TEFL LESSON PLANNING GUIDE

Prepare to teach English as a foreign language by developing the habit of writing and following a detailed lesson plan

CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

Once you know who you are teaching, what you are teaching and why you are teaching, the next step is to figure out HOW you are going to teach your lesson. Lesson planning is the first component of successful teaching. No matter how well you believe you can teach without preparation, the students will be aware of the difference in quality of a planned and an unplanned lesson.

Many experienced teachers, once they have methodology set in their mind, write only a minimally structured lesson plan as they will have developed a set routine for how they approach each lesson.

New teachers however should develop the habit of rigidly writing and following a detailed lesson plan for at least the first 6 months to a year. This will require some real discipline, but it will pay off in terms of your skill development over time.

Sit down after each class and take a few notes about what went well, what went wrong and how you might have done a better job. This will help you to refine your skills. Even very experienced teachers put some serious thought into problems that occurred during class and how they might best be corrected.

Save every lesson plan you write. If you teach a certain book or certain topics repeatedly to students of similar levels (and you will), you'll find you need only to put a little polish on the lesson, drawing from the notes that you wrote after the previous class.

This book focuses on building a lesson plan, and looks at what should be included in a plan to help you deliver effective lessons. It is for new teachers who want a good starting point and experienced teachers who feel they need more structure in their classes.

BUILDING A LESSON PLAN

The lesson should always follow a logical progression. If it does, the students will have a much clearer idea of where they are going. To produce a fairly logical lesson plan, you just need to remember this:

PRESENTATION

PRACTICE

PRODUCTION

Students will progress in English if each and every lesson follows these stages. The amount of time allocated to each stage varies. Factors include the length of the lesson, the level of the students and (to a lesser degree) the aim of the lesson.

PPP (presentation, practice, production) is not the only teaching method. As you progress in your teaching career you may use other approaches and adapt your lesson plans to suit these. However, PPP is a great place to start.

Let's relate the PPP formula to boiling an egg.

- *Someone explains to you how to boil an egg, hopefully accompanied with a short demonstration. (Presentation)*

- *Students go through the various stages of boiling an egg under supervision from the instructor. Students repeat the stages until they are confident. (Practice)*

- *Students boil an egg unsupervised. (Production)*

WHY DOES THIS APPROACH WORK?

There may be some of you who learnt how to swim by literally being thrown in at the deep end. This may work, but there is also the possibility that you may drown or that you may never go swimming again. Generally speaking, our psyches revolve heavily around feeling at ease. This is true in any learning environment.

The presentation section is there to arouse interest and motivation in the students. It also has the function of convincing the students that there is a reason to be there and that they will benefit from the lesson.

Once the language has been presented, it needs to be modelled, so both the student and the teacher are clear that the practice stage will go smoothly. This involves using the language in a controlled context and will generally involve lots of repetition to ensure the students have learnt the target language. It is essential that their understanding of the language is checked thoroughly.

The practice stage is there for two main reasons:

- *It enables the students to practise the language without feeling embarrassed, ensuring their confidence levels rise rather than fall*

- *It enables the teacher to identify and address any potential problem areas before the students produce the language freely. The practice stage will undoubtedly include repetition and constant checking by the teacher.*

The production stage of the lesson is when the students use the new language in a free environment, whether in a discussion, a role-play or a presentation. It should not be rushed, and a key part of the production stage is feedback. Whatever form this takes, there should always be time at the end of the lesson to go through what has been produced, addressing any errors and checking that the students have understood what they have been taught.

PRESENTATION

PRACTICE

BUILDING A LESSON PLAN

Here is a lesson plan template you can follow:

Teachers Name	
Date of Lesson	
Time and length of lesson	
Level of Class (ie Beginner):	
Number of Students	
Make up of the class: (ie age, nationalities, mixed abilities?)	
Aims of the lesson	
Secondary aims of the lesson	
WILF	
WALT	

Assumptions about the class	
Anticipated difficulties	
Strategies to overcome difficulties	
Materials to be used	

Timing	Stage / Procedure	Interaction	Reason for doing the activity	How it went (record)

The lesson plan template is divided into two parts. The first two pages are what you need to think about to help you prepare, and the final two pages are the stages and procedures that you will follow during the lesson.

To start, we will look at the stages and procedures. These are used to divide the lesson. Different activities will need to be planned for each stage/procedure. It is advisable to set out your reasons for doing each activity as this will help you to understand if the activity is suitable or not.

