

SEVEN LAWS OF TEACHING

This outline is taken from a book called "The Seven Laws of Teaching," by John Milton Gregory. The book was first published in 1886 as an instruction manual for Sunday school teachers. Gregory was involved in public education in the state of Michigan and was at one time the state superintendent of public instruction.

The basis for the book is the concept that teaching has "natural laws which are as fixed as the laws of circling planets or growing organisms." Therefore, Gregory argues, if these simple laws are adhered to, knowledge must be communicated.

1. The Law of the Teacher

- a. **The Law** - A teacher must know that which he would teach.
- b. **The Law Stated as a Rule** - Know thoroughly and familiarly the lesson you wish to teach--teach from a full mind and a clear understanding.
- c. **Rules for Teachers:**
 - i. Prepare each lesson by fresh study.
 - ii. Find in the lesson its analogies to more familiar facts and principles.
 - iii. Study the lesson until it takes shape in familiar language.
 - iv. Find the natural order of the several steps of the lesson from the simplest notions to the broadest views.
 - v. Find the relation of the lesson to the lives of the learners.
 - vi. Use freely all legitimate aids.
 - vii. Complete mastery of a few things is better than an ineffective smattering of many.
 - viii. Have a definite time for the study of each lesson in advance of the teaching.
 - ix. Have a plan of study, but do not hesitate to study beyond the plan.
 - x. Do not deny yourself the help of good books on the subject of your lessons.
 1. Do not read without thinking.
 2. Talk the lesson over with an intelligent friend.
 3. Write out your own views.

d. Violations and Mistakes:

- i. The teacher may think that in any event he will know much more of the lesson than the pupils, and his ignorance will pass unnoticed. The cheat is almost sure to be discovered.
- ii. Teaching is not merely “hearing lessons.”
- iii. Looking hastily through the lesson to gather enough to fill the period.
- iv. Using the lesson as a mere framework upon which to hang some fancies of their own.
- v. Claiming extensive study and profound information, which he has not the time to lay properly before the pupils.

2. The Law of the Learner

- a. **The Law** - A learner must attend with interest to the material to be learned.
- b. **The Law Stated as a Rule** - Gain and keep the attention and interest of the pupils upon the lesson. Do not try to teach without attention.

c. Rules for Teachers:

- i. Never begin a class exercise until the attention of the class has been secured.
- ii. Pause whenever the attention is interrupted or lost--wait until it is completely regained.
- iii. Never wholly exhaust the attention of your pupils.
- iv. Adapt the length of the class exercise to the ages of the pupils.
- v. Arouse attention when necessary by variety in your presentation.
- vi. Kindle and maintain the highest possible interest in the subject.
- vii. Present those aspects of the lesson that correspond to the ages and attainments of the pupils.
- viii. Appeal to the interest of your pupils.
- ix. Refer to the favorite stories, songs, and subjects of the pupils.
- x. Look for sources of distraction and reduce them.
- xi. Prepare beforehand thought-provoking questions.
- xii. Make your presentation as attractive as possible.
- xiii. Maintain and exhibit in yourself a genuine interest in the lesson.
- xiv. Make good use of your eyes and hands. Pupils will respond to your earnest gaze and your lifted hand.

d. Violations and Mistakes:

- i. Class is started before the attention of the pupils has been gained.
- ii. Pupils are urged to listen after their power of attention has been exhausted.
- iii. Little or no effort is made to discover the tastes or experiences of the pupils.
- iv. Killing the power of attention in their pupils by failing to use any fresh inquiries or any new, interesting statements to stimulate interest in the subject.

