

PLANNING A LESSON

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A key aspect of effective teaching is having a plan for what will happen in the classroom each day. Creating such a plan involves setting realistic goals, deciding how to incorporate required materials (course textbooks) and other materials, and developing activities that will promote learning.

An example lesson plan and lesson planning worksheet, attached at the end of this document, provide step-by-step guidance for lesson development. A supervisor observation worksheet allows supervisors to give specific feedback on a written lesson plan or an observed lesson.

Before working through this section, beginning instructors may want to check *Be Prepared: Survival Tips for New Teachers* in the What Teaching Is section.

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Set Lesson Goals

Lesson goals are most usefully stated in terms of what students will have done or accomplished at the end of the lesson. Stating goals in this way allows both teacher and learners to know when the goals have been reached.

To set lesson goals:

1. Identify a *topic* for the lesson. The topic is not a goal, but it will help you develop your goals. The topic may be determined largely by your curriculum and textbook, and may be part of a larger thematic unit such as Travel or Leisure Activities. If you have some flexibility in choice of topic, consider your students' interests and the availability of authentic materials at the appropriate level.
2. Identify specific *linguistic content*, such as vocabulary and points of grammar or language use, to be introduced or reviewed. These are usually prescribed by the course textbook or course curriculum. If they are not, select points that are connected in some significant way with the topic of the lesson.
3. Identify specific *communication tasks* to be completed by students. To be authentic, the tasks should allow, but not require, students to use the vocabulary, grammar, and strategies presented in the lesson. The focus of the tasks should be topical, not grammatical. This means that it may be possible for some students to complete the task without using either the grammar point or the strategy presented in the first part of the lesson.
4. Identify specific *learning strategies* to be introduced or reviewed in connection with the lesson. See Motivating Learners for more on learning strategies.
5. Create goal statements for the linguistic content, communication tasks, and learning strategies that state what you will do and what students will do during the lesson.

Structure the Lesson

A language lesson should include a variety of activities that combine different types of language input and output. Learners at all proficiency levels benefit from such variety; research has shown that it is more motivating and is more likely to result in effective language learning.

An effective lesson has five parts:

- Preparation
- Presentation/Modeling
- Practice
- Evaluation
- Expansion

The five parts of a lesson may all take place in one class session or may extend over multiple sessions, depending on the nature of the topic and the activities.

The lesson plan should outline who will do what in each part of the lesson. The time allotted for preparation, presentation, and evaluation activities should be no more than 8-10 minutes each. Communication practice activities may run a little longer.

1. *Preparation*

As the class begins, give students a broad outline of the day's goals and activities so they know what to expect. Help them focus by eliciting their existing knowledge of the day's topics.

- Use discussion or homework review to elicit knowledge related to the grammar and language use points to be covered
- Use comparison with the native language to elicit strategies that students may already be using
- Use discussion of what students do and/or like to do to elicit their knowledge of the topic they will address in communication activities

2. *Presentation/Modeling*

Move from preparation into presentation of the linguistic and topical content of the lesson and relevant learning strategies. Present the strategy first if it will help students absorb the lesson content.

Presentation provides the language *input* that gives students the foundation for their knowledge of the language. Input comes from the instructor and from course textbooks. Language textbooks designed for students in U.S. universities usually provide input only in the form of examples; explanations and instructions are written in English. To increase the amount of input that students receive in the target language, instructors should use it as much as possible for all classroom communication purposes. (See Teaching Goals and Methods for more on input.)

An important part of the presentation is *practice output*, in which students practice the form that the instructor has presented. In practice output, accuracy of performance is important. Practice output is designed to make learners comfortable producing specific language items recently introduced.

Practice output is a type of communication that is found only in language classrooms. Because production is limited to preselected items, practice output is not truly communicative.

3. *Practice*

In this part of the lesson, the focus shifts from the instructor as presenter to the students as completers of a designated task. Students work in pairs or small groups on a topic-based task with a specific outcome. Completion of the task may require the bridging of an information gap (see Teaching Goals & Methods for more on information gap). The instructor observes the groups and acts as a resource when students have questions that they cannot resolve themselves.

In their work together, students move from practice output to *communicative output*, in which the main purpose is to complete the communication task. Language becomes a tool, rather than an end in itself. Learners have to use any or all of the language that they know along with varied communication strategies. The criterion of success is whether the learner gets the message across. Accuracy is not a consideration unless the lack of it interferes with the message.

4. *Evaluation*

When all students have completed the communication practice task, reconvene the class as a group to recap the lesson. Ask students to give examples of how they used the linguistic content and learning or communication strategies to carry out the communication task.

Evaluation is useful for four reasons:

- It reinforces the material that was presented earlier in the lesson
- It provides an opportunity for students to raise questions of usage and style
- It enables the instructor to monitor individual student comprehension and learning
- It provides closure to the lesson

See Assessing Learning for more information on evaluation and assessment.

5. *Expansion*

Expansion activities allow students to apply the knowledge they have gained in the classroom to situations outside it. Expansion activities include out-of-class observation assignments, in which the instructor asks students to find examples of something or to use a strategy and then report back.