THE STAGES/PROCEDURES THAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN EVERY LESSON:

- *Warm-up/Review*
- *Aims (this stage does not require activities but it is useful to include it in the stages/procedures so you do not forget to write the aims on the board)*
- *Presentation*
- *Controlled Practice*
- *Freer Practice*
- *Production*
- *Follow-up*
- *Wrap-up*

You should also comment on the interaction for each activity (see page 32) and the timing (see page 23).

Finally, there is a section for you to write down how the lesson went. Completing this will help you with future lessons.

WARM-UP/REVIEW

WHAT?

This is the first part of the lesson, where you say hello, return homework, and give the students an easy warm-up exercise preferably related to the day's topic. This is also a good time to review the previous week's lesson. The warm-up should be an easy, fun activity that gets the students actively using English and talking to each other. Don't ask your students very teacher-centred questions such as, "What did you do this week?".

WHY?

- *A warm-up activity relaxes the students and helps to build their confidence in speaking English*
- *It gets the students thinking and speaking in English*
- *It creates a positive learning environment in which the students will feel comfortable taking risks*
- *It provides an opportunity to introduce that day's target language and to lead into the lesson theme*

POINTS TO CONSIDER

The warm-up should be fairly easy so that the students feel confident in using English. If it is too hard, you may set a stressful mood for the whole lesson.

This is a good opportunity to teach some of the day's vocabulary in a gentle, low-pressure situation and to get the students thinking about the topic.

You need this time to organise yourself whilst the students are doing something constructive.

AIMS

WHAT?

Go over the day's topic and structures on the board and, if possible, tie them into what has been studied over the previous weeks.

WHY?

- *The students see what they are going to learn, thus giving them a sense of purpose*
- *It focuses both the teacher and the students*
- *It sets the agenda for the day*
- *It increases student motivation*
- *Writing the aims on the board will help you with both timing and pace*

POINTS TO CONSIDER

If you have a clear lesson plan, this part should be easy. Writing the aims on the board will help you with timing and pacing your lesson.

PRESENTATION

WHAT?

This is the most teacher-centred part of the lesson. You present your students with the necessary language and structures for the day's lesson. It is important at this stage of the lesson to elicit from the students what they already know.

WHY?

- *It provides the students with the necessary tools to successfully complete the later communicative, fluency-based activities*
- *It gives the students new information*

POINTS TO CONSIDER

Although this section of the lesson is teacher-centred, it is important to elicit from the students what they already know. This is important, as students can only take on so much new information in one lesson. In order for you to teach the right amount, you need to know from which point they are learning new material and how much is revision.

CONTROLLED PRACTICE

WHAT?

Controlled practice activities give the students a chance to practise the language that has just been presented. They allow the students to manipulate and become familiar with the language, without putting it into a context or situation. You should actively monitor and correct at this stage of the lesson.

WHY?

- *It gives students a chance to practise the key language points*
- *Teachers can correct any problems*
- *Teachers can check students' understanding*
- *It reinforces and helps cement the language points for the students*

POINTS TO CONSIDER

These exercises should focus on the language by itself, rather than putting it into a role-play or extension exercise. Students shouldn't be worrying about other information, but simply the language points being taught that day. This is the time that students need to cement the language so that they can use it competently in the exercises that follow.

Practice makes perfect

FREER PRACTICE

WHAT?

Now that the students are feeling more comfortable with the language, you put it into a context. However, it is unrealistic to expect the students both to concentrate on using the language naturally and effectively and to come up with a situation or information for a role-play. So give the students a standard situation to work with and provide them with all the appropriate information.

WHY?

- *It provides additional practice of the structures or target language*
- *It is a transitional stage, leading to the free and personalised use of the target language in the production stage of the lesson*
- *Points to consider*

At this point students need to practise using the language fluently in a natural context. However, they are not yet confident enough to think of the context and use the language freely. Therefore, it is up to you, as the teacher, to provide the information that the students need to practise the target language, such as discussion questions or a role-play scenario.

PRODUCTION

WHAT?

During the production stage, you offer students opportunities to use the target language in a free and personalised way. The language is internalised and students are able to produce and use it at will. The focus at this stage of the lesson is fluency and mimicking, as closely as possible, the authentic use of language outside the classroom. You should act as a monitor and facilitator and delay feedback and correction until the activity is concluded.

