoning and evidence
- W.4: Produce clear writing for a task

Workforce Skills:

- Digital literacy
- Critical thinking
- Professional communication

Learning Activities:

- Day 1: What is AI?
- Day 2+: AI Demo: Stations
- Day 3 - 4: Prompt Writing Basics
- Day 5: Evaluating AI
- Day 6 – 8: Project Work

Description:

- Class discussion, pre-assessment, examples of AI in daily life
- Participants explore AI tools in stations
- Participants compare weak vs strong prompts
- Fact-checking AI activity. Also discuss: cheating, bias, privacy. Complete: Evaluating AI Worksheet
- Participants complete final task (see assessments)

Materials/Resources:

- AI tool (ChatGPT or similar)
- Sample prompts (good vs bad)
- Articles for summarizing
- Fact-checking checklist
- Project rubric

Assessments:

Pre-Assessment:

Quick discussion

- Have you used AI before? What do you think AI can/can't do?

Formative Assessments:

- Prompt-writing practice (students improve weak prompts)
- Evaluating AI Worksheet (Is this accurate? Biased?)
- Exit tickets (1 thing learned, 1 question)

Summative Assessment:

“AI for Real Life” Project – Students choose ONE:

- Write a professional email using AI (then edit it)
- Use AI to summarize an article and verify accuracy
- Use AI to help create a resume or job plan

Must include:

- Their prompt
- AI response
- Their edited final version
- A short reflection: What did the AI do well? What did you fix?

Reflection:

Setting Objectives

Instructors can improve their lesson plan development and outcomes by writing strong learning objectives for each lesson. Learning objectives guide lesson content and delivery. Strong objectives have clear goals that drive both instruction and assessment, thus helping instructors achieve more in the limited amount of class time available and clearly guiding participant progress and learning. They are also tools to break down content into manageable chunks for participants. There is no one “right way” to write an objective, but here are some content ideas to consider:

Strong learning objective:

- Participants will **[TASK]** + **[CONTENT]** + **[CONDITIONS]** + **[CRITERIA]**

TASK and CONTENT: Use real tasks and materials. What will the participants actually be doing in class? *Examples: compare two phone plans and justify the best option, analyze word choice in a poem*

CONDITIONS: What learning tools or supports will the participants be able to use during the lesson? *Examples: use notes, with a partner, using a calculator, using a graphic organizer*

CRITERIA: What will an acceptable outcome look like? *Examples: 4 out of 5 correct, include at least two pieces of evidence, rubric score of 3 or higher*

By including clear, specific tasks, content, conditions, and criteria for success, instructors can more effectively monitor and assess lesson outcomes, setting participants up for success.

Note: This objective writing approach builds on Mager’s model and the ABCD framework by emphasizing four elements: task, content, conditions, and criteria.^{1 2}

¹ Robert F. Mager, *Preparing Instructional Objectives* (Belmont, CA: Fearon Publishers, 1962).

² Taken from the University of Connecticut Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning, *Learning Objective Tip Sheet*, <https://cetl.uconn.edu/learning-objective-tip-sheet/>, accessed March 23, 2026.

TOOL



Learning Objective Examples

Key: Participants will [task - do something observable] What? [content – what is being used], with/using [conditions/tools/supports], by [clear criteria for success].

Participants will explain why AI-generated responses may contain errors or bias, using class discussion and examples, by describing at least two reasons in their own words.

Participants will evaluate the accuracy of an AI-generated response to a research question, using a provided article and verification checklist, by identifying at least two accurate claims and one potential error or bias.

Participants will:

Analyze word choice a poem orally and in writing using sentence stems, models and small group support by identifying two words with positive connotation and two with negative connotation.

Participants will:

Apply a visualization strategy while reading a short passage and explain how their mental image helped them understand the text, including at least one specific connection they made.

Participants will:

Participate in a mock job interview, responding to at least 3 common questions using complete sentences and relevant examples, as measured by a communication rubric score of 3 or higher.

TOOL



Learning Objective Writing Checklist

1. Clarity & Focus

- ☐ Starts with: *“Participants will...”*
- ☐ Describes **participant learning**, not teacher actions
- ☐ Focuses on **one clear skill or outcome** (not multiple verbs)

2. Observable Task (TASK)

- ☐ Uses a **measurable action verb** (e.g., solve, explain, compare, write)
- ☐ Avoids vague verbs (e.g., understand, learn, know)
- ☐ The learning can be seen or heard

3. Specific Content (CONTENT)

- ☐ Clearly states **what knowledge or skill** students are working with
- ☐ Avoids general phrases like “the concept” or “the material”
- ☐ Answers: *“Do what, with what?”*

4. Conditions (CONDITIONS)

- ☐ Specifies tools, supports, or context (e.g., text, calculator, graphic organizer)
- ☐ Clarifies whether work is **independent or supported**
- ☐ Makes expectations transparent and fair

5. Criteria for Success (CRITERIA)

- ☐ Defines what “good enough” looks like
- ☐ Includes measurable indicators (e.g., accuracy, number of examples, rubric level)
- ☐ Allows **consistent scoring across teachers**

6. Alignment Check

- ☐ The objective can be **directly assessed**
- ☐ The planned activity actually **matches the objective**
- ☐ The objective reflects the **intended level of rigor**

7. Rigor & Relevance

- ☐ The task reflects **meaningful thinking** (not just recall, unless appropriate)
- ☐ When possible, connects to a **real-world or authentic task**

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit³

³ PROMPT: ChatGPT, can you create an objective writing checklist based on this learning objective formula: "Student will [TASK] + [CONTENT] + [CONDITIONS] + CRITERIA]?"

Lesson Planning

Lesson plans provide a framework for each class provided by instructional staff. Effective plans should guide classroom activities and create a clear pathway from learning objectives to learning outcomes. Enhance your lesson planning by using the tools provided:

TOOL



Lesson Plan Template

Here is a simple template containing the essential components of a strong lesson.

TITLE OF LESSON (TIME)

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

MATERIALS NEEDED:

OBJECTIVES:

STANDARDS COVERED:

PROCESS:

FACILITATORS' NOTES:

See pages 109, 117, and 122 for examples of completed lesson plans.



TOOL



Lesson Plan Checklist

Use this as a self-check before delivering your lesson. If you can't check a box, consider tightening the lesson plan.

1. Clarity & Purpose (Big Picture)

- ☐ The lesson has 1-2 clear, focused objectives
- ☐ The lesson connects to a real-world context (workforce, life skills, or community)
- ☐ The lesson can be realistically completed in the time allotted

2. Objectives (High-Quality & Measurable)

- ☐ Objective uses a measurable verb (e.g., solve, analyze, explain, compare, not “understand”)
- ☐ Clearly defines what students will produce or do
- ☐ Includes conditions (with what tools/support?)
- ☐ Includes criteria for success (how well is “good enough”?)
- ☐ Aligns to GED/HSE/competency/standards skill expectations

Quick test:

If you walked into the room, could you see whether students met the objective?

3. Materials & Preparation

- ☐ All materials are listed and ready in advance
- ☐ Materials are accessible for participants (reading level, language clarity, formatting)
- ☐ Technology (if used) has a backup plan
- ☐ Examples/models are prepared (not improvised)

4. Activity Overview (Hook & Relevance)

- ☐ Lesson starts with a clear hook (question, scenario, problem, or challenge)
- ☐ Students understand why the lesson matters
- ☐ The opening activates prior knowledge or experience
- ☐ Lesson utilizes a best fit instructional strategy to engage participants
- ☐ Students are doing thinking early (not just listening)

5. Process (Scaffolded Instruction)

Check that your lesson follows a gradual release model:

A. Modeling (“I Do”)

- ☐ Instructor clearly demonstrates the skill
- ☐ Thinking is modeled out loud
- ☐ Example is relevant and clear
- ☐ Example and materials are presented using multiple modalities

B. Guided Practice (“We Do”)

- ☐ Participants practice with support and feedback
- ☐ Questions check for understanding (not just “any questions?”)

C. Independent Practice (“You Do”)

- ☐ Misconceptions are addressed in the moment
- ☐ Participants apply the skill independently
- ☐ Task matches the objective exactly
- ☐ Participants must think, not just follow steps

6. Rigor (Depth of Thinking)

- ☐ Participants must explain, justify, or analyze (not just complete)
- ☐ Questions go beyond recall (why/how, not just what)

7. Differentiation & Support

- ☐ Struggling students have entry points (sentence frames, graphic organizers, chunking, models, visuals)
- ☐ Advanced students have extension opportunities
- ☐ Lesson activities and assessments provide opportunities for student choice
- ☐ Lesson anticipates common barriers (reading level, math gaps, attention)
- ☐ Supports do NOT lower the rigor—just improve access

8. Participant Engagement

- ☐ Participants are actively doing something at least 70–80% of the time
- ☐ Opportunities for discussion, collaboration, or movement exist
- ☐ Participants are producing work, not just consuming information
- ☐ Clear expectations for participation are built in

9. Assessment (Formative Check)

- ☐ There is a clear way to measure if the objective was met
- ☐ Assessment is aligned directly to the objective
- ☐ Includes a check for understanding during the lesson
- ☐ Includes an end-of-lesson task or product

10. Reflection & Improvement (After Teaching)

- ☐ Did participants meet the objective? How do you know?
- ☐ Where did participants struggle most?
- ☐ Did the lesson feel too easy, too hard, or just right?
- ☐ What would you reteach or adjust?

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit ⁴

⁴ ChatGPT, I'm providing educational staff with a simple lesson plan template for designing GED or high school equivalency lessons. Can you create a lesson plan design checklist to complement the template and to guide staff as they create scaffolded, rigorous, and highly-effective lessons?

TOOL



Lesson Plan Template

1. Poor Time Management

- Activities run too long or end too early
- No buffer time for discussion, questions, or reteaching
- Key objectives rushed or skipped

Fix: Plan in chunks (10–20 minute blocks) and prioritize what participants *must* learn vs. what's optional.

2. Lack of Movement or Engagement

- Students sitting passively for long periods
- Over-reliance on lecture or worksheets
- No opportunities for hands-on or collaborative learning

Fix: Build in movement every 15–25 minutes (pair work, stations, physical response).

3. Cognitive Overload (Too Much Information)

- Trying to cover too many concepts in one lesson
- Introducing multiple new skills at once
- Not allowing time for practice

Fix: Focus on 1–2 core objectives. Depth beats coverage.

4. Unclear Instructions or Explanations

- Directions are vague or overly wordy
- Modeling is missing or incomplete
- Participants are unsure what success looks like

Fix: Use “I do → We do → You do” and show a clear example of a completed task.

5. One-Size-Fits-All Instruction

- Lesson targets only one ability level
- No scaffolding for struggling learners
- No extension for advanced learners

Fix: Plan at least one support (sentence frames, guided steps) and one extension (challenge problem, application task).

6. Lack of Relevance

- Content is disconnected from students' lives, goals, or career pathways
- No explanation of “why this matters”
- Skills taught in isolation

Fix: Explicitly connect lessons to jobs, real-life decisions, or YouthBuild projects.

7. Insufficient Practice Opportunities

- Not enough time for students to apply the skill
- Practice is rushed or skipped
- No feedback loop

Fix: Plan for **guided practice + independent practice**, with feedback built in.

8. Lack of Differentiated Supports

- No visual aids, sentence stems, or graphic organizers
- Heavy reliance on text for all learners
- Language barriers not considered

Fix: Add multiple entry points—visuals, discussion, modeling, and structured supports.

9. Poor Transitions Between Activities

- Lost time between segments
- Students disengage during shifts
- Confusion about what to do next

Fix: Script transitions and give clear, concise directions before moving on.

10. Overemphasis on Teacher Talk

- Instructor dominates the lesson
- Limited student thinking or discussion
- Students become passive recipients

Fix: Aim for students doing the thinking at least 50% of the time.

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Ongoing Learning Assessments

Assessments give instructors insight into YouthBuild participant growth and understanding. Building in regular assessment opportunities helps track progress and identify readiness for testing or remaining skill gaps. Assessments also provide opportunities for participants to apply new learning and practice high-stakes materials, such as GED/HiSET prep, final projects, or exams.

PRO TIP: Use a mix of formative and cumulative assessments to support participant learning and mastery.

Formative Assessments

- o Formative assessments are ongoing checks for understanding that occur throughout a unit or topic of study. They allow participants to apply new knowledge and skills while giving instructors insight into participant progress. Instructors use this information to adjust instruction, pacing, and materials to better support understanding and move participants toward mastery.

⁵ PROMPT: ChatGPT, can you take my notes and also expand upon them to make a list of "common lesson planning pitfalls" for YouthBuild instructors?

- o Formative assessments are most effective when they are frequent, varied, and directly aligned to the lesson objective. The focus of formative assessments is on growth, not mastery.
- o **Examples:**
 - **Draft Work** - allows participants to practice skills and receive feedback before submitting a final product. This supports skill development, revision habits, and deeper learning, while giving instructors opportunities to guide improvement.
 - **Reflections** - provide participants with the opportunity to think critically about what they have learned. This may include summarizing key ideas, making connections, asking questions, or evaluating their own understanding. Reflections also give instructors insight into participants' depth of thinking and areas that may need more work.
 - **Exit Tickets** - brief prompts completed at the end of a lesson (e.g., one question, summary, or problem). They help participants process information discussed in class and help instructors quickly assess whether participants met the lesson objective to inform planning for the next session.

Summative and Cumulative Assessments

- o These assessments are evaluations used at the end of a unit, course, or instructional period to measure a participant's mastery of content and skills.
- o Note: **Summative assessments evaluate learning at the end of instruction, while cumulative assessments evaluate learning across the full scope of instruction.**
- o In YouthBuild programs, these assessments are especially important for determining readiness for credentialing exams (e.g., HiSET/GED), career pathways, or transition into employment or postsecondary education.
- o **Examples:**
 - **Portfolio Assessments** - collections of participant work over time that demonstrate growth, skill development, and mastery. Portfolios may include written work, projects, reflections, and skill demonstrations.
 - **Performance-Based Assessments** - tasks that require participants to demonstrate skills in action (e.g., presenting, building, problem-solving, or completing a job-related task).
 - **End-of-Unit Projects or Presentations** – extended projects that require participants to apply knowledge and skills to a real-world task or problem. Participants demonstrate that they are able to synthesize learning and communicate their understanding to others.
 - **Certification or Credentialing Tests** - standardized exams (such as HiSET or industry-recognized certifications) that measure readiness for academic credentials or workforce qualifications. These are often required for program completion or career advancement.
- o **For more summative and cumulative assessment ideas, see these sections:**
 - PBSL
 - CBE
 - Unit Planning

Tips for Designing Effective Assessments

- o Effective assessments should align with course objectives, accurately measure participant learning, and support academic and workforce skill development.
- o **Assessment Design Process** - Use this quick process to design aligned and effective assessments:

Step 1: Determine the Learning Objective

What should participants know or be able to do?

- Start with a clear, specific objective. This ensures the assessment is focused and meaningful.
- **Example:** *“Participants will analyze word choice a poem orally and in writing using sentence stems, models and small group support by identifying two words with positive connotation and two with negative connotation.”*
- Refer to the Learning Objectives information in Section 3 for more tips and examples.

Step 2: Determine Acceptable Evidence

How will participants show their learning?

- Decide what type of assessment will best demonstrate mastery of the objective.
- Example: Solve problems, explain reasoning in writing, or teach the concept to a peer.

Step 3: Establish Criteria for Success

How will you measure it?

- Identify what successful performance looks like. Use a rubric, checklist, or clear expectations.
Example: Correct calculations, clear explanation of steps, accurate use of formulas, and providing correct examples.

Assessment Design Principles

- o **Align Assessments with Learning Objectives** Assessments should directly measure the skills and knowledge outlined in the lesson or course objectives. Clearly defined objectives make it easier to design focused, meaningful assessments.
- o **Match the Assessment Type to the Skill Being Measured**
Choose assessment formats that accurately capture the type of learning you want to measure. For example, multiple-choice questions may assess recall, while written responses or projects show critical thinking and application.
- o **Use a Variety of Assessment Types**
Incorporating multiple formats (e.g., quizzes, discussions, projects, presentations) allows participants to demonstrate learning in different ways and supports differentiation.

- **Provide Clear Directions**

Provide clear directions, expectations, and criteria for success. Use rubrics or examples so participants understand what quality work looks like.

- **Incorporate Participant Choice When Appropriate** When possible—especially for cumulative assessments—offer options in how participants demonstrate mastery (e.g., written, visual, or oral formats).

- **Differentiate When Possible** Offer multiple ways to demonstrate understanding and ensure assessments are accessible to all learners.

- **Balance Choice with Skill Development Requirements**

Ensure participants still practice essential skills (such as writing or problem-solving) that are required for credentialing exams and workplace readiness.

- **Check for Appropriate Level of Rigor** Ensure assessments are challenging enough to promote growth while remaining achievable.

- **Use Assessment Data to Inform Instruction**

Use results to guide reteaching, pacing, and targeted support.

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Resources to Support Assessment Design

- [SEE Learning Objectives Section](#)
- [SEE CBE Section for Rubric Examples](#)

⁶ PROMPT: ChatGPT, can you take my notes on designing effective assessments and create a simple assessment design process?

Creative Assessment Ideas

Creative assessments provide participants with multiple ways to demonstrate their learning beyond traditional tests. These approaches can increase engagement, support different learning styles, and better reflect real-world skills. Instructors should still align creative assessments to learning objectives and include clear criteria for success.

Visual Assessments

- **Posters or Infographics** – Summarize key concepts, processes, or data visually
- **Videos** – Explain a concept, demonstrate a skill, or present a project
- **Models** – Build or design a physical or digital representation of learning
- **Board Games** – Create a game that teaches or reviews key content
- **Slideshows** – Present information using visuals and structured talking points
- **Performances or Skits** – Act out concepts, historical events, or scenarios
- **Charts, Tables, or Graphics** – Organize and interpret data visually
- **Demonstrations or Skill Showcases** – Perform a task (e.g., math problem-solving, tool use, or job-related skill)

Written Assessments

- **Paragraphs or Essays** – Explain, analyze, or argue a concept
- **Narratives or Short Stories** – Apply learning through storytelling
- **Letters or Emails** – Write to a specific audience (e.g., employer, community leader)
- **Blogs or Articles** – Share information or perspectives in an informal, real-world format
- **Reflection Journals** – Track growth, challenges, and learning over time

Audio Assessments

- **Podcasts or Audio Recordings** – Explain ideas, conduct interviews, or reflect on learning

Interpersonal / Collaborative Assessments

- **Community Panels** – Present ideas or solutions to a group and respond to questions
- **Peer Teaching** – Participants teach a concept to others
- **Role Plays or Simulations** – Practice real-life scenarios (e.g., job interviews, workplace situations)
- **Debates** – Develop and defend positions using evidence

Summative or Cumulative Assessments (that incorporate multiple components)

- **Portfolios** – Collect work over time to show growth and mastery
- **Problem-Based Projects** – Solve a real-world challenge using course content
- **Presentations** – Share learning with peers using visual or verbal communication

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit ⁷

⁷ PROMPT: ChatGPT, please provide a clean format for my list of "creative assessment ideas". Make suggestions for ideas I might have missed.

TOOL



Project Example

Resource Origin: RiseUp Community School

Location: Denver, CO

#Be the Change - Digital Citizenship Final Project

Overview

Often, we hear about the negative impact that social media and the digital world have on our lives, but there is a great potential to do good with the new technology available to us. For this project, you and your team must determine some way to use digital media to have a positive impact on the school or the community.

Your task is to demonstrate these skills by developing project artifacts:

- Work successfully in a team (Artifact - Partner Agreement)
- Prove that you are meeting a school or community need. To do this, you might conduct research, create and distribute a survey or interview someone with expertise. (Artifact - Social Investigation)
- Develop and enact a plan to improve the school or the community using digital media (Artifact - Project Planner)
- Collect results to be analyzed and reported by your team (Artifact - Data Analysis)

Consider

Collaboration

- How will your process and product demonstrate that you worked successfully with your partner(s)?

Citizenship

- How will your process and product demonstrate your understanding of digital citizenship through your impact on the school or community?

Digital

Action Plan

Select one of the following action plans:

- Launch and manage a change-oriented Facebook group
- Design and share a Public Service Announcement
- Create a database (e.g. StoryCorps interview archive)
- Teach a school or community group about a beneficial online tool (e.g. voice-to-text tools, etc.)
- Create and launch an infographic
- Teach a school or community group about digital citizenship
- Record and post a podcast
- Film and post a video
- Launch a written or photo blog

OTHER TEACHER TOOLS

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Best Practices to Support Participant Math Success

1. Ensure Qualified Instruction

- o Employ a credentialed educator with experience in math instruction and adult learning

2. Use a Clear Instructional Model

- o Implement a consistent framework (e.g., CBE, PBSL, Academic Integration) to guide instruction and assessment

3. Explicitly Teach Thinking Strategies

- o Model problem-solving processes (e.g., breaking down problems, estimating, checking work)
- o Use think-alouds to make reasoning visible

4. Prioritize Conceptual Understanding + Procedural Fluency

- o Balance “how to solve” with “why it works”
- o Connect math concepts across topics

5. Use Multiple Modalities

- o Incorporate hands-on activities, visuals, discussion, and real-world applications
- o Include manipulatives, diagrams, and modeling whenever possible

6. Connect Math to Real-World Contexts

- o Use authentic tasks (budgeting, measurements, data analysis)
- o Design project-based or problem-based learning experiences

7. Leverage AI Strategically

- o Design integrated lessons and units
- o Provide on-demand tutoring and explanations
- o Personalize content to student interests and skill levels
- o Generate real-world math projects
- o Support data collection, analysis, and visualization

8. Use High-Quality Digital Tools

- o Incorporate platforms like Khan Academy and other interactive tools for practice and reinforcement

9. Differentiate Instruction

- o Provide scaffolds (sentence frames, guided steps, visuals)
- o Offer extension tasks for advanced learners
- o Adjust pacing and complexity as needed

10. Use Ongoing Formative Assessment

- o Check for understanding frequently (exit tickets, quick problems, discussions)
- o Adjust instruction based on student needs

11. Build Math Confidence and Mindset

- o Normalize struggle as part of learning
- o Celebrate progress, not just correctness
- o Address math anxiety directly

TOOL



Best Practices to Support Participant Reading/Writing Success

1. Ensure Qualified Instruction

- o Employ a credentialed educator with expertise in literacy and adult learning

2. Use a Clear Instructional Model

- o Apply a structured framework (e.g., CBE, PBSL, Academic Integration) to guide literacy development

3. Explicitly Teach Thinking Strategies

- o Model comprehension strategies (summarizing, questioning, inferencing)
- o Teach writing processes (planning, drafting, revising, editing)

4. Differentiate by Reading Level and Skill

- o Provide leveled texts and scaffolded supports
- o Use small-group or individualized instruction when possible

5. Use Real-World, Relevant Content

- o Incorporate authentic texts (articles, job materials, forms)
- o Design writing tasks connected to real-life goals

6. Integrate Multiple Modalities

- o Combine reading, writing, speaking, and listening
- o Include discussion, visuals, and collaborative activities

7. Leverage AI Strategically

- o Design integrated lessons and writing tasks
- o Provide feedback and tutoring support
- o Adjust reading levels and rewrite texts for accessibility
- o Generate writing prompts and project ideas

8. Build Vocabulary Intentionally

- o Teach academic and domain-specific vocabulary explicitly
- o Reinforce through repeated exposure and usage

9. Use Structured Writing Supports

- o Provide sentence frames, graphic organizers, and models
- o Gradually release responsibility to learners

10. Incorporate Frequent Writing Opportunities

- o Include low-stakes writing (journals, reflections)
- o Balance with formal writing tasks

11. Use Ongoing Formative Assessment

- o Monitor comprehension and writing progress regularly
- o Provide timely, specific feedback

12. Promote Learner Voice and Choice

- o Allow participants to select topics of interest
- o Encourage personal expression and goal-setting

STANDARDIZED TESTING TIPS AND STRATEGIES

Some YouthBuild participants struggle when taking tests such as the GED or HiSET, not because they lack academic skills, but because they are intimidated by or unfamiliar with standardized testing practices. Instructional staff can support YouthBuild participants by focusing on testing strategies that help participants prepare for the act of taking the test.

