*Teachers working smarter*

[**Creating a Strong Hook**](http://theonlinepd.wordpress.com/p-3-lesson-planning/creating-a-strong-hook/)

The hook is the beginning part of any lesson. Sometimes people also call it an opening. I think “hook” is a better description of what really needs to happen at the beginning of a lesson. Great teachers pull their kids in right away and sell them on what they’re about to learn. Think it’s not that important? Think about the last staff meeting or professional development you went to. Chances are if the presenter didn’t convince you in the first 5-10 minutes that what you were about to learn was important and relevant to you then you probably didn’t pay much attention. I am guilty of it myself.

The Elements of a Strong Hook:

* Explains **what** students are about to learn.
* Explains **why** what they are about to learn is important.
* **Connects** what they are about to learn to what they already know
* Explains **how** the learning will take place (the day’s agenda).
* **Captures** student’s interest.

Ideas For How to Hook Your Students:

1) **Demonstration**

When I think of demonstrations I think of Mr.Wizard – the old science show from the 80’s. Demonstrations are usually simple labs that are easier for the teacher to perform while students watch. You can find hundreds of demonstrations online. Here is one of my favorites: [Density Demo.](http://www.middleschoolscience.com/dietcoke.htm)

2) **Discrepant event**

Discrepant events are a type of demonstration that taps into common misconceptions. They usually have a big “ooooh, aaaah” factor to them. Because they demonstrate laws of nature that often conflict with common beliefs they motivate students to learn more. Here’s a link to one of my favorite discrepant events: [surface tension.](http://www.metacafe.com/watch/1027511/discrepant_event_water_drops_on_a_penny/)

3) **KWL chart**

KWL stands for Know, Want to Know, Learned. It is a good way to get students to access what they already know. You can then build off what they know to increase their interest in what they’re going to learn that day. [KWL Chart Template](http://theonlinepd.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/kwlchart.pdf)

4) **Quickwrite**

This is just a short writing prompt that can help tap into students’ prior knowledge. For example, “Has the earth always looked the way it does today? If not, how has it changed? What changed it?”

5) **Read an interesting article or blurb**

This could be something from a newspaper or a source that your students find relevant. For example, when I was in the classroom scientists were debating if Pluto was really a planet during our solar system unit. To open up the lesson on the characteristics of a planet my students read a short article about the ongoing debate.

6) **Real world problem**

One of the math teachers I work with includes a real world problem in his structured notes each day. Every day he tells his students “after you meet this objective, you’ll be able to solve this real-life problem.” It’s applicable and engaging at the same time. Here’s an example of one of Mike’s real world connections: [Mike’s “get real” problem](http://theonlinepd.files.wordpress.com/2008/02/parallelograms-8-2.doc)

7) **Video or audio clip**

A few weeks ago I was observing a teacher and he opened his lesson with a video clip from myth busters about what happens when you take the safety valve off a hot water heater. He captured every student in the room’s attention. With the invention of YouTube it has never been easier to find exciting clips.

8.) **Controversial statements or hot topics**

Put a controversial quote on the board; bring up a current topic in the news, or a hot debate that ties into that day’s objective.

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**Teach Like a Champion — Technique 12**

[Teach Like Champion](http://about.pricegrabber.com/mrdr.php?url=http%3A%2F%2Fabout.pricegrabber.com%2Fsearch.php%3Fform_keyword%3Dteach%2Blike%2Ba%2Bchampion&mode=about_specialed) by Doug Lemov.  This week's technique continues on structuring and delivering your material.

Technique 12 -- Hook it.

The "hook" Doug speaks of is called the "anticipatory set" in educational circles, but "hook" is a good vernacular way of expressing "anticipatory set."  It's the thing that grabs, or "hooks" your attention and helps to focus you on the topic at hand.  It could be a story, a puzzle, a picture, or a riddle that grabs your student's attention and then leads them into the topic at hand.  Doug suggests the following:

* **A Story:** Tell a quick and engaging story.  If you're teaching the bill of rights, you might want to tell a story about a child who got sent to the office because of a shirt he was wearing.  If you're introducing multiplication, you might tell about a caterer deciding how many chicken fingers he needs to buy for a banquet to serve all the children in your class.
* **Analogy:** Find something in your students' lives that connects with the concept you are teaching.  Maybe you're going to teach about the circulatory system and you brainstorm with your students how they might get a crate of oranges to all the people on a city block by carrying 3 oranges in each backpack of the 25 children in your class.
* **Prop:** A good prop can quickly engage your students.  Want to talk about spores?  Nothing like a really green moldy piece of bread to get your student's interest.  Talking about the 2nd world war?  I still have my father's Army Air Force uniform, which would certainly give kids a hands on experience of what people felt and experienced as the United States joined with the allies to battle fascism.
* **Media**:  A popular song or a brief piece of video might introduce your lesson.  For some great little teaching videos, you might check [Teacher Tube](http://www.teachertube.com/).  This week they're featuring an actor doing a dramatic presentation of the Gettysburg Address.  While I was a Lutheran Pastor I lead a workshop for young church leaders (teens) on worship and used a scene from [Mad Max:  Beyond the Thunder Dome](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0089530/). It was a real hit, and quickly got across the elements of worship.
* **Status:** With the furious energy that is focused on celebrities, status and fame capture the attention of many students.  You might want to ask your students if they heard about Lindsey Lohan going to jail--and you might connect her to someone like Nelson Mandela (if your are talking about apartheid or slavery or some other injustice.)  When introducing a topic, talk about how it is "great." "The book we are reading was on the best seller list for 36 months." Or, "This author is considered the greatest of the beat generation."
* **Challenge:** Give the students a task, individually or in small groups.  Back to introducing multiplication: "There are 24 children in our class.  If I buy jelly beans for the whole class, and everyone will get 8 jelly beans, how many jelly beans must I buy?  The three people in your group see if you can figure it out, and be prepared to report out how you got your result." If you're teaching Shakespeare, you might challenge the class to translate a speech from your reading for the day into modern English (You might show a clip of Leonardo DiCaprio in Romeo and Juliet to talk about updating Shakespeare's dialog.)

For a hook to be truly successful it needs to live up to three criteria:

1. It's short.  It's the introduction, not the lesson.
2. It yields.  It will quickly get you to instruction, not down a side alley.  Something that is clever but doesn't actually serve the lesson will only waste your time.
3. It's energetic and optimistic.  You dwell on what is great about Shakespeare, or multiplication or the bill of rights, not what is hard, or confusing or difficult, unless that is what makes it great.

A final note:  You don't need a hook for every lesson.  Some teachers use hooks only to introduce new material.