WHY?

- *It ties the lesson together*
- *It personalises the target language*
- *It enables the students to interact naturally*
- *It builds confidence*

POINTS TO CONSIDER

At this point you should merely be giving the students ideas to work with and allowing them to use the language as they feel appropriate. Also, you can get away from focusing heavily on the target language and start including additional language that the students know. The aim here is to allow students to use language in as natural and fluent a way as possible within the confines of the class.

FOLLOW-UP

WHAT?

All productive activities need to be concluded with a follow-up that brings the students back together as a group. It offers the class a chance to hear what other students/pairs/groups discussed and the problems or successes that they encountered in the activities. This is the time for you to give feedback, correction and encouragement.

WHY?

- *It helps the students to remember the objective of the activity*
- *It brings the students back together as a class*
- *It gives the students a sense of achievement*

POINTS TO CONSIDER

It is important to bring the class back to the group as it feels much more natural and gives the previous exercise a sense of purpose. Simply stopping the students and saying goodbye does not give proper closure to the lesson.

WRAP-UP

WHAT?

The wrap-up draws the lesson to a close. Bring the class back together and recap the objectives, target structures and vocabulary studied that day. You can tie in the day's lesson with previous and later lessons. Summarise the objectives of the lesson and what students have learnt. This is also the time to set homework and talk about the next lesson.

WHY?

- *It brings the lesson to a close*
- *It lets the students see how the lesson objectives were met and gives them a sense of achievement*
- *It prepares the students for the next lesson*

POINTS TO CONSIDER

This is the time to pass on necessary administration and to give the students a few words of encouragement.
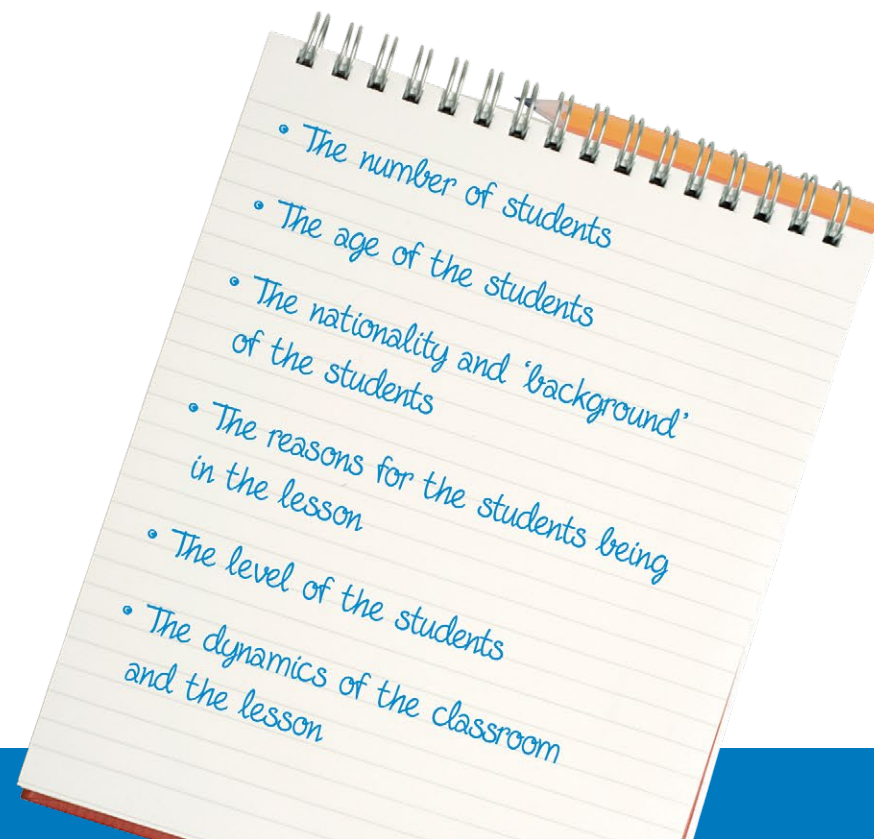
PRE-PLANNING PREPARATION

The first two pages of the lesson plan template focus on pre-planning preparation (see pages 5 and 6).

This section explores the information that you need for good pre-planning preparation, and also looks at other factors you should consider for effective lesson planning.

