

Chapter 7: Creating a Lesson Plan

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“You didn’t plan to fail. You just failed to plan.”

-The Bouncing Souls

The second day of summer school I was to teach a lesson in the US History classroom on “Industrialization and Urbanization.” Only one student, Larry, had registered for the class. Nevertheless, we were to teach the class as if it were full, make him raise his hand, and follow all our classroom rules and procedures. With the other first-years, second-years, and TEAM teacher all in the room with Larry, he must have felt he was a part of some strange experiment. I planned for 4 hours the night before the lesson, scripting out what I would say, changing the order of activities, cutting out organizers, and finding color-coordinating papers and marker. I felt prepared. With no friends in the class to distract him and my full attention, how could things go wrong? The lesson began fine but when it came to the notetaking, Larry fell asleep. The bell rang to end class before I could get to any sort of assessment. As Larry walked out the door between “classes” (basically walking into the hall and then turning back into the same room), my team teacher gave me two important notes: 1. By not getting to the assessment, I had missed the whole purpose of the lesson and 2. Larry’s mom had come to school that morning and told us that Larry was narcoleptic.

So began an illustrious lesson planning career. The advantage of starting from this point was that the bar for my own expectations was low, I was open to feedback, and there was nowhere to go but up. Below are some of the tools that I developed to lesson plan both more efficiently and effectively that will possibly help you to maximize assessment and minimize students falling asleep, except maybe the narcoleptic ones.

How to Approach Planning

1. Begin at the end

Just as many writers find a blank page intimidating, so too may you find a blank lesson planning book or Google document. To combat this, I recommend starting at the end. Knowing where you are going and having a timetable is a quick way to combat the initial paralysis of planning. Today, I begin at the end of the year and work backwards, but as a beginning teacher or one new to the subject area, that may seem ambitious and not yet a realistic option. You might start with the quarter, or even the month. I hesitate to suggest starting with a week because weeks can pass too quickly and do not require the necessary level of forethought and coordination.

As someone who takes comfort in logistics, I like to literally count out the number of days I have over a given period and then break that down by unit. For example, when

I taught foreign language, I knew I wanted to cover all of the present tense including the present progressive in Spanish I. This allowed me to determine which chapters in the book would need to be covered (Intro.-Chapter 6b) which was 13 units, which needed to be covered over a period of 36 weeks. I then factored in a week at the beginning and end of the year, state testing, and some other various events that might slow the pacing down. Much of this information was available via my school's official calendar, which was posted online over the summer. Once I knew approximately how many weeks I was working with, I could determine how much time I could allot for each unit.

The very first thing I would note on the calendar I created for myself was the days I would give summative assessments and what information generally would be covered on each. The outline below (Example 1) shows a hypothetical start to my planning. This plan shows that on Friday, September 9th, I would give a summative assessment on the preliminary chapter of the textbook as well as additional information covered in class. Once I had those dates chosen and the topics for them determined, I could begin to plan the weeks leading up to that assessment, as well as smaller assessments that would need to be completed first.

Example 1

September				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	2	3	4	5
No School	6	7	8	9 Assess Intro. - Alphabet - Names - Greetings - Goodbyes

Determining when assessments are going to occur helps determine what time is left for instruction. Now I know in the 8 classes leading up to the assessment, I need to cover the 4 topics that will be assessed, approximately 2 classes per topic, if the topics are of similar depth (see Example 2).

Example 2

September				
Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1 Alphabet	2 Alphabet	3 Alphabet/Names	4 Names	5 Greetings
No School	6 Greetings	7 Goodbyes	8 Goodbyes	9 Assess Intro. - Alphabet - Names - Greetings - Goodbyes

You may find your school or district has a pacing guide or common assessments. These are things you will want to find out about right away as they will be helpful in determining your own daily pacing as well. I did not have a pacing guide and so created my own in this way. Other teachers I knew had a pacing guide but it was very general and did not provide much structure in terms of what they needed to accomplish on a daily basis. Even if you do have a fairly specific pacing guide, you will likely find that with school schedules which include pep rallies and state testing and unexpected days off or interruptions, it will be helpful to have a plan that goes beyond the week so you can maintain, within reason, your final objectives.