3. The Law of the Language

- a. **The Law** - The language used as medium between teacher and learner must be common to both.
- b. **The Law Stated as a Rule** - Use words understood in the same way by the pupils and you--language clear and vivid to both.
- c. **Rules for Teachers:**
 - i. Learn the pupils' words and meanings they give those words.
 - ii. Learn what the students know about the subject and how they express it.
 - iii. Express yourself as much as possible in the language of the pupils.
 - iv. Use the simplest and fewest words that will express your meaning.
 - v. Use short sentences and the simplest construction.
 - vi. If the pupil does not understand, repeat your thought in other language.
 - vii. Help the meaning of words by illustrations taken from the pupils' experiences.
 - viii. When it is necessary to teach a new word give the idea before the word.
 - ix. Try to increase both the pupil's vocabulary and understanding.
 - x. Encourage pupils to talk freely.
 - xi. Make haste slowly. Make sure a word is understood before introducing a new one.
 - xii. Frequently check the pupil's understanding of the words he uses.
- d. **Violations and Mistakes:**
 - i. Do not mistake an attentive look for understanding.
 - ii. Truly check for understanding. A pupil may say he understands when he does not.

- iii. Covering teacher ignorance with big words.
- iv. Do not expect pupils to ask for explanations.
- v. Not getting the pupils to express back the new words.
- vi. Not realizing how limited most pupils vocabularies really are.
- vii. Not realizing that much of what is taught is outside the experience of the pupils.

4. The Law of the Lesson

- a. **The Law** - The lesson to be mastered must be explicable in terms of truth already known by the learner--the unknown must be explained by the known.
- b. **The Law Stated as a Rule** - Begin with what is already well known to the pupil upon the subject and with what he has himself experienced--and proceed to the new material by single, easy, and natural steps, letting the known explain the unknown.
- c. **Rules for Teachers:**
 - i. Find out what your pupils know of the subject that you wish to teach them.
 - ii. Make the most of the pupils' knowledge and experience. Let them feel its extent and value as a means to further knowledge.
 - iii. Encourage your pupils to clear up and freshen their knowledge by a clear statement of it.
 - iv. Begin with facts or ideas that lie near your pupils' knowledge and experience.
 - v. Relate every lesson as much as possible to former lessons.
 - vi. Arrange your presentation so that each step of the lessons shall lead easily and naturally to the next.
 - vii. Proportion the steps of the lesson to the ages and attainments of your pupils.
 - viii. Find illustrations in the commonest and most familiar objects suitable for the purpose.
 - ix. Lead the pupils themselves to find illustrations from their own experience.
 - x. Make every new fact or principle familiar to your pupils. Make them comfortable with it.

- xi. Urge the pupils to make use of their own knowledge and attainments to find or explain other knowledge/.
- xii. Make every advance clear and familiar so that progress to the next step can be on known ground.
- xiii. Choose problems for your pupils to solve from their own activities so they can see them as real problems, not artificial.
- xiv. Your pupils are learning to think: they must learn to face intelligently and reflectively the problems that arise in both inside and outside the classroom.

d. Violations and Mistakes:

- i. Pupils are made to study that for which they are inadequately prepared or not prepared at all to learn.
- ii. Neglecting to ascertain carefully the pupils' equipment with which to begin the subject.
- iii. Failure to connect the new lesson with those that have gone before.
- iv. Past learning is considered goods stored away, instead of instruments for further use.
- v. Elementary facts and definitions are not made thoroughly familiar.
- vi. Every step is not thoroughly understood before the next is attempted.
- vii. Assigning lessons or exercises that are too long for the pupils.
- viii. Failure to place the pupils in the attitude of discoverer.
- ix. Failure to show the connections between the parts of the subject that have been taught, those before it, and those yet to come.

5. The Law of the Teaching Process

- a. **The Law** - Teaching is arousing and using the pupil's mind to grasp the desired thought or to master the desired art.
- b. **The Law Stated as a Rule** - Stimulate the pupil's own mind to action. Keep his thought as much as possible ahead of your expression, placing him in the attitude of a discoverer, an anticipator.
- c. **Rules for Teachers:**
 - i. Adapt lessons and assignments to the ages and attainments of the pupils.
 - ii. Select lessons which relate to the environment and needs of the pupils.
 - iii. Find the subjects point of contact with the lives of the pupils.

