

Preparing to Teach

Seasoned educators often say that it takes as long to prepare for a lesson as it does to lead it. As you continue to lead hands-on lessons throughout the term, your preparation routine will become refined. Here are some tips for being as prepared as possible, with an eye on efficiency.

Know Your Lessons

The first step in preparation is to know what you're going to do:

1. Read the entire lesson plan ahead of time.
2. Be sure you understand the following:
 - The learning objective; which skills or concepts will be new to students and which are students learning?
 - Each action step and the time required for each step
 - Which reflection questions you intend to use with students to assess what they have learned
3. Some lessons suggest that you try out specific activities before you lead them with students. Read the lesson plan thoroughly to assess whether this will be necessary because this may be required several days ahead of leading the lesson.

Teaching with Texts

When a FoodCorps lesson requires or suggests the use of a published book, check to ensure that text is not banned by your state or district. Familiarize yourself with any “banned book” lists in your state or district and avoid using

those books, even if they are included in FoodCorps lesson plans. PEN America tracks book bans across the country; find more information at pen.org.

Gather Your Materials

The supplies available to FoodCorps members at each school and partner site will vary from place to place. Here are two rules of thumb to follow:

1. Plan ahead to make sure you have the materials and supplies you need for the lesson.
2. Try to be creative and flexible about the supplies you have available to you.

As you plan for a lesson, first ask your school and/or partner site if the required and optional supplies are available to use. Are you able to borrow trays for a cooking lesson from the cafeteria? Does a classroom teacher have a prized tool, like a grain grinder, that you might be able to borrow? Would the school maintenance staff be able to lend you a shovel? Within the FoodCorps Lessons you'll also notice room for adaptations in the realm of materials and supplies. If you are excited about leading a lesson but are feeling stumped about how to pull it off with a specific supply, reach out to your fellow members and FoodCorps staff to brainstorm ideas for low-cost supplies or alternative methods to lead the lesson.

Preparing materials for your lesson in advance allows you to be timely and thoughtful about

your schedule. Before leading hands-on lessons with a class, do the following:

1. Print out your lesson plan for handy reference, along with any other printable handouts linked to the lesson.
2. Gather, label, and consolidate food supplies (see more below).
3. Gather any lesson materials, such as chart paper, materials for hands-on student experiences, and visual aids.
4. Set up and test any media required in the teaching environment, such as short clips, videos, and audio.
5. Prepare visual cues to help give students ownership and control of lessons, including agenda, goals for the lesson, student roles, and key concepts.

Use Shortcuts for Materials

If you use things all the time in the same place, consider having a set in the classroom or garden where you use it. For example, get a set of colored pencils to keep in the garden shed, or install a whiteboard in the garden so you don't have to haul out a chart stand every time you teach there.

- If you will be using the same visual aids many times, consider laminating them to make them last.
- Consider how you can reuse materials. For example, you might use the “mystery canisters” from the FoodCorps Plant Part Mystery lesson to build anticipation for many other lessons, simply by putting new, relevant items in the canisters each time.

Have a Plan B

Having a Plan B in place is always helpful in the event that an activity takes longer than

expected, students are not comprehending an activity and you've exhausted all your options, students are having behavioral issues, or a schoolwide schedule change interrupts your class. In terms of materials, it can be helpful to have a “Plan B Box” with the necessary materials at all times. Some Plan B options might include these:

- Sing a song.
- Read a book.
- Lead a writing activity with students.
- Lead an art activity; reflect on and express prior learning in a new, different way.
- Lead an impromptu nature scavenger hunt in the school garden or on the school grounds.
- Review the “Adaptations” or “Extensions” sections of lessons that you've previously led with that group of students. Can you extend an activity within the theme you are teaching?

To create a safe and fun cooking environment for your students, preparation is key! Before any class, take the time to create an organized system and space for a seamless teaching experience. Consider the following practices:

Do Your Food Prep

1. Label your food supplies in the refrigerator according to the date/class that you plan to use them for, and store food supplies in a food-safe manner.
2. Review your class allergy list to make sure that your recipe is safe for the entire class to consume.
3. Create cooking stations for student use.
4. Wash, peel, and chop vegetables that may require adult skill level.
5. Set up an area that is specifically for tasting with students.

Organize Your Cleanup

Designing a thoughtful cleanup system will allow you ample time and space to devote to your other obligations as a FoodCorps member throughout the day. Cleaning up can be less challenging if you do the following:

- Assign tasks to different groups of students so that students assist with cleanup.
- Use bus bins or a cart, if available, to store and transport dirty dishes and utensils to a dish-washing area.
- Set out dish soap, sponges, and other cleaning supplies before class begins.

Take a Breath

With so much to do, it is easy to run around preparing right until the minute you walk into class to join your students. Whenever possible, give yourself just a moment to stop with the details, take a breath, and mentally shift from logistics coordinator to inspiring, warm, well-prepared lesson leader. That way, the minute you start teaching your mind is on your students and not on your to-do list.