2. Structure your weeks in a predictable way

Once you have determined the general topics to be covered on a given day, it is helpful to have a consistent daily structure in place. This is part of removing the “blank page” phenomenon when beginning planning and also allows for your lessons to build on one another instead of simply teaching individual lessons in a vacuum. Thus, it greatly helps with planning to have a “Monday,” “Tuesday,” “Wednesday” structure. The one I utilize is outlined below in Example 3.

There are several other significant benefits to having a consistent weekly (or biweekly or even monthly) schedule. One additional benefit is that it affords the students an amount of predictability. With everything that happens in the life of a student, providing a level of predictability can go a long way in easing stress. This stability also helps develop trust with them. Another benefit is that it helps to avoid the dreaded question that students inevitably ask every day- “What are we doing today?” This usually leads to an answer by another student of, “Work,” followed by a round of

complaining. This attitude is not a positive way to begin class. Instead, this entire conversation can be avoided by having a clear and consistent schedule. By the end of the first month of school, if any of my students walked into class on a Friday and asked what we were doing that day the rest of the class would, in a highly annoyed manner, let them know we were taking either a test or a quiz, followed by some reminder that we had been doing this “all year.” As a tip, I would also recommend having a monthly calendar posted somewhere in the room to remind students, again, of the long term plan.

Example 3

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Initial Notes	Application	Practice, Mini-Assessment	Secondary Topic Notes	Practice, Mini-Assessment

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Tertiary Topic Notes	Application	Practice, Mini-Assessment	Review	Summative Assessment

As I mentioned, utilizing this type of planning allowed me to focus my own efforts. If I only allot 3 days in which to take notes, I will have to ensure the unit is limited to 3 primary topics. This allows for a more meaningful summative assessment. This type of planning also pre-schedules assessments, which makes me accountable for reaching the goals set forth by a specific date. The other element of this plan I like is that note taking is spread throughout the unit. Although frontloading information can be important, it is also good to break up input to maintain student interest and also to allow for practice to occur soon after input so it is fresh and can be mastered immediately. When students are required to immediately use knowledge or information, it makes them more accountable for that information, since they know it will be immediately relevant.

3. Utilize a gradual release model

Before getting into the nitty gritty of the actual day’s plans, I found it important to determine the gist of the day and the proportion of the different types of work we might be doing. There are numerous names for these instructional modes. Here, I have used what I found to be the simplest and most straightforward terminology to avoid confusion. For examples of the proportions in which each might be used, see Table 1 at the end of this chapter.

I do: In this mode, the teacher is doing the majority of the talking in an effort to model. This can be done within a note taking context or may be done as an example when giving directions to students. In this mode, although in an exaggerated way, I am doing exactly what I would like the students to do in the future. In a math class, this might look like the teacher working a problem while narrating, in a science class this might look like a teacher writing his or her own observations, in an English class this might look like a teacher constructing a particular type of sentence, or in a social studies class this might look like a “think aloud” where the teacher is narrating his or her own thought process when reading a passage. Be sure to verbalize your thinking process when possible. Being explicit about your thoughts when considering a concept will help students when they are thinking on their own.

We do: In this mode, the teacher releases some control of the activity to the group as a whole. Perhaps the teacher asks students leading questions, eventually making them less leading. The teacher might ask a student to explain their thinking and then ask the class for input on that student’s process. A teacher may ask students to direct him or her to the next steps or the teacher could ask students to begin on their own and then share their results with the class. What is important here is that the teacher ascertains the areas that will be potentially problematic for students when they are released to work independently.

You do: In this mode, the students are responsible for completing similar work without the guidance of the teacher. This mode does not have to be individual work, although it may be.* The goal here should be for students to master the skill or information they are working on AND for them to be able to replicate it in the future. This practice should directly relate to the assessment in some way. For example, if equations are set up in a specific way on the test, that should in some way be mirrored in the student practice. Ultimately, you would like students to have mastered the material to the extent they can handle it being delivered in a variety of ways but it is also important that students are familiar with the information in the way it will be asked so they can truly demonstrate their understanding.

What is nice about this model is it can also be replicated in a microcosm. For any activity you begin in class, there can be a brief “I do, We do, You do” in the instructions. For example, “Here is the activity. Let me walk you through the example,” (I do) “Now let’s look at number one together,” (We do) “Begin working on number two,” (You do).

* I found small group work to be highly successful in my classes as it limited the number of questions that I had to answer and allowed students to explain things to one another, giving them confidence in their own knowledge.

