



# **Guide for New Teachers**

# Introduction

Starting your teaching career is exciting—but it can also feel overwhelming. At Progress Learning, we remember what those first weeks and months are like, and we're here to support you every step of the way.

This guide was created by experienced educators and EdTech professionals who understand the real challenges new teachers face. Inside, you'll find practical tips and strategies for some of the most important parts of teaching—from setting goals and managing your classroom to personalizing instruction for your students.

You'll also hear advice and encouragement from members of the Progress Learning team, including former teachers and dedicated ambassadors who've been in your shoes. Whether you're navigating your first day or planning for your first parent conference, we hope this guide helps you feel a little more prepared and a lot more supported.

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# Student Empowerment Through Goal Setting and Accountability

Student empowerment is about helping students take ownership of their learning by building confidence, setting goals, and actively engaging in their academic progress. Teachers can support this by meeting individually with students to review their instructional data, explain what it means, and identify areas for growth. From there, students can set clear, measurable goals and use targeted practice to work toward on-grade-level mastery. This process not only builds self-awareness, but also encourages students to take a leading role in their own success.



Empowering students is a critical part of effective teaching. Over time, the role of the teacher has shifted—from being the primary source of information to serving as a guide who supports each student’s individual learning journey.

In today’s digital age, students have access to more information than ever before. This reality challenges us to rethink how teachers and students interact. Traditional teaching methods that rely on textbooks and memorization are no longer enough. Instead, we must help students learn how to sift through information, think critically, and become active participants in their education.



When students feel a sense of ownership over their learning—when they know how to set goals, track their progress, and work toward mastery—they are more likely to stay motivated and engaged. That motivation comes from seeing their own growth and understanding that they are working toward something meaningful. The more they recognize their progress, the more confident and invested they become in their learning.

# How to Set SMART Goals for Yourself and Students

One of the most impactful parts of goal setting is helping students create goals that are both measurable and attainable. A goal without a clear plan for tracking progress and maintaining accountability often falls short.

Using SMART Goals is a proven approach that sets students up for success. These goals are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound—providing a clear framework for both students and teachers.

As you guide your students through setting their goals, consider setting a few for yourself as well. What would make your first year in the classroom feel successful? Whether it's building strong relationships, mastering classroom routines, or growing in your instructional practice, modeling goal setting alongside your students shows them the value of the process—and helps build a classroom culture focused on growth.

<b>S</b>	<b>Specific</b>	Define the goal in detail and find your purpose for the goal.
<b>M</b>	<b>Measurable</b>	How will success be measured? Set concrete criteria for measuring progress.
<b>A</b>	<b>Attainable</b>	Can you accomplish the goal? It should be challenging yet realistic.
<b>R</b>	<b>Relevant</b>	Is the goal constructive? It needs to be results-focused and productive.
<b>T</b>	<b>Time-based</b>	Your goal should have a set deadline and regular checkpoints.

# Classroom Management

How do you plan to approach classroom management? What does your discipline style look like? Will you handle issues yourself or refer students to the office when problems arise?

Classroom management can be one of the more challenging aspects of starting out as a new teacher. It's also one of the most important. Establishing your presence and setting clear expectations early on builds trust and sets the tone for a productive learning environment.

Here are a few practical tips to help you manage your classroom effectively and confidently from day one.



## **Build and Maintain Relationships**

Invest time in getting to know your students and building trust. A strong relationship foundation makes it easier to navigate disruptions when they arise.



## **Create a Structured Learning Environment**

Consider seating arrangements that support focus and collaboration. Rotating assigned seats regularly can help manage behavior and promote inclusivity.



## **Call Out Positive Behaviors**

Use specific praise to call out positive behaviors—e.g., “I appreciate how Sam followed directions right away.” When appropriate, ignore minor distractions to maintain momentum.



## **Set Clear Expectations and Stay Consistent**

Students thrive when they know what to expect. Be firm, fair, and consistent in how you enforce classroom rules.



## **Actively Monitor the Room**

Move around the classroom frequently. Proximity can serve as a gentle, nonverbal reminder and help deter off-task behavior before it escalates.

# Personalized Learning

Personalized, or individualized, learning is a term that is often used in the world of education. But what does it mean? Essentially, personalized learning customizes instruction to meet each student's unique needs and preferences.

As educators, we want our students to be able to access the information they need to succeed and participate in learning experiences that are meaningful to them. This is why, rather than attempting to provide differentiation for a few students' unique learning needs, we need to shift our perspective to offering instruction that is inclusive of all learning needs.