- iv. Excite the pupil's interest in the lesson: hint that something worth knowing is to be found out if the lesson is thoroughly studied.
- v. Frequently join the pupils in the search for some fact or principle.
- vi. Be patient: give the pupil time to explain himself.
- vii. The lesson that does not culminate in fresh questions ends wrong.
- viii. Observe each pupil to see that his mind is not wandering.
- ix. It is your chief duty to awaken the minds of your pupils.
- x. Repress the desire to tell all you know or think about the lesson. Let what you tell lead to a question.
- xi. Give the pupil time to think; encourage him to ask questions when puzzled.
- xii. Restate the questions you are asked, try to answer in such a way to lead to a new question or deeper thought.
- xiii. Teach the pupils to ask: What? Why? How? Where? When? By whom? What of it?
- xiv. Recitations should not exhaust a subject.

d. Violations and Mistakes:

- i. Attempting to force the lesson simply by telling.
- ii. Failure to try to remember what needs to be remembered.
- iii. Do not require rapid recitations in the words of the book.
- iv. Not giving pupils time to think about questions raised in class.

6. The Law of the Learning Process

- a. **The Law** - The pupil must reproduce in his own mind the truth to be learned.
- b. **The Law Stated as a Rule** - Require the pupil to reproduce in thought the lesson he is learning--thinking it out in its various phases and applications until he can express it in his own language.
- c. **Rules for Teachers:**
 - i. Help the pupil form a clear idea of the work to be done.
 - ii. Warn him that the words of his lesson have been carefully chosen; that they may have peculiar meanings, which it may be important to find out.
 - iii. Show him that usually more things are implied than are said.
 - iv. Ask him to express, in his own words, the meaning of the lesson as he understands it, and to persist until he has the whole through.

- v. Let the reason why be perpetually asked until the pupil is brought to feel that he is expected to give a reason for his opinions.
- vi. Aim to make the pupil an independent investigator.
- vii. Help him to test his conceptions to see that they reproduce the truth taught.
- viii. Seek constantly to develop in pupils a profound regard for truth as something noble and enduring.
- ix. Teach the pupils to hate shams and sophistries, and to shun them.

d. Violations and Mistakes:

- i. The pupil is left in the twilight of an imperfect and fragmentary mastery by a failure to think it into clearness.
- ii. The language of the textbook is so insisted upon that the pupil has no incentive to try his own power of expression.
- iii. The failure to insist upon original thinking by the pupils.
- iv. Frequently no reason is asked for the statements in the lesson, and none is given.
- v. The practical applications are persistently neglected.

7. The Law of Review

- a. **The Law** - The test and proof of teaching done must be a reviewing, rethinking, re-knowing, reproducing, and applying of the material that has been taught.
- b. **The Law Stated as a Rule** - Review, review, review, reproducing the old, deepening its impression with new thought, linking it with added meanings, finding new applications, correcting any false views, and completing the true.
- c. **Rules for Teachers:**
 - i. Consider reviews as always in order.
 - ii. Have times for set review.
 - iii. At the close of each lesson glance backward at the ground which has been covered.
 - iv. After five or six lessons, or at the close of a topic, take a review from the beginning.
 - v. Try to make reference to former lessons.
 - vi. New lessons should incorporate material from former lessons.

- vii. Make the first review as soon as practical after the material has been covered.
- viii. Keep large amounts of the material in mind so that you can do an impromptu review at any time.
- ix. Use new questions to review the old material.
- x. Do not omit the final comprehensive review.
- xi. Find as many applications as possible.
- xii. Do not omit the final comprehensive review.
- xiii. Find as many applications as possible.
- xiv. Do not forget the value of homework in review.
- xv. Do not forget the value of homework on the material of previous lessons.

d. Violations and Mistakes:

- i. Total neglect of review.
- ii. Inadequate review.
- iii. Delaying review to the end of the term.
- iv. Making the review a simple repetition of standard questions.

The full-length book “The Seven Laws of Teaching,” by John Milton Gregory, can be purchased for less than \$10.00 at www.VeritasPress.com. It is a recommended investment for any Bible class teacher.