



FIELD GUIDE / VOLUME 1

Better Learning With the Tools You Already Have

Five classroom ideas for teachers who want technology to make a lesson better without buying anything new.

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Use what you have. Teach the lesson better.

EdTech Alchemy began with a familiar school problem: the work still matters even when the budget is tight.

I have worked in schools where the budget was tight, the devices were aging, and the internet connection was unreliable. The work still had to get done. Teachers taught me to start with the lesson, use what was available, and pay close attention to what helped students learn.

That is the habit behind **EdTech Alchemy**: start with what students need, look honestly at the time and tools you have, and try one manageable change.

A NOTE BEFORE YOU START

You do not need to overhaul a course or become the building's technology expert. Choose one idea that fits a lesson you already teach. Try it with one class, look at the student work, and adjust it from there.

Adapt every idea to your students, your school policies, and the realities of your day.

Start with the lesson. Add technology only when it helps.

A practical check before you add an app, device, or new classroom routine.

1 What do students need to learn?

Name what students should understand, practice, create, or explain. Start there before thinking about the app.

2 What could get in the way?

Be honest about time, devices, reading levels, the internet connection, accessibility, and how much help is available.

3 What can you already use?

List the tools students know, routines that work, colleagues who can help, and paper options that still make sense.

4 Can you try it with one class?

Use one lesson or one class period before changing the whole unit or asking everyone to use it.

5 Who is doing the work?

Watch who participates, who waits, who needs another way in, and whether the technology adds work for students or teachers.

6 What does the student work show?

Keep what helped students understand or produce better work. Change what caused confusion. Note what you will try next.

A Form That Responds to Students

Use one question to send students to review, practice, or a challenge.

WHAT CHANGES IN THE LESSON

Instead of sending every student through the same explanation, let one response point them to the help, practice, or challenge they need next.

WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ A form tool your school allows
- ☐ Two or three short resources
- ☐ One question that shows what students understand

1

Choose one question that tells you something

Ask a question that reveals the misunderstanding or decision that matters most in this lesson.

2

Prepare three next steps

Review: explain it another way. Practice: try a similar example. Challenge: use the idea in a new situation.

3

Bring everyone back together

End every path with the same short question so students can share what they learned before the class moves on.

4

Look for class patterns

Notice which path students used and where directions caused trouble. Do not use one answer to label a student.

TRY THIS FIRST

Start with one question and one alternate explanation in a lesson you already teach.

WATCH FOR

Links students cannot open, confusing directions, or a path with no way back to the class.

TEACHER CHECK

If a student answers incorrectly, can they still get useful help without feeling singled out?

Sketch the choices before you build the form.

THE QUESTION

What one response would tell you whether a student needs review, more practice, or a challenge?

REVIEW

Explain it another way

Use a short explanation, worked example, image, or audio option, followed by a quick check.

PRACTICE

Try a similar example

Give one comparable problem or scenario, quick feedback, and a chance to explain the answer.

CHALLENGE

Use the idea somewhere new

Ask for a comparison, a new example, or a response that asks students to create something and explain it.

BRING THE CLASS BACK TOGETHER

Finish this sentence: The most helpful idea from my path was ____ because ____.

Shared Slides for Better Feedback

Use a slide deck to help students give feedback they can actually use.

WHAT CHANGES IN THE LESSON

Students already know slides. A few clear directions can turn the deck into a simple routine for noticing strengths, suggesting one next step, and revising work.

WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ A shared slide deck
- ☐ One slide for each student or group
- ☐ Two sentence starters for feedback

1

Give everyone a clearly labeled slide

Assign each student or group one slide and keep the directions short enough to see while they work.

2

Show what helpful feedback sounds like

Replace 'looks good' with two starters: 'I notice...' and 'One thing you could try is...'

3

Keep the movement orderly

Assign slide numbers or use a timer. Two thoughtful comments are better than a rush of vague ones.

4

Make students use the feedback

Each student chooses one comment, revises the work, and briefly explains what changed or why it did not.

TRY THIS FIRST

Model one comment together before students open the shared deck.

WATCH FOR

Students racing to leave comments without time to read them or improve the work.

TEACHER CHECK

Do students have time to improve their work, or are we just collecting comments?

A focused feedback activity in 20 minutes.

3 MIN

Set expectations

Review what good work includes and read one example of helpful feedback.

7 MIN

Notice something specific

Visit two assigned slides. Point to one clear strength or detail on each.

5 MIN

Offer one helpful next step

Return to one slide and suggest one change connected to the assignment goal.

5 MIN

Revise the work

Students make one change and write a sentence explaining what they revised.

ANOTHER WAY TO RESPOND

Let students type, record, dictate, or give feedback to a teacher or partner who can write it down.

One Device, Four Jobs

Keep every student thinking when a group has only one screen.

WHAT CHANGES IN THE LESSON

A device shortage does not have to mean one student works while everyone else watches. Clear jobs and offline tasks can keep the whole group involved.

WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ One device for each group
- ☐ Four simple role cards
- ☐ At least one task that does not need a screen

1

Plan different kinds of work

Ask students to gather information, make something, test an idea, and explain their thinking. Changing seats is not enough.

