

SETTING PRIORITIES



AGENDA

- Starter
- What's First?
- Getting It Done
- Setting Priorities
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will define “prioritize.”

Students will determine how to prioritize activities and will practice prioritizing their own activities.

Students will recognize and resolve conflicting goals.

Materials Needed

- At least five soft foam balls or five balls of rolled-up socks (Starter)
- Completed “On Your Way” activity sheets from the previous lesson (Part III)

Starter (3 minutes)

Ask for a volunteer to join you at the front of the class. Tell the volunteer to stand about six feet away from you.

Take all five of the soft foam balls and toss them all at once to the volunteer. As you do this, say to the student, "Here, catch!"

Once you and the volunteer have picked up all the balls, tell the volunteer to catch again and toss each ball to the student, one at a time.

Explain to the class that it is easier to do things one at a time, rather than all at once. Tell them, "Picture all the things you want to do today. If you tried to do them all at once, you would be lucky to get any of them done."

Explain that today's lesson will focus on prioritizing their tasks and goals, which will allow students to get them all done, one at a time.

Part I What's First? (10 minutes)

Purpose: Students define "prioritize."

1. Students discuss what to prioritize.

Ask students, "What does it mean to prioritize something?" Lead students to recognize that "prioritize" means to place a group of items in order from most important to least important.

Ask students to list people, places, or things that are important to them. Write responses on the board. When there are 10 items listed, ask students to number them from one (the most important) to 10 (the least important). Ask volunteers to share their rankings. Point out that people have different priorities.

Ask students why they might need to prioritize items. Explain that people often prioritize tasks they must do so that they know which things to focus on.

2. Students recognize that to prioritize, they must identify the tasks they need to accomplish.

Point out that students need to know their tasks in order to establish an order of priority. Tell them that as simple as that sounds, people often waste time just trying to remember the things they need to do when they have a lot to get done. Ask students to suggest possible solutions to this. Lead students to recognize that a written list of tasks is a useful tool for prioritizing activities.

Ask students to name some of the tasks that they might put on a written list to prioritize. Write student responses on the board. (Students might respond: chores, jobs at work, homework assignments, and personal goals.)

3. Students learn that there are different ways to prioritize.

Ask students, “Which would you rather eat: a bowl of ice cream, a head of lettuce, or a banana?”

Have students vote. Write the number of votes for each item on the board. Then, elicit students’ responses for why they chose one item over another. Point out that people have different ways to prioritize. Ask students to identify the different ways the list could be arranged. (Students might respond: by what you like to eat, by what is least fattening, by which might be the most nutritious.)

Explain that the process of prioritizing is similar to what they just did. Point out that the different ways to prioritize a list produce different results.

Ask students to identify the criteria they could use to prioritize the different items on their lists of tasks to accomplish. (Students might respond: chronological order, importance, what they need to do in order to achieve a goal.)

4. Students learn that determining priorities involves considering consequences.

Point out to students that prioritizing is a decision making process: they are deciding which task to do first or spend the most time on. Remind students of the importance of considering consequences in the decision making process. Refer students to the options on the previous page and have them list the consequences of choosing one food item over the other.

Tell students that once they have determined what the likely consequences are, they must decide which of the consequences is most important to them.

Part II Getting It Done (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students learn to prioritize activities.

1. Students discuss multiple priorities.

Explain to students that it is necessary in many cases to prioritize tasks based on more than one criterion. Ask students to suggest examples of times when they might need to take into consideration more than one criterion. Write student responses on the board. (Students might respond: when more than one task is a step toward your goals, when you are asked to do something by someone you respect, when you have promised to do something.)

Ask students to recall some of the different ways these items can be prioritized.

Explain to students that time is almost always an element in prioritizing. Some activities, such as chores or homework, may be limited to one day. Other activities, such as long-term career goals, can take place over several years.

2. Students learn how to prioritize their tasks.

Explain to students that they are now going to prioritize their tasks. Say, "Let's imagine you have three things you have to do: go to a party, do your homework, and do some chores around the house."

Ask students to suggest ways that they would prioritize the tasks. List their responses on the board.

When students disagree about the way the list should be prioritized, have them defend their reasoning. Encourage students to explain the consequences of choosing to do one task over another.