Planning a Daily Lesson

Now that we have covered the big picture elements of lesson planning, there are far fewer questions about where to begin planning a lesson. The general structure of a daily lesson is fairly straightforward. What changes from day to day is the proportion of each activity as a part of the whole lesson. Again, having a consistent structure in place is helpful both for teacher planning purposes and for student confidence. The general elements are as follows:

1. Bell Ringer
2. Announcements/Reminders
3. Introduction/Set
4. I do
5. We do
6. You do
7. Whole Class Close OR Assessment

1. Bell Ringer: Typically I give myself about 5 minutes for students to come in and complete a bell ringer. This should be something for which the directions are the same every day that way the students can work on it independently and do not need to ask the teacher for clarification or assistance. If the teacher has to give directions, he or she will waste valuable minutes allotted to this activity and also will not be able to take advantage of the first few minutes of class. This time should be utilized for taking attendance, checking or collecting homework, passing back graded work, and setting up any activities that will occur during that class. In my foreign language classes, I liked to do a short reading comprehension activity on Spanish culture every day since that was an element of the course that was often overlooked.

Some examples of bell work that are easy for students to accomplish on their own might include:

- A review from the previous class
- Journal response to a quote
- Multiple choice questions in review or in preview
- A KWL chart
- A short reading comprehension activity
- A written response to a stimulus
- An analysis of, or response to, a current event
- A vocabulary activity in preview or review of the lesson

2. Announcements/Reminders: It is very important to me that students know what is upcoming, not only in the class period but also long term. As soon as the bell ringer is over, I like to go over this as a transition into the lesson. I always have the information listed on the board or projected and it includes upcoming dates that assignments are due as well as any other announcements. This listing transitions easily into a brief rundown of what we will be doing that day. This also allows the students to understand the broader context in which the day's lesson exists so that they can answer the question, "Why are we learning this?"
3. Introduction and/or Set: Depending on how far into the unit you are, or your goal for the day, you may need to introduce the topic. A set can be done to grab the students' attention, interest them in a more mundane topic, or prepare them for an activity or extended metaphor to be used later in class. This could be as short as 2 minutes or as long as 7-9 minutes, depending on where you are in the unit and the topic being introduced.

Some examples that will grab students' attention and get them primed to begin might include:

- A photograph
- A work of art
- A sketch comedy clip
- A dramatic movie clip
- A reference to pop culture
- An extended metaphor
- A story
- Anything with a surprise twist at the end

4-6 (I-do, We-do, You-do) were covered in the previous section.

7. Whole Class Close or Assessment: At the end of the lesson, skill mastery and objectives need to be tied together. This can be done in a variety of ways depending on what the students did in the lesson, how far along the class is in a particular unit, or even the subject matter. If you plan to administer a formative assessment in class, this may be the time to do it if the assessment was not the sole focus of the class. With strong time management, it is possible to assess in the second half of the class period or even in the last minutes in the form of an exit ticket or quick quiz.













Some examples that wrap up the class and review the day's work might include:












- A journal entry
- A short written summation of the activity
- A quiz
- A teacher-led question and answer
- Completion of a KWL chart
- A spoken or written contextualization of the material learned
- A brief application of the knowledge gained to a different scenario
- Completion of the set if it was a story, extended metaphor, etc.

This structure works because it is easy to follow and flexible enough to adapt to any subject area, grade level, style of lesson, and class length. Below, I have expanded upon the above two week plan to include the proportions of I do, We do, You do. You will notice they expand and contract depending on the day but the overall structure of the day remains constant.

Table 1: Two-Week Unit Plan

 I do  We do  You do

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Notes	Application	Practice, Mini-Assessment	Secondary Topic Notes	Practice, Mini-Assessment
Input  	Guided Practice   	Independent Practice   	Input/Guided Practice  	Independent Practice  

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Tertiary Topic Notes	Application	Practice, Mini-Assessment	Review	Summative Assessment
Input  	Guided Practice   	Independent Practice   	Guided/Independent Practice  	

You will find that on a given day you have far too much to do to also reinvent the wheel. My advice is to make things as simple as possible in order to execute your lesson efficiently. Once you have mastered that, then you can play around with the structure. The end goal is to deliver the information to the students in a way they can understand. Having your class move smoothly will amplify the amount students are able to learn, even if everyday does not include fireworks.