2

Give each student a job

The navigator handles the device, the questioner checks the thinking, the recorder takes notes, and the reporter prepares to share.

3

Change jobs during the lesson

Switch jobs before students switch tasks so the same student does not control the screen all period.

4

End with something the group made together

Bring the notes and ideas together in one short explanation, model, solution, or decision.

TRY THIS FIRST

Try two tasks and switch jobs once before planning a full rotation.

WATCH FOR

The same student typing all period while everyone else watches or waits.

TEACHER CHECK

Can you point to important thinking each student is doing, including the students without the device?

One device, four jobs, and three ways to keep students working.

1 TASK A / FIND OUT

Use the device to gather, compare, or check information. Record only what the group needs for the task.

YOUR VERSION

2 TASK B / MAKE

Use paper, manipulatives, a whiteboard, or rehearsal to build a model, draft, or explanation.

YOUR VERSION

3 TASK C / CHECK THE THINKING

Test a claim, find an exception, solve a similar problem, or correct an example with a mistake in it.

YOUR VERSION

4 PUT IT TOGETHER / SHARE

Use something from every task in one final explanation, model, solution, or decision.

YOUR VERSION

CHANGE JOBS

Navigator / Questioner / Recorder / Reporter

Feedback Students Can Use

Turn one online assignment into a chance to revise and learn.

WHAT CHANGES IN THE LESSON

A grade or a page of comments often ends the work. A simple routine for turning in work, reading feedback, and revising gives students a reason to try again.

WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ One online assignment
- ☐ A short student checklist
- ☐ A way for students to resubmit

1

Show students what good work includes

Turn the rubric into a short checklist students can read and use before they turn in the assignment.

2

Give one clear next step

Point to the most important improvement. A page of comments can hide the one thing a student needs to do next.

3

Let students revise

Use resubmission, version history, or a second copy so students can make the change and you can see it.

4

Ask what changed

Students explain what they revised, which feedback they used, and what still feels uncertain.

TRY THIS FIRST

Try this with one assignment, one clear comment, and one chance to revise.

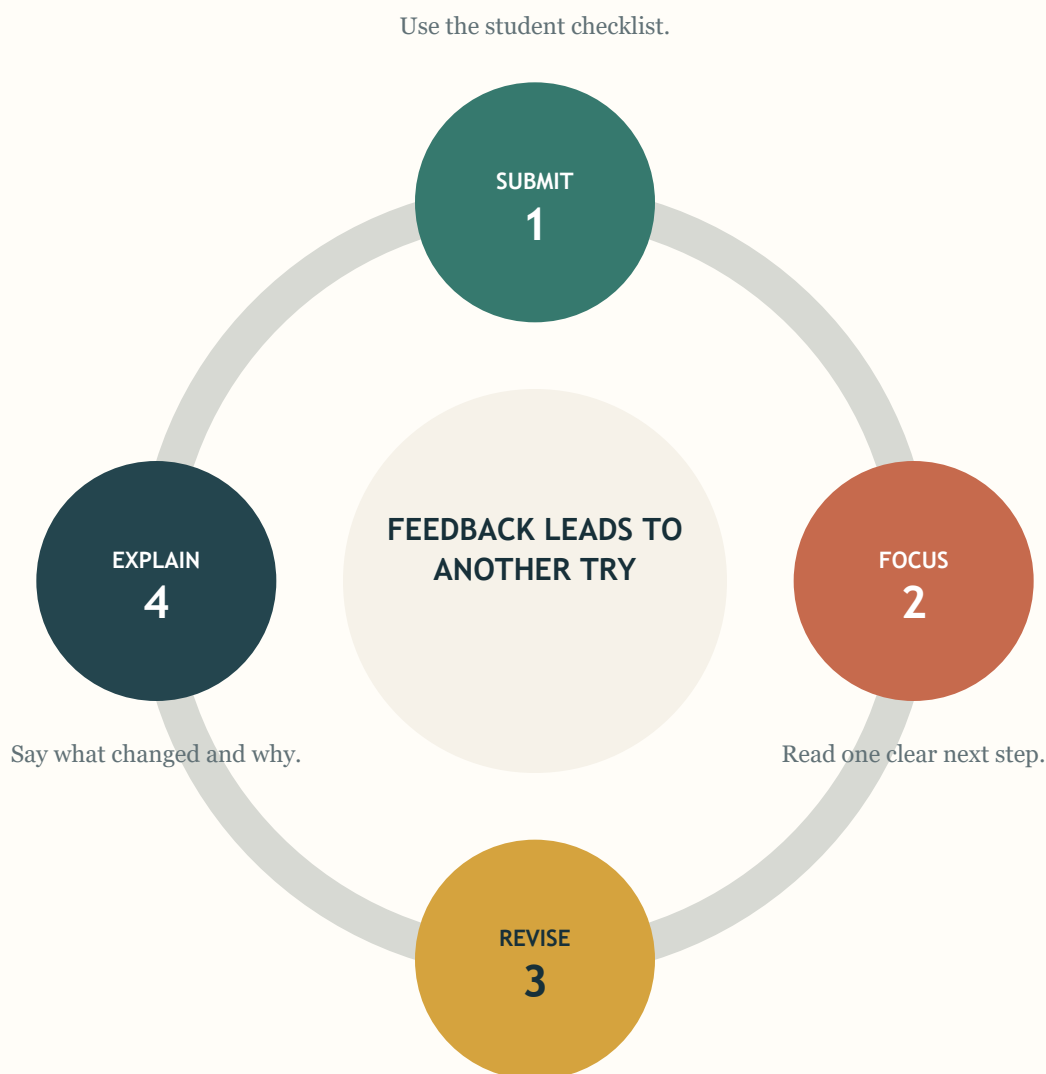
WATCH FOR

So much feedback that students cannot tell which change matters most.