TOOL



Testing Strategies Tips for Participant

Explicitly teaching testing strategies prior to the GED or HiSET can support participant test success. Provide these tips to participants:

Prior to the Test

- Get a full night of sleep.
- Eat a meal before the test to support your brain's ability to think clearly.
- Arrive for the test early to avoid the stress of feeling rushed or running late.

Language Arts Test

- Read the question first. This way, you can look for specific information when reading test passages.
- If you're unsure of the answer, use the process of elimination to remove multiple choice answers you know are wrong. Then, guess with the remaining choices. This increases the odds that you will guess correctly.
- Summarize paragraphs in your head after you read to help remember main ideas.

Math Test

- Read the entire word problem with all supporting data, including graphs and tables, before choosing an answer. Successful testers may reread questions multiple times before answering.
- Break problems into steps to avoid getting overwhelmed or missing a step.
- If you are unsure of the answer, estimate or approximate to get as close as possible.
- Remember to use the on-screen calculator when necessary.

Social Studies Test

- Most questions can be answered from provided text passages. Don't worry about having memorized all history facts.
- Charts and data may include details needed to answer questions. Be sure to review these items carefully.
- Study economic vocabulary to be familiar with terms before the test.

Science Test

- Review graphs and tables carefully. Look for data trends.
- Study science vocabulary to be familiar with experiment terms before the test.
- Read the questions first before reading passages or examining data.

All Tests

- Try to maintain a positive attitude. Negativity can affect your ability to focus and keep pushing through a test.
- Read all of the answers before picking one. Then reread the question to make sure the answer you picked fits the question.
- Look for key words in reading and math questions for clues about what the question is looking for.
- Look for key words in answer choices. When you see words like "always" and "never", think carefully if this is true, or would the words "often" or "sometimes" have been more appropriate. If it isn't "always" true or "never" true, then the statement is incorrect.
- Answer the questions you know first. This way, you can ensure that you get several questions right before you tackle more challenging ones.
- Skip questions you don't know. You can come back to them at the end of the test.
- Budget your time. Thinking about how many questions are on the test compared to the length of the test will help you to decide when to move on if you get stuck.
- If you have time at the end of the test, double check your answers. Make sure you didn't select any wrong choices by mistake.
- When you are unsure of an answer, go with your gut and pick the answer you think is most likely to be correct. Avoid changing your mind later.

TEST ANXIETY STRATEGIES

Some YouthBuild participants need additional support to manage the physiological experience that they have when asked to perform on a high-stakes test. When a YouthBuild participant has the academic skills to pass a GED or HiSET test but feels scared or underperforms when taking the test, that participant may be experiencing test anxiety.

Here is a tool that includes mental and physical strategies that participants can use when testing to help manage or decrease testing anxiety.

TOOL



Tips for Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is a normal experience for students taking long or very important tests. There are steps you can take to manage test anxiety. First, determine if test anxiety is what you're feeling.

Know your symptoms. You may be experiencing test anxiety if:

- Your heart is beating faster than normal
- You are sweating
- You feel rage or stress for no apparent reason
- You feel down on yourself or negative
- You feel sick to your stomach
- You're having a hard time staying focused
- You feel embarrassed for no reason
- You feel thirsty
- Your muscles feel unusually tense in parts of your body

Tips for Overcoming Test Anxiety

1. Before the Test:
 - a. Be prepared. It's easier to feel confident and calm down if you've practiced and know what to expect on the test.

⁸ Taken from GED Testing Service, *How to Study for the GED Test*, <https://www.ged.com/blog/how-to-study-for-the-ged-test.html>, accessed April 27, 2026.

⁹ Taken from Kent State University, *GED Test Taking Strategies*, <https://literacy.kent.edu/eureka/EDR/5/Middletown/StudyLife%20Skills/GED%20Test%20Taking%20Strategies.pdf>, accessed April 27, 2026.

¹⁰ Taken from ETS HiSET, *HiSET Study Companion*, https://hiset.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/hiset_study_companion.pdf, accessed April 27, 2026.

- b. Get a good night's sleep. Most adults need between 7-9 hours of sleep at night to feel rested and refreshed. If you know you will be nervous the night before the test, try to sleep well during the week leading up to the test.
- c. Arrive at least 30 minutes early. This way, you won't feel unnecessarily rushed or stressed for travel reasons before the test.

2. During the Test:

- a. Repeat some affirmations. Positive thinking can help battle anxious feelings. Tell yourself "I've got this! I'm prepared for this test. I feel nervous because my body and mind are preparing to work hard. I've done hard things before, and I can do this now."
- b. Use breathing techniques, like box breathing. Breathe in for four seconds, hold for four seconds, breathe out for four seconds, hold for four seconds. Repeat this several times or for several minutes. Breathing techniques help your body to calm down and reduce feelings of anxiety.
- c. Use thinking techniques, like the 5-4-3-2-1 technique. Help your mind push out negative thoughts by noticing details around you. Notice 5 things you can see, 4 you can hear, 3 you can touch, 2 you can smell, and 1 you can taste.
- d. Remind yourself that you can often try again! Sometimes, the first GED or HiSET test is just a learning experience. Work with your instructor to determine when you can retake a test if necessary. ^{11 12 13}

AI IN THE CLASSROOM

AI can enhance instruction and maximize YouthBuild participant learning when used effectively. Beyond lesson planning, instructors can use AI to generate differentiated materials, create practice assessments, and support feedback and grading. It also saves time so instructors can focus on lesson quality—but they should always review outputs for accuracy, alignment, and potential bias or misinformation.

Instructors can use AI to:

Brainstorm

o Generate lesson ideas

AI can help instructors quickly produce a range of lesson ideas aligned to specific learning objectives. Instructors can use targeted prompts (e.g., including the skill, content area,

¹¹ Taken from GED Testing Service, *5 Tips to Overcome Test Anxiety When Taking the GED*, <https://www.ged.com/blog/5-tips-to-overcome-test-anxiety-when-taking-the-ged.html>, accessed April 27, 2026.

¹² Taken from GED Testing Service, *Test Anxiety (Tools for Test-Takers)*, <https://www.ged.com/content/dam/websites/ged/resources/December-TfT-TestAnxiety-Dec-2024.pdf>, accessed April 27, 2026.

¹³ Taken from Peterson's, *GED Math Test Success: Overcoming Math Anxiety*, <https://www.petersons.com/blog/ged-math-test-success-overcoming-math-anxiety/>, accessed April 27, 2026.

student level, and desired instructional approach) to generate multiple activity options, examples, or project ideas that can be adapted for their classroom.

- o Generate lists of resources for lesson development or topic research AI-powered search tools can support instructors in locating relevant articles, texts, videos, and instructional materials to strengthen lesson design. Instructors can use AI to identify credible sources, summarize key findings, or gather multiple perspectives on a topic. Instructors should always apply professional judgment to verify output accuracy and relevance.

Create Content & Lesson Plans

- o Develop leveled course materials
AI can adjust complex texts into multiple reading levels while preserving key ideas, allowing instructors to differentiate instruction without rewriting content from scratch. It can also generate model paragraphs, essays, or explanations aligned to both course content and participant skill levels, supporting scaffolding and skill growth.
- o Develop lesson plans aligned to objectives and instructional strategies AI can generate lesson plans based on learning objectives and incorporating specific instructional strategies (e.g., think-pair-share, writing workshop, project-based learning). Instructors can prompt AI with the objective, target content, and desired strategy to receive a sequenced plan that includes opening, guided practice, independent work, and assessment.
- o Develop handouts and visual supports
AI can quickly create clear, well-organized handouts that highlight key concepts, vocabulary, and examples. It can format materials that are visually appealing and readable (e.g., chunked text, bullet points, headings) and generate simple visuals such as charts, diagrams, or graphic organizers aligned to lesson content.
- o Develop educational games tied to course materials
AI can turn lesson content into interactive review activities such as quizzes, Jeopardy-style games, role-play scenarios, or problem-solving challenges. This allows instructors to reinforce learning in an engaging way while reducing planning time and increasing student participation.
- o Developing assessments
AI can generate a range of assessment types—including multiple-choice questions, short responses, performance tasks, and project-based assessments—aligned to specific

standards or skills. It can also adjust rigor and format to match different ability levels and provide answer keys or scoring guidance for efficient evaluation.

AI Programs that Support Education

o Chatbots and AI Assistants

Tools such as Google Gemini, ChatGPT, and Claude can support instructors in planning, content creation, and instructional problem-solving. These platforms generate comprehensive responses, explanations, and materials by drawing on large-scale data and patterns in language. Instructors can use them to draft lessons, differentiate materials, model responses, or troubleshoot instructional challenges, while critically reviewing outputs for accuracy and alignment.

Use: to brainstorm ideas, create drafts, differentiate learning materials, or save planning time

o Education-Specific AI Platforms

Platforms like ReadTheory and CommonLit use AI to assess participants' reading levels and deliver appropriately leveled texts with related comprehension questions and progress monitoring. Instructors can use these tools as supplemental supports to build reading comprehension and writing skills over time. For math, platforms like Khan Academy provide adaptive practice, instructional videos, and skill tracking to support individualized math growth. Together, these tools allow instructors to better meet diverse learner needs.

Use: to provide targeted skill practice, supplement class instruction, or support individualized learning pathways.

AI SAFETY TIPS:

- Always review AI outputs to make sure they are correct, aligned to goals, appropriate and safe for participants, and without bias or misinformation.
- Never input sensitive personal or student data into AI.
- AI cannot replace direct instruction and participant rapport-building.

TOOL



AI Education Tools and Resources

Teacher Planning & Content Development Tools

This list highlights a range of AI tools designed to support lesson planning, content creation, and overall instructional effectiveness. Some tools are free, while others offer limited free versions or require a paid subscription. Instructors should review features and pricing to determine the best fit for their needs.

- MagicSchool.ai – An AI tool designed specifically for educators that generates lesson plans, scaffolds, assessments, and instructional materials aligned to student needs and standards.
- Colleague.ai – An AI-powered assistant that supports teachers with planning, brainstorming, and instructional decision-making. It also helps refine ideas and generate classroom-ready resources.
- Brisk Teaching - A browser-based AI tool that integrates with existing platforms (like Google Docs) to quickly create feedback, lesson materials, and student supports. It also supports grading efficiency.
- NotebookLM - An AI tool by Google that helps users organize, summarize, and generate insights from their own documents and sources. Teachers can use it to build content knowledge and create materials grounded in specific texts.
- TeacherServer - A platform that uses AI to generate structured lesson plans, activities, and instructional resources. It's designed to streamline planning while aligning content to learning objectives.
- Suno – An AI tool that creates original songs from text prompts, which teachers can use to make engaging, content-based music for lessons. It's especially effective for reinforcing concepts through rhythm and repetition.
- ReadTheory – A reading platform that assesses students' comprehension levels and automatically provides leveled passages with follow-up questions. It provides individualized practice and ongoing progress tracking.
- Grammarly - An AI-powered writing assistant that provides real-time feedback on grammar, spelling, clarity, and tone. It helps students strengthen writing skills by offering suggestions and explanations that improve both correctness and overall communication.
- Snorkl - An AI-powered math tool that allows students to show and explain their thinking while solving problems, then provides feedback on their reasoning.
- Prodigy – A game-based math platform that adapts to student ability levels (typically grades 1–8) and reinforces skills through interactive gameplay. It increases engagement while providing teachers with data on student progress.
- Khanmigo - An AI tutor developed through Khan Academy that provides guided support, hints, and explanations to help students think through problems step by step.

TOOL



Writing Effective AI Prompts Tip Sheet

Resource Origin: YouthBuild Global

Conference Session: *Using AI in the Classroom*, YouthBuild Global Education Conference, 2025

Instructors can improve the quality and usefulness of AI outputs by writing effective prompts. Strong prompts include clear context, specific directions, and defined outcomes so outputs align with instructional goals. This toolkit offers guidance, but instructors should also experiment to find what works best for them.

These are the essential parts of a strong prompt:

Role + Task + Context + Format

Example: **Role:** “Act like you are a math instructor...”

Task: “Design a 45-minute lesson plan to introduce finding the area of a circle.”

Context: “Your students are 18-24 years old but are studying this topic for the first time. Use an “I Do, We Do, You Do” gradual release format to support students as well as the think-pair-share instructional strategy. Also, include real-world examples relevant for older students.”

Format: “Use clear section headers, bullet points, and include sample problems with answers. The lesson plan should use the template provided and be in a printable pdf format.”

AI Literacy Instruction

YouthBuild instructors can support participants’ academic growth, digital literacy, and workforce preparation by integrating AI literacy into their classes. While AI literacy targets specific knowledge, skills, and awareness related to AI, programs can seamlessly embed it within reading, writing, and math instruction; job readiness training; construction skills; leadership development; and other program components. Embedding AI literacy across these areas strengthens overall participant development and supports long-term success.

According to the U.S. Department of Labor, AI literacy is, “a foundational set of competencies that enable individuals to use and evaluate AI technologies responsibly, with a primary focus on generative AI, which is increasingly central to the modern workplace.”¹⁴ To support AI literacy programming, DOL has developed the [AI Literacy Framework](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/advisories/TEN/2025/TEN%2006-25/Attachment%20I%20%28Accessible%20PDF%29.pdf), guidance for AI literacy development in programs.

¹⁴ Taken from U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Training and Employment Notice No. 06-25, Attachment I (Accessible PDF), <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/advisories/TEN/2025/TEN%2006-25/Attachment%20I%20%28Accessible%20PDF%29.pdf>, accessed April 27, 2026.

Instructors can use AI in a variety of ways to benefit learners (see Using AI as a Teaching Tool section). In addition, YouthBuild participants need to learn how to utilize AI safely, effectively, and ethically.¹⁵

PRO TIP: Use a generative AI chatbot like Google Gemini or ChatGPT to learn more about how to use AI to create projects.

Sample prompt: “What are some cool products that high school or GED students can generate using AI?” Use chatbot suggestions (ex. “Turn it into a project menu”) or ask iterative questions to learn more or hone the output. (ex. “How would a student use AI with Google Slides?” or “Suggest free AI tools to complete AI-generated learning guide.”)

TOOL



Create a Lesson Plan Using AI

Step 1: Clarify the Foundation

Before using AI, identify the core elements of your lesson:

- Lesson topic
- Learning objectives (aligned to standards or competencies)
- Standards or desired outcomes
- Student population (grade level, skill level, special considerations)
- Desired assessment method

Step 2: Prompt the AI Effectively

Use a clear, detailed prompt. Include:

- Lesson topic
- Grade level / learner profile (e.g., GED prep, ELL, mixed-level)
- Lesson structure (e.g., *I Do / We Do / You Do*, workshop model)
- Instructional strategies (e.g., think-pair-share, modeling, discussion)
- Differentiation (include, or ask AI to suggest strategies)
- Assessment or desired outcome (what students should produce or demonstrate)
- Time frame (e.g., 45 minutes, 90 minutes)

PRO TIP: The more specific your prompt, the more usable the output.

Step 3: Review the AI Output Critically

Do not assume the AI response is ready to use. Check for:

- Alignment to objectives and standards
- Accuracy of content
- Clarity and structure of the lesson flow
- Bias or misinformation
- Appropriate rigor for your learners

Use your lesson planning checklist to guide this step.

¹⁵ Taken from U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Training and Employment Notice No. 06-25, Attachment I (Accessible PDF), <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/advisories/TEN/2025/TEN%2006-25/Attachment%20I%20%28Accessible%20PDF%29.pdf>, accessed April 27, 2026.

Step 4: Refine Through Iteration

Improve the lesson by prompting AI again. For example:

- Add differentiation strategies
- Adjust for time constraints
- Increase rigor or scaffolding
- Include more student interaction

Strong practice: Treat AI like a collaborator, not a one-shot tool.

Step 5: Personalize for Your Classroom

Adapt the lesson to fit your specific context:

- Add real-world connections relevant to students
- Adjust language and examples
- Incorporate student interests
- Modify pacing based on your group

Sample Prompt Template:

Create a [length] lesson plan on [topic] for [grade level/student population]. Include [lesson structure], [instructional strategies], and a clear assessment. Align to [standards or competencies].

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit¹⁶

TOOL**YouthBuild AI Project Ideas****Purpose:**

Participants will have the opportunity to design a product that uses AI to teach, solve a problem, or create something meaningful for a real audience. Each project idea suggests relevant AI tools that participants can use, creating opportunities for participants to develop their AI literacy.

Note: Some AI tools included in this menu are free, offer limited free versions, or require payment for full access. Staff should review tools in advance and select options that align with program resources.

Project Tips:

- Require a **real audience** (classmates, community, program staff, etc.)
- Build in:
 - Draft → Feedback → Revision → Final Share
- Emphasize: *usefulness over flashiness*

¹⁶ PROMPT: ChatGPT, here are some instructions I'm providing in the toolkit to teach instructors how to create lesson plans with AI. Can you structure this to look nice and check for anything I might have missed?

LEVEL 1: Entry Projects (Low barrier, high engagement)

1. AI Podcast Episode

Product:

A 5–10 minute podcast teaching a GED topic or discussing a real issue

AI Tools:

- ChatGPT (script + outline)
- Google Gemini
- Audacity (recording/editing)

Skills:

- Communication
- Content understanding
- Planning

2. AI-Generated Learning Guide

Product:

A student-friendly guide (visual + written) for a GED topic

AI Tools:

- ChatGPT
- Google Gemini
- Canva

Skills:

- Summarizing
- Visual design
- Teaching others

3. AI Visual Explainer (Poster or Slides)

Product:

Infographic or slide deck explaining a concept step-by-step

AI Tools:

- Canva
- Piktochart
- Genially

Skills:

- Clarity
- Visual communication
- Concept mastery

LEVEL 2: Applied Projects (Stronger skill-building)

4. AI GED Tutor Chatbot

Product:

A chatbot that teaches a specific GED topic and gives feedback

AI Tools:

- ChatGPT Builder

Requirements:

- Teaches (not just answers)
- Includes practice questions
- Gives hints before answers

Skills:

- Instructional thinking
- Problem-solving
- Iteration

5. AI Data Project (Real Issue)

Product:

A data-backed presentation (ex: attendance, budgeting, community issue)

AI Tools:

- ChatGPT, Google Gemini or Claude (analysis)
- Spreadsheet tools (Google Sheets / Excel)

Skills:

- Critical thinking
- Data literacy
- Real-world application

6. AI Learning Game

Product:

A quiz, scenario game, or “choose your path” learning experience

AI Tools:

- ChatGPT or other generative AI chatbot
- + Google Slides

Skills:

- Logic
- Engaging design
- Content mastery

LEVEL 3: Advanced / Showcase Projects

7. AI App Prototype

Product:

Prototype of an app (study tool, planner, support tool)

AI Tools:

- Glide Apps
- ChatGPT

Skills:

- Product thinking
- User Experience (UX) design
- Problem-solving

8. AI for Community Impact

Product:

AI solution to a real problem (housing, jobs, transportation, etc.)

AI Tools:

- ChatGPT
- Google Gemini
- Claude

Skills:

- Leadership
- Civic thinking
- Real-world application

Examples:

- Resource finder chatbot
- Budgeting assistant
- Job prep coach

Required Components (for ALL projects)

Each project must include:

1. Clear purpose (“Who is this for?”)
2. AI use explanation (“How did AI help?”)
3. Draft + revision evidence
4. Final product
5. Short presentation or demo

Simple Rubric Categories

- **Usefulness** (Does it actually help someone?)
- **Accuracy** (Is the content correct?)
- **Effort & iteration** (Did they improve it?)
- **Clarity** (Is it easy to understand/use?)
- **Presentation** (Can they explain it clearly?)

Developed using ChatGPT, human edit¹⁷

¹⁷ ChatGPT, what are 8-10 cool products that high school or GED students can generate using AI? Please develop the list into a project menu for instructional staff.

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

Program Name: Georgia Building Trades Academy (GABTA) YouthBuild

Location: Atlanta, Georgia

GABTA YouthBuild has taken an innovative approach to AI literacy to strengthen both workforce readiness and digital literacy for participants. In 2025, the program partnered with a local tech organization to create meaningful opportunities for YouthBuild participants to apply AI skills directly to construction-related work, including blueprint design.

GABTA YouthBuild's Program Director and Manager of Student Success and Partnerships began by identifying the specific AI literacy skills participants would need to be successful. Before introducing advanced AI applications, participants spent several weeks building foundational skills in generative AI. This included writing effective prompts using tools like ChatGPT and Google Gemini, evaluating AI-generated responses, and iterating to improve outputs.

Once participants had built these foundational skills, GABTA YouthBuild partnered with G-Data Labs to provide hands-on instruction and access to specialized AI tools. G-Data Labs supported the project by providing an instructor, access to a computer lab, and software to support the next phase of the project. GABTA YouthBuild's Manager of Student Success and Partnerships collaborated closely with the instructor to ensure the content was aligned to YouthBuild participants' needs and skill levels.

During this phase, participants worked in small groups to apply their AI skills to real-world construction tasks. Using ChatGPT and Google Gemini, they uploaded blueprints, generated floor plans, and used Runway to create drone fly-through simulations of their AI-designed homes. As their skills developed, participants enhanced their designs by adding furniture, textures, and additional details.

Through this project, GABTA YouthBuild participants engaged in a hands-on learning experience that strengthened both AI literacy and workforce readiness skills. The program not only built technical skills, but also strengthened collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking. Staff are excited to continue exploring how emerging technologies can expand opportunities for participants.

Why This Worked:

- **Skills before tools:** Participants built foundational AI skills (prompting, evaluating, iterating) before using advanced software.
- **Strong industry partnership:** G-Data Labs provided both technical expertise and access to tools that the program could not offer on its own.
- **Aligned instruction:** Staff worked closely with the partner to ensure content was relevant, accessible, and paced appropriately for participants.

- **Real-world application:** Participants applied AI to authentic construction tasks, increasing engagement and relevance.
- **Gradual complexity:** The project started with simple tasks and built toward more complex outputs, helping participants build confidence along the way.

Implementation Tips from GABTA YouthBuild Staff:

- Start by assessing and building participants' foundational skills, including digital literacy and questioning strategies.
- Provide training opportunities for staff so they are equipped to support AI literacy development.
- Start simple. AI technology is evolving rapidly, and it can be easy to overcomplicate projects. Keeping the project focused and manageable helps ensure participant success.

AI Literacy Lesson Ideas & Plans

The following AI lessons provide YouthBuild participants with opportunities to think critically about how AI impacts the world we live in as well as develop AI skills to promote academic growth and job readiness.

TOOL



Three Ideas for Introducing AI Literacy

Instructors can use these instructional strategies and tools to introduce AI literacy:

- Gallery Walk
Find images related to AI and hang them around the classroom. Prepare a Gallery Walk worksheet with questions like, "How does this picture relate to AI?". Students circulate and complete the worksheet. As a whole group, participants discuss how AI is represented in the pictures.
- Four Corners Debate
Create multiple statements about AI, such as "I have used AI in my everyday life", "I need AI skills to be successful in the job world", "AI is safe to use," and so on. When the instructor reads a statement, participants decide if they strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree, and move to the corresponding corner of the room. Participants in each corner discuss their stance and name examples. Then, volunteers from each corner share why they chose the answer they did.
- AI Pre-Assessment
Instructor hands out a questionnaire designed to assess participants' current experience, beliefs and options about AI.