INFORMATION GATHERING

In an ideal world, teachers have all the information they need at their disposal when they are constructing their lesson plan. The result being that the lesson can be tailored around the composition of the class to help get the most effective results from the lesson. Unfortunately, this information is not always available. However, if you 'do your homework' before you plan, you can get a good deal of the information that you need.

THE INFORMATION YOU REQUIRE:

- The number of students
- The age of the students
- The nationality and 'background' of the students
- The reasons for the students being in the lesson
- The level of the students
- The dynamics of the classroom and the lesson

RESOURCES

There are some resources that are generally available at most schools.

THE CLASS ROLL

If there is such a thing in the institution in which you find yourself, refer to it to get an idea of the number of students who will turn up for your class, their nationalities and attendance patterns.

THE STAFF AND OTHER TEACHERS

If you are new to the school, talk to the existing personnel to get as much information as possible about the students and how enrolment works. The existing teachers may have taught the class in question before and therefore will be able to pass on handy information. There may also be student files that could contain all sorts of useful information for you.

THE STUDENTS

If possible, talk to the students to find out a little about their background, the length of time they are studying, their reasons for studying and their level. If this isn't possible before the first lesson, use subsequent lessons to find out as much as you can about the class. Lessons can then be tailored around the individuals in your class.

WHY IS THIS INFORMATION IMPORTANT TO KNOW?

The lesson's success will largely hinge on one question: did the students learn what you wanted them to? The age of the students, as well as their backgrounds and their reasons for studying, will have an effect on the interest generated by the lesson. Obviously, some lessons will work better with certain ages than others; attention spans vary according to age; students from different backgrounds are interested in different things; and the context of the lesson will be of more interest if it ties in with the students' reasons for studying.

DETERMINING THE LEVELS OF THE STUDENTS

ENGLISH LEVELS IN THE FOUR SKILLS

The level of the students is clearly a key issue. It is not just their overall level of English that matters: students are bound to have strengths and weaknesses when it comes to English. This means that levels in grammar, writing, listening, reading and speaking all need to be ascertained.

A student's level of English may depend on their background, their previous exposure, if any, to the English language and how long it has been since they last used English. For example, different cultures often have different approaches to language learning. In many countries, spoken English does not rate highly on the teaching agenda. Times are changing however and recently oral communication has gained importance. Therefore, when a student last used English is important.

CONFIDENCE LEVELS

The students' levels of confidence are also important. Stereotypically, students from certain countries have more confidence in their abilities than others but these stereotypes cannot always be relied upon.

Logistically, the number and personalities of the students will need to be considered in relation to the dynamic of the classroom. Whether the classroom is small, large, open plan or of fixed furnishing will have an impact on the activities performed. Similarly, if the class is rather active, activities involving getting up and moving around will have maximum results. Also, what is the layout of the classroom? What resources and equipment are available to you?

CHOOSING AIMS

In any lesson it is essential to have clear and focused objectives. One of the most important things for any teacher to consider is why they are teaching a particular topic. Clear goals and aims provide a framework for the teacher to select and evaluate the potential value of an activity: will it help the students achieve the aim of the lesson?

It is also important that the students can see what they are going to learn, what they are learning and what they have learnt. The lesson's aims should be presented on the board. This keeps both the teacher and student focused.

CONSIDER PRESENTING AIMS FROM THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

GRAMMAR AND FUNCTION

CORRECTION

DISCUSSION SKILLS

VOCABULARY

IDIOMS

CULTURAL TOPIC

ASPECTS OF CULTURE & CUSTOMS

WALT AND WILF

WALT

WALT stands for 'we are learning to…' and is the purpose of the lesson, the aim. This is what the students are learning.

WILF

WILF stands for 'what I'm looking for…' and is connected to the productive activity. It is what the teacher wants the students to be producing at the end of the lesson.

EXAMPLE

- **We Are Learning To** - Use the past simple tense
- **What I'm Looking For** - To write a story in the past simple form using pictures

This shows you and your students that the aim/purpose of the lesson is for students to use the past simple tense and at the end of the lesson you want them to do this by writing a story in the past simple form using pictures.

It's a great idea to include WALT and WILF on the board so that the aim and what you want the students to achieve are both clear throughout the lesson.

TIMING

The typical timing problem for upper level classes is to try and cover too much material. Consequently, you spend too much time at the beginning of the lesson practising and presenting the material and end up with almost no free practice time at the end of the lesson and a very rushed review and wrap-up.