So, how is it possible to create these types of learning experiences for our students while making sure that they master their state standards? It's necessary to look at the [Why](#), [What](#), and [How](#) of learning. When we think about Why students learn, we have to look at engagement: Are they interested? Can they sustain the effort and persistence required to complete their tasks? Do they have tools for self-regulation?

When we consider What students are learning, we have to look at representation. Since we know that perception and comprehension vary greatly among learners, we need to ensure that we represent the information they need to know in various ways. There is no one way to represent the information that will meet the needs of all students, which is why it is key that options are available. The ability to customize displays, audio, and visual representations of information, as well as clarify language and symbols are critical components of adequately representing information for all students.

When discussing the How of learning, we need to ask ourselves: How are students able to demonstrate what they have learned? Do we provide them with multiple means of action and expression? Do they have access to tools and assistive technologies? Are there different ways for them to demonstrate what they have learned as opposed to simply answering multiple choice questions? Do they receive adequate, personalized feedback? Can they monitor their own progress?

This may seem like a lot to consider when designing quality instruction. How do we personalize instruction, while still ensuring that all required standards are covered throughout the school year? The good news is that quality, educational technology platforms like Progress Learning can significantly help with this. Teachers can continue to focus on creating safe, effective, and welcoming learning environments while employing the help of technology to cover standards and provide optimal accessibility for all students and their unique needs.

# Instructional Design/Planning

Instructional Design is defined by [Instructional Design Central](#) as “the process by which learning products and experiences are designed, developed, and delivered.” Essentially, instructional design is behind creating any educational experiences or instructional materials. The basis for instructional design is determining the needs of the learners or users, designing the instruction, developing and implementing it, and evaluating the effectiveness of the instruction.

While some are of the opinion that you need an instructional designer title in order to design instruction effectively, it can also be argued that teachers are, in fact, instructional designers themselves.

While teachers may not have been introduced to the instructional design models in their credentialing programs, more and more information on instructional design strategies has become a part of their training and professional development. When you look at the main components of instructional design, it is easy to see that teachers have been doing this all along.

Teachers analyze the needs of their students, design and develop instruction, deliver the instruction, and evaluate the effectiveness of their instruction with every lesson they teach.

Especially during the pandemic, as teachers were forced into remote learning, they were put into the role of instructional designer like never before. Teachers understand pedagogy and practice the steps of instructional design on a daily basis, making them [excellent instructional designers](#).

To design effective instructional materials, lessons, and units, first start with your analysis of your learners. Looking at your students — their unique needs, learner profiles, and environment — will help determine the key needs of your instruction.



# Providing an Equitable Education

As educators, it is critical that our students are learning in a safe, effective, and equitable environment. Our classrooms have a wide variety of learner profiles and meeting the needs of each and every student is our top priority. From ESL/ELL students to students with learning disabilities, IEPs and 504s, we must work to ensure accessibility for all students to engage them in appropriate learning experiences that meet their individual and unique needs.

In creating an equitable classroom for all students, it's important to acknowledge the historical marginalization of student groups as well as any unconscious biases that may emerge when designing safe and inclusive classrooms, materials, and learning experiences.

This is where it becomes increasingly important for teachers to build relationships with students and get to know their individual needs and learner profiles. It is also imperative that assumptions are not made about what students know or might relate to and instead, assess background knowledge and cultural norms. Making accommodations for students is a lot easier if you understand what their unique needs are. Relationships with parents and caregivers are also of key importance.

## To recap:



**Get to know your students, build relationships, and discover their interests, backgrounds, and unique learning needs**



**Keep note! Track your observations and the progress students are making**



**Perform formal and informal evaluation via quality assessments**



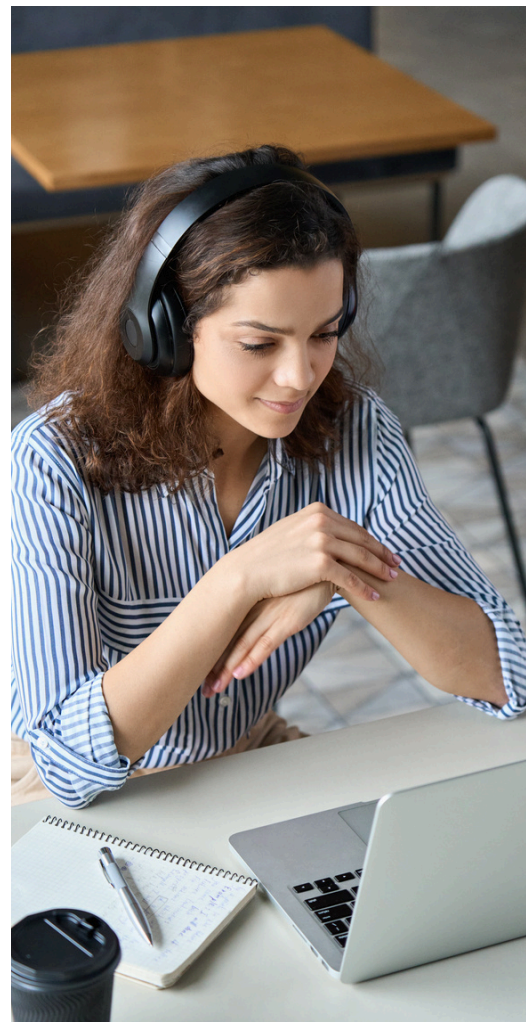
**Consistently assess your accommodations for students to ensure they are working for them**