TOOL



AI Literacy Pre-Assessment (10 Questions)

1. Which of the following best describes Artificial Intelligence (AI)?
 - A. A type of robot that looks like a human
 - B. Computer systems that can perform tasks that usually require human intelligence
 - C. A search engine like Google
 - D. A social media platform
2. Which of the following are examples of AI tools? (*Select all that apply*)
 - A. Spell check in Microsoft Word
 - B. Chatbots like ChatGPT
 - C. Voice assistants like Siri or Alexa
 - D. Calculators
3. Short Answer: What is one way AI is currently used in everyday life?
4. AI always provides correct and unbiased information.
 - ☐ True
 - ☐ False
5. Have you ever used an AI tool (like ChatGPT, Google Gemini, etc.)?
 - A. Yes, frequently
 - B. Yes, a few times
 - C. I've heard of them but never used one
 - D. No, never
6. Short Answer: If you have used AI before, what did you use it for?
7. Which of the following is the BEST way to use AI for learning?
 - A. Copy answers directly without checking
 - B. Use it to explain ideas and help you understand
 - C. Avoid using it completely
 - D. Use it only for entertainment
8. Circle one
"I believe AI can help me learn new skills."
 Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
9. Circle one
"I am confident I could use AI tools responsibly (without cheating or misusing them)."
 Strongly Disagree – Disagree – Neutral – Agree – Strongly Agree
10. Open-Ended: What concerns or questions do you have about using AI in school or at work?

Answer Key: 1.) B; 2.) A, B, C; 3.) answers will vary. Examples – voice assistants (Siri, Alexa), chatbots (ChatGPT, Google Gemini), Netflix recommendations, spell check; 4.) false; 5.) answers will vary; 6.) answers will vary; 7.) B; 8.) answers will vary; 9.) answers will vary; 10.) answers will vary.

Lesson Plan

AI AS A LEARNING TOOL (90-110 MINUTES)

Students explore AI educational uses through stations.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- ☐ Devices with internet access
- ☐ Copies of AI prompt template: Role + Task + Context + Format
- ☐ Station worksheets
- ☐ Station materials
 - o Station 1 – Reading text (not included)
 - o Station 3 – Short quiz on a math concept (not included)

OBJECTIVES:

Participants will:

- o Evaluate the accuracy, usefulness, and limitations of AI-generated outputs using guided evaluation questions by identifying at least one strength and one limitation for each output and justifying their reasoning with evidence (critical thinking).
- o Discuss and defend their evaluations of AI tools during partner or small-group discussions by clearly stating a claim and supporting it with at least one piece of evidence from their AI interactions (communication).
- o Use AI tools for educational purposes (e.g., summarizing, tutoring, feedback, writing support) during station activities with provided prompts/templates by generating at least one appropriate AI prompt and demonstrating responsible use (e.g., refining prompts, questioning outputs, or identifying potential inaccuracies)(digital literacy).

STANDARDS COVERED:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 – Initiate and participate effectively in collaborative discussions
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.8 – Evaluate the validity of reasoning and accuracy of evidence
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6 – Use technology to produce and publish writing

PROCESS:

- **Activity 1: Activate Prior Knowledge**
 - o AI Topic – What do you think it means to “Use AI responsibly”? Explain.
 - o 2–3 min: Silent individual writing
 - o 3–5 min: Pair/share
 - o 2 min: Quick whole-group share
- **Activity 2 – Modeling (Minilesson – AI for Education) (20-25 Minutes)**
 - o **Purpose:** Show Participants What Good AI Use Actually Looks Like Before They Try It.
 - o **Step 1: Live Demo (Teacher Modeling) – 12-15 Minutes**
 - Project one generative AI tool for participants to see (ChatGPT or Google Gemini are two easy options)
 - Introduce the prompt template and provide examples:
 - Role + Task + Context + Format

- Model a weak vs strong prompt:
 - Weak Prompt: “Explain linear equations”
 - Strong Prompt: “Explain linear equations like I’m a beginner. Use simple language, give two examples, and include a real-life situation.”
- Think aloud while modeling:
 - “This isn’t specific enough... AI might give me something confusing.”
 - “Now I’m adding some extra details and an audience—Let’s see if this improves the response.”
- Then evaluate the output out loud:
 - Is this new output clear?
 - Is anything missing?
 - Would this actually help me learn about linear equations?
- **Step 2: Model AI Output Evaluation – 8-10 Minutes**
 - Ask Participants:
 - ☐ What did the AI do well?
 - ☐ What did it not do well?
 - ☐ Would you trust this to prepare for a test?
- **Activity 3 – Stations (60-70 Minutes Total ~15-18 Minutes Per Station)**

Structure Option:

 - **4 stations × 15 minutes each = 60 minutes**
 - 1–2 minutes transition between rounds (build this in mentally)

Inside each 15-minute station:

 - 3–4 min: Set up + prompt design
 - 6–8 min: AI interaction
 - 3–4 min: partner discussion + evaluation
 - **STATION 1 – AI For Study Guides**
 - Task:
 - Choose ChatGPT or Google Gemini
 - Copy and paste the provided reading text.
 - Prompt the AI to make a summary. Then, prompt AI to create flashcards.
 - Examine the output and evaluate for effectiveness.
 - Discuss with a partner:
 - What did the AI do well?
 - What did it struggle with?
 - Would you actually use this for studying? Explain.
 - Extend – Use two different AI models and compare the outputs. Which do you prefer and why?
 - **STATION 2 – AI For On-Demand Tutoring**
 - Task:
 - Choose Khan Academy or Claude
 - Choose one of the following complete topics:
 - Language Arts – Symbolism
 - Math – Linear Equations

- Social Studies – the 4th Amendment
 - Science – Physics – Inertia
 - Design a prompt for AI using the prompt template (above)
 - You want AI to break down the concept in simple terms as if it was a tutor. It should also provide examples and visuals.
 - Examine the output and evaluate for effectiveness. Ask follow-up questions as necessary.
 - Discuss with a partner:
 - What did the AI do well?
 - What did it struggle with?
 - Would you actually use this for studying? Explain.
 - Extend – use two different AI models and compare the outputs. Which do you prefer and why?
- o **STATION 3 – Quiz & Feedback**
- Task:
 - Complete the short quiz on [math concept].
 - Choose ChatGPT or Quillbot (a Google extension)
 - Design a prompt for AI using the prompt template
 - You want AI to check your answers and then provide explanation for anything you got wrong.
 - Upload the quiz and your responses into AI.
 - Consider: Purposely giving an incorrect answer to see if AI catches it as well as how AI explains the correct answer.
 - Examine the output and evaluate for effectiveness. Ask follow-up questions as necessary.
 - Discuss with a partner:
 - What did the AI do well?
 - What did it struggle with?
 - Would you actually use this for studying? Explain.
 - Extend – Use two different AI models and compare the outputs. Which do you prefer and why?
- o **STATION 4 – English Language Support**
- Task:
 - First, participants write a one-paragraph response to one of the following questions:
 - Should cell phones be allowed in schools? Explain.
 - How does AI support student learning? Explain.
 - What is one healthy habit that you've heard about that you'd like to try? Explain.
 - Choose Grammarly or Google Translate
 - Design a prompt for AI using the prompt template
 - You want AI to translate, clarify, or clean-up your writing and then explain what it did.
 - Upload the writing question and your one-paragraph response.

- Examine the AI output and evaluate for effectiveness. Ask follow-up questions as necessary.
- Discuss with a partner:
 - What did the AI do well?
 - What did it struggle with?
 - Would you actually use this
- Extend – Use two different AI models and compare the outputs. Which do you prefer and why?

• **Activity 4 – Reflection And Debrief**

- Step 1: Individual Reflection (5-7 Minutes)
 - Participants respond in writing:
 - Which AI task was **most helpful** and why?
 - Which AI task was **least helpful** and why?
 - What is one example where AI could give **wrong or misleading information**?
 - When should you not use AI for schoolwork?
- Step 2: Small Group Discussion (5-7 Minutes)
 - In groups, participants discuss:
 - There is AI actually useful for learning?
 - Where does it become a problem?
 - Encourage debate to dive deep into AI usage.
- Step 3: Whole Class Debrief (5-6 Minutes)
 - Facilitate a short share-out.
 - Write two columns on the board:
 - AI helps learning when...
 - AI hurts learning when...
 - Whole class report out to complete the chart.
- Exit Ticket

If a new YouthBuild participant asked you, “Should I use AI to study?” – What would you tell them?

FACILITATORS’ NOTES:

Station ideas borrowed from the 2025 YouthBuild Global Education Conference, “Using AI in the Classroom”

- Participants may over-trust AI at first. Be sure to emphasize areas where AI can be damaging or unreliable
- Try to challenge trust without shutting down curiosity and enthusiasm

AI Stations Worksheet: Evaluating AI Outputs

Station 1: Study Guide

Your Prompt:

AI Output Snapshot: What did the AI produce? (Quick Summary)

Rate the AI Output for...	1	2	3	4
Accuracy (is it correct?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Clarity (Easy to understand?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Usefulness (Helpful for learning?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Completeness (Did it fully answer the task?)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Critical Thinking

- 1. What did the AI do WELL?
- 2. What did the AI do POORLY or miss?
- 3. Do you think any part of this response could be WRONG or misleading? Explain.
- 4. What follow-up question would improve this response?

Discussion (Be ready to share) Your final judgment:

- ☐ I would use this as a study tool
- ☐ I would use this with caution
- ☐ I would NOT trust this

Why? (Be specific).

EXTRA: Compare (if you used 2 tools)
Which AI tools did you use? _____ vs _____
Which was better? Why?

Station 2: On-Demand Tutoring

Your Prompt:

AI Output Snapshot: What did the AI produce? (Quick Summary)

Rate the AI Output for...	1	2	3	4
Accuracy (is it correct?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Clarity (Easy to understand?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Usefulness (Helpful for learning?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Completeness (Did it fully answer the task?)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Critical Thinking

- 1. What did the AI do WELL?
- 2. What did the AI do POORLY or miss?
- 3. Do you think any part of this response could be WRONG or misleading? Explain.
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- ☐ I would NOT trust this

Why? (Be specific).

EXTRA: Compare (if you used 2 tools)

Which AI tools did you use? _____ vs _____

Which was better? Why?

Station 3: Quiz & Feedback

Your Prompt:

AI Output Snapshot: What did the AI produce? (Quick Summary)

Rate the AI Output for...	1	2	3	4
Accuracy (is it correct?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Clarity (Easy to understand?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Usefulness (Helpful for learning?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Completeness (Did it fully answer the task?)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Critical Thinking

- 1. What did the AI do WELL?
- 2. What did the AI do POORLY or miss?
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- ☐ I would NOT trust this

Why? (Be specific).

EXTRA: Compare (if you used 2 tools)

Which AI tools did you use? _____ vs _____

Which was better? Why?

Station 4: English Language Support

Your Prompt:

AI Output Snapshot: What did the AI produce? (Quick Summary)

Rate the AI Output for...	1	2	3	4
Accuracy (is it correct?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Clarity (Easy to understand?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Usefulness (Helpful for learning?)	☐	☐	☐	☐
Completeness (Did it fully answer the task?)	☐	☐	☐	☐

Critical Thinking

- 1. What did the AI do WELL?
- 2. What did the AI do POORLY or miss?
- 3. Do you think any part of this response could be WRONG or misleading? Explain.
- 4. What follow-up question would improve this response?

Discussion Prep (Be ready to share) Your final judgment:

- ☐ I would use this as a study tool
- ☐ I would use this with caution
- ☐ I would NOT trust this

Why? (Be specific).

EXTRA: Compare (if you used 2 tools)

Which AI tools did you use? _____ vs _____

Which was better? Why?

Lesson Plan

USING AI THE RIGHT WAY (45-60 MINUTES)

Responsible AI use for resume improvement

YouthBuild Program: Charles Stewart Mott Community College

Location: Flint, MI

Lesson created by Katrina Ireland of Mott Community College, 2026

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Devices With Internet Access
- Student Resumes
- Career-Specific AI Prompt
- Definition Of “Transferable Skills” (Posted Or Handout)
- Activity Reflection Worksheet

OBJECTIVES:

Learning Objectives: Students will be able to...

- Explain the right vs. Wrong way to use AI in a professional setting
- Identify and articulate transferable skills from past work experiences
- Use AI to revise resume language without losing voice or honesty
- Evaluate whether AI suggestions are accurate and truthful

Language Arts Objective: Students will be able to...

- Write a clear, evidence-based reflection that explains revision decisions using specific examples from their resume and AI feedback.

STANDARDS COVERED:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4
Produce clear and coherent writing appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5
Develop and strengthen writing through planning, revising, editing, and rewriting
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9
Draw evidence from informational texts (including AI-generated suggestions) to support analysis and reflection

PROCESS:

- **Activity 1 – Thought-Provoking Question - Journal (5-7 Minutes)**
 - Why is it important to use AI as a tool instead of letting it do the work for you in [career field]? Give one reason.
 - Optional Follow-Ups:
 - What could go wrong if you rely too much on AI in a [healthcare, construction, etc.] Career?
 - How can a potential employer tell if your resume was written by AI?
 - Why does honesty matter in this field?
 - Ask a few volunteers to share.

• **Activity 2 – Opening Discussion (5–7 Minutes)**

- o Introduce the lesson goal: Today, you will use AI to improve your resumes, but we will focus on using AI in a responsible and professional way
- o Ask students these guiding questions:
 - “What do people do wrong when using AI?”
 - “What happens if everyone uses the same AI-generated resume?”
 - “Why does honesty matter more in healthcare careers?”
- o Emphasize the following points: (Create an Anchor Chart)
 -  Wrong way to use AI:
 - “Write my resume for me”
 - Copy/paste without proof reading
 - Letting AI exaggerate or invent experience
 -  Right way to use AI:
 - Write your resume first, then revise
 - Use AI as an editor or coach
 - Stay truthful and keep your voice

• **Activity 3 – Mini-Lesson – Transferable Skills (8-10 Minutes)**

- o Say: Today, we will learn about transferable skills: Transferable skills are abilities you can use in many different jobs, classes, or situations—like communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and time management. These skills aren’t tied to just one task, so you can carry them with you wherever you go.
 - Class reads the definition together.
- o Say: Let’s come up with some examples together.
- o Examples - CNA Focus: what skills does a CNA use every day?
 - Instructor Writes Down Responses And Guides Toward:
 - Patient Care
 - Communication
 - Teamwork
 - Reliability
 - Attention to Detail
 - Emotional Intelligence
- o Examples - Construction Focus: What skills does a construction laborer use every day?
 - Instructor writes down responses and guides toward:
 - Safety Awareness
 - Communication
 - Time Management
 - Teamwork
- o **Note:** Even if you’ve never worked in [career], your past jobs will show some of these skills. That’s why they’re referred to as transferable skills. You just need to describe them the right way.

• **Activity 4 - Participant Self-Review (7-10 Minutes)**

- o Participants will:
 - Read their resume quietly
 - Highlight:
 - One section they feel confident about
 - One section that could be stronger or clearer
 - Instructor models this process first with an example and demonstrates the self-review with a think-aloud.
 - Then, students have 7-10 minutes to work.

• **Activity 5 - Using AI Properly (10-15 Minutes)**

- o Instructor: AI should improve your writing, not replace it. Let's practice using a prompt.
- o Career-Focused Resume Prompt (Student Use)
 - Instructor will provide the career-specific prompt wording for participants.
 - Instructor models this process prior to student independent work.
 - Type this prompt:
 - o CNA example: I'm a CNA student preparing for a healthcare job. Below is the resume I wrote for myself. Some of my past jobs may not be in healthcare, but I want to show how my experience connects to working as a Certified Nursing Assistant.
 - Then include this general career prompt:
 - o Help me:
 - Improve clarity and wording
 - Fix grammar or formatting
 - Make my job duties sound more professional
 - Highlight transferable skills (such as communication, teamwork, responsibility, time management, and helping others)
 - Add impact by showing what I accomplished or how I helped others
 - Keep my original voice
 - Make it no more than 1 and ¼ pages long
 - DO NOT:
 - Add any skills, certifications, or experiences that I didn't list
 - o If something is unclear, suggest improvements instead of making things up.
 - o Here is my resume:
 - Students will then upload their resumes to generative AI.
- o Instructor explains:
 - This works because it
 - Keeps the student in control
 - Connects experience to specific job skills
 - Prevents dishonesty
 - Builds stronger, more professional language

- Instructor models this process first:
 - Show transformation (share via projector):
 - Before:
 - Helped customers and worked the register
 - After:
 - Assisted customers by communicating clearly
 - Handled transactions accurately
 - Resolved customers' concerns calmly in a timely manner
 - With Impact:
 - Assisted 50+ customers per shift by communicating clearly
 - Processed transactions accurately and ended each shift with a balanced drawer
 - Resolved customers' concerns in a fast-paced environment
 - Connect to Career-Specific Work:
 - Say: This shows soft skills and job-readiness skills that employers are looking for in new applicants.
- Participants type prompts and upload resumes.
- **Activity 6: Review, Revise, Reflect (10-15 Minutes)**
 - After receiving AI suggestions, participants must:
 - Read all suggestions carefully
 - Decide:
 - What to keep
 - What to change
 - What to reject
 - Look for anything that rings dishonest
 - Omit anything that violates the honesty rule
 - Edit their resume themselves
 - **Reflection Questions (Think-Pair-Share)**
 - Participants complete the activity reflection worksheet:
 - What is one change suggested by AI that you decided to use? Explain.
 - Did AI help you show skills that relate to [career]?
 - Did it suggest anything untrue or exaggerated?
 - Does your resume still sound like you?
 - Did your job descriptions become clearer and more impactful?
 - Would an employer trust what you wrote? Why?
 - After completing the worksheet, participants turn to a partner and discuss what they think. If time, discuss as a whole group.
 - **Exit Ticket**
 - Participants answer ONE:
 - “One way AI improved my resume without changing who I am”
 - “One rule I’ll follow when using AI in my career”
 - “One skill I now see in my experience that connects to being a [job position].”

FACILITATORS' NOTES:

- Teacher Talking Point Suggestions
 - Employers are not looking for a perfect resume, but they are looking for candidates who are responsible, honest, and able to communicate clearly.
 - “AI should help you sound like the best version of yourself, not someone else.”
- **Optional Extensions**
 - Compare before and after resumes (high impact)
 - Peer review: “Does this still sound like you?”
 - Apply this skill to:
 - Cover letters
 - Job applications
 - Professional emails
- **Adjusting This Lesson Based On Career Pathway**
 - Activities 5 & 6 focus on a CNA-specific example. However, instructors can adjust the focus based on participants’ specific interests.

Lesson Plan

JOB SEARCHING WITH AI (40-50 MINUTES)

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Computers/Laptops/Tablets
- Access to Internet
- [AI Job Search Planning Sheet](#)

OBJECTIVES:

- Participants Will Be Able To:
 - Draft an effective AI job search prompt using role, task, context, and format.
 - Evaluate AI-generated job search results for relevance and accuracy.
 - Identify and record next-step leads (companies, contacts, application methods).
 - Revise prompts based on output quality to improve results.

STANDARDS COVERED:

- AI Literacy Framework
 - 3 – Direct AI Effectively
 - 4 – Evaluate AI Outputs
 - 5 – Use AI Responsibly
- Common Core Standards
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.7 – Conduct short research projects to answer a question
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.8.8 – Gather relevant information from multiple sources and assess credibility
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1 – Engage effectively in collaborative discussions

PROCESS:

- **Activity 1: Activate Prior Knowledge (7 Minutes)**
 - Participants write or discuss:
 - What steps have you already taken toward employment? You can include certificates earned, education and coursework completed, etc.
 - Group reports out. Record answers on the board. Make sure the list is complete and fill in any missing steps (resume, mock interviews, etc.)
- **Activity 2: Instructor Modeling – Using AI For Job Search (10-12 Minutes)**
 - **Note for Instructors** – This lesson assumes that students have practiced AI prompting in previous lessons. If this is the first time participants will draft an AI prompt, more time (and more explanation/examples) should be devoted to this skill.
 - **Lesson Tip** – prepare for the lesson by creating an activity step visual (e.g. – writing them on the board, projecting a slide, providing a handout, etc.)

- o Say: Today we will use AI to take the next step towards employment, finding real job opportunities and acting on them. We will practice job searching using generative AI [ChatGPT, Google Gemini, etc.]
- o Step 1 - Creating a Strong Prompt
 - Review: Strong prompts are key to getting the AI response you want.
 - Prompt Formula: **ROLE + TASK + CONTEXT + FORMAT**
 - Model Examples: For this step, instructor should model writing a prompt using a template. Provide 3-4 examples.
 - *“Make a list of 20 construction employers in [city, state] who are currently hiring laborers with a GED and NCCER certificate. Include contact info”*
 - *“List 20 entry-level CNA jobs in [city, state] for certified candidates and explain the best way to apply”*
 - *“List 10 companies in [city, state] that hire apprentices or laborers and provide contact information”*
 - *“Find 15 HVAC companies in [city, state] that offer on-the-job training and share hiring contact name and phone number”*
 - **Note:** these prompts seemingly omit the “role” portion of the prompt formula. Instructors can talk to participants about AI acting as a search tool in these examples if necessary.
 - Partner practice: each person will take 5-6 minutes to create their own prompt and share it with a partner.
 - Partners make sure prompts include role (see note above if relevant), task, context, and format, and revise as necessary.
- o Step 2 – Engaging With AI
 - Model examples: demonstrate the process for entering the prompt and engaging with generative AI.
 - Briefly discuss observable results. Teach participants to ask:
 - Is this what I wanted?
 - Does it seem accurate?
 - Should I adjust my prompt or add an iteration to get a better result?
- o Step 3 – Record Next Steps
 - Tell participants, “You will use the AI job search planning sheet to collect information.”
 - Record which companies will you contact
 - Record key information – hiring contact name and phone/email, business address, online application link
 - Record next steps
 - Examples: Visit website and complete application, email hiring contact, call for more information, visit location to submit application, etc.

- **Activity 3: Participant Work Time (15-20 Minutes)**

- o Participants interact with generative AI
- o They should enter their prompts, analyze results, and take notes (on paper or electronically) on the results
- o Encourage them to request some of the additional resources that AI may suggest, such as creating a 30-day job search plan
- o Instructor role: circulate and encourage thinking:
 - Is my prompt specific enough?
 - Do I actually want to apply to [company]?
 - What is your next step with this company?
- o Additional activity for completed pairs
 - Tell pairs to create a prompt to ask AI to teach them the best ways to use AI for job searching. Encourage them to include the components of a good prompt.
 - Read and evaluate the AI response.

- **Activity 4: Debrief (8-10 Minutes)**

- o Instructor leads whole group reflection
- o Ask for volunteers:
 - What about your prompt worked?
 - Did you have to change anything?
 - Which companies did you find?
 - Where will you apply first—and why?

FACILITATORS' NOTES:

Be sure to pre-teach vocabulary as necessary, such as “Generative AI”, “Output”, and “Iteration”.

AI Job Search Planning Sheet

Name: _____

AI Prompt:

Directions: Enter your prompt into [generative AI]. Record the AI outputs below. Don't forget to ask yourself:

- o Is this the information that I wanted?
- o Does it seem accurate and truthful?
- o Should I adjust my prompt to get a better result?