One possible solution is to give yourself a cut-off time during the lesson at which point you switch to the free practice exercises regardless of how far you have got through the earlier exercises. You will soon learn how much material is an appropriate quantity to teach in a lesson. It is also useful to have several possible stop points during the earlier part of the lesson.

It's a good idea to estimate the timing for each stage/procedure. There is a section on the lesson plan template to write this in. Writing the times will help you to monitor how the lesson is progressing and ensure that you allow adequate time for each stage/procedure.

THINGS TO WATCH OUT FOR

TRY EVERYTHING

Don't rule out certain activities just because you think the students in question won't appreciate them. A little game of Simon Says, for example, can prove to be a great short activity to get the students enthused. Such activities can work well if classes are dragging or students are lethargic.

USE YOUR IMAGINATION

Just because you don't have a whiteboard or IWB (interactive white board), it doesn't mean that you can't do 'board work'. White sheets of paper work just as well and they have the added benefit of being easier to write on. You can also put them up around the room. Similarly, just because you only have one student, it doesn't mean they can't do a role-play. They can practise two roles for the price of one. Some students do wonderful impersonations of the opposite sex!

You will be dealing with very different individuals, so be open to learning and listening. The lesson will go much better of you personalise it.

LESSON LENGTH AND TIMING

One essential piece of information is the length of the lesson. How many minutes are you going to be teaching for? Factors that may destroy your perfect lesson include: late comers, school meetings, changeover of the classes if the school day involves moving from one class to another, and classes running over time if there is no break between classes. As you get to know your students and the environment, you'll get a pretty good idea of how long you actually have for 'pure teaching' in the class. The time of day that the class is held will also have an impact as students are human too. The ability to retain and use new information, not to mention a new language, will vary as students' attention spans rise and fall throughout the day.

CHECKLIST

Here is a checklist of points to consider before you make your lesson plan.

- Students' motivations
- Students' needs
- Age appropriate
- Background
- Level appropriate
- Aims
- Resources available
- Length of course
- Length of lesson
- Number of students

NEEDS ANALYSIS

Use this checklist to help you plan appropriate content for your lesson.

WHY IS THE LANGUAGE NEEDED?

- For study
- For work
- For training
- For a combination of these
- For some other purposes (examination, promotion and so on)

HOW WILL LANGUAGE BE USED?

- Medium: speaking, writing, reading, etc
- Channel: telephone, face-to-face, etc
- Types of text or discourse: academic text, lectures, informal conversations

WHAT WILL THE CONTENT AREAS BE?

- Subjects: medicine, commerce, environment, etc
- Level: technician, postgraduate, secondary school, etc

WHO WILL LEARNER USE THE LANGUAGE WITH?

- Native or non-native speakers
- Level of knowledge of receiver
- Relationships: teacher, colleague, superior, etc

WHERE WILL THE LANGUAGE BE USED?

- Physical setting: office, lecture theatre, hotel, workshop, etc
- Human context: alone, meetings, on the telephone, etc
- Geographical context: in own country, abroad, etc

WHEN WILL THE LANGUAGE BE USED?

- Concurrently with the course or subsequently
- Frequently, seldom, in small amounts, in large chunks

AIMS OF THE LESSONS

DEFINING THE AIMS

Once you have established a rough idea of who and where you are going to teach, the next crucial question for your lesson plan is: what are you going to teach?

Think back to a time when you learnt a skill. Generally any good lesson, whether it is a history lesson, a piano lesson or a scuba-diving lesson, has an aim to it. What did you learn in a particular lesson? For example, in a scuba-diving lesson, the aim may be as simple as putting on your gear, or it may be as complex as using a compass under the water.

A lesson can be deemed a success, generally, if the students have learned what you wanted them to learn. The aim of the class has been met. Of course, the list of possible aims for an English lesson is extensive. Here are a few examples:

- ***Introducing a grammatical point***
- ***Developing reading skills***
- ***Raising awareness of aspects of phonology***

You may consider these aims to be rather vague, but the idea is not to be specific. The target language will specify exactly what is being taught. Despite the apparent vagueness, it is essential that the aims are met as this will have an immediate effect on the lesson. Tied in with this section are any sub-aims, if you feel the need for them. For example, the aim of developing reading skills may have the sub-aim of skimming.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

Don't go overboard on the number of aims

It's often easy to forget how long it can take to digest and, more importantly, correctly use, new material. It is far better to leave the classroom 100% certain that the students have fully achieved one aim successfully, rather than several aims vaguely. There is nothing wrong with concentrating on one point, as long as the students achieve something and the material was detailed and lesson-appropriate.