During the discussion, make the important point that doing homework is a stepping-stone goal to most long-term goals. For this reason, one important consequence of not doing their homework is that their action plan for achieving their long-term goals will be set back. Remind students of the importance of keeping their long-term goals in sight.

Lead students to the following prioritization:

1. Homework should be first, as it relates to their long-term goals.
2. Household chores are next. If students don't do their chores, they may lose the privilege of going to the party.
3. Going to the party is last. Socializing and being with friends is important but should not distract students from other goals and responsibilities.

Tell students that if they made homework their first priority, they stayed focused on their long-term goals. Point out that they also saw that taking care of family responsibilities made it possible to have fun and go to the party.

3. Students recognize that their goals can sometimes conflict.

Ask students what they would do if they only had one hour to finish their homework and do household chores, but each of these tasks would take an hour to complete.

Explain to students that when they have several tasks and not all of them can be completed, they have conflicting goals.

Ask students to suggest the major reasons for running into conflicting goals. Elicit from students that the most common source of conflict is time limitations.

4. Students identify ways to deal with conflicting goals.

Ask students to offer possible solutions to the conflicting goals of doing homework, going to the party, and doing the chores. (Students might respond: go late to the party or don't go at all, don't do the homework, don't do the household chores.)

Have students discuss the consequences of each option. Tell students that when they change priorities, they have to look at the consequences. It is important that they do not make a change that seems positive in the short term but has a negative impact on their long-term goals.

Part III Setting Priorities (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students practice prioritizing their own activities.

1. Students make their own to-do lists.

Tell students that they are now going to practice prioritizing their short-term goals. Have students refer to their "On Your Way" activity sheets from the previous lesson and any planners they may have. Have them create a list of the tasks they need to accomplish this week. Remind students to include any regularly scheduled activities (such as homework or extracurricular activities).

2. Students prioritize their lists.

Give students about five minutes to number their lists in order of priority. Encourage students to discuss any conflicts with you or with each other. Remind them to always consider the consequences of their decisions.

3. Students discuss the prioritizing process.

Ask students to explain the process they went through to prioritize their activities. Ask them to share any conflicts that seemed particularly difficult to resolve and explain what they considered when prioritizing. Encourage students to discuss consequences.

Explain to students that there are two steps to dealing with conflicting goals. First, they must recognize that a conflict exists. Second, they must create a plan to deal with the situation and then act on it. Point out that they shouldn't make the mistake of hoping that a conflict will simply go away, because it won't.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Ask students to define "prioritizing." Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- “Prioritizing” means ordering items from the most important to the least important so that goals can be accomplished.
- The criteria for prioritizing can differ depending on circumstances and needs.
- It is important to consider consequences when prioritizing activities.
- When goals conflict, it is important to consider alternatives that might resolve the problem.

Student Assessment

1. How does setting priorities help people accomplish their goals?
2. List all of the things that you need to do this week. Prioritize the list.
3. What criteria did you use to prioritize your list?

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“One today is worth two tomorrows.”

Ask students to think of other proverbs that are similar to this (e.g., “never put off until tomorrow what you can do today,” “a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” “a stitch in time saves nine”). Ask students why they think there are so many variations on this sentiment.

Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Explain to students that all news stories must answer these questions: Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? Have students make a list of seven things they must do today by answering these questions. Discuss how answering these six questions will help students to stay focused and finish tasks completely.

Writing in Your Journal

Have students list things they must accomplish tomorrow in the order they should be done.

Have students revisit this page the following evening, when they make another list for the next day and analyze whether their intended list was accomplished. If not, why?

Using Technology

Have students name inventions that help people finish work more quickly. To prompt students, compare the oven and the microwave, or a manual and electric pencil sharpener.

Have students draw a picture depicting life before the inventions and life after the inventions. Have students rank the inventions based on their impact on everyday life (e.g., the car had more of an impact than the iPod).

Homework

Have students interview a family member to find out how they prioritize tasks.

Ask students to explain how their family members prioritize tasks. Discuss the various ways that people determine priorities (e.g., time, ease, importance, values).

Additional Resources

Have students read Aesop's "The Tortoise and the Hare."

Have students discuss the message of this fable and the priorities of both the tortoise and the hare.