1. **Company:** _____

a. Position Available: _____

b. Why I Am A Good Fit: _____

c. Application (Circle One): Online In-Person

d. Hiring Contact Name: _____

e. Hiring Contact Phone # And Email: _____

2. **Company:** _____

a. Position Available: _____

b. Why I Am A Good Fit: _____

c. Application (Circle One): Online In-Person

d. Hiring Contact Name: _____

e. Hiring Contact Phone # and Email: _____

3. **Company:** _____

a. Position Available: _____

b. Why I am a good fit: _____

c. Application (Circle One): Online In-Person

d. Hiring Contact Name: _____

e. Hiring Contact Phone # and Email: _____

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Instructional strategies (IS) are thoughtful, systematic methods and approaches that instructional staff can use to help YouthBuild participants achieve specific learning objectives. Some are whole activities, and some are techniques.

Instructional Strategy Selection Guide:

This guide contains suggestions for a variety of highly effective strategies that YouthBuild instructional staff can use to support learning goals. Use this index to search for specific strategies by lesson needs or topics:

If your goal is to... support reading comprehension

- [Previewing a Text](#)
- [Pre-Teaching Vocabulary](#)
- [Think-Aloud](#)
- [Close Reading](#)
- [Activate Prior Knowledge](#)
- [Graphic Organizers](#)

If your goal is to... develop writing skills

- [Writing Workshop](#)
- [Graphic Organizers](#)
- [Peer Review](#)
- [Providing Models \(Exemplars\)](#)

If your goal is to... support math understanding and problem-solving

- [Chunking](#)
- [Graphic Organizers](#)
- [Using Manipulatives](#)
- [Teaching Thinking Strategies Explicitly](#)
- [I Do, We Do, You Do \(Gradual Release\)](#)

If your goal is to... build collaboration skills, use:

- [Think-Pair-Share](#)
- [Jigsaw](#)
- [Learning Stations \(Station Rotation\)](#)
- [Literature Circles](#)
- [Gallery Walk](#)
- [Peer Review](#)

If your goal is to... build discussion and student voice

- [Think-Pair-Share](#)
- [Fishbowl Discussion](#)
- [Four Corners Debate](#)
- [Literature Circles](#)
- [Jigsaw](#)

If your goal is to... increase engagement and movement

- [Gallery Walk](#)
- [Learning Stations \(Station Rotation\)](#)
- [Jigsaw](#)
- [Four Corners Debate](#)

If your goal is to... build independence and learning habits

- [Anchor Charts](#)
- [Independent Reading](#)
- [Teaching Thinking Strategies Explicitly](#)
- [Think-Aloud](#)
- [Peer Review](#)

If your goal is to... introduce or prepare students for new learning

- [Activate Prior Knowledge](#)
- [Pre-Teach Vocabulary](#)
- [Previewing a Text](#)
- [Providing Models \(Exemplars\)](#)
- [Graphic Organizers](#)

If your goal is to... support English Language Learners

- [Think-Aloud](#)
- [Pre-Teach Vocabulary](#)
- [Graphic Organizers](#)
- [Providing Models \(Exemplars\)](#)
- [Think-Pair-Share](#)

Activate Prior Knowledge

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

Activating prior knowledge is a strategy that helps participants connect new learning to what they already know, have experienced, or have previously studied. This process prepares the brain to receive and organize new information more effectively.

Purpose

- Improve comprehension and retention of new content
- Increase student engagement and lesson relevance
- Build connections across lessons and experiences

When to Use

- At the beginning of a lesson or unit
- Before introducing new concepts or texts
- When transitioning between related topics
- As a quick warm-up activity

How to Use This Strategy

1. Set the Purpose

Clearly state what participants are about to learn and why it matters.

2. Prompt Participant Thinking

Ask questions or provide prompts that connect to prior learning or experiences.

- “What do you already know about...?”
- “Where have you seen this before?”

3. Use a Structured Activity

Choose a quick method to surface thinking, such as:

- Think-Pair-Share
- Quick-write or journal response
- KWL chart (Know–Want to Know–Learned)
- Brainstorm or list

4. Surface and Discuss Ideas

Invite participants to share responses. Record key ideas to validate contributions and make thinking visible.

5. Clarify and Bridge

Address misconceptions and explicitly connect participant responses to the upcoming learning.

What It Looks Like in Practice

Before a lesson on persuasive writing, participants respond to: “When have you tried to convince someone of something?” The instructor collects examples (e.g., convincing a friend, debating a rule) and connects these to persuasive techniques that will be taught in the lesson.

Anchor Charts

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

Anchor charts are visual tools created with participants to capture key concepts, strategies, and learning processes during a lesson or unit. They serve as references that participants can return to as they practice and apply new skills.

Purpose

- Make thinking visible
- Reinforce key concepts and processes
- Provide ongoing support for independent work
- Build student ownership of learning

When to Use

- Introducing new concepts
- Modeling processes or strategies
- Supporting ongoing units of study
- Reviewing and summarizing learning

How to Use This Strategy

1. **Introduce the Focus** Begin with a clear learning objective or question (e.g., “How do we identify the main idea?”).
2. **Co-Create the Chart**
As you teach, record participant ideas, steps, and examples in real time.
 - Use student language when possible
 - Ask guiding questions to shape responses
3. **Include Key Elements**
Effective anchor charts often include:
 - Clear headings
 - Step-by-step processes or strategies
 - Visuals, symbols, or color coding
 - Examples and/or non-examples
4. **Use the Chart Actively** Refer to the chart throughout the lesson and in future lessons. Prompt participants to use it during independent or group work.
5. **Encourage Participant Interaction**
Invite participants to:
 - Add ideas or examples
 - Use the chart to explain their thinking
 - Reference it when solving problems
6. **Revisit and Revise** Update charts as understanding deepens. Retire or replace charts when they are no longer needed.

Anchor Chart Topic Ideas:

1. Reading strategies (predicting, questioning, summarizing, inferring)

2. Text structures (cause/effect, compare/contrast, sequence)
3. Writing process (brainstorm → draft → revise → edit)
4. Problem-solving strategies (draw a model, make a table, guess & check)
5. Order of operations (PEMDAS)
6. Fractions, decimals, and percentages connections
7. Place value
8. Study skills (note-taking, summarizing)
9. Growth mindset reminders
10. Sentence stems (“I agree with... because...”)
11. Discussion norms
12. Scientific method steps
13. Classroom Entry/exit procedures
14. Turn-and-talk guidelines
15. Technology use norms

Chunking

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

Chunking is a strategy that breaks complex information or tasks into smaller, manageable parts to improve understanding, reduce cognitive overload, and support step-by-step learning.

Purpose

- Increase comprehension of complex content
- Prevent participants from becoming overwhelmed
- Improve focus and task completion
- Support memory and retention

When to Use

- Introducing new or complex concepts
- Assigning multi-step tasks or projects
- Reading dense or challenging texts

How to Use This Strategy

1. Identify Natural Break Points

Divide content, text, or tasks into logical sections (e.g., paragraphs, steps, stages).

2. Present One Chunk at a Time

Teach or assign a small portion before moving on to the next.

3. Check for Understanding

After each chunk, pause for questions, discussion, or quick checks for understanding.

- “What is the main idea of this section?”
- “What did we just do in this step?”

4. Engage Participants in Processing

Have participants summarize, annotate, or discuss each chunk before continuing.

5. Connect the Chunks

At the end, help participants see how the parts fit together into a whole.

What it Looks Like in Practice

During a math lesson, the instructor introduces a multi-step problem one step at a time. After each step, participants practice and explain their thinking before moving forward.

Materials/Preparation

- Pre-divided text, tasks, or notes
- Guiding questions or prompts for each chunk

Close Reading**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY****Description**

Close reading is a structured approach to analyzing a text through multiple, purposeful readings that deepen comprehension and focus on evidence, meaning, and author's craft.

Purpose

- Develop critical thinking and analytical skills
- Improve comprehension of complex texts
- Build evidence-based reasoning
- Strengthen academic vocabulary and discussion

When to Use

- Working with complex or important texts
- Teaching analysis (e.g., theme, argument, tone)
- Preparing for writing or discussion tasks
- Supporting standards-aligned reading instruction

How to Use This Strategy

- 1. Select a Purposeful Text** Choose a short, meaningful passage aligned to your objective.
- 2. First Read – Get the Gist**
Participants read to understand the general idea.
 - Focus: "What is this mostly about?"
- 3. Second Read – Analyze Structure and Details**
Participants reread to examine key details, vocabulary, and organization.
 - Annotate, highlight, or respond to guiding questions
- 4. Third Read – Deepen Understanding**
Focus on deeper meaning, author's purpose, or implications.

- Use text-dependent questions requiring evidence

5. Discuss and Apply

Engage participants in discussion or writing using evidence from the text.

What it Looks Like in Practice

Participants read a short article three times: first to summarize, second to identify key details and vocabulary, and third to analyze the author's argument. They then write a response that cites evidence.

Tips for Success

- Use short, high-quality texts
- Texts should be challenging but not unattainable
- Provide clear purpose for each reading
- Model annotation and thinking early on
- Ask text-dependent (not opinion-only) questions

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide guided annotations or sentence starters
- Read aloud or use audio support for access
- Pre-teach critical vocabulary as needed

Materials/Preparation

- Selected text and guiding questions
- Annotation tools (highlighters, notes, or digital tools)

Fishbowl Discussion

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

A fishbowl discussion is a structured conversation strategy in which a small group of participants discusses a topic in an inner circle while the rest of the class observes from an outer circle. Participants then switch roles, allowing all individuals to engage as both speakers and observers.

Purpose

- Promote meaningful, student-led discussion
- Develop listening and speaking skills
- Model effective discussion behaviors
- Encourage reflection on discussion quality

When to Use

- Analyzing texts, issues, or essential questions
- Practicing discussion skills and academic discourse
- Reviewing or synthesizing learning
- Preparing for debates or seminars

How to Use This Strategy

1. **Set the Purpose and Norms**
Clearly define the discussion goal and establish expectations (e.g., use evidence, build on ideas, listen actively).
2. **Form Inner and Outer Circles**
Select a small group (4–6 students) for the inner circle. The remaining participants form the outer circle.
3. **Provide a Focus Question or Task**
Use open-ended, text-based, or thought-provoking questions to guide discussion.
4. **Facilitate the Inner Circle Discussion**
Inner circle participants discuss while the outer circle listens without interrupting.
5. **Assign an Observation Task**
Outer circle participants take notes to track specific behaviors (e.g., use of evidence, participation, questioning, collaboration).
6. **Debrief and Reflect** Pause to discuss what worked, what could improve, and key ideas from the discussion.
7. **Rotate Roles**
Switch groups so all participants participate in the inner circle.

What it Looks Like in Practice

Participants discuss the question, “What is the author’s main argument?” using evidence from a text. Observers track how often speakers reference the text and build on each other’s ideas. Afterward, the class reflects before rotating groups.

Tips for Success

- Keep inner groups small to ensure participation
- Provide sentence stems (e.g., “I agree with... because...”)
- Give observers a clear, focused task
- Limit discussion time to maintain energy (10–15 minutes)

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide discussion questions or prompts in advance
- Allow note-taking or preparation time before speaking
- Assign specific roles (e.g., facilitator, evidence finder)

Materials/Preparation

- Discussion question(s) or text
- Observation checklist or note-taking tool
- Clearly established discussion norms

Four Corners Debate

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

A four corners debate is a structured discussion strategy in which participants take a position on a statement or question by moving to one of four designated areas in the room (e.g., Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) and then justify their thinking through discussion and evidence.

Purpose

- Promote critical thinking and decision-making
- Encourage all participants to take and defend a position
- Develop speaking, listening, and reasoning skills
- Make participant thinking visible

When to Use

- Introducing or exploring controversial or open-ended topics
- Activating prior knowledge or opinions
- Practicing argumentation and use of evidence
- Reviewing concepts or themes

How to Use This Strategy

1. **Present a Statement or Question**
Share a clear, debatable prompt (e.g., "School uniforms should be required.").
2. **Explain the Four Corners**
Assign each corner of the room a position:
 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
3. **Give Think Time** Allow participants a minute to reflect and choose their position.
4. **Have Participants Move** Participants physically move to the corner that best represents their thinking.
5. **Discuss Within Corners**
In groups, participants discuss their reasoning and prepare to share. Encourage use of evidence or examples.
6. **Share and Debate** Each group shares their reasoning. Allow participants to respond to or question other groups.
7. **Allow Participants to Change Corners (optional)**
Give participants the opportunity to change corners if their thinking shifts based on discussion.
8. **Debrief and Reflect** Discuss how and why opinions formed or changed. Highlight strong reasoning and use of evidence.

Tips for Success

- Use prompts that are truly debatable (avoid obvious answers)
- Require participants to justify their position with reasoning or evidence
- Ensure all participants take part in group discussion
- Normalize changing positions as a sign of learning
- Set clear norms for respectful disagreement

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide sentence starters (e.g., “I believe this because...”)
- Allow written or partner rehearsal before speaking
- Offer background information or examples to support understanding

Materials/Preparation

- Prepared statement or question
- Clearly labeled corners (signs optional)

Gallery Walk

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

A gallery walk is an interactive strategy in which participants move around the room to view, analyze, and respond to posted materials (e.g., questions, texts, images, student work). Participants engage in discussion, written responses, or problem-solving at each station.

Purpose

- Promote active engagement and movement
- Encourage collaboration and discussion
- Expose participants to multiple perspectives or examples

When to Use

- Reviewing or synthesizing content
- Analyzing multiple texts, problems, or sources
- Sharing and responding to student work
- Activating prior knowledge or generating ideas

How to Use This Strategy

1. Prepare Stations

Post materials around the room (e.g., questions, charts, problems, images). Each station should have a clear task.

2. Explain the Task and Expectations

Clarify what participants should do at each station (e.g., discuss, write responses, solve, annotate).

3. Organize Participants into Groups

Place participants in small groups and assign a starting station.

4. Rotate Through Stations

Groups move from station to station at timed intervals, completing the task at each one.

5. Engage in Discussion and Response

Encourage participants to build on previous responses, ask questions, or provide evidence.

6. Monitor and Support

Circulate to prompt deeper thinking and ensure participation.

7. Debrief and Synthesize

Bring the class together to review key ideas, clarify misunderstandings, and highlight strong responses.

What it Looks Like in Practice

Participants rotate through stations with photographs or images tied to a government vocabulary word—democracy, monarchy, dictatorship, etc. At each stop, they respond to a question related to the vocabulary word and images. At the end, the class discusses patterns across sources.

Tips for Success

- Set time limits to maintain pace (3–5 minutes per station)
- Ensure accountability (written responses, roles, or reporting out)
- Limit the number of stations to avoid fatigue
- Model expectations before starting

Materials/Preparation

- Posted materials or prompts for each station
- Chart paper, sticky notes, or response sheets
- Timer (optional)

Graphic Organizers**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY****Description**

Graphic organizers are visual tools that help participants organize, connect, and represent ideas. They structure thinking by showing relationships between concepts (e.g., sequence, cause/effect, comparison), making complex information easier to understand and process.

Purpose

- Support comprehension and organization of ideas
- Make abstract thinking visible
- Guide participants through specific cognitive tasks
- Improve writing, problem-solving, and analysis

When to Use

- Before, during, or after reading or instruction

- ❑ Organizing ideas for writing or discussion
- ❑ Analyzing relationships (e.g., compare/contrast, cause/effect)
- ❑ Planning multi-step tasks or projects

How to Use This Strategy

1. Match the Organizer to the Task

Select a format that aligns with the thinking goal:

- Venn diagram (compare/contrast)
- Flowchart (sequence/process)
- Cause-and-effect chart
- Main idea/details web

2. Model How to Use It

Demonstrate how to complete the organizer using a think-aloud.

- Show what goes where and why

3. Guide Participant Practice

Complete part of the organizer together.

- Ask questions to prompt student input
- Clarify expectations

4. Provide Independent or Collaborative Use

Participants complete the organizer on their own or in groups.

5. Use the Organizer to Extend Learning

Have participants use their completed organizer to:

- Write a response
- Explain their thinking
- Prepare for discussion

What it Looks Like in Practice

Participants use a cause-and-effect chart to analyze factors leading to a historical event. They then use the organizer to write a short explanation of how the causes are connected.

Tips for Success

- Choose the organizer based on the thinking task—not convenience
- Search for free graphic organizer resources online
- Keep the design simple and uncluttered
- Model expectations before independent use
- Use organizers as a tool for thinking, not just note-taking

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide partially completed organizers for support
- Offer different organizer types for the same task

Materials/Preparation

- Selected or created graphic organizer (paper or digital)
- Example/model for demonstration

I Do, We Do, You Do (Gradual Release of Responsibility)

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

“I Do, We Do, You Do” is an instructional model in which the instructor first models a skill, then guides participants through practice, and finally releases responsibility to participants for independent application.

Purpose

- Build participants understanding through clear modeling and support
- Develop independence and confidence
- Reduce frustration during new learning
- Ensure participants know *how* to complete a task before working independently

When to Use

- Introducing new skills or concepts
- Teaching processes or multi-step tasks
- Supporting participants who need structured guidance
- Before independent practice or assessment

How to Use This Strategy

1. I Do (Teacher Modeling)

The instructor demonstrates the skill or process while thinking aloud.

- Clearly show *how* and *why*
- Model steps and decision-making

2. We Do (Guided Practice)

Participants practice with instructor support.

- Ask guiding questions
- Prompt participants through each step
- Provide immediate feedback

3. You Do (Independent Practice)

Participants apply the skill independently.

- Monitor for understanding
- Provide support as needed

4. Check and Reflect

Review participants work and address misunderstandings before moving on.

What it Looks Like in Practice

In a writing lesson, the instructor models how to write a strong topic sentence (“I Do”), the class collaborates to write one together (“We Do”), and then participants write their own (“You Do”).

Tips for Success

- Do not skip or rush the “I Do” phase—modeling is critical
- Ensure all participants participate during “We Do”
- Circulate and give feedback during independent work
- Re-teach or return to guided practice if needed

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide additional guided practice for participants who need support
- Offer extension tasks during independent work
- Use small groups during the “We Do” phase

Independent Reading

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

Independent reading time is a structured period during which participants read independently and quietly. Participants engage with self-selected or assigned texts to build fluency, comprehension, and stamina.

Purpose

- Build reading fluency and endurance
- Increase exposure to reading
- Develop comprehension and vocabulary
- Foster independent reading habits

When to Use

- As a daily or regular routine
- At the beginning or end of class
- To reinforce reading skills and habits
- During literacy blocks or intervention time

How to Use This Strategy**1. Set a Clear Purpose**

Define expectations for reading.

- “Today, focus on identifying the main idea as you read.”

2. Ensure Appropriate Text Selection

Provide or guide participants to texts at an appropriate level and of interest.

3. Establish Expectations and Routines

- Read silently and independently
- Stay engaged with the text
- Minimize disruptions

4. Build Stamina Over Time Start with shorter periods (10–15 minutes) and gradually increase duration.**5. Monitor and Support** Circulate, confer with participants, or check for engagement and understanding.**6. Include Accountability**

Add a light task to reinforce purpose, such as:

- Quick reflection
- Reading log
- Brief written or verbal response

7. Debrief or Share (Optional)

Invite participants to share insights, questions, or recommendations.

What it Looks Like in Practice

Participants read independently for 15 minutes. Afterward, they write a short response identifying the main idea or a key detail from their text.

Tips for Success

- Keep expectations clear and consistent
- Ensure participants have access to appropriately leveled and engaging texts
- Avoid overloading with heavy assignments—keep accountability light
- Confer with participants to support and guide reading
- Model reading habits by reading alongside participants when possible

Differentiation Ideas

- Offer a range of text levels and formats (including audio support)
- Provide guiding questions or reading prompts
- Allow participants choice to increase engagement

Materials/Preparation

- Access to books or texts
- Optional reading logs or response prompts

Jigsaw

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

Jigsaw is a cooperative learning strategy in which participants become “experts” on one part of a topic and then teach it to their peers. Each participant’s contribution is essential to the group’s overall understanding.

Purpose

- Promote collaboration and shared responsibility
- Deepen understanding through teaching others
- Build communication and listening skills
- Ensure all participants engage with the content

When to Use

- Learning multi-part content or topics
- Analyzing different texts, perspectives, or concepts
- Breaking down complex material into manageable sections
- Encouraging participant-led learning

How to Use This Strategy

1. Divide the Content

Break the material into distinct sections or topics.

2. Form “Home Groups”

Place participants in small groups (3–5 students). Assign each student a different section of the content. It helps to label the sections. For example, to discuss animals in biology, home groups can be numbers (Groups 1, 2, 3 and 4) and expert groups can be types of animals (mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds).

3. Form “Expert Groups”

Participants with the same section meet to learn, discuss, and prepare how they will teach the content.

4. Develop Expertise

In expert groups, participants:

- Read or analyze the material
- Identify key ideas
- Plan how to explain it clearly

5. Return to Home Groups

Each participant teaches their section to their group members.

6. Synthesize Learning

Groups combine all parts to build a complete understanding of the topic.

7. Check for Understanding

Use a quick assessment, discussion, or reflection to ensure all participants learned all sections.

What it Looks Like in Practice

Participants study different causes of a historical event in expert groups. Back in their home groups, each participant teaches their assigned cause, and the group creates a complete explanation together.

Tips for Success

- Keep content chunks balanced and manageable
- Provide clear expectations for what “teaching” should include
- Hold all participants accountable for learning all sections
- Monitor expert groups to ensure accuracy
- Use a final check for understanding

Materials/Preparation

- Divided content or resources for each section
- Note-taking or planning tools
- Clear instructions and expectations

Learning Stations**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY****Description**

Learning stations are a structured instructional approach in which participants rotate through different areas of the classroom, each designed with a specific task or

learning objective. Stations may include collaborative work, independent practice, or application tasks.

Purpose

- Differentiate instruction and meet diverse learning needs
- Increase participants engagement through varied activities
- Provide targeted support in small groups
- Reinforce and extend learning through multiple modalities

When to Use

- Practicing or reinforcing skills
- Differentiating instruction for varied readiness levels
- Reviewing or applying content
- Exploring various aspects of a topic

How to Use This Strategy

1. **Design Purposeful Stations** Create 3–5 stations with clear, distinct objectives (e.g., exploration, practice, application, review).
2. **Prepare Materials and Directions** Ensure each station has clear instructions and all necessary materials. Tasks should be meaningful and aligned to the learning goal.
3. **Organize Students into Groups**
Divide participants into small groups and assign starting stations.
4. **Explain Expectations and Procedures** Model how rotations will work, including timing, transitions, and behavior expectations.
5. **Rotate Through Stations**
Participants move through stations at timed intervals, completing each task.
6. **Facilitate and Support** Instructor rotates to monitoring progress, push thinking, and provide support. If appropriate, instructor can lead one of the stations.
7. **Debrief and Synthesize** Bring the class together to review key learning, address misconceptions, and connect station activities.

What it Looks Like in Practice

In a math class, participants rotate through four stations: (1) instructor-led small group instruction, (2) independent practice, (3) problem-solving task, and (4) review or skill reinforcement.

Tips for Success

- Keep tasks clear, focused, and manageable
- Build in accountability (recording responses, products, or check-ins)
- Practice routines before implementing
- Use a timer to maintain pacing

- Start small (2–3 stations) and build complexity over time
- If instructor is leading a station, make sure the other stations are strong enough that participants can work productively without supervision.

Differentiation Ideas

- Assign groups based on readiness or skill level
- Vary task complexity across stations
- Provide scaffolds or extensions as needed

Materials/Preparation

- Materials and instructions for each station
- Timer (optional)
- Recording sheets or tasks for accountability

Literature Circles

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

Literature circles are small, participant-led discussion groups in which members read the same text and meet regularly to discuss it using assigned roles or discussion responsibilities. The goal is to deepen comprehension through collaborative conversation and analysis.

