

# 11 Tips for Catechists

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**Planning and preparation are key to the success of any catechist. Here are 11 tips to help you with your lesson planning.**

**1. Do long-range planning.** The lesson you are planning is only part of a larger plan for the whole year. Make sure you get a picture of the whole calendar year, and see how much time you have to carry out what you hope to accomplish. Get a good feel for how this lesson can build on the previous one and lay the foundation for the next.

**2. Get to know your text and the children in your group.** Get to know your textbook's philosophy, strategies, approaches, strengths, and weaknesses. Get a sense of the whole book, and then zero in on a set of chapters or a unit to see how each lesson fits in with the whole. At the same time, get to know the children in your group and how capable they are of handling the text as it is written. Make adjustments as needed.

**3. Examine the teacher notes in the catechist manual.** A catechist manual is often a catechist's best friend. Catechetical texts like *Christ Our Life* and *Finding God* have excellent catechist manuals that lay out the lesson much like a blueprint and offer step-by-step instructions. The more you familiarize yourself with the teacher notes, the better you will be able to implement your lesson and still leave room for spontaneity.

**4. Imagine yourself teaching the lesson.** Use your imagination to visualize the lesson you are about to teach. Imagine every possible scenario and how you would react. Picture how much time each segment of your lesson is going to take. Keep a notepad nearby to jot down ideas that can become part of your lesson. Write down a list of materials that you will need for certain situations. Imagine problems that might arise and visualize how you may best handle them. With this visualization complete, you will feel as though you've already taught this lesson once and are now building upon it.

**5. Make adjustments to fit the needs of your learners.** No lesson plan is ironclad and unchangeable. Once you've picked up the main focus of the lesson, think of your learners and their unique needs and make any necessary adjustments. You may have children that are not very talkative, but the lesson calls for discussion. Perhaps you will need to adjust to allow for some nonverbal form of expression. Whatever the case, the better you know your learners, the better you'll be able to make adjustments so that the lesson will be as effective as possible.

**6. Know your learning outcomes (objectives).** Know what the children are supposed to be able to know and/or do as a result of the lesson. Learning outcomes (sometimes referred to as “objectives”) state concretely and in measurable terms what it is that your learners should be able to know and do when the session is complete. Most catechetical textbooks articulate the learning outcomes for a lesson. Without these stated learning outcomes, you would never have any hope of knowing whether you’ve accomplished what you had set out to do.

**7. Follow a catechetical process.** Think of your lesson as a movement: you want to move your learners from where they are to where Jesus wants them to be. St. Ignatius of Loyola described this as entering through their door but leaving through your door. This movement, called the catechetical process, involves four steps:

- Engaging the life experience of the children.
- Exploring the concepts to be taught (Scripture and Tradition).
- Reflecting and integrating the concepts with the lived experience.
- Responding with a new way of living.

**8. Get your materials ready.** Be sure that you have all the materials you will need to complete the lesson. There’s nothing worse than reaching a point in the lesson when you tell children to cut pictures out of magazines only to find out that you don’t have scissors (or magazines). Visualizing the lesson ahead of time will help you see what materials you will need that perhaps were not listed in the instructor manual.

**9. Have Plan B ready.** Always have an option ready in case something falls flat, takes less time than expected, or just isn’t working the way you had hoped. Be sure to have materials on hand for alternate activities.

**10. Overplan.** It is always better to prepare more than you think you’ll need. Until you learn how to effectively gauge your time, it is quite possible that what you think will comprise an entire session will only cover half of the allotted time. When this happens, panic tends to set in. On the other hand, if you have more material than you need, you can relax and decide how to adjust your next session to make room for what you didn’t accomplish in this session.

**11. Pray.** Before you sit down to plan a lesson, take some time to pause and ask the Holy Spirit to guide you. Do your planning and preparation in a prayerful environment. Light a candle. Play some instrumental music. Place a Bible on the table next to you. Dim the lights. Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire and guide you, and to give you the help you need to be focused, loving, and creative.

The *Christ Our Life* and *Finding God* programs from Loyola Press both offer online lesson planning to help you prepare so that class time runs smoothly.