

## Lesson Planning and Staging

Walking into a class of new students sometimes can be a daunting experience, even for an experienced teacher. So all teachers use lesson plans to give the class direction. But the lesson plan has other benefits, both for us as teachers and our students. Some of the reasons for planning lessons include:

- allowing the teacher to time the individual components
- providing for a logical progression of activities
- showing students that some time has gone into preparing their lesson
- enabling the teacher to see whether there is a balance of activities and skills within the lesson

Planning will take a lot of time for the new teacher, initially perhaps as much time to plan one lesson as the lesson itself. But this time is worth investing. Tried and tested lesson plans can be repeated with other classes and adapted to suit other levels. Also there is nothing like the feeling of a good lesson when students are learning in a positive atmosphere that you have helped to create. This is unlikely to happen by chance.

The purpose of a lesson plan is to provide us with a lesson framework. Our lesson will need to include a variety of components, because students will quickly get bored if we just do one thing (30 minutes of dictation is not very inspiring), and the plan helps us order these components. This order should be logical and enable us to see a link between each of the components, which leads us to achieve the aim of the lesson plan. We need to consider four elements in our planning which are listed in the boxes below:

1. Lesson Aim  
*What do we want to achieve in this lesson?*

2. The Class  
*How many students, ages, sexes, group dynamics etc.*

3. How to achieve the lesson aim  
*Which combination of activities will be successful?*

4. The unexpected  
*What will we do if something goes wrong?*

We will look closely at these elements in more detail as we progress through this section. We have outlined what is needed in a lesson plan, so let's look at how we can plan the various stages of the lesson. There is no hard and fast rule, but you might want to try the following which many teachers find effective. We have broken the stages of a lesson into 5 components:

**Stage 1 – Engagement activity**

**Stage 2 - Presentation**

**Stage 3 - Study**

**Stage 4 - Practice**

**Stage 5 – Warm down**

Let's look at each in turn.

**Stage 1 – Engagement activity**

When your class arrive, they may not be in tune or ready for English. This stage helps to 'warm them up' and engage them, so that they are receptive to your lesson when it begins in earnest. Briefly (because we are going to cover this in more depth in Module 2) an engagement activity (sometimes called a warmer) gets your students speaking, wakes them up mentally and enables them to get ready for what is to come.

An engagement activity usually takes no more than 5-10 minutes, sometimes less, and it allows a time buffer between the start of the classroom time and the start of the lesson proper (think of all those students who come in late and the teacher has to repeat themselves!)

There are many engagement activity ideas that can be used. Some will fit into the theme of your lesson if you are really in tune, others will just be a good activity that wakes your students up. Here is a link to some of the best ones we have found on the web, from the Developing Teacher's website:

[http://www.developingteachers.com/newsletterplans/News\\_warmers\\_nov1999.htm](http://www.developingteachers.com/newsletterplans/News_warmers_nov1999.htm)

As we said above, we will cover this in more depth in Module 2, but the above will get you started and should provide you with some useful ideas when you come to writing your first lesson plan at the end of this module.

## **Stage 2 – Presentation**

This stage is designed to introduce the theme to the class, leading them into the lesson. If you wish it can be combined with the Engagement Activity.

### **Why do we do this?**

When learning languages at school, this was the part that seemed to be missed out. There was often nothing preceding 'open your books at page 54'. The result was that the teachers often failed to engage their students into what followed, leading to some students losing interest and shutting off mentally. The basic idea behind the 'presentation' stage is that if you prime students you warm them to what follows. It aids learning, as the brain is activated, ready to find out more. It should be lively, predominately oral, and take no longer than about 10 minutes.

### **How is this achieved?**

The best way to create good engagement activities is to select a main activity or theme for the 'study' part of the lesson and work backwards. For example, imagine you have selected a reading activity, which is a section from Nelson Mandela's autobiography, 'Long Road to Freedom' for your *study* component. Here is an example of an engagement activity:

i) 'Yes' or 'No' game.

Students ask you questions to guess who they are going to read about. You can only answer 'yes' or 'no'. When they have guessed the person, put picture of Nelson Mandela on the board and invite students (in pairs or small groups) to discuss the following questions:

- a) What do you know about Nelson Mandela?
- b) Is he a popular figure in your country?

Invite general feedback and comment from the class.