Purpose

- Promote participant-led discussion and engagement with texts
- Develop comprehension, analysis, and interpretation skills
- Build accountability for reading and participation
- Encourage multiple perspectives and critical thinking

When to Use

- Reading novels, short stories, or informational texts
- Supporting independent or small group reading
- Practicing discussion and analysis skills
- Extending comprehension beyond basic recall

How to Use This Strategy

1. Select Texts and Form Groups

Choose appropriate texts and group participants (3–5 per group), often based on reading level or interest.

2. Assign Roles or Responsibilities

Provide clear roles to guide discussion (optional but helpful), such as:

- Discussion Leader
- Summarizer
- Vocabulary Finder
- Connector (text-to-self/world)
- Visualizer

- Questioner

3. **Set Clear Expectations**

Define how participants should prepare (e.g., reading, notes, role completion) and how discussions should function.

4. **Provide Reading and Prep Time**

Participants read assigned sections and complete their role or notes before meeting.

5. **Facilitate Group Discussions**

Participants lead their own discussions while the teacher circulates, listens, and supports as needed.

6. **Monitor and Support**

Prompt deeper thinking with questions and ensure all students participate.

7. **Reflect and Share**

Have groups reflect on their discussion and/or share key insights with the class.

What it Looks Like in Practice

A group of four participants reads a chapter of a novel. During discussion, one participant summarizes the chapter, another asks questions, another highlights key vocabulary, and another connects the text to real-life experiences. The group discusses each contribution.

Tips for Success

- Model what strong discussion looks like before starting
- Keep groups small to ensure participation
- Use roles early on, then gradually release responsibility
- Hold participants accountable for preparation. Provide role-based worksheets to support
- Provide discussion prompts to deepen thinking

Differentiation Ideas

- Offer different texts based on reading level or interest
- Provide sentence starters or guiding questions
- Allow audio or supported reading as needed

Materials/Preparation

- Selected texts
- Role sheets or discussion guides (optional)

Peer Review

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

Peer review is a structured process in which participants evaluate and provide feedback on each other's work using clear criteria. The goal is to improve the quality

of work through constructive feedback and revision. Additionally, the reviewing peer develops evaluation skills.

Purpose

- Improve participant work through feedback and revision
- Develop critical thinking and evaluation skills
- Build understanding of success criteria
- Promote collaboration and participant ownership

When to Use

- During drafting or before final submission
- After teaching expectations or providing models
- In writing, problem-solving, or project-based tasks
- When revision is an intended part of the process

How to Use This Strategy

1. **Teach What Quality Feedback Looks Like**
Model how to give specific, helpful, and respectful feedback.
 - Avoid vague comments like “good job”
2. **Provide Clear Criteria or Rubric**
Ensure participants know what they are looking for.
 - Use checklists, rubrics, or guiding questions
3. **Assign Structured Roles or Prompts**
Give participants a clear task, such as:
 - Identify one strength
 - Suggest one improvement
 - Ask one question
4. **Facilitate the Review Process**
Participants exchange work and provide feedback based on criteria.
5. **Monitor and Support** Circulate to ensure feedback is accurate and meaningful.
6. **Revise Based on Feedback**
Participants use peer feedback to improve their work.
7. **Reflect on Feedback** Participants consider which feedback was helpful and why.

What it Looks Like in Practice

Participants exchange written paragraphs and use a checklist to identify a clear topic sentence, supporting evidence, and explanation. They provide one suggestion for improvement, then revise their own work.

Tips for Success

- Model and practice giving feedback before using the strategy
- Keep feedback focused on specific criteria
- Limit the number of feedback points to avoid overload
- Build in time for revision—this is essential

- Emphasize respectful and constructive language
- This strategy works best when participants have multiple opportunities to practice the review process

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide sentence starters (e.g., “One strength is...”, “You could improve by...”)
- Use checklists or guided forms for support
- Pair participants strategically based on needs

Materials/Preparation

- Participant work to review
- Rubric, checklist, or guiding questions
- Optional feedback form

Pre-Teach Vocabulary

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

Pre-teaching vocabulary involves introducing and exploring key words and terms before participants encounter them in a lesson, text, video, or task. This supports comprehension by reducing barriers to understanding new content.

Purpose

- Improve comprehension of texts and instruction
- Build academic and content-specific vocabulary
- Support access for all learners, especially those who need language support
- Increase confidence and participation

When to Use

- Before reading a complex text
- Prior to introducing new content or concepts
- When essential vocabulary may limit understanding
- With multilingual learners or participants with limited background knowledge

How to Use This Strategy

1. Select Key Vocabulary

Choose a small number of high-impact words (3–5).

- Focus on words essential to understanding the lesson

2. Provide Student-Friendly Definitions

Explain words in clear, simple language.

- Avoid dictionary-only definitions
- Ask AI to generate student-friendly wording when appropriate

3. Use Multiple Representations

Support understanding with examples, visuals, gestures, or real-world connections.

4. Engage Participants in Active Processing

Have participants interact with the words:

- Turn and talk
- Use in a sentence
- Connect to prior knowledge
- Draw visual representations

5. Connect to the Lesson or Text

Show how the words will appear in the upcoming task.

- “You’ll see this word when we…”

6. Revisit and Reinforce Use the words during the lesson and encourage participants to apply them in speaking and writing.**What it Looks Like in Practice**

Before reading a science text, the instructor introduces the words *predict*, *observe*, and *conclusion* using simple definitions and examples. Participants practice using the words before encountering them in the text.

Tips for Success

- Limit the number of words—focus on what matters most
- Prioritize words critical to understanding (not just unfamiliar words)
- Use visuals or examples whenever possible
- Revisit vocabulary throughout the lesson
- Encourage participants to use the words actively

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide visuals, sentence starters, or translations
- Pre-teach vocabulary in small groups for additional support
- Use word banks or vocabulary charts

Materials/Preparation

- Selected vocabulary words
- Simple definitions and examples
- Optional visuals or graphic organizers

Previewing a Text**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY****Description**

Previewing a text is a pre-reading strategy in which participants examine key features of a text (e.g., title, headings, images, structure) to build a general understanding before reading. This helps participants anticipate content and prepare for deeper comprehension.

Purpose

- Improve comprehension and reading efficiency

- Activate prior knowledge and set a purpose for reading
- Reduce confusion when encountering complex texts
- Build confidence before engaging with new material

When to Use

- Before reading informational or literary texts
- When introducing complex or unfamiliar content
- To prepare participants for close reading or analysis
- As a quick pre-reading routine

How to Use This Strategy

1. Set a Purpose for Previewing

Tell participants what they are looking for.

- “We’re previewing to get a general idea of what this text is about.”

2. Examine Key Text Features

Guide participants to look at:

- Title and subtitles
- Headings and structure
- Images, captions, or graphs
- First and last paragraphs (optional)

3. Think Aloud (Model the Process)

Demonstrate how to make predictions.

- “Based on this heading, I think this section will explain...”

4. Have Participants Make Predictions

Participants share what they think the text will be about and what they expect to learn.

5. Record Key Ideas (Optional)

Capture predictions or questions for reference during reading.

6. Connect to Reading Task

Transition into reading with a clear purpose.

- “Now let’s read to confirm or revise our predictions.”

What it Looks Like in Practice

Before reading an article, participants examine the title, headings, and images. They predict the main idea and identify questions they have, then read to check their understanding.

Tips for Success

- Keep the preview brief (3–5 minutes)
- Focus on structure and key features—not every detail
- Model thinking early on
- Use predictions to drive engagement during reading
- Revisit predictions after reading

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide guiding questions or a checklist

- Model multiple examples before independent use
- Pair participants for discussion

Materials/Preparation

- Selected text
- Optional preview guide or checklist

Providing Models

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

Providing models involves showing participants clear examples of high-quality work (and sometimes non-examples) to illustrate expectations, processes, and criteria for success. Models help participants understand what strong work looks like and how to produce it.

Purpose

- Clarify expectations and success criteria
- Support participant understanding of quality work
- Reduce confusion and guesswork
- Improve participant performance and independence

When to Use

- Introducing a new task, assignment, or product
- Teaching writing, problem-solving, or projects
- Before independent work or assessment
- When participants are unsure what “good” looks like

How to Use This Strategy

1. Select or Create a Strong Model

Choose an example that clearly meets expectations and aligns with the learning goal.

- Use AI to generate a model when appropriate. Be sure to verify that the AI output serves as an exemplary and matches task expectations.

2. Present the Model with Purpose

Explain why participants are examining the model.

- “We’re going to look at what makes this a strong response.”

3. Analyze the Model Together

Guide participants in identifying key features.

- Highlight structure, clarity, use of evidence, or reasoning

4. Make Criteria Explicit

Connect observations to a rubric or success criteria.

- Record key features for reference

5. Compare (Suggested Extension)

Show a weaker or non- example and discuss differences.

6. Apply the Learning

Have participants use the model and criteria to guide their own work.

What it Looks Like in Practice

Before a writing assignment, the instructor shares a strong paragraph and guides participants in identifying what makes it effective (clear topic sentence, evidence, explanation). Participants then use these criteria to write their own paragraph.

Tips for Success

- Choose models that are clear and aligned to the task
- Focus on *why* the model is effective—not just what it is
- Avoid overwhelming participants with too many examples
- Use student-friendly language when discussing criteria
- Revisit the model during and after student work

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide annotated models for additional support
- Use multiple models at varying levels

Materials/Preparation

- Selected model(s) or exemplar(s)
- Rubric or success criteria (optional but recommended)

Think-Aloud**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY****Description**

A think-aloud is a strategy in which the instructor verbalizes their thinking process while completing a task (e.g., reading, solving a problem, writing). This makes invisible cognitive processes visible so participants can learn how to approach similar tasks.

Purpose

- Model critical thinking and problem-solving processes
- Make abstract thinking visible and learnable
- Improve comprehension and strategy use
- Support participant independence

When to Use

- Introducing a new skill or strategy
- Modeling how to approach complex tasks
- During reading, writing, or problem-solving
- When participants are unsure how to begin or think through a task

How to Use This Strategy**1. Identify the Focus**

Choose a specific thinking strategy to model (e.g., making predictions, solving step-by-step, analyzing evidence, making inferences).

2. Explain the Purpose

Tell participants what you are modeling and why. ○ “I’m going to show you how I think through this problem.”

3. Model the Thinking Process

Complete the task while verbalizing your thoughts.

- Highlight decisions, questions, and reasoning
- Keep the thinking clear and focused

4. Connect Thinking to Strategy

Name the strategy being used.

- “I’m checking my understanding here...”

5. Engage Participants

Pause and invite participants to contribute or predict next steps.

6. Transition to Guided Practice

Have participants try the same thinking process with support.

What it Looks Like in Practice

While reading a passage, the instructor pauses and says, “This part is confusing, so I’m going to reread and look for clues. I notice this word connects back to the main idea...” Participants then practice using the same strategy.

Tips for Success

- Keep think-alouds brief and focused
- Avoid over-explaining—highlight key thinking moves
- Use natural, student-friendly language
- Plan key points in advance
- Practice the think-aloud before demonstrating in class
- Gradually release responsibility to participants

Materials/Preparation

- Selected task, text, or problem
- Planned focus strategy or key thinking points

Think-Pair-Share**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY****Description**

Think-Pair-Share is a structured discussion strategy in which participants first think independently about a question, then discuss their ideas with a partner, and finally share with a larger group. This routine increases participation and supports deeper thinking.

Purpose

- Promote active participation from all participants

- Develop speaking, listening, and reasoning skills
- Improve quality of responses through rehearsal
- Support processing and understanding of content

When to Use

- Before whole-class discussion
- After posing a question or problem
- During reading, problem-solving, or reflection
- To check for understanding

How to Use This Strategy

1. **Pose a Clear Question or Prompt**
Ask an open-ended or focused question aligned to the lesson goal.
2. **Think (Independent Time)**
Give participants time (30–60 seconds or more) to think or write their response.
 - Ensure all participants engage before discussion
3. **Pair (Partner Discussion)**
Participants share their ideas with a partner.
 - Encourage both partners to speak
 - Prompt participants to build on each other's thinking
4. **Share (Whole Group or Small Group)**
Invite participants to share ideas with the class or another group.
 - Highlight a range of responses
5. **Synthesize and Clarify**
Summarize key ideas and address misconceptions.

What it Looks Like in Practice

The instructor asks, “What is the main idea of this paragraph?” Participants think silently, discuss with a partner, and then share responses with the class.

Tips for Success

- Protect the “think” time—don’t skip it
- Use clear time limits for each phase
- Hold all participants accountable for participating
- Circulate during partner discussions to monitor quality
- Ask follow-up questions to deepen thinking

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide sentence starters (e.g., “I think... because...”)
- Allow written responses before speaking
- Pair participants strategically for support

Materials/Preparation

- Prepared questions or prompts
- Optional note-taking space

Teach Thinking Strategies Explicitly

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

Teaching thinking strategies explicitly involves directly modeling and guiding participants in how to think through a task (e.g., analyzing, summarizing, problem-solving) rather than expecting them to figure it out independently. The instructor makes the thinking process visible and provides structured support until participants can apply the strategy on their own.

Thinking Strategy Examples

Some examples of thinking strategies are visualizing, summarizing, analyzing, connecting to background knowledge, monitoring understanding, asking questions, drawing inferences, and brainstorming.

Purpose

- Develop participants' critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Make invisible thinking processes visible and learnable
- Improve independence and transfer of skills across tasks
- Support all learners, especially those who struggle with abstract thinking

When to Use

- Introducing a new skill or cognitive strategy
- Before independent practice or complex tasks
- When participants are unsure how to approach a task
- When modeling expectations for quality work

How to Use This Strategy

1. **Name the Strategy and Purpose**
Clearly explain what the strategy is and when to use it.
 - "Today I'm going to show you how to visualize details in a narrative."
2. **Model the Thinking (Think Aloud)**
Demonstrate the strategy while verbalizing your thinking process.
 - "The words 'sagging under heavy snow' make me picture how the branches of a tree droop when covered with thick, wet snow."
3. **Highlight Key Steps** Break the strategy into clear, repeatable steps and record them if helpful.
4. **Guide Participant Practice**
Practice together with prompts and support.
 - Ask questions that lead participants through the same thinking process
5. **Gradually Release Responsibility**
Move from instructor-led to participant-led use of the strategy (I do → We do → You do).
6. **Reinforce and Revisit**
Encourage participants to use the strategy across tasks and over time.

What it Looks Like in Practice

In a reading lesson, the instructor models how to infer meaning from a text by thinking aloud while reading. Participants then practice the same strategy in pairs before applying it independently.

Tips for Success

- Be explicit—don't assume participants will "pick it up"
- Keep think-alouds focused and concise
- Develop anchor charts for each thinking strategy and post in the classroom for participants to reference
- Use consistent language for strategies across lessons
- Provide repeated opportunities for practice

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide visual guides or step-by-step checklists
- Offer sentence starters to support student thinking
- Allow collaborative practice before independent work

Materials/Preparation

- A clearly defined strategy and example task
- Optional anchor chart or visual of steps
- Prepared prompts or questions for guided practice

Using Manipulatives**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY****Description**

Manipulatives are physical or virtual objects (e.g., counters, algebra tiles, fraction strips) that participants use to model and explore mathematical concepts. They help make abstract ideas concrete and support conceptual understanding.

Purpose

- Build deep understanding of mathematical concepts
- Make abstract ideas visible and tangible
- Support problem-solving and reasoning
- Bridge concrete experiences to symbolic representation

When to Use

- Introducing new or abstract concepts
- Supporting participants who need additional conceptual understanding
- Exploring relationships (e.g., fractions, operations, equations)
- Reinforcing or reteaching skills

How to Use This Strategy**1. Select Appropriate Manipulatives**

Choose tools that clearly represent the concept (e.g., base-ten blocks for place value, algebra tiles for equations).

2. Model How to Use Them

Demonstrate how the manipulatives represent the math concept.

- Use a think-aloud to connect actions to meaning

3. Guide Participant Exploration

Allow participants to use manipulatives to solve problems with support.

- Ask questions to prompt thinking

4. Connect to Abstract Representation

Help participants link the model to numbers, symbols, or equations.

- “What does this group represent in the equation?”

5. Transition Toward Independence

Gradually reduce reliance on manipulatives as understanding develops.

6. Reflect and Explain

Have participants explain how the manipulatives helped them understand the concept.

What It Looks Like in Practice

Participants use algebra tiles to model the equation $x + 3 = 7$. They physically remove three tiles to isolate x , helping them understand why subtraction is used to solve the equation.

Tips for Success

- Always connect the manipulative to the math concept—don't skip this step
- Use consistent representations to avoid confusion
- Keep the focus on thinking, not just movement
- Ask participants to explain what their model shows
- Gradually move from concrete → visual → abstract
- Use AI to identify websites and retailers that sell math manipulatives to build a class collection

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide additional guided practice with manipulatives
- Pair participants to discuss their models
- Offer visual supports alongside physical tools

Materials/Preparation

- Physical manipulatives (e.g., counters, tiles, blocks) or virtual tools
- Prepared problems or tasks aligned to the concept

Writing Workshop

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

Description

Writing workshop is a structured approach to writing instruction that includes a short mini-lesson, extended independent writing time, and opportunities for feedback and sharing. Participants engage in the full writing process (planning, drafting, revising, editing, publishing) with instructor guidance and support.

Purpose

- Develop writing skills through practice and feedback
- Build participant independence and ownership
- Support the writing process from idea to final product
- Differentiate instruction through conferencing and choice

When to Use

- Teaching writing (narrative, informational, argumentative)
- Supporting extended writing tasks or projects
- Building writing stamina and habits
- Providing ongoing writing practice

How to Use This Strategy

1. **Mini-Lesson (10–15 minutes)**
Teach a focused writing skill or strategy.
 - Model the skill (e.g., writing a strong introduction)
 - Keep it brief and targeted
2. **Independent Writing Time (20–30+ minutes)**
Participants write while applying the mini-lesson.
 - Work on drafts, revisions, or new pieces
3. **Conferring (Ongoing)**
Meet with individual participants or small groups.
 - Provide targeted feedback
 - Support next steps
4. **Peer Collaboration (Optional)**
Participants may share work or give feedback during writing time.
5. **Sharing and Reflection (5–10 minutes)**
Participants share excerpts or reflect on their work.
 - Highlight use of the mini-lesson skill
6. **Repeat the Process Regularly**
Build consistency through routine workshop sessions.

What It Looks Like in Practice

The instructor models how to write a strong topic sentence. Participants then work on their own topic sentences and paragraphs while the instructor conferences with individuals. At the end, a few participants share their writing.

Tips for Success

- Keep mini-lessons short and focused on one skill
- Protect independent writing time
- Confer with participants regularly and intentionally
- Use a checklist or note sheet to track student conferences

- Build routines so participants know what to expect
- Emphasize revision as part of the process

Differentiation Ideas

- Provide sentence starters or graphic organizers
- Offer targeted small-group instruction
- Allow choice in topics or writing formats

Materials/Preparation

- Writing materials (notebooks, devices, etc.)
- Prepared mini-lesson
- Optional rubrics or checklists

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit ¹⁸

CONTENT AREA LESSONS

Instructional staff can search for lessons by topic in this section: Reading & Writing, Math, Social Studies, Science. Refer to the AI lessons section for Job-Readiness lesson plans.

Math Lesson Plan

WRITING LINEAR EQUATIONS FOR PHONE PLANS (50-60 MINUTES)

In this lesson, participants will practice writing linear equations by modeling real-world phone plan costs, helping them connect abstract math concepts to practical decision-making. Through guided practice and explanation, students learn to represent, interpret, and justify relationships between variables such as monthly fees and data usage.

Days 3 & 4 of Math Unit

AI usage notes included at the end of the document.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- White Board/Projector
- Paper/Notebooks or Phone Plan Practice Handout
- Writing Utensils
- Exit Tickets

¹⁸ PROMPT: First of series – ChatGPT, I am compiling a list of instructional strategies to include in an education toolkit for instructors. I've written some notes describing anchor charts that I'd like to include as an entry in the list. Can you make sure my explanation contains all the necessary details for an instructor to use "anchor charts" as a strategy in his or her classroom? Can you then revise my language to make the entry simple and clear? Finally, can you suggest an instructional strategy template to use for other strategies in the list?

OBJECTIVES:

Participants will:

- Write linear equations representing phone plan cost scenarios (monthly fee and cost per GB) during guided and independent practice using provided scenarios (Plans A–D) by correctly expressing each situation in the form $y=mx+b$ with accurate values for rate and starting cost in at least 2 out of 3 scenarios.
- Explain the meaning of each component of a linear equation (variables, rate, and constant) in a real-world phone plan context using written explanations and/or sentence frames by accurately describing what each term represents and how it relates to total cost.
- Clearly explain the problem (selecting the best phone plan) using relevant details and set clear boundaries for what needs to be addressed by identifying what is being measured (total cost) and what is changing (data usage), and using their equation as evidence to justify their reasoning.

STANDARDS COVERED:

Critical Thinking Competency (See Sample Rubric)

- Participants can **define the problem**
- Participants can **organize thinking and evidence**

CCSS

- CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.HSA.CED.A.2
- CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.HSF.LE.A.2
- CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.HSA.CED.A.1
- CCSS.MATH.PRACTICE.MP4

PROCESS:

1. Activity 1: Warm-Up (5-7 Min)

- Instructor writes on board or projects the question:
 - If a phone plan costs \$30 per month plus \$5 per GB of data, how could we represent the total cost?
- Participants write responses to prepare for quick discussion.
- Instructor guides toward:
 - Monthly Fee = Constant
 - Per-Unit Cost = Rate
 - Equation: $y = 30 + 5x$

2. Activity 2: Mini-Lesson (10 Min) – “I Do”

- Instructor says: **“Today, we are going practice a key critical thinking skill -- defining a problem -- using math equations. At the end of class, you will be able to explain the problem (what you are trying to figure out—the total cost of a phone plan) and what information matters (monthly fee and cost per unit of data).”**
- Instructor writes formula on board
 - Total Cost = (Rate x Usage) + Monthly Fee
- Connect to (prior knowledge of equation) $y = mx + b$

- i. M = Cost per unit
 - ii. B = Starting cost
- d. Instructor provides examples
 - i. Sample Plan A: Using this formula, if a phone plan costs \$20/month and includes a \$10 per GB charge, what would the equation look like?
 - 1. $y = 10x + 20$
 - ii. Instructor leads participants through discussion of the word problem and equation. Questions:
 - 1. What does 10 mean?
 - 2. What does 20 mean?
 - iii. Instructor writes an explanation of the equation on the board to model thinking and writing.
 - 1. "Now, we can define the problem. This equation shows the solution to the question, 'How much will Phone Plan A cost?' 10 represents the cost in dollars per GB used, x is the unknown number of GBs in one month, 20 is the standard monthly fee for the plan, and y represents the total monthly cost after determining the number of GBs used.

3. Activity 3: Guided Practice (15 Min) – “We Do”

- a. Participants work with a partner. PARTICIPANTS WORK WITH A PARTNER.
- b. Sample Plan B: If a phone plan costs \$40/month and includes a \$5 per GB charge, what would the equation look like? $y = 5x + 40$
 - i. Participants write the equation, label the variables, and explain in their own words.
 - ii. Instructor circulates to answer questions and push thinking.
 - 1. Question: How do you know your equation matches the situation?
 - 2. Possible sentence stems:
 - a. This equation shows...
 - b. [Variable] Shows/Represents...
 - c. [Number] Shows/Represents...