# Professional Development

Above all, remember your own love of learning and desire to grow. Remember why you became a teacher and what your motivation is. You are helping to shape young minds and have a great deal of impact on your students' lives. Check in with your own goals as an individual and an educator. Take advantage of your opportunities for professional development and stay up to date with all the latest news in the world of education.

At Progress Learning, we make professional development easy. We support you with live and on-demand [training and webinars](#) on a weekly and monthly basis. Our experienced and enthusiastic trainers will answer any and all questions you have so that you can feel empowered to use Progress Learning in your classroom. Teacher training sessions include:

- Getting Started for Elementary Teachers (K-5)**
- Getting Started for Secondary Teachers (6-12)**
- Getting Started with Liftoff (2-8)**
- Getting Started for ACT® and SAT® Readiness**
- Ask An Expert – Core Curriculum Content**
- Special Topic: Remediation Strategies**
- Special Topic: Green Dot/Galaxy Star Challenge**
- Special Topic: School Data Dig**
- Special Topic: Author Your Own Questions**
- Train the Trainer**



In addition, we are constantly updating our [News & Blog](#) page with the latest teacher tips, including [AI Professional Development for Teachers](#), [Networking in Education](#), and more! We cover all the latest news in education and standardized assessments and offer resources and support for all trending education topics.

Join our email list to receive helpful tips and tricks every Tuesday—designed to help you make the most of all the features and tools available on the Progress Learning platform.

We're here to support your success. If you ever have questions or need assistance, our support team is just an email away at [support@progresslearning.com](mailto:support@progresslearning.com).

# Assessments and Reporting

Collecting meaningful assessment data and using it to inform reports is a key part of tracking student progress. As a teacher, you've learned when and how to use different types of assessments to support learning.

Let's take a closer look at the four main types of assessments:

## Diagnostic

Occurs before instruction to assess student's pre-knowledge and starting level

## Interim

Given across an entire school or district to compare results of groups of students

## Benchmark

Measures the academic progress of large groups of students

## Summative

Measures success at the end of a checkpoint — lesson, unit, or project

## Pro Tips for Better Assessment Practices

1

### Document Informal Observations

Keep notes on student behavior, participation, and understanding to support your formative assessment data.

2

### Leverage EdTech Tools

Use digital platforms with built-in assessment builders to create high-quality, standards-aligned assessments quickly and efficiently.

3

### Diversify Question Types

Go beyond multiple choice—incorporate short answer, drag-and-drop, matching, or open-ended prompts to better gauge student understanding.

4

### Rethink Summative Assessments

Assessments don't always need to be traditional tests. Projects, presentations, and models can serve as effective alternatives. Just be sure to provide clear guidelines and rubrics so students know how to demonstrate what they've learned.

# Quality Resources: How Progress Learning Can Help

Teaching is no simple task. We understand that you have one of the most important jobs as an educator guiding the next generation and it is our top priority to support you every way we can.

In addition to creating a safe and equitable learning environment, planning personalized instruction, managing your classroom, and of course, continuing your own learning and development, you must also ensure students get quality, standards-based instruction at every grade level.

We help by supplementing your classroom with high-quality content and resources that are aligned to each individual state's unique standards for all subjects and grades. Through our diagnostics and reports, as well as our assessment and assignment builder featuring an extensive item bank and a variety of question types, we empower you to create quality instruction and assessments and easily access the data needed for reporting.

On top of that, our built-in accessibility features and accommodations make it simple for you to personalize instruction and create equitable assignments, study, and practice for each of your student's unique needs. Finally, our up-to-date, researched news and blogs, webinars, and training are here to support you in your own professional learning journey.



**From all of us at Progress Learning, we want to thank you for embarking on this journey as an educator and remind you that we've got your back. You've got this!**