TEACHER CHECK

Can a student tell what to improve next without guessing what the grade means?

Plan what students will do after they get feedback.



TIME SAVER

Keep a short bank of comments you use often, then personalize the one sentence this student needs.

AI for Lesson Planning

Use AI to brainstorm while keeping teacher judgment in charge.

WHAT CHANGES IN THE LESSON

AI can suggest examples, questions, and alternate approaches. The teacher still checks the facts, protects student information, and decides what fits the class.

WHAT YOU NEED

- ☐ An AI tool your school allows
- ☐ A planning question with no student names or records
- ☐ A short teacher checklist

1

Keep student information out

Do not paste names, records, IEP details, grades, or details that could identify a student into an unapproved tool.

2

Describe the class and the lesson

Include the learning goal, grade or course, time, available materials, needed supports, and anything that cannot change.

3

Ask for choices

Ask for three possible approaches, what could go wrong, and questions you may not have considered.

4

Check it like a teacher

Verify facts and examples. Replace generic wording. Decide whether the idea fits your students, policies, and classroom.

TRY THIS FIRST

Ask for three ways to teach one difficult idea, then decide whether any of them are worth using.

WATCH FOR

An answer that sounds confident but is inaccurate, inappropriate, or impossible in your classroom.

TEACHER CHECK

Could I explain what I used, what I checked, and why I made the final choice to a student or family?

A planning prompt that keeps the teacher in charge.

I am planning a **[lesson, unit, or intervention]** for **[grade or course]**. Students need to **[learning goal]**. We have **[time, available materials and tools, and important supports or limits]**. Give me three possible approaches that do not require new purchases. For each one, tell me what students would do, what might be difficult, how I could make it more accessible, and what I should check before using it. Ask me three questions before recommending one.

THE TEACHER REVIEW

- ☐ I left out student names, records, and family information.
- ☐ The tool is allowed by my school or district.
- ☐ I checked facts, examples, and any sources it provided.
- ☐ I considered whether my students can access and understand the activity.
- ☐ I rewrote generic wording and made the final instructional choices myself.

FINAL QUESTION

Would I still use this plan if I had to explain every choice to my staff, students, or families?

Ask whether it will actually help students learn.

Circle 0 (no), 1 (partly), or 2 (yes). Use the score to start a conversation, not to make the decision for you.

QUESTION	0	1	2
Does it help students learn something specific?	☐	☐	☐
Can we use it with the devices, time, and internet we actually have?	☐	☐	☐
Can students use it with a keyboard, captions, readable contrast, and different formats?	☐	☐	☐
Does it protect student data and follow school or district rules?	☐	☐	☐
Will students understand why we are using it?	☐	☐	☐
Is the learning benefit worth the extra work it creates for teachers and students?	☐	☐	☐
What happens to student work if the tool goes away?	☐	☐	☐

TOTAL / 14

Question to discuss first: What would this replace in the school day?

Plan one small change to a lesson you can actually try.

05

MIN

GOAL

What do students need to learn or do more successfully?

05

MIN

SNAG

What keeps getting in the way?

05

MIN

WHAT WE HAVE

Which tools, routines, materials, and people could help?

10

MIN

FIRST TRY

What can I try with one class or one lesson this week?

05

MIN

LOOK FOR

What student work, response, or behavior will tell me whether it helped?

A good first try fits into a real school week and gives you something useful to notice in student work.

Use what you have. Pay attention to what students need.

The next good idea may come from a lesson you already teach, a tool students already know, or a conversation with the teacher next door.

JOIN THE FIELD NOTES

Field Notes is where I share classroom ideas that may help with a lesson or problem you are working on. I write when I have something worth sharing.

edtechalchemy.com/field-guide/

RESPONSIBLE USE NOTES

This guide offers practical teaching ideas, not legal advice. Follow your school or district policies, requirements for approved tools, accessibility processes, and applicable privacy law. Never place identifiable student information in an unapproved service.

FOUNDATIONS AND FURTHER READING

1. CAST, [Universal Design for Learning Guidelines 3.0](#) (2024).
2. U.S. Department of Education, [Privacy and Education Technology](#).
3. U.S. Department of Education, [Guidance on Artificial Intelligence Use in Schools](#) (2025).
4. Office of Educational Technology, [Empowering Education Leaders: A Toolkit for Safe, Ethical, and Equitable AI Integration](#) (2024).