Key Questions for Instructors:

- “What does each part of your equation represent in this situation?”
→ *Targets: Explains ideas and concepts*
- “How do you know your equation matches the problem?”
→ *Targets: Defines the problem / Uses knowledge and resources*
- “What do your variables stand for, and why did you choose them?”
→ *Targets: Organizes thinking and evidence*
- “How could you use your equation as evidence to explain the cost of the plan?”
→ *Targets: Selects evidence to support a claim (intro level)*

4. Activity 4: Independent Practice (15-20 Min) – “You Do”

- a. Instructor provides 2-3 scenarios:
 - i. Plan C: \$0/month + \$15 per GB
 - ii. Plan D: \$25/month + \$8 per GB
 - iii. Participants write the equation, label the variables, and explain the equations in writing.

- b. Instructor circulates to answer questions, provide additional support, and push thinking using the key questions in Activity 4.
 - i. Question: How do you know your equation matches the situation?
- c. If time, instructor has volunteers come to the board and write equations for Plan C and Plan D. Discuss variables and meanings.

5. Activity 5: Debrief/Exit Ticket (5 Min)

- a. Show that you can **define a problem**. Write an equation for a phone plan and explain what each part means.

PRO TIP: Use Exit Ticket responses to assess participant understanding. Provide additional examples and addresses challenges or misconceptions in subsequent lessons.

FACILITATORS' NOTES:

Differentiation Notes

- Scaffold entry: Provide equation templates
 - (e.g., *Total Cost* = ____ + (____ × ____))
 - Label examples for students who need support
- Use sentence frames: Support explanations ◦ (e.g., “The variable ____ represents...”, “The number ____ means...”)
- Start with concrete models:
 - Allow use of tables or examples before moving to equations
- Vary task complexity:
 - Simplify numbers for support
 - Add complexity (e.g., included data, tiered pricing) for advanced students
- Flexible grouping: Pair students strategically and assign roles (e.g., “writer” and “explainer”)

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit¹⁹

AI Usage & Tips

The following prompt criteria were used to generate the math lesson plan:

- 8th grade level math lesson on linear equations
- Real-world problem-based topic
- Use “I Do, We Do, You Do” gradual release format
- Use the critical thinking competency rubric to develop objectives and assessments
- Use a competency-based education approach

The lesson that AI provided (including formulas) was then reviewed, and content was edited, added, or removed according to lesson goals.

¹⁹ See AI Usage description

Resource: Additional Math Activities

Access additional math activities from [The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics' Effective Mathematics Teaching Practices Handout](#).

Science Lesson Plan

HOW THE BRAIN LEARNS NEW SKILLS (50-60 MINS)

Participants will watch a video and examine brain cells to understand “growth mindset” and how the brain learns.

All usage notes included at the end of the document.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- [Diagram of a Neuron Visual](#) – for reference (project on board)
- Blank Diagram Of A Neuron Handout
- [YouTube Video – Growth Mindset: The Truth About Your Brain By Khan Academy](#)
- Optional worksheet packet (provided at the end of the document)

OBJECTIVES:

Participants will:

1. Identify and label the key parts of a neuron (dendrite, axon, and cell body) and describe their functions using a neuron diagram during guided practice by correctly labeling each structure and matching it with its function with no more than one error.
2. Explain how the brain changes when learning new skills (e.g., stronger connections, increased efficiency, neuron communication) using information from the video and guided notes by describing at least one accurate example of how practice affects the brain using appropriate vocabulary (e.g., neuron, connection).
3. Analyze their own mindset (fixed vs. growth) during group discussion and independent reflection using evidence from the video by using at least one piece of evidence or explanation that connects mindset to how the brain learns.

STANDARDS COVERED:

GED Science Standards:

SEP (Science & Engineering Practices):

- Develop and use models (diagram of neuron)
- Analyze and interpret information from a video
- Construct explanations using evidence

Life Science Content:

- Structure and function of cells (neurons)
- Organization of systems (nervous system)
- Relationship between structure and function in living systems

Crosscutting Concepts:

- Structure and function
- Cause and effect (practice → brain changes)

Workforce/Competency Connection:

- Critical Thinking: Evaluate evidence from the video to draw conclusions about learning and

PROCESS:

Activity 1: Warm-Up (5–7 minutes)

Prompt (Think–Pair–Share):

“Think about a skill you learned that was hard at first (driving, math, job skill, etc.). What made it difficult—and what helped you improve?”

- Students write (2 min)
- Pair share (2–3 min)
- Whole group share (2 min)

Transition: “Today we’re going to look at what is actually happening in your brain when that learning happens.”

Pre-Teach Vocabulary (8–10 minutes)

Introduce 5 key terms (student-friendly definitions):

- **Neuron** – a brain cell that sends and receives information
- **Density** – how closely packed something is (like connections in the brain)
- **Efficient** – able to work well with less effort
- **Dendrite** – part of a neuron that receives signals
- **Axon** – part of a neuron that sends signals

Visual Support: See neuron diagram, included below lesson

Quick Check:

- Ask: “Which part of a neuron receives information? Which sends it?”

Activity 2: Video & Guided Viewing (10–12 minutes)

Show the video:

- [YouTube Video – Growth Mindset: The Truth About Your Brain by Khan Academy](#)

Students complete a simple guide:

- Look for:
 - What happens to the brain when you practice?
 - How do neurons change?
 - What is the difference between fixed vs. growth mindset?

Key idea to reinforce:

- The brain becomes more efficient and builds stronger connections with practice
- Learning physically changes the brain (neuroplasticity)

Activity 3: Parts of a Brain Cell (10 minutes)

Task:

- Label a neuron diagram
- Match function to structure:
 - Dendrite → receives signals
 - Axon → sends signals

Extension Question:

“Why would having more connections (higher density) help you learn faster?”

Expected idea:

More connections = stronger communication between neurons = better learning

Activity 4: Mindset & Brain Science (Collaboration Strategy) (12–15 minutes)

Strategy: Small Group Discussion + Evidence Sort

In groups of 3–4: Give students statements to sort (sample statements):

Statement	Fixed or Growth?
“I’m just not good at this.”	
“I’ll get better with practice.”	
“This is too hard—I quit.”	
“My brain is growing when I struggle.”	

Task:

1. Sort statements
2. Use evidence from the video to justify answers

Instructor prompt:

“What does the science say about whether your brain can change?”

Reinforce:

- **Brain connections grow stronger with practice**
- **Effort leads to physical brain changes**

Independent Reflection (5–7 minutes)

Prompt:

“Do you tend to have a fixed or growth mindset when learning something new? Give one example and explain how brain science supports changing that mindset.”

Participants write their responses in journals or on handouts.

Exit Ticket / Debrief (5 minutes)

Students respond:

1. What is a neuron?
2. How does practice affect the brain?
3. One way your mindset can change your learning:

Optional verbal debrief:

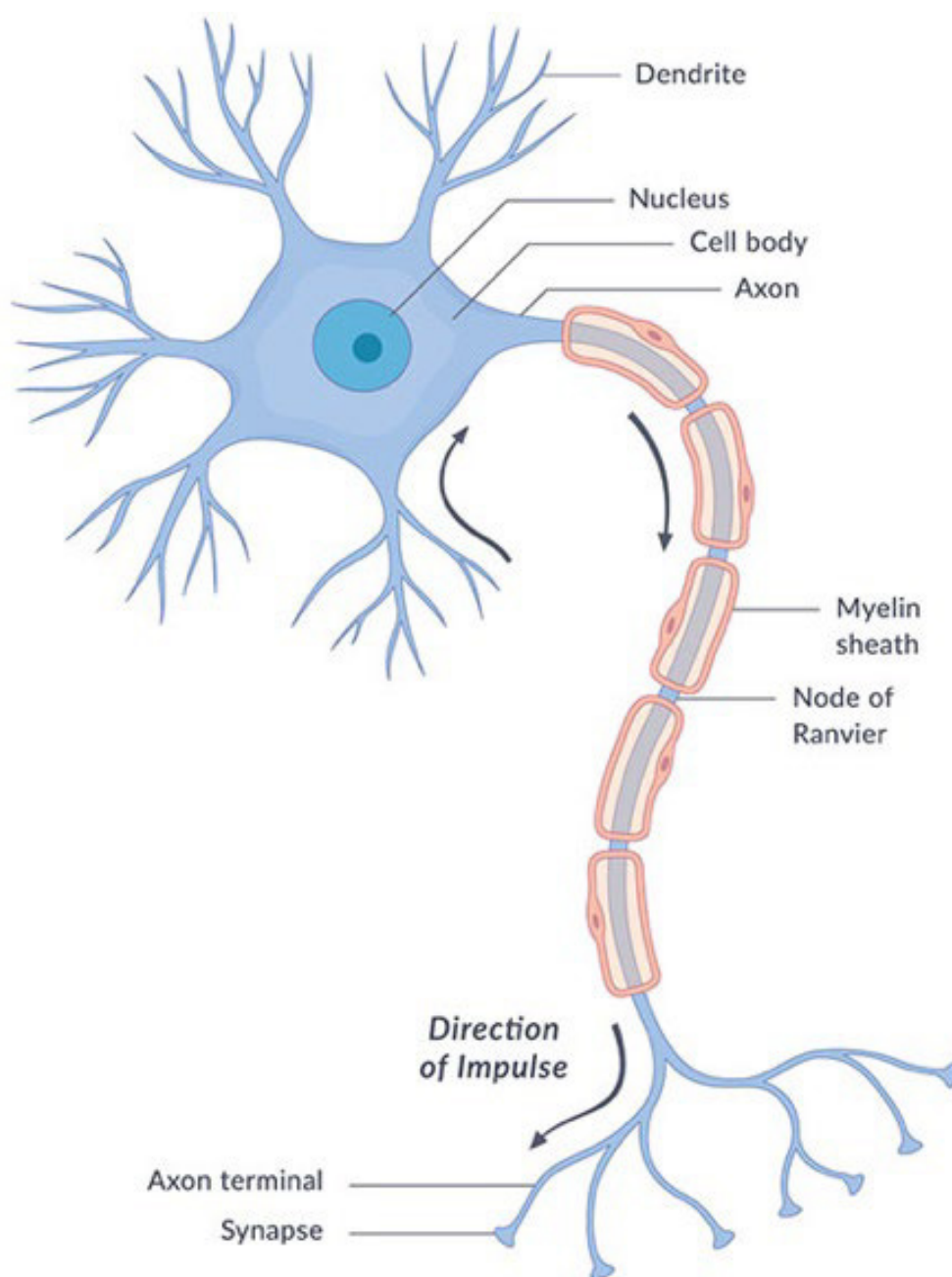
“What’s one thing you’ll do differently the next time learning feels hard?”

FACILITATORS’ NOTES:

- Insert neuron diagram in Part 3 if desired
- [YouTube Video – Growth Mindset: The Truth About Your Brain by Khan Academy](#)
- Encourage complete sentences for GED prep
- Allow discussion before written responses for support

Differentiation Tips

- ELL support: Provide visuals + sentence frames
- Struggling learners: Pre-labeled diagram option
- Advanced learners: Add concept of neuroplasticity or synapses



GED Science Worksheet Packet: How the Brain Learns New Skills

Name: _____ **Date:** _____

Part 1: Warm-Up Reflection

Directions: Think about a skill you learned that was difficult at first.

1. What is one skill that was hard for you to learn?

2. Why was it difficult at first?

3. What helped you improve?

Part 2: Vocabulary

Directions: Match each term to its correct definition.

Terms:

- A. Neuron
- B. Density
- C. Efficient
- D. Dendrite
- E. Axon

Definitions:

- ___ 1. Able to work well with little wasted effort
- ___ 2. A brain cell that sends and receives information
- ___ 3. How closely packed something is
- ___ 4. Part of a neuron that receives signals
- ___ 5. Part of a neuron that sends signals

Use the words in a sentence (choose 2):

- 1.

- 2.

Part 3: Parts of a Neuron

Directions: Label the parts of the neuron below.

(Teacher: insert neuron diagram here if desired)

Word Bank: dendrite, axon, cell body

Answer the questions:

1. Which part of the neuron receives signals?

2. Which part sends signals?
3. Why are neurons important for learning?

Part 4: Video Notes

Growth Mindset: The Truth About Your Brain

Directions: Watch the video and answer the questions.

1. What happens in your brain when you practice something?
2. How do neurons change as you learn?
3. What does it mean for the brain to become more “efficient”?
4. What is the difference between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset?

Part 5: Mindset Sort Activity

Directions: Write “Fixed” or “Growth” next to each statement.

- ___ 1. “I’m just not good at this.”
- ___ 2. “I can improve with practice.”
- ___ 3. “This is too hard—I quit.”
- ___ 4. “My brain grows when I try.”
- ___ 5. “Mistakes help me learn.”

Short Answer:

6. Choose one “growth mindset” statement. Explain why it is supported by brain science.

Part 6: Personal Reflection

Directions: Answer in 3–5 complete sentences.

Do you usually have a fixed or growth mindset when learning something new?

Use what you learned about the brain to explain your answer.

Exit Ticket

Directions: Answer each question clearly.

1. What is a neuron?
2. How does practice change the brain?
3. What is one thing you will do differently when learning something new?

AI Usage & Tips

The following prompt criteria were used to generate the science lesson plan:

- Biology science lesson on how the brain learns new skills
- Present information to participants from the [YouTube Video – Growth Mindset: The Truth About Your Brain by Khan Academy](#)
- Select 3-5 science terms from the video to pre-teach in the lesson (including "neuron", "density", and "efficient").
- Participants should study the parts of a brain cell and use the information in the video to consider if they have a "fixed mindset" or a "growth mindset"
- Include a warm-up and a debrief or exit ticket
- tie the lesson to GED science standards and include at least one collaboration instructional strategy

The lesson that AI provided (including images, some of which were incorrect or not helpful, and worksheet materials) was then reviewed, and content was edited, added, or removed according to lesson goals. Learning objective and lesson activity alignment was verified.

Social Studies Lesson Plan

KEY TERMS GALLERY WALK (80 MINUTES)

In this lesson, students will practice vocabulary development by participating in a key terms gallery walk. This lesson (and its materials) focuses on social studies terms, but instructors can adapt this activity for other vocabulary words as needed.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Gallery Walk Images (find pictures that represent economics, politics, society/social, and beliefs)
- Painters Tape (or other for hanging images)
- Sticky Notes with Numbers (1 – 20)
- Lesson Slideshow, Computers, and Projector (optional)
- [Gallery Walk Worksheet](#)
- [Gallery Walk Teacher Example](#)
- [My Perspective Wheel Worksheet](#)

OBJECTIVES:

- Participants will analyze and categorize examples of social, economic, political, and belief systems by connecting key terms to real-world images and personal experiences
- Participants will collaborate in small groups to discuss, compare, and justify their interpretations of key terms using evidence from images and personal perspectives.
- Participants will evaluate how personal experiences shape perspective by explaining how their views influence their understanding of social, economic, and political concepts.

STANDARDS COVERED:

Collaboration: Students work effectively with others by sharing ideas, listening actively, and building on group members' contributions to reach a shared understanding or goal.

Critical Thinking: Students analyze information and experiences to make meaning, recognize different perspectives, and explain how evidence and personal background influence understanding.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.8.6

Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Building towards: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

PROCESS:

Before Class:

- Hang Gallery Walk images around the room and label with sticky note numbers.
- Print lesson handouts and worksheets
- Organize desks into groups of three or more

Activity (AC) #1: Warm-up – Journal (5 minutes)

- Students get journals and take seats when they enter class. Display journal prompt (on board or slideshow):
 - Does social media help us or hurt us? Give one thing that's happened to you (an experience) when using social media that makes you feel this way.
- Ask 2-3 students to share.

AC #2: Key Term - Understanding “Perspective” (10 minutes)

- **Say:** To deepen our understanding of social studies, we are going to get a little more personal. To do this, you will be filling out a personal culture wheel that contains your **perspective** on four different topics:
 - **Social, Economic, Political, and Beliefs**
 - (Write these on the board or share in a slideshow.)
- **Say:** We will explore examples of these terms today to strengthen your understanding and identify your perspectives.
- Define perspective on the board or share slide.
 - **“Perspective - the way you see and understand something based on your own experiences, beliefs, and position in life.”**
 - **Explain:** Your perspective is the way you see something. If you think that sugar is dangerous to eat and only causes cavities and health problems, then from your *perspective* a candy shop is an evil place. If you observe the world from a dog's perspective, you see through the dog's eyes.
 - **Say:** Let's practice.
 - **Write:** “Social Media” on the board. Then write, “From my perspective, social media is...”

- **Ask:** From your perspective, is social media a good or bad thing?
 - **Say:** When you answer, please use this term to practice. You can say, “From my perspective, social media is...(good or bad).”
 - Then, give one experience you’ve had with social media that makes you feel this way. For example, did a social media post make you feel a certain way? Did a friend have a good or bad experience for some reason? Have you noticed some change in your everyday life that could be a result of social media?
- Select 2-3 volunteers to respond to the prompt USING the sentence stem.
- Transition: Say – Social media is one example of a topic that would connect to today’s key terms: “social” and “society”.

AC #3: Gallery Walk (40 minutes)

- **Say:** Now, let’s examine the rest of today’s key terms.
- **Slide:** If you have a slide with the key terms, show it now.
- **Pass out:** Key Terms Gallery Walk worksheet.
- **Read** the key terms together (teacher and/or volunteers). Clarify terms as necessary.
- Explain the Gallery Walk:
 - **Say:** Notice the pictures hanging up around the room. For this activity, you will find a picture to represent each of the key terms on your worksheet. There are four terms, so you should be finding four pictures, one for each term. (Clarify that economy/economic, government/political, and society/social are grouped together if necessary.)
 - **Say:** Some pictures can be used for more than one key term, but you must explain the connection between the key term and the picture you choose.
- **Model:** Demonstrate how to complete the worksheet with the Gallery Walk teacher example.
 - Tape the example to the wall after sharing so that students can reference it during the activity.
- Tell students they will have **15 minutes** to walk around the room, select their pictures, and fill out their worksheets.
- After all students have returned to desks and completed worksheets, tell them that they will discuss their findings in their groups.
- **Write** group discussion instructions on the board, or project a slide with instructions.
- Students discuss for 10 minutes.
- Return to whole class instruction. Ask each group to report out on 1-2 terms (as time allows). Make sure all of the terms have been discussed by the end of the discussion. Ask for more connections as necessary.

AC #4: Perspective Practice (20 minutes)

- **Say:** Now it’s time to consider these terms from your perspective. Who can remind us of what perspective means? (Give the definition or share the definition slide again if necessary).
- **Pass out the My Perspective Worksheet**
- **Part 1 - Say:** Use this handout to write down and then examine your own perspective on the topics we talked about today. Use the definitions on your Key Terms Gallery Walk for reference.

- **Model:** Let's do a few examples together before you get started. Project a 4-column table or draw a 4-column table on the board. Label each section with the key terms. Here are some possible examples:
 - **Economic** – Do you live in an urban or rural area? What type of building do you live in? Do you eat out or cook your own food? What do you often buy? What services do you use?
 - **Political** – What type of gov't do we have? What rights do you most value? What laws do you agree with/disagree with? Do you vote?
 - **Social** – Who is in your family? Who do you live with? What do you do with your friends? Do you have any hobbies? What are your traditions?
 - **Beliefs** – If you are religious, you can list it here. What other values guide how you live your life: Truth, justice, courage, kindness? How do you think we should treat people we don't know?
 - Teacher fills out information in the chart on the board. Leave this chart up once students begin to work independently.
- Give students 6-8 minutes to fill out their charts.
- **Part 2 – Model:** Tell students that you will answer one question together as an example.
 - Type or write your answer on the board for students to reference as necessary as they work.
 - Give students 10 minutes to answer the questions.
 - If time allows, ask for volunteers to report out or have students pair-share.

AC #5: Debrief & Exit Ticket (5 minutes)

- Exit Ticket: On a scale from 1-10, how well do you understand the key terms from today's lesson?
 - Which term is the easiest to understand?
 - Which term is the hardest to understand? Write one question that you have about this term.

Follow-Up or Next Day Activity Ideas:

AC: Think-Pair-Share

- Share your Perspectives Practice chart with a partner. Then, using the Venn Diagram, compare and contrast your charts. If you need to add ideas to your chart to be able to fill out both similarities and differences, you may do so.

FACILITATORS' NOTES:

- Instructors can use this lesson as a starting point for more in-depth examination of any key terms.
- This lesson assumes that students are already familiar with the difference between nouns (n.) and adjectives (adj.) to understand why economy/economic, government/political, and society/social are related. Instructors may want to pre-teach this information for the clarity of this lesson.

Key Terms Gallery Walk

Name: _____

Date: _____

Key Terms:

Economy (n.) - An economy is the system of how people in a country make, buy, and sell goods and services to get the things they need and want. **Economic** (adj.) means anything that has to do with money, jobs, and how people make, buy, and sell things—like economic decisions (choices about how to spend or save money).

Government (n.) - A government is the system of people, laws, and officials that define and control the country that you live in. The word **political** (adj.) means anything that has to do with the government, how power is used, and the different ideas people have about how a country should be run—like political debates (arguments about what the government should do).

Society (n.) – A society is a group of people living together in a community who share laws, customs, and ways of doing things. Relatedly, **social** (adj.) means anything that has to do with people interacting with each other within society—like social activities (hanging out with friends), social rules (how we've expected to behave around others), or social problems (issues that affect groups of people in a community).

Belief (n.) - A belief is an idea that a person accepts as being true or real and is tied to his/her personal

Gallery Walk: Find a picture to represent each of the words above. Be sure to use each word.

Picture # _____ : This picture represents

How can you tell? (What is your evidence?) _____.

Picture # _____ : This picture represents _____.

How can you tell? (What is your evidence?) _____.

Picture # _____ : This picture represents _____.

How can you tell? (What is your evidence?) _____.

Picture # _____ : This picture represents _____.

How can you tell? (What is your evidence?) _____.

Gallery Walk Instructor Example



Picture # 22 This picture represents government.

How can you tell? (What is your evidence?):

This is a picture of US presidents. Presidents are a part of government because they are elected by US citizens to be leaders. They hold some power and affect laws and policies as members of the US government.

My Perspective Practice

Social Studies

Name: _____

Date: _____

Part 1: Review the key terms definitions on your Gallery Walk worksheet. Then, use this chart to brainstorm some of your personal experiences with each of the key terms. Write your ideas in the chart.

Economic	Political	Social	Belief
• Related: job, money, housing, shopping	• Related: laws, rights, government	• Related: family, friends, hobbies	• Related: religion, values, art, science

Part 2: Review the experiences and ideas you listed in the chart above. Then, answer the questions below by providing your **perspective** on each topic.

1. Economic:

- a. What is your perspective on saving money? Do you think it is useful or pointless, or somewhere in between? Share a personal experience that has led to this perspective.

2. Political:

- a. What is your perspective on voting? Should people vote in every election, only some elections, not at all, or somewhere in between? Share a personal experience that has led to this perspective.

3. Social:

- a. What is your perspective on social media? How does it impact young people or even society as a whole? Share a personal experience that has led to this perspective.

4. Belief:

- a. What is one personal belief that is very important to you? This could be a belief related to religion or a way that you live your life. Share a personal experience that has led to this belief.

Reading Lesson Plan

INFERRING PERSPECTIVES: COMPARING APPROACHES TO HISTORICAL CHALLENGES (50-60 MINS)

Participants will read two history texts: One on the Apollo 11 mission and one on Apollo 13. Students will use a close reading strategy to examine the texts and make inferences.

