

## Module 2

# Unit 1: Lesson Planning Basics

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### Introduction

While many who are new to teaching may think the real magic happens in the classroom, in reality it begins in the planning of the lesson. A poorly planned lesson will rarely turn out well in the classroom. Alternatively, a lesson that has been clearly thought out will take much less effort to execute. A strong lesson plan will help the teacher deliver information based on learning goals more efficiently and easily; it is a road map with a beginning, a destination and a route to get there. In other words, the lesson plan facilitates the flow of information from teacher to student and anticipates obstacles that might impede progress. Effective lesson plans include options for the teacher to deploy when it is necessary to clarify the challenging aspects of the material. Therefore, strong lesson planning is essential to executing an effective lesson in the classroom. In this unit of Module 2 we will take time to break down lesson planning step-by-step so that you are well prepared.

### The Skills

Let's begin at the beginning. If you are going to plan dynamic, strong lessons, you first need to know what you are teaching. In English language teaching there are four main skills. These are: speaking, reading, listening and writing. They should all be infused within a course regardless of the level. Even writing can be taught in beginner classrooms. You will learn in later modules how to frame lessons for different skills based upon the level of the students.

### Receptive vs. Productive Skills:

These four skills are split into two main types:

**Receptive Skills = Reading and Listening**

**Productive Skills = Speaking and Writing**

Reading and listening are considered receptive skills, while speaking and writing are labeled as productive skills. Receptive skills do not require the students to produce language. For example, when a student reads material, they receive the language and understand it internally. Sometimes the skills of reading and listening are referred to as **passive** for this reason. Alternatively, the skills of speaking and writing require the production of language. Therefore, the productive skills are often referred to as **active** skills.

These are important distinctions from the standpoint of the teacher. Receptive skills are more difficult for teachers to assess. In order to gauge a student's progress in the areas of reading and listening, the teacher must set multiple tasks within the lesson to discern the student's level of comprehension. On the other hand, in lessons focused on productive skills, the proof of the student's understanding is visibly or audibly evident.

## **The Process of Learning**

It is important to understand this distinction between receptive and productive because these principles relate to the process of learning. The process of learning moves from receptive understanding to productive use. Therefore, lessons are typically planned in a manner that facilitates this flow. For example, a lesson on reading would be followed by a lesson on speaking, rather than the other way around. By beginning with a receptive skill and moving to a productive skill, you allow your lesson to flow with, rather than against, the natural process of human learning. Also, the use of different skills allows for those skills to support one another. For example, reading improvement can lead to writing improvement, and vocabulary improvement can lead to listening comprehension improvement. These are just two examples, but the principle is clear: combining different skills into a lesson can strengthen the students' learning of the core course material. Using different skills together in the classroom creates what is referred to as an integrated skills lesson. Effective skills integration will lead to a much more balanced approach to teaching.

## **The Classroom and The Real World**

While a lesson plan will focus on one of the four skills, several of the skills will come into play during the full course of the lesson. For example, a speaking lesson may involve note-taking (writing), a short reading activity or listening to fellow students. By combining skills, the teacher can create an atmosphere in the classroom that closely mimics the real world. When we stop to think about the four skills in our daily life, are they ever fully separate? When we have a conversation, we are listening to the other person as well as speaking ourselves. We also may read a newspaper article and discuss it with those around us. When we combine skills in the classroom, we produce a similar environment.

## **Where do grammar and vocabulary come into play?**

You may be wondering where grammar and vocabulary lessons fall into this mix of receptive and productive skills. Grammar and vocabulary are the two subsets of speaking lessons. While we may be prone to think of them as receptive skills, they are in fact skills which help us speak. Therefore, they are productive, active skills. You couldn't have clear, verbal communication without knowledge of grammar and vocabulary.

## **Lesson Planning Skills**

Having reviewed the skills that are taught in an English language classroom, let's now take a look at the basic elements that go into developing strong lesson plans.

