

The backward design model of curriculum planning

Source:

McTighe, J. (n.d.). [Understanding by Design. Three Stages of Backward Design: Frequently Asked Questions:](#)

Understanding by Design (UbD) (McTighe) offers a planning framework to guide curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Its two key ideas are:

- a) focus on teaching and assessing for understanding and transfer
- b) design curriculum “backward” from those ends.

The deliberate use of backward design for planning curriculum units results in:

- more clearly defined goals
- more appropriate assessments
- more tightly aligned lessons, and more purposeful teaching.

Understanding by Design (UbD) is based on seven key tenets:

1. UbD is a way of thinking purposefully about curriculum planning; it is not a rigid program or prescriptive recipe.
2. The primary goal of UbD is student understanding: the ability to make meaning of “big ideas” and transfer their learning.
3. Understanding is revealed when students autonomously make sense of and transfer their learning through authentic performance. Six facets of understanding—the capacity to explain, interpret, apply, shift perspective, empathise, and self-assess—serve as indicators of understanding.
4. Effective curriculum is planned “backward” from long-term desired results through a three-stage design process (Desired Results, Evidence, Learning Plan). This process helps avoid the dual problems of “textbook coverage” and “activity-oriented” teaching, in which no clear priorities and purposes are apparent.
5. Teachers are coaches of understanding, not mere purveyors of content or activity. They focus on ensuring learning, not just teaching (and assuming that what was taught was learned); they always aim—and check for—successful meaning making and transfer by the learner.
6. Regular reviews of units and curriculum against design standards enhance curricular quality and effectiveness.
7. UbD reflects a continuous improvement approach to achievement where the results of lesson design/planning—i.e., student performance—inform teachers of needed adjustments in both curriculum and instruction.

The big picture of backward design

The backward design approach is summarised in the table below. More detail can be found in supporting material for each of the stages in the following sections.

	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3
Description	Stage 1 starts with identifying the desired results for students by establishing the overall goal/s of the learning sequence/unit using Syllabus standards. Stage 1 focuses on identifying what students will understand, will know and be will be able to do	Stage 2 focuses on evidence of learning by assessment. Teachers plan performance tasks and evidence of understanding that is required. Performance tasks determine what the students will demonstrate in the unit and what evidence will prove their understanding. This can include self-reflections and self-assessments on learning	Stage 3 lists the learning activities that will lead students to the desired results
Design Questions	<i>What should students come away understanding, knowing and able to do?</i>	<i>What is evidence of desired results (i.e., desired understanding)?</i>	<i>What learning activities promote understanding, knowledge, skill, student interest?</i>
Design Considerations	National, state and local standards Teacher expertise and interest	Six facets of understanding	Research-based repertoire of learning and teaching strategies. Essential and enabling knowledge and skills
Filters (Design Criteria)	Enduring ideas Opportunities for authentic, discipline-based work	Valid, reliable, authentic and sufficient assessment	W.H.E.R.E.T.O... Where and why Hook and hold Explore, experience, enable, equip Reflect, rethink, revise Evaluate work and progress Tailor and personalise the work Organise for optimal effectiveness
Results in:	A unit or sequence of lessons framed around enduring understandings and essential questions.	A unit or sequence of lessons anchored in credible and vital evidence of the desired understandings.	Coherent learning experiences & teaching that evoke and develop the desired understandings, promote interest and make excellent performance more likely.