All usage notes included at the end of the document.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- The two provided paragraphs (Apollo 11 and Apollo 13)
- Highlighters or Annotation Tools
- T-Chart or Venn Diagram Handout
- Sentence Stems (optional support for ELLs)
- Annotation Key Handout (optional support)

OBJECTIVES:

- **Participants will:**
 - Draw evidence-based inferences about how the Apollo 11 and Apollo 13 crews approached problem-solving and challenges, using specific details and quotes from the texts.
 - Evaluate how two historical events present differing viewpoints on overcoming challenges and support their analysis with evidence from informational texts.

STANDARDS COVERED:

GED Social Studies Practices Covered:

1. Analyzing Historical Events and Arguments
 - Participants examine how two historical events approached the same topic (space exploration and survival) in different ways.
2. Evaluating Evidence and Drawing Conclusions
 - Participants use quotes and actions from each text to infer beliefs and support claims.
3. Comparing and Contrasting Perspectives
 - Participants identify similarities and differences in viewpoints and methods.
4. Reading and Analyzing Informational Texts
 - Participants engage in close reading of secondary source texts and interpret meaning.

ELA Standards

- RI.9-10.1 – Cite strong and thorough textual evidence
- RI.9-10.2 – Determine central ideas and analyze development
- RI.9-10.6 – Determine an author's point of view or purpose
- RI.9-10.9 – Analyze how two texts address similar themes/topics

Critical Thinking Competency:

Participants will analyze information, evaluate evidence, and draw reasoned conclusions based on multiple sources.

PROCESS:

Instructional Strategy Focus

- Close Reading (multiple reads with a specific purpose each time)

Activity 1: Warm-Up / Do Now (5-7 Mins)

Prompt (project on screen or handout): Think about a time when you faced a hardship or challenge. Then, answer the following focus question: When facing hardship, is it better to follow a structure (plan) or adapt (change) as you go? Explain your reasoning.

- Participants write independently (2-3 min)
- Quick pair-share (2-3 min)
- Discuss as a class.

Instructor: Make two columns on the board (structure and adapt). Capture participant responses and reasoning.

Don't evaluate at this time. This primes the comparison without giving away the answer.

Introduce Topic and Learning Targets (3-5 Mins)

"Today we're going to practice two important skills:

- **Inferring ideas that are not directly stated**
- **Comparing how two texts present different approaches to the same issue"**

Define **inference** in plain language:

"Using clues from the text + your thinking to figure out what's not directly said."

PRO TIP: Write the definition of inference on the board or post somewhere in the class for participants to reference during the activity.

The two texts we will compare are about historical space missions. We will compare the texts to understand how each mission team approached solving problems.

Activity 2: I Do (Modeling Close Reading) (10 mins)

Project or read aloud the **Apollo 11** paragraph.

Model annotation + thinking aloud:

- Highlight a quote: *"relied on careful planning and strict procedures"*
- Circle: "detailed instructions and checklists," "specific roles," "training and established procedures"

Think-Aloud Example:

- "I notice the team is following step-by-step instructions..."
- "They are relying on preparation and plans, even when small issues come up..."
- "This makes me think they believe something about how problems should be solved..."
- **Important:** Do NOT name "planning" or "structure" explicitly—model *inferring*, not answering.

Ask 1–2 guiding questions:

- "What do their actions suggest about how they approach challenges?"
- "What clues (specific words or phrases) helped you figure that out?"

Activity 3: We Do (Guided Practice) (10–12 mins)

Read the **Apollo 13** paragraph together.

Participants annotate with prompts:

- Underline key **actions**

- Star important **details**
- Write a quick note: *“This suggests…”*

Guiding questions (discuss as a class or in pairs):

- “What changed for this team during the mission?”
- “What actions did they take in response?”
- “What do those actions suggest about how they solve problems?”
- “How is this approach similar to or different from Apollo 11?”

Push participants to **cite specific words/phrases**, not general opinions.

- “Show me the phrase that made you think that.”
- “Where do you see that in the text?”

Activity 4: You Do (Independent Practice – Comparison Task) (15–20 mins)

Participants complete a **T-chart or Venn diagram**:

Apollo 11	Apollo 13
Actions	Actions
Key Details/Quotes	Key Details/Quotes
What this suggests about their approach to solving problems	What this suggests about their approach to solving problems

PRO TIP: Add **movement**, if desired, by having participants write their T-chart notes on stickies and posting them to a T-chart on the board. Examine as a class.

Next, participants answer (written response):

- *“How did the Apollo 11 and Apollo 13 teams differ in their approaches to solving problems during their missions? Use evidence from both texts.”*

Instructor role: Circulate, press for:

- “Where’s your evidence?”
- “What makes you say that?”
- “Point me to the line that supports your idea.”

Activity 5: Exit Ticket / Debrief (5–8 mins)

Option A (Inference Focus):

- *“Based on the texts, what can you infer about how each team believed problems should be solved? Use at least one piece of evidence from each paragraph.”*

Option B (Application):

- *“Which approach to problem-solving do you think is more effective: following a clear plan or adapting as challenges arise? Explain using evidence from both texts.”*

Lesson **Performance Indicators (Student-Friendly)**

Critical Thinking Competency:

- Identifies relevant evidence from both texts
- Explains what the evidence suggests (inference)
- Compares approaches clearly and accurately
- Supports ideas with specific textual references

FACILITATORS' NOTES:

- This lesson assumes that participants have practiced the skill of comparison before. To use this lesson, either incorporate comparison into prior lessons, or split this into two days and focus on (model) the skill of comparison during the mini-lesson of the second day.
- Apollo 11 and Apollo 13 paragraphs provided below
- To build interest or buy in, consider:
 - Projecting pictures of outer space or rockets launching at the beginning of class
 - Incorporating a brief reference to recent space missions

Differentiation / Support

- Provide sentence starters:
 - "This suggests that..."
 - "A key difference is..."
- Pre-highlight 1–2 key sections for struggling readers
- Allow partner discussion before writing

AI Usage & Tips

The Apollo 11 and Apollo 13 paragraphs were generated by AI using a specific prompt and were reviewed by the instructor. Prompt included these instructions:

- Appropriate for a 9th grade reading level
- Include historical facts about Apollo 11 and Apollo 13 and how each mission demonstrates a different approach to problem-solving
- Make paragraphs where the mission's approach must be inferred and is not directly stated

Paragraph 1 – Apollo 11 Mission (Structured Planning & Precision)

In 1969, the Apollo 11 mission successfully landed the first humans on the moon. During the mission, astronauts and engineers relied on careful planning and strict procedures to guide their actions. Each step—from launching the spacecraft to landing on the moon—was completed using detailed instructions and checklists. The crew followed specific roles and communicated constantly with mission control to stay on track. Even when small issues arose, they relied on training and established procedures to respond.

Inference suggestion: This approach shows that the team believed success depended on preparation, organization, and following a clear plan.

Paragraph 2 - The Apollo 13 Mission (Flexibility & Adaptation)

In 1970, the Apollo 13 mission faced a serious emergency when an oxygen tank exploded during the flight. With their original plan no longer possible, the astronauts and engineers had to quickly adjust their approach. Instead of relying on set procedures, they created new solutions using the limited materials available on the spacecraft. The crew followed changing instructions from mission control and adapted step by step as new problems appeared. Even under pressure, they remained flexible and open to new ideas.

Inference suggestion: This approach shows that the team believed success depended on adapting to challenges and finding solutions in the moment.

The following prompt was used to generate a lesson plan:

Create a 50-60 minute lesson plan with a warm-up, gradual release, and an exit ticket or debrief. The lesson should also include these two objectives: participants will make inferences based on historical

events, and also participants will compare two texts. (Please reword these objectives to make them measurable.) **Add a Social Studies objective based on the GED, too.** Include the close reading instructional strategy in the lesson.

The AI lesson output was then reviewed, and content was edited, added, or removed according to lesson goals. PRO TIPS were added to emphasize important teaching practices. Learning objective and lesson activity alignment was verified.

Resource: Teaching Thinking Strategies

[Project Zero | Harvard Graduate School of Education](#)

The Project Zero *Thinking Routines* resource is a collection of short, easy-to-implement instructional strategies designed to make learner thinking visible. Each routine provides a simple structure that helps students analyze, reflect, question, and engage more deeply with content.

YouthBuild instructors can use this tool to build critical thinking skills across subjects, support discussion-based learning, and encourage all participants to actively engage with and interpret content. The strategies are flexible and quick to apply, so they work well as warm-ups, discussion frameworks, or reflection activities, and support a classroom culture that focuses on thinking, not just answers.

YOUTHBUILD EDUCATION GLOSSARY

This glossary provides a brief explanation of common education terms that academic instructors or other staff may encounter and want to know more about, with the goal of demystifying educational concepts as well as addressing concepts that were not discussed in detail elsewhere in the toolkit.

A.I. Literacy: The ability to understand, use, and critically evaluate artificial intelligence tools and technologies. This includes knowing how AI works, its benefits, and its limitations. AI literacy prepares participants for emerging workforce demands and responsible technology use.

Asset-Based Approach: A perspective that focuses on participants' strengths, skills, and potential rather than their challenges. It builds on what individuals already bring to the learning environment and supports participant confidence and motivation.

Blended Learning: A combination of in-person instruction and digital or online learning activities. Participants move between instructor-led and technology-supported experiences. In youth services settings, blended learning offers flexibility and expands access to resources.

Bloom's Taxonomy: A framework that categorizes levels of thinking from simple to complex: remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate, and create. It helps educational staff to design activities that move beyond basic recall and supports deeper learning and skill development.

Chunking: The practice of breaking information or tasks into smaller, more manageable parts. This makes complex material easier to understand and complete and helps reduce learner frustration.

Collaboration Skills: The ability to work effectively with others toward a shared goal. This includes communication, listening, problem-solving, and shared responsibility. Collaboration skills are essential for both learning and workplace success.

Competency-Based Education (CBE): An approach that focuses on what participants know and can do rather than time spent in a course. Participants progress by demonstrating mastery of specific skills or competencies. This approach supports personalized pacing and real-world skill development.

Cumulative Assessment: An evaluation that measures learning across multiple lessons or over time. It requires participants to draw on a range of knowledge and skills, and it evaluates overall growth and long-term understanding.

Differentiation: The practice of adjusting instruction to meet different skill levels, needs, and interests. This may include varying content, activities, or ways participants demonstrate learning. Differentiation helps ensure all participants can access and succeed in learning.

Formative Assessment: Informal checks for understanding that occur during learning. These can include discussions, quick tasks, or observation. Formative assessment helps staff adjust instruction in real time.

Gradual Release of Responsibility: A teaching approach that shifts responsibility from the instructor to the participant, often described as “I do, we do, you do.” Support is reduced as skills develop, thus building independence without overwhelming learners.

Higher-Order Thinking Skills: Skills that involve analyzing, evaluating, and creating rather than memorizing. These help participants solve problems and think critically which support deeper learning and real-world decision-making.

Instructional Strategies: Methods and techniques used to support learning, such as discussion, modeling, and hands-on activities. These are chosen based on participant needs and goals. Effective strategies increase engagement and understanding.

Learner Agency: A student's ability to take an active role in their own learning by making choices, setting goals, and reflecting on their progress. It emphasizes ownership, voice, and responsibility, empowering learners to direct their learning experiences and apply skills in meaningful contexts.

Learning Objectives: Clear statements of what participants should know or be able to do by the end of a lesson or activity. They guide both instruction and assessment. Learning objectives help keep learning focused and purposeful.

Metacognition: The ability to reflect on and manage one's own thinking and learning process. This includes planning, monitoring, and evaluating how one approaches tasks.

Modeling: The instructor demonstrates a skill or process so participants can see what success looks like. This may include thinking aloud or showing steps. Modeling clarifies expectations and can help build participant confidence with a task or skill.

Multiple Intelligences: The idea that individuals have different types of strengths, such as linguistic, logical, or interpersonal abilities. This encourages offering varied ways to learn and demonstrate understanding. Recognizing multiple intelligences helps instructors to recognize and build on participant strengths.

Multiple Modalities: Using different ways to present and engage with content, such as visual, auditory, and hands-on approaches. This increases accessibility and engagement for all learners.

Personalized Learning: An approach that tailors learning experiences to individual participants' needs, goals, and pace. This may include flexible pathways, choice in activities, or targeted support. Personalized learning helps meet participants where they are and supports progress over time.

Problem-Based Service Learning (PBSL): A learning approach where participants identify and address a real community problem through a structured project. Learning occurs through researching, planning, and taking action. This educational model builds academic and workforce-readiness skills and civic responsibility.

Project-Based Learning (PBL): A teaching approach where participants learn by working on a real-world project over time. They build knowledge through research, collaboration, and creating a final product. PBL supports engagement and practical skill development.

Scaffolding: Temporary support provided to help participants learn new skills. Scaffolding techniques include instructor modeling, pre-teaching vocabulary words, or using templates to structure writing. Support is gradually removed as confidence and ability increase. Scaffolding helps learners progress without becoming overwhelmed.

Student-Centered Learning: An approach that prioritizes participant voice, choice, and active involvement. Participants play a key role in decision-making and problem-solving. This increases engagement and ownership.

Success Criteria: Clear descriptions of what successful work looks like for a specific task or learning objective. They help participants understand how their work will be evaluated and what they are aiming for. Success criteria make expectations transparent and support self-assessment.

Summative Assessment: An evaluation that occurs at the end of a lesson, unit, or program to measure what participants have learned. These are typically more formal and may be graded or scored. Summative assessments help determine overall learning outcomes and program effectiveness.

Transfer of Learning: The ability to apply knowledge and skills learned in one context to a new situation. This might include using math skills on the job or applying communication strategies in different settings. In a YouthBuild program, transfer of learning is key to ensuring skills are useful beyond the classroom.

Trauma-Informed Practices: Approaches that recognize the impact of trauma and emphasize safety, consistency, and respect. These practices support emotional regulation and trust. In youth services settings, they help participants stay engaged and ready to learn.

Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK): A framework that describes levels of thinking required for tasks, from basic recall to complex reasoning. It helps ensure activities are appropriately challenging and supports rigor and meaningful learning.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): The range of tasks that a participant cannot yet do independently but can accomplish with guidance or support from an instructor or peer. It represents the “just right” level of challenge—beyond what is easy, but not so difficult that it leads to frustration. Working within the ZPD helps staff provide the right level of support to promote growth and build confidence.

SECTION

04

**Classroom Design
& Practices**

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04 Classroom Design & Practices

INTRODUCTION

YouthBuild instructors can shape key operational aspects of classroom design to create strong learning conditions for YouthBuild participants. These include the daily, behind-the-scenes structures and routines that support effective instruction and the implementation of rigorous educational models. When these elements are in place, they promote critical thinking, teamwork, and collaboration. Strong classroom design also establishes a foundation for high expectations, ensuring that participants have the resources and guidance needed to make meaningful academic progress.

A CLASSROOM BASED ON YOUTHBUILD PARTICIPANTS

Instructors can support YouthBuild participants as they re-engage with academics by considering their experiences, needs, and opinions when designing classroom spaces and practices. Here are some things to consider when creating a classroom for YouthBuild participants.

Classroom Environment

Instructors can support YouthBuild participant educational achievement by creating a classroom environment that feels safe, promotes effective learning mindsets, and contains tools that support learning.

BEST PRACTICES TO POSITIVELY IMPACT CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

- **Foster a growth mindset**
 - o A growth mindset is the belief that one can gain intelligence and skills through ongoing

effort and practice. With a growth mindset, mistakes are seen as an opportunity for learning. Anyone can grow and develop.¹

- o Conversely, a fixed mindset is just how it sounds. Someone is either smart and academically capable or not. This doesn't change regardless of effort or engagement.
- o When YouthBuild participants have a growth mindset, they demonstrate resilience and engage with challenges in a productive way. This, in turn, leads to academic achievement.²
- o However, many young people entering YouthBuild programs come with a past fraught with negative learning experiences. It may be difficult for these new participants to reframe their learning experience in a positive way to engage effectively in the YouthBuild classroom. There are several steps that instructors can take to support the development participants' growth mindsets.
 - Early in a cohort, instructors can create opportunities for YouthBuild participants to share and reflect on their previous school experiences.
 - Instructors can explicitly teach about brain development and growth mindset early in the cohort. They can encourage participants to reflect on if they had a growth mindset or a fixed mindset in the past. Instructors facilitate lessons to demonstrate how a growth mindset is an effective and more productive mentality when approaching learning. See below for sample lessons.
 - Instructors can display posters, anchor charts, or images that recall the growth mindset philosophy to keep the concept fresh for YouthBuild participants.
 - Instructors can model and think-aloud to demonstrate their own learning process, including during challenges and setbacks. This type of growth mindset support is especially relevant as many instructors are learning about Artificial Intelligence alongside their YouthBuild participants. Instructors can make visible their own challenges with prompting, identifying real versus AI-generated images, and so on.
 - Instructors can reinforce a growth mindset for praising student achievement based on effort made rather than on intelligence alone.³

¹ Taken from Stanford University Teaching Commons, Growth Mindset and Enhanced Learning, <https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/teaching-guides/foundations-course-design/learning-activities/growth-mindset-and-enhanced-learning>, accessed March 14, 2026. Note: Stanford professor Carol Dweck pioneered this concept in her book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006).

² Taken from Stanford University Teaching Commons, Growth Mindset and Enhanced Learning, <https://teachingcommons.stanford.edu/teaching-guides/foundations-course-design/learning-activities/growth-mindset-and-enhanced-learning>, accessed March 14, 2026.

³ Taken from Carol S. Dweck, Gregory M. Walton, and Geoffrey L. Cohen, *Academic Tenacity: Mindsets and Skills that Promote Long-Term Learning*, Stanford University, 2014.

- o Finally, curriculum models link Competency-Based Education and Problem-Based Service Learning also support growth mindset, because YouthBuild participants actively confront and address mistakes as learning opportunities. They collaborate to overcome challenges and regularly reflect on their own growth.

TOOL
Quick Growth Mindset Activities

- **Growth Mindset Media**
 - o Discuss “mindset” and “self-fulfilling prophecy” with participants
 - o Tell participants that you will show them a short video about growth mindset and that they will take notes about “growth mindset” versus “fixed mindset”
 - o Watch the short video – Growth Mindset by UNC Learning Center: [Growth Mindset by UNC Learning Center](#)
 - o Afterwards, discuss what participants noted and create a table on the board
 - o Discuss how having a growth mindset will help participants be successful at YouthBuild
- Create similar pre-teach, view, and debrief activities for these additional growth mindset videos.
 - o [YouTube Video – Michael Jordan shares his story on Growth Mindset](#)
 - o [YouTube Video – Growth Mindset: The Truth About Your Brain by Khan Academy](#)
- **Harness Participant Feedback**
 - o Instructors can foster a sense of classroom safety by encouraging and acknowledging participant ideas and feedback, creating opportunities for participants to share their thoughts and make decisions about the classroom. This builds trust and supports participant ownership of both the learning environment and their own learning.
 - o For example, YouthBuild participants can suggest unit topics, classroom reading materials, community service projects, and preferred classroom activities. YouthBuild participants can also provide feedback when something in class is not working, such as an instructional strategy, routine or rule. Receiving this feedback can benefit an instructor, because it can redirect ineffective classroom practices or content towards more effective practices, even on a cohort-by-cohort basis. While one cohort may enjoy inserting brainteasers into classroom activities, another cohort may find them frustrating. Getting feedback to remove practices that are not working can help an instructor design classroom practices that are efficient and effective for YouthBuild participants.
 - o By harnessing participant feedback when creating classroom rules and responsibilities, instructors also create opportunities for participants to take ownership of the maintenance and enforcement of expectations.

Lesson Plan

SETTING CLASSROOM NORMS (60-75 MINUTES)

In this lesson, YouthBuild participants reflect on their past classroom experiences and identify what helps them learn successfully. Through journaling, peer interviews, and group discussion, participants will help create shared classroom norms around respect, participation, and responsibility.

By the end of the lesson, YouthBuild participants will have contributed ideas that will help shape expectations for how the class works together.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Large chart paper or whiteboard
- Sticky notes or sentence strips
- Writing utensils
- Student notebooks or laptops (optional)
- Peer interview worksheet (suggested questions in [Activity 2](#))
- Tape or markers

OBJECTIVES:

Participants will be able to:

1. Reflect on what helps them learn successfully in a classroom.
2. Practice active listening and respectful communication with peers.
3. Identify shared expectations for how participants and instructors should treat one another.
4. Contribute ideas to a set of classroom norms.

STANDARDS COVERED:

COMPETENCY EXAMPLES:

- Communication competency – proficient means that a participant can articulate thoughts and ideas effectively using a variety of forms and styles.
- Citizenship competency - proficient means that a participant can identify the perspectives and arguments expressed by others in class and compare them to his/her own.

CCSS:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.1 – Collaborative discussions with diverse partners
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 – Initiating and participating effectively in discussions
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.8.4 – Presenting ideas clearly to others

PROCESS:

Activity 1: Independent Reflection (Journaling) – 10 minutes

1. Participants complete this writing prompt: “Think about a class where you felt comfortable learning and participating. What made that classroom a good place to learn?”
2. Encourage participants to think about:
 - a. How students treated each other

2. Encourage participants to think about:
 - a. How students treated each other
 - b. How the teacher supported learning
 - c. What helped people stay focused
 - d. What made people feel respected
3. Ask several volunteers to share their ideas.
4. Next, ask participants to write one or two key ideas from their reflection on sticky notes or sentence strips.
5. Participants place their ideas on the board or chart paper.
6. Instructor says:
 - a. "Today we are going to use your ideas to learn about each other and create norms for how we want our classroom to work."

Activity 2: Peer Interviews - 20–25 minutes

1. Explain: "You have thought about what helps you learn. But everyone in this room may need different things to be successful. We are going to interview each other to learn what our classmates need."
2. Participants pair up. Each participant interviews their partner using questions such as:
 - a. What helps you stay focused in class?
 - b. What makes you feel respected in a classroom?
 - c. What is something that distracts you from learning?
 - d. What is one responsibility students should have in class?
 - e. What is one thing teachers can do to help students succeed?
3. Participants write down their partner's responses. Encourage them to ask follow-up questions.

Activity 3: Share and Identify Common Themes - 15–20 minutes

1. Bring the class back together.
2. Ask pairs to share one or two important things they learned from their partner.
3. As participants share, write responses on chart paper under categories such as:
 - a. Respect
 - b. Participation
 - c. Responsibility
 - d. Focus
 - e. Support
4. Examples may include:
 - a. Listen when others are speaking
 - b. Be on time
 - c. Help each other
 - d. Ask questions when confused
 - e. Keep phones away during instruction

Activity 4: Create Draft Classroom Norms - 10–15 minutes

1. Review the list of ideas generated by participants.
2. Ask the group: “Looking at these ideas, what expectations should we agree to follow as a class?”
3. Work together to turn ideas into clear classroom norms, such as:
 - a. We listen respectfully when others speak.
 - b. We come prepared and ready to participate.
 - c. We ask questions when we need help.
 - d. We stay focused during class time.
4. Be sure to clarify more general norms.
 - a. For example, what does “We stay focused during class time” look like? Does it mean phones are away and participants are making eye contact?
5. Record the final list on chart paper.
6. Explain that these norms will guide how the class works together.

Closing Reflection – 5 minutes

1. Ask participants to respond verbally or in writing:
 - a. Which classroom norm is most important to you?
 - b. How will following these norms help everyone succeed?
2. Instructor closes with:
 - a. “A strong classroom depends on everyone contributing. The norms we created today will help us build a respectful and productive learning environment.”