## **Stage 3 - Study**

### **What is the 'study' aspect of the plan?**

This is the lesson core. It may be a reading, writing, speaking or listening activity that you have chosen or a combination of them in some form. Whatever you choose, the activity should act as a base for some sort of analysis or study and there should be a link, thematic or otherwise with the engagement activity.

### **Why do we do this?**

So the students study an area or a particular skill, also that they prove they have grasped the area under analysis in a task or series of tasks.

### **How is this achieved?**

The tasks may be a series of practices around a grammar focus, for example, or they may be more broad based to improve all round competencies in the language. Having selected the Mandela reading, see how it can be used as a revision of past tenses in the following way:

- i) Students underline examples of the past simple. Then circle the past continuous.
- ii) Compare them on the board, eliciting answers from the class about form and usage.
- iii) Prepare 'controlled' exercises ensuring students understand the difference between simple and continuous. One way of doing this is through a 'cloze' exercise where students fill in the missing word in a sentence with the correct form of the verb. For example: 'I \_\_\_\_\_ (read) the section on the Study Stage at the moment.'
- iv) Students mark each other's work as you all go through the answers as a class.

Alternatively, if your lesson focus is on language development, then you could use the text differently:

- i) Pre-teach new language to students
- ii) Students read text and answer set questions in controlled environment
- iii) In groups, discuss answers to broader conceptual questions which deal with the underlying message of the text (see the following plan for examples of this).

Notice in both of the above the mention of 'controlled' exercises. These are tasks that allow a limited response only and serve to ensure that the target language is being used accurately. It is important that this focus on accuracy is done before any work on fluency is undertaken.

#### **Stage 4 - Practice**

##### **What is the 'practice' phase?**

This is the phase that allows the students more freedom to use what they have learned in the study phase and practices it in different contexts. This phase generally contains more open tasks (rather than the controlled practices that characterised the earlier stage) that allow for a natural use of the target language. This phase is often referred to as a free practice.

##### **Why do we do this?**

It is important that students can use the target language outside of controlled exercises and that they have the opportunity to explore the language. They are more likely to speak and write naturally if they have the opportunity to practise in the classroom.

##### **How is this achieved?**

There are a variety of 'freer' tasks depending on what you wish to practise. These include games, class discussions, free writing tasks and communication activities.

Returning to the theme highlighted earlier, we can continue with the revision of the past tenses, which provides us a good opportunity to use narrative tenses. For example, put the phrase: 'It was a dark and stormy night...'

on the board. Ask your students (in pairs or small groups) to prepare the continuing story. Or if you would like to continue the theme of Nelson Mandela, have students write a short summary paragraph of what they have read, detailing their own thoughts on his experiences. If you have introduced any new language, now is a good time to see if students can recycle it and use it in a

productive exercise. Then students present their stories or texts to the rest of the class and write up a neat copy for homework, to be handed in next lesson.

The 3 main stages of the lesson; presentation, study and practice will work particularly well when you have a structured language point to work through. It provides an excellent model for teaching lower ability groups, but may be found a little predictable for more advanced groups. As you get more confident you can adjust the order, or even have different phases repeated. If you have a very imaginative higher level group, you might lead in with the practice phase and the narrative idea 'It was a dark and stormy night...' and give them 10 minutes to prepare something. Go around the class eliciting a sentence each on the board to complete the story. Analyse grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure etc. together using the board work as a prompt. You could return to the freer practice by asking students, in groups, to tell each other about the scariest thing that has ever happened to them.  
But that all comes later.

### **Stage 5 – Warm down**

The final part is a warm down stage. This is often overlooked by teachers and it is probably the most omitted part of plans when things don't run to time. But it is here that you and your students can take a breath. You can use it as a recap of the main points of the lesson, or if your lesson has been quite work focused then it can be a good chance to do something lighter. Again, that list of activities we looked at earlier in this section will come in useful:

[http://www.developingteachers.com/newsletterplans/News\\_warmers\\_nov1999.htm](http://www.developingteachers.com/newsletterplans/News_warmers_nov1999.htm)

This will send your students out on a high, hopefully looking forward to your next lesson!

Now let's put some of the above into a sample lesson plan, so you can see what goes where. As you will see in the lesson plan that follows, we have used a template and we will ask you to do this when you plan your lessons on this course as well.