All Lesson Plans Have:

- A skill
- A context
- A goal
- Activities
- Evaluation

**The Skill the Lesson Focuses On:**

Every English language lesson requires a plan that is structured around a key skill. These include listening, reading, writing, speaking (grammar) or speaking (vocabulary). In order to choose the skill for your lesson, teachers must consult the material given to them by their school. Teachers may be asked to complete a certain number of chapters or units within a given term. Using the criteria laid out by the school, evaluate which skill you wish to focus on for that particular lesson.

**The Context the Lesson is Built Around:**

The context of a lesson is the topic it centers on. This should be a real-life scenario. Sometimes textbooks do a great job of providing relevant contexts for lessons, but other times they don't. Use your best judgment to adjust the context when necessary. Keep in mind that the more relevant and natural the context of the lesson, the easier it will be for your students to learn the material. Some examples of a suitable context could include shopping for food in a market, writing about a recent vacation, asking a friend for advice, and visiting a zoo.

**The Goal the Lesson Achieves:**

Lessons need to be constructed with a goal in mind. This goal should be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely. For example, in a lower level class a goal for one lesson may look like this: By the end of the lesson, I want my students to be able to create their own concept for a zoo and role play advertising their zoo to potential visitors using animal vocabulary appropriately. An example of a goal for a mid-level class could be: By the end of the lesson, I want my students to be able to complete a role play activity in a "market" and demonstrate that they can buy and sell foods using count and non-count nouns appropriately.

**The Activities in the Lesson:**

All lessons are built on a series of activities. Choosing these activities and making sure they build on each other appropriately is the challenge for the teacher. Keep the following three rules in mind when choosing activities for your lessons. First, choose a variety of activities. Students will not enjoy doing five true/false worksheets in a row, nor will they enjoy doing multiple interview activities in a row. Secondly, sequence your activities logically from the students' point of view. Sometimes what is understandable for the teacher as a native speaker is not what makes sense for the students. Finally, move from more controlled activities to freer activities. Begin with activities that are more straightforward like multiple choice or fill in the blank. Then as the lesson progresses, allow your students the freedom to do more creative activities such as interviews and debates.

**The Evaluation of the Lesson:**

After the basic plan for the lesson is complete, it's time to evaluate the plan. Ask yourself the following questions: Will the lesson plan work with my class? Does this plan move my students successfully towards the goal of the lesson or does it get side tracked in some way? Are there any points where I anticipate students having trouble? How can I plan ways to avoid/overcome these obstacles? How will I assess my students' progress throughout the lesson? The answers to these questions will assist you in assessing the effectiveness of the lesson plan, identifying any problems, and making any needed adjustments. As part of the evaluation process, consider the timing of the lesson as well as any materials that may be needed. Evaluate each activity and assign an anticipated amount of time for each one. Be sure this time is appropriate for the class time available and for the stage of the lesson.

Also consider the materials that are needed for the lesson. For some lessons it may be necessary to gather photos or other outside materials for the students to use. Do this once your lesson is fully planned and you know what is required.

A final component in the evaluation phase of the lesson plan is the process of teacher reflection. This will take place after you have taught the lesson. It is absolutely critical to spend time reflecting on the outcome of the lesson in order to improve your skills. Here's a quick review of the reflection process as discussed in Module 1.

### **Phase I: Big Picture**

The first step in the process of self-reflection is to step back and look at the lesson overall. How do you feel now that it's over? How do you think the lesson was received by your students? Is there any overwhelming emotions surrounding this particular lesson?

### **Phase II: The Positives**

Next, move on to the positives from the lesson. What went well and how did you know it went well? Did you give strong instructions? Was there a particularly fun activity that the students enjoyed? What were your favorite elements of the lesson overall?

### **Phase III: The Negatives**

What didn't work as well as it could have in the lesson? Did the students seem to enjoy an activity, but not understand the main point? Why was this? Work through the issues you see with activities in the class and also in your skill set as a teacher. How could any weaknesses be mitigated?

### **Phase IV: Action Steps**

Lastly, make a few actionable steps to apply to future lessons. Will you commit to planning your instructions better? Working on time management? Being more consistent in discipline? Choose one or two on which to focus attention. Over time this will strengthen core teaching skills.

## Lesson Planning Summary