FACILITATORS’ NOTES:

- Design your classroom norm categories based on your program’s values and focus areas. Some other classroom norm categories might be:
 - Group Work Expectations
 - Independent Work Expectations
 - Student Responsibilities vs Teacher Responsibilities
 - Safety
 - Electronic Usage
 - Breaks
 - Etc.
- Instructor must reference and enforce classroom norms throughout programming after development in order to work. Instructors should be prepared to address situations in which participants do not follow or respect classroom norms. Instructors can address these situations individually with participants or with the group, depending on the circumstances.

TOOL



Participant Feedback Forms

Resource Origin: RiseUp Community School

Location: Denver, CO

Student Feedback Survey

Please rate your instructor and this course in the categories below. Please complete the form to the best of your ability, as we take your feedback seriously and will use it for the ongoing improvement of this course and your experience at YouthBuild. This survey is anonymous and confidential. Thank you for your time.

1 - Never

2 - Some of the time

3 - Most of the time

4 - Always

<u>Course Statements</u>	1	2	3	4
<i>My instructor helps me understand difficult ideas and skills.</i>				
<i>This course contains a variety of learning activities, including hands-on and small group activities.</i>				
<i>My instructor uses examples in class that I understand.</i>				
<i>My instructor knows when the class does not understand.</i>				
<i>My instructor explains things in different ways.</i>				
<i>My instructor checks to make sure I understand new ideas and skills.</i>				
<i>My instructor lets us demonstrate our understanding in a variety of different ways in class.</i>				
<i>I understand what I am supposed to be learning in this course.</i>				
<i>I feel safe to make mistakes and share my opinion in this course.</i>				
<i>My instructor listens to me.</i>				
<i>My instructor explains what we are learning and why.</i>				
<i>I am interested in the topics we are learning about in class.</i>				
<i>My instructor shows how this class connects to other school subjects.</i>				
<i>I have to work hard to do well in the course.</i>				
<i>We learn to correct our mistakes as part of this course.</i>				
<i>My instructor only accepts my best effort.</i>				
<i>My instructor admits when he/she makes a mistake.</i>				

What do you think was the best thing about this course?

My favorite activity we did was...

Me least favorite activity we did was...

What about this course can be improved?

Do the activities in class fit your individual learning style? Please explain.

Thank you for your feedback!

TOOL



YouthBuild Youth Policy Council Manual

Resource Origin: YouthBuild Global

Resource: [YouthBuild](#) | [WorkforceGPS](#) | [Policy Councils Building a Culture of Leadership](#)

Programs can learn best practices and tips about how to develop a Youth Policy Council by referencing the Youth Policy Council Manual, available on WorkforceGPS. Youth policy councils are a way for YouthBuild programs to create opportunities for participants to share perspectives, collaborate on solutions, and influence program policies, thus fostering a stronger sense of participant ownership and accountability within programming. This approach not only strengthens engagement, but also builds leadership, critical thinking, and civic participation skills that extend beyond the classroom.

- **Create Teambuilding Opportunities**

- By incorporating teambuilding activities into instruction, instructors encourage participants to get to know each other and build trust, which in turn helps create a safer classroom environment while building participants' collaboration and communication skills.

TOOL



YouthBuild Orientation TeamBuilders

Resource Origin: YouthBuild Global

Resource Name: YouthBuild Orientation Manual 3: Activity Catalog Ice Breaker and Team Building Activities

TEAMBUILDER #1: Ice Breaker and Team Builder Blanket Game

This fun activity will help participants get to know each other through a playful exercise that also strengthens creativity.

Time: 1 hour

Category: Ice Breakers, Team Building

Resources Required:

- Blanket
- Two facilitators (or a facilitator and a volunteer from the participants)

Preparing:

Using the tape, create a line long enough for all of the participants to stand on it.

Delivering:

1. Split participants into two teams.
2. Have each team sit on either side of the room, facing each other.
3. Hold the blanket up between the two teams such that neither team can see any of the opposing team members.
4. Each team chooses someone to go stand at the blanket.

- Once both teams have a participant standing at the blanket, drop the blanket. First person to yell the name of the opposing team member wins.

Debriefing:

- What strategies did your team use to prepare for the game?
- How did it feel waiting behind the blanket, not knowing who would be revealed?
- What made it easy or difficult to recall someone's name quickly?
- Did the game get easier as you played more rounds? Why or why not?
- How does learning and remembering names affect how connected you feel to the group?

Facilitator's Notes:

Modification:

Each team can share a verbal clue before the blanket drops as a hint.

Thank you to YouthBuild Fall River (Fall River, MA) for sharing this activity with YouthBuild Global.

TEAMBUILDER #2: Ice Breaker and Team Builder Centric Circles

This activity gives participants a rapid-fire opportunity to ask each other questions.

Time: 40 minutes

Category: Ice Breakers, Team Building, Community Connections

Resources Required: None

Preparing:

Prepare some questions for participants to ask each other. Make sure each question is straight forward and wouldn't take too long to answer. Some possible questions include:

- What is a typical breakfast for you?
- What is your favorite form of exercise?
- What is one TV show you watch, but you're not proud of it?
- Do you collect anything?
- Do you consider yourself shy or outgoing? Why?
- Do you play any sports? If so, which ones?
- Do you have any pets?
- What was the last movie you saw? Did you like it?
- Describe your perfect dinner.
- What would you do with a million dollars?
- Name one job you'd like to do as an adult.
- What is one thing you wish you could change about yourself?
- Name a book you really enjoyed reading.
- What is the farthest place you've ever travelled to?
- What is one thing you're good at?
- What is one thing you'd like to get better at?
- What is the best thing you can cook?
- If you had an extra hour to yourself every day, what would you do with it?

Delivering:

- Split participants into two, equally sized groups.
- Ask one group to form a circle with each participant looking outwards (away from the circle's center) and then ask the other group to form a circle around the first such that every participant is paired with a participant from the other circle.

3. Explain that you, the facilitator, will be giving participants a question to discuss for 1-2 minutes with the participant they are currently paired with, after which the outer circle will rotate and shift to the next participant in the inner circle and begin to discuss a new question.
4. Give an example first question, and once the time is up, before having the participants rotate, ensure that everyone understands how the remainder of the activity will work.
5. Once you have answered all questions, have the participants rotate and then ask the next question.
6. Repeat until all participants on the outer circle have talked with all participants on the inner circle.
7. Have all participants return to the larger group and discuss how the activity went.

Debriefing:

- What did you like about the activity?
- What did you find difficult?

Facilitator's Notes:

Should the challenge prove too easy for one or more teams, the facilitator can impose some "Twists":

- Facilitator can change or adapt the question to the appropriate situation.

Thank you to OWTC YouthBuild (Ogden, UT) for sharing this activity with YouthBuild Global.

TEAMBUILDER #3: Problem Solving – Crossing Galaxies

This is a fun team building activity that can get participants working together to solve a problem, in this case, traveling across a "galaxy" using teamwork and limited supplies.

Time: 20 minutes

Category: Team Building, Leadership Skills

Resources Required:

- Large paper plates
- Tape to mark start and finish lines

Preparing:

Use the tape to mark the starting line and finish, roughly 20 feet apart from one another.

Delivering:

1. Divide participants into groups of roughly 4-6 participants each and have them gather at the starting line.
2. Give each participant a "star" (a large sized paper plate).
3. Explain the rules of the game to the participants: each team must get from the start to the finish in 10 minutes using their stars and being sure to not touch the "galaxy" (the floor between the start and finish). Moreover, while participants can share stars, each team must make this journey without losing contact with any stars even for just a second, or else "gravity" (a facilitator) will take it away instantly.

Debriefing:

- What did you like about the challenge?
- What did you find difficult?

Facilitator's Notes:

Make sure that all participants start behind the starting line and that safety is maintained as a priority throughout the activity.

If the challenge proves too easy or too difficult, consider imposing some of the following twists:

- If the challenge is too difficult, give each team an extra “star” or two to start with.
- If the challenge is too easy, have participants try again with one fewer stars or without talking.

Thank you to Civic Education Center and Classroom Law Project for sharing this activity with YouthBuild Global.

TEAMBUILDER #4: Human Treasure Hunt (People Bingo)

This activity focuses on commonalities between participants and is a great tool for helping groups of any size get to know each other.

Time: 20 minutes

Category: Ice Breakers, Team Building

Resources Required:

Printed copies of “Treasure Hunt” list

Preparing:

Compile a “Treasure Hunt” list with a list of qualities or traits that pertains to notable portion of your participants. (Note: you may also choose to include qualities that only pertain to a few or maybe even none of the participants for a fun twist)

Delivering:

1. Give each participant a Treasure Hunt sheet. They must find different peers who match each trait—no one can be used more than once.

Facilitator's Notes:

Variations and Considerations:

- You can offer a prize to whoever finishes first to increase the competition.
- Playing frantic music can build the tension.
- You may choose to use the program application to gather information to make the “Treasure Hunt” list more personalized for each cohort of participants.

Sample Questions Include:

- _____ is the same height as you (within an inch or two).
- _____ was born the same month as you.
- _____ has the same number of siblings as you.
- _____ can play a musical instrument. What one? _____
- _____ has visited more than 10 states.
- _____ is at least halfway done with their AmeriCorps hours!
- _____ has lived in a big city. Which one? _____
- _____ has the same eye color as you.
- _____ speaks more than one language.
- _____ has earned a certification at YouthBuild.

- _____ has the same favorite game! Which one? _____
- _____ has performed on stage before.
- _____ has the same favorite TV show. Which one? _____

Thank you to Project Adventures for sharing this activity with YouthBuild Global.

TEAMBUILDER #5: Communication Activity – Marshmallow Game

This activity improves communication and teamwork through a game similar to telephone and whisper-down-the-alley.

Time: 1 hour

Category: Team Building, Leadership Skills

Resources Required:

- Marshmallows • Skewers

Preparing:

Build a unique structure using some of the marshmallows and skewers.

Delivering:

1. Split participants into two teams.
2. Have each team assign roles—every participant should be a Seer, Runner, or Builder.
3. Each group must then try to recreate a marshmallow structure hidden in another room (or a secluded part of the same room), but each role is limited in what they can contribute:
 1. The Seers are the only participants who can see the original structure.
 2. The Runners are the only participants who can go between the Seers and Builders, and they may do so as many times as they wish.
 3. The Builders are the only participants who can build the new structure.
4. Whichever team's structure looks most like the original wins.

Thank you to YouthBuild Fall River (Fall River, MA) for sharing this activity with YouthBuild Global.

Access to Resources

Instructors can ensure that YouthBuild participants have meaningful access to a range of learning tools and resources that support academic achievement. These should include both materials and technology that reflect participants' experiences and interests. Investing in high-quality resources helps create a rich learning environment that promotes critical thinking and fosters a love of learning.

TOOL



Useful Learning Resources List

Instructional & Classroom Tools

- Computers or laptops – including Chromebooks, etc.
- Tablets
- White boards
- Overhead projector
- SMART Board
- Printers
- Charging stations/power strips
- Book libraries
- Headphones
- Chart paper
- Document camera
- Timers

Student Organization & Access

- Binders, notebooks, and folders
- Storage systems
- Flexible seating options

Academic & Intervention Supports

- Math manipulatives (e.g., algebra tiles, fraction models)
- Leveled texts
- Dictionaries
- Calculators

TOOL



Creating a Classroom Library Tip Sheet

A well-designed classroom library can be a powerful tool for increasing engagement, building literacy skills, and fostering a sense of ownership among participants. This tool offers practical strategies for developing and maintaining a classroom library that is participant-centered and sustainable, thus supporting a classroom environment where reading is valued, supported, and enjoyed.

- **Funding Opportunities**
 - Explore grants, donations, book drives, and partnerships with local libraries or organizations
 - Consider DonorsChoose, local businesses, or workforce partners for support
- **High-Interest and Leveled Texts**
 - Include a range of reading levels to support all participants
 - Prioritize high-interest, relevant, and age-appropriate materials
 - Include multilingual texts if relevant
 - Offer multiple formats:
 - Physical books
 - Audiobooks (with devices/headphones)
 - E-books (via tablets or apps)
 - Include career-related texts, biographies, and real-world reading (e.g., manuals, articles)
 - Provide options for struggling readers (graphic novels, high-low texts, audiobooks)
- **Participant Voice and Ownership**
 - Let participants recommend or help select books
 - Invite them to help organize or manage the library
 - Create opportunities for peer recommendations or reviews
- **Organization & Storage**
 - Use bookshelves, bins, or labeled containers (can double as a construction project)
 - Organize by genre, topic, or reading level for easy navigation
 - Create a visually inviting space that encourages browsing
- **Book Access and Check-Out System**
 - Consider if participants will be able to take the books home or use them only in class
 - Build in time for independent reading if books stay on-site
 - Keep systems simple (sign-out sheet, etc.)
 - Establish clear, fair expectations for lost or damaged books (focus on responsibility, not punishment)
- **Building a Reading Culture**
 - Set aside regular time for independent reading
 - Model reading as an instructor
 - Allow participant choice
 - Celebrate reading (book talks, recommendations, informal discussions)

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit⁴

⁴ PROMPT: ChatGPT, please take my notes on “Tips for Creating a Classroom Library” and create a bulleted tool on this topic for educators. Please suggest any additional steps or information that I should consider.

TOOL



Accessing Digital Libraries & Tools Tip Sheet

This tool offers practical ways for instructional staff to find and use credible digital libraries and online research resources in their classrooms. Instructors can use these resources to supplement lessons, support independent work, and ensure all participants have access to high-quality, engaging materials.

1. Partner with Your Local Library

Local libraries often have access to free research tools and other resources available to local community members.

Key Actions:

- Schedule a library tour
- Invite a librarian guest speaker to demonstrate databases and research tools
- Ensure all participants obtain library cards
- Teach how to access online library portals (many include free databases and ebooks)

2. Access Digital Library and Student-Friendly Platforms

- **Sora** – Free ebooks/audiobooks often connected to schools or libraries
- **Libby/OverDrive** – Public library ebook and audiobook apps
- **Gale Databases** – Research articles, biographies, news sources
- **CommonLit / ReadTheory** – Literacy platforms with built-in texts and assessments
- **Project Gutenberg** – Free public domain books
- **National Geographic Kids / Newsela** – Informational texts at varied reading levels

3. Teach Participants How to Search Effectively

- **Core Skills**
 - Use keywords instead of full questions (e.g., “climate change causes” vs. “why is climate change happening?”)
 - Apply filters (reading level, date, source type)
 - Use quotation marks for exact phrases
 - Try multiple search terms if results are weak
 - Skim titles, summaries, and headings before reading fully
 - Prompt AI effectively
- **Digital Library-Specific Skills:**
 - Navigating search bars vs. category browsing
 - Using database filters (peer-reviewed, publication date, topic)
 - Saving or bookmarking resources
- **PRO TIP:**

Be sure to model these skills for participants. They will learn best by watching someone struggle and refine a search in real time.

4. Build Research Skills (Beyond Google)

- **Teach participants to:**
 - Recognize the difference between:
 - Search engines (Google)

- Research databases (Gale, library systems)
- AI chatbots (ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Claude)
- Identify credible vs. unreliable sources
- Use multiple sources to confirm information
- Cite or track where information comes from
- **Provide Ongoing Support**
 - Create a “go-to” list of approved platforms
 - Offer step-by-step guides or anchor charts
 - Assign guided research activities
 - Use scaffolded questions to support comprehension
 - Pair participants for peer support
 - Revisit and reinforce search skills regularly

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit ⁵

Classroom Structures & Routines

Instructors can establish classroom structures and routines that also provide a sense of safety and foster YouthBuild participant independence and ownership.

- Strategies Seating Arrangements
 - Consider: Accessibility
 - **Wide, clear pathways:** Maintain aisles wide enough for easy movement of participants and instructors.
 - **Flexible seating choices:** Include a mix (standard desks, sofas or bean bags, quiet corners) to support different physical and sensory needs.
 - **Minimize barriers:** Avoid tight clusters or blocked exits; ensure materials (boards, screens, supplies) are reachable from multiple locations.
 - Consider: Attention and Engagement
 - **Prioritize clear sightlines:** Every participant should be able to see instructional space without obstruction.
 - **Use U-shape or horseshoe layouts:** These allow eye contact, discussion, and easy teacher access to all students.
 - **Build in movement lanes:** Arrange desks so the instructor can circulate constantly—proximity reduces off-task behavior.
 - **Avoid “dead zones”:** Back corners or tight clusters where students are harder to reach.
 - **Strategic placement:** Seat high-support students where you can check in quickly without calling attention.

⁵ ChatGPT, please provide a clean format for, and add ideas to, my list of "tips for accessing digital libraries and tools". Note that the goal of the tool is to help instructors find and use digital libraries and online research resources in their classrooms.

- **Board + student visibility:** Instructor should be able to see all faces while near the board (don't get "stuck" teaching from one spot).
- **Quick transitions:** Choose layouts that can shift easily between instruction, practice, and discussion without major disruption.
- o Consider: Collaboration Opportunities
 - **Pods/clusters (3–5 students):** Best for on-going group work, projects, and peer learning.
 - **Pairs/partner desks:** Ideal for "turn and talk," quick checks, and low-stakes collaboration.
 - **Noise management:** Spread groups out or create zones to reduce overlap and distraction.
 - **Teacher access to groups:** Ensure you can easily step into any group without disrupting others.
 - **Flexible regrouping:** Use movable desks/tables so students can shift between independent, pair, and group work
- **Daily Routines**
Implementing daily routines helps to create familiarity and support YouthBuild participant learning. Consistent daily routines can free up time for instructors and promote YouthBuild participant independence as well as provide regular thinking or reflection opportunities for participants.

o Examples of Daily Routines

- **The First Five and the Final Five (Opening and Closing Routines)** – These are consistent 3–5 minute routines at the start or end of class that help participants transition between classes. Participants know to do these **five** things independently at the beginning or end of class.
 - **Benefits:**
 - Establish structure and predictability (especially important for participants with inconsistent prior schooling)
 - Build independence—participants know what to do immediately

Examples:

The First Five

- Grab your folder & journal
- Read the Daily Learning Objective
- Read the agenda
- Be prepared to learn
- Complete the Warm-up

The Final Five

- Complete Exit Ticket
- Put away your folder & journal
- Clean up at & around table
- Plug in & store computers
- Push in your chair before leaving

⁶ ChatGPT, can you gather information about strategic classroom desk arrangements, particularly in these categories • Strategies Seating Arrangements o Accessibility – participant movement and access to resources o Attention and Engagement – arrangements for teacher movement and class management o Collaboration – Note desk arrangements for pair or group work?

- **Warm-up Stretch Circle** – This is a brief physical and/or community-building activity, often done in a circle, to energize students and build classroom culture.
 - **Benefits:**
 - Increases alertness and readiness to learn (especially for early morning or post-lunch classes)
 - Builds community and trust among participants
 - Helps regulate stress and improve focus
 - **Examples:**
 - **Stretch + Share:** Each student shares a goal for the day while leading a stretch
 - **Stretch + Check-in Prompt:** “One word to describe how you’re feeling today”
- **Journaling** - Participants complete a thought-provoking or review prompt, often at the beginning of class
 - **Benefits:**
 - Strengthens writing fluency and critical thinking
 - Encourages self-expression and personal connection to content
 - Provides insight into student thinking and experiences
 - Can serve as a way to connect with or activate prior knowledge for new topics
 - **Examples:**
 - **Reflection Prompt:** “Describe a time you solved a problem—what steps did you take?”
 - **Goal Setting:** “What is one academic goal you have for this week?”
 - **Opinion Writing:** “Do you think technology helps or hurts learning? Why?”
- **Exit Tickets / Debrief** – This is a quick check for understanding at the end of a lesson, often written but sometimes verbal.
 - **Benefits:**
 - Provides immediate feedback on student comprehension
 - Helps instructors adjust next lessons based on real data
 - Reinforces accountability for learning
 - Encourages students to reflect on their progress
 - **Examples:**
 - **Skill Check:** Solve one problem or answer one key question from the lesson
 - **Confidence Rating:** “Rate your understanding (1–5) and explain why”
 - **Application Question:** “Where could you use this skill outside the classroom?”

Classroom Management

Many of the classroom practices described in this section, such as setting expectations together and establishing clear structures and routines, support positive, productive participant behaviors in the classroom. In turn, these behaviors reinforce key employment skills and improve learning outcomes.

When participants need additional support, several evidence-based practices can help instructors manage behavior effectively.

TOOL



Classroom Management Tip Sheet

This tip sheet provides proactive practices and quick-response strategies to support a positive, respectful, and productive classroom environment—especially for participants who may feel disconnected from traditional school settings.

Build the Foundation (Prevent Issues Before They Start)

- Co-create expectations with participants so they feel ownership and fairness
- Be predictable and consistent with routines and responses
- Explain the “why” behind activities to increase relevance and buy-in
- Start strong every day (clear opener, welcoming tone, structured start)
- Use names and build relationships intentionally—connection reduces resistance

Promote Engagement and Focus

- Move closer - use proximity to encourage attention and reduce off-task behavior
- Incorporate movement (stand, stretch, rotate, hands-on tasks)
- Break lessons into short chunks to avoid overload
- Offer choice when possible (topics, formats, partners)
- Check for understanding frequently instead of assuming – confusion = disengagement

Respond to Disruptive Behavior (In-the-Moment Strategies)

- Talk to participants privately, away from the group
- Redirect, don’t call out—keep corrections low-key and respectful
- Use calm, neutral language (avoid power struggles)
- Acknowledge emotions without escalating (“I can see you’re frustrated”)
- Give clear, simple directions instead of long explanations in the moment

Maintain a Respectful Climate

- Be aware of your own tone, facial expressions, and body language
- Always remain courteous and calm
- Avoid sarcasm or public criticism (can damage trust quickly)
- Recognize effort, not just outcomes
- Normalize mistakes as part of learning

Support Diverse Needs

- Provide accommodations for participants who need extra support
- Offer structured breaks to reset attention and reduce frustration
- Be flexible when appropriate while maintaining clear boundaries
- Watch for triggers (frustration, embarrassment, fatigue) and respond early

Follow Through and Build Accountability

- Enforce expectations consistently—avoid favoritism or inconsistency
- Use logical consequences tied to behavior (not punishment for punishment's sake)
- Follow up after incidents to repair relationships and reset expectations
- Reinforce positive behavior publicly and frequently

Mindset Shifts for YouthBuild Classrooms

- Assume positive intent—behavior often reflects past experiences, not defiance
- Focus on growth, not compliance
- Prioritize dignity and respect at all times
- Remember: connection drives engagement more than control

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit ⁷

Additional Classroom Management Resources

Websites for Classroom Management

- [Edutopia](#)
 - This website contains articles, videos, and research-backed strategies. Topics include classroom routines, instructional strategies, relationship-building, and de-escalation strategies.
- [Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development \(ASCD\)](#)
 - This website offers articles, webinars, and books on classroom climate and engagement. Incorporates whole-child and trauma-informed educational approaches.
- [Scholastic Teacher Resources](#)
 - This website covers some classroom management basics, like rules, organization, and community, and provides some free and ready-to-use tools.
- [International Institute for Restorative Practices \(IIRP\)](#)
 - This website presented by the IIRP contains videos, podcasts, and other tools providing rationales, instructions, and resources for implementing restorative practices.

Developed with ChatGPT, human edit ⁸

⁷ ChatGPT, I am developing a list of tips for classroom management that will be directed at educators who work with 18-24 year old students who benefit from restorative approaches to discipline. Please provide a clean format for my current list of tips. Share any content suggestions.

⁸ ChatGPT, can you provide websites and texts suggestions that educational staff can access to dive deeper into classroom management?

YOUTHBUILD.ORG