Identify Materials and Activities

The materials for a specific lesson will fall into two categories: those that are required, such as course textbooks and lab materials, and authentic materials that the teacher incorporates into classroom activities.

For required materials, determine what information must be presented in class and decide which exercise(s) to use in class and which for out-of-class work.

For teacher-provided materials, use materials that are genuinely related to realistic communication activities. Don't be tempted to try to create a communication situation around something just because it's a really cool video or beautiful brochure.

Truly authentic communication tasks have several features:

- They involve solving a true problem or discussing a topic of interest
- They require using language to accomplish a goal, not using language merely to use language
- They allow students to use all of the language skills they have, rather than specific forms or vocabulary, and to self-correct when they realize they need to
- The criterion of success is clear: completion of a defined task

Resources

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Example Lesson Plan (from English as a second language)

Lesson Topic The topic of the lesson is *Planning Weekend Activities*

Lesson Goals Linguistic content:

Using “going to / not going to” to describe future activities

I will present the grammatical form and the pronunciation issues

Students will do structured practice with workbook exercises

Students will use the forms in communication tasks

Communication tasks:

Reading event listings in newspapers and magazines

Providing information about weekend events to others

Completing individual weekend activity plan

Students will work in groups to share information

Students will develop individual plans

I will observe and act as resource

Learning strategies:

Cooperate

Selective Attention

I will model Selective Attention

Students will do structured practice with event listings

Students will use the strategy in the communication task

Structure

Preparation (8-10 minutes)

- As students are arriving, chat with them about whether they like to go to movies, concerts, restaurants
- Ask how they find out what’s going on around town
- Review homework sheet on simple future; ask for examples of other ways to talk about the future
- Outline goals for today’s class

Grammar Presentation and Practice (8-10 minutes)

- Move from preparation into presentation of “going to / not going to.”
- Discuss native speaker pronunciation (“gonna”). Stress that they don’t have to do it, but they need to be able to understand it.
- Use selected items from textbook exercises for student practice and to identify and clear up any confusion.

Strategy Presentation and Practice: (5-6 minutes)

- Hand out photocopied page with sample event listings.
- Read first one aloud, describing strategy for identifying key information (Selective Attention). Connect to discussion during preparation stage if possible.
- Have class as a group read the others, modifying strategy to fit.

Communication Practice, Part 1 (12-15 minutes)

- Students divide themselves into groups of four.
- In each group, give movie listings to one student, TV listings to another, theatre and concert listings to another, and restaurant guide to another.
- Give each student an entertainment budget for the weekend.
- Students work together to develop weekend plans. Plans can include joint activities (2, 3, or all 4) as well as individual ones. Plans can include activities not listed on the distributed materials.
- Tell students that the product of the activity will be a written weekend activity plan.

Communication Practice, Part 2 (5 minutes)

Each student writes an outline of planned weekend activities. The outline should include costs for each activity to be sure the student is staying within budget.

Evaluation (5-6 minutes)

Bring students back together as a class. Ask members of each group to give examples of ways they used “going to” in making their plans. Ask members of each group to describe how reading strategies helped them find the information they needed to make their plans.

Expansion (homework for next class)

Have students bring in 3 examples of oral or written use of “going to” that they find.

Materials

Required Materials:

- Homework exercise on the simple future
- Textbook section on “going to”

Authentic Materials:

- Weekend TV listings
- Newspaper movie listings
- Newspaper theatre and concert listings
- City magazine restaurant guide

Instructor Lesson Planning Worksheet

Use this worksheet to plan a lesson on a specific topic. Remember that a lesson may extend over more than one class session.

Lesson Topic The topic of the lesson is _____

Lesson Goals

Linguistic content:

Communication tasks:

Learning strategies:

Structure

Preparation

Time:

What teacher will do:

What students will do:

Presentation

Time:

What teacher will do:

What students will do:

Practice

Time:

What teacher will do:

What students will do:

Evaluation

Time:

What teacher will do:

What students will do:

Expansion

Time:

What teacher will do:

What students will do:

Materials

Required Materials:

Authentic Materials:

Supervisor Observation Worksheet

Use this worksheet when reviewing a teacher's written lesson plan or observing the teacher teaching the lesson. Whenever possible, give specific examples.

Lesson Topic The topic of the lesson was _____

Was the topic made clear to the students?

Lesson Goals

Linguistic content:

Communication task:

Learning strategies:

Were the goals explained to the students?

How were the goals appropriate/not appropriate to the topic and to the students' proficiency level?

Structure

Preparation

Time:

Too little/too much time?

What teacher did:

What students did:

How well did it work?

Presentation

Time:

Too little / too much time?

What teacher did:

What students did:

How well did it work?

Practice

Time:

Too little / too much time?

What teacher did:

What students did:

How well did it work?

Evaluation

Time:

Too little / too much time?

What teacher did:

What students did:

How well did it work?

Expansion (if observation is possible)

Time:

Too little / too much time?

What teacher did:

What students did:

How well did it work?

Materials

Required Materials:

Appropriate to students' proficiency level?

Authentic Materials:

Appropriate to students' proficiency level?