



# Checklist – Formulating Fundamental Understandings

To be used when planning a teaching unit

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## 1. Start From Learning (Not Activities)

- Have I stated what students should understand, not just what they'll do?
  - Is it an idea beyond a single task, exercise, or lesson?
  - Would this understanding still be relevant after the unit?
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## 2. Go Beyond Facts and Procedures

- Does it begin with "Students understand that..."?
- Does it avoid listing concepts, rules, or steps?
- Does it highlight a meaningful idea, principle, or relationship?

✗ "Students know that..."

✓ "Students understand that..."

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## 3. Check for Depth

- Does it help students explain why something works?
- Does it require thinking, interpreting, or connecting ideas?
- Could it lead to discussion, justification, or nuance?

If the answer can be recited, the understanding is not yet deep enough.

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#### 4. Test Transferability

- Can it be applied in another context or task?
  - Does it apply beyond a specific example?
  - Does it help students link with other situations or subjects?
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#### 5. Confirm It Can Be Expressed Through Language

- Can students explain, argue, compare, or justify this understanding?
  - Does it support high-level thinking tasks (analyze, evaluate, create)?
  - Is language used as a thinking tool, not just a form to produce?
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#### 6. Craft the Wording Carefully

- Is it stated in one clear, readable sentence?
  - Does it contain one strong idea without overloading?
  - Is it understandable when rephrased at the students' level?
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#### 7. Check for Pedagogical Alignment

- Do planned activities truly lead to this understanding?
  - Do assessments require students to use it—not just recall?
  - Does this understanding guide my choices, not the other way around?
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#### 8. “Teacher Mental Load” Test

- Does this help me make clearer decisions?
  - Does it help me know what to keep or drop?
  - Does it simplify my planning instead of complicating it?
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#### Final Validation Question

🍀 If my students remember only one thing from this unit in a year, is it this?

If the answer is yes, the understanding is strong.