Don't over-estimate your students

There is nothing worse for a learner than feeling overwhelmed and out of their depth. Pitching an aim that is unrealistic in relation to the level of the class will have several negative effects for students. It will damage the students'

confidence and make it impossible for them to produce the target language. It is also likely to lead to a larger number of errors in other areas of the language, as their general confidence drops.

Never forget the students' needs

As mentioned earlier, the lesson's success can generally be related to the accomplishment of the aim. However, clearly the aim of the lesson has to relate to the individual students. What are the students' needs? Choose materials, topics and ideas that will appeal to the students whilst still helping them to learn the English that they need.

What is the target structure or vocabulary?

Tied in with the lesson aims is the actual target language or vocabulary that you are going to teach.

For example, establish whether you are going to teach a single point or contrast grammatical points. If you are teaching a grammatical structure, it is of paramount importance to have a set of examples of the target structure around which the lesson will be based.

If the lesson's aim is to teach vocabulary from a particular theme, consider precisely which words you want the students to produce at the end of the lesson. Be specific. It is possible to combine the two areas of target structure/vocabulary within the domain of an aim.

What is the lesson based around?

Whatever you are teaching, whether it be a grammatical structure, a set of new words or even reading skills, it is essential to have a theme to the lesson. In other words, what is the lesson about? What is the context of the lesson? If you have learnt a language before, you will remember that a lesson with a theme is much more digestible than one without. It gives the students an answer to their frequent question: what are we studying today?

The make-up of the students will play a large role in the decision of what theme you will use: consider what interests them and what theme will help them to learn the material more effectively. For example, if students are interested in sports, basing a lesson around sports will enhance their motivation.

How does the lesson fit into the timetable?

Most language institutions have regular attendees, whether they attend for a week or a year. Some students may miss the odd lesson but it can generally be assumed that your class will consist of a core group of students attending regularly.

With this in mind, you must consider the broader picture: namely, where does each lesson fit into the whole course? Generally, the human mind works logically. We function more efficiently if things form an orderly pattern. This goes for language learning too. When planning a lesson, it is important to demonstrate a pattern to your students. Basically this involves answering two main questions:

- *What have your students learnt before?*

- *What are they going to learn next?*

Many teachers follow a course-book, especially if students have access to it. This enables students to 'know where they are at.' Of course, there are drawbacks to this approach: namely, some students will race ahead in their own time and subsequently find lessons boring. This can be avoided with mixing it up a bit without disrupting the logical approach. As with everything, course-books vary: there is no single format for what you teach and when. For example, some curricula in various books or institutions teach the present simple before the present continuous - the differences are stylistic and not crucial.

The theme and function of the class is another important area to consider. For example, it is rather strange to expect the students to learn how to order food in a restaurant if they have yet to learn how to greet the restaurant staff. Making

logical choices will make lessons easier for both students and teachers.

What do students already know?

Considering what the students already know affects the success of the lesson. This is clearly easier if you have taught the students for a while. You know what you've taught them and what they've grasped. When teaching, elicit as often as possible so you know whether or not they've remembered what you did in previous lessons.

If you are unsure what the students already know, use the resources around you: the other teachers and any paperwork relating to previous lessons. Also use the students themselves. They will be able to tell you whether or not they have learnt something before.

What materials do you have at your disposal to make the lesson work?

Generally speaking, classes vary in their dynamics quite significantly. We have considered the actual size and layout of the class but now we will look at the materials on offer to you, the teacher, and then, the students.

In every lesson plan, it is beneficial to list what materials you are going to use. The list can be used as a final checklist just before you start the lesson: do you have everything you need with you to teach the lesson you've planned to teach? Different things should stimulate different students. It is, therefore, advantageous to use as wide a range of materials as possible. Not only will it mix the lesson up a little, it'll also mean you have a better chance of getting the most out of each individual student.

Materials that could be used include flashcards, magazines, DVDs/CDs and other objects. By using a range of materials, you will trigger students' thought processes and not waste time by talking too much.

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS

How are you going to organise your students?

Throughout the three main stages of the lesson, it is essential to consider how you are going to organise the students to get maximum results. Here we are talking about the dynamics of the activities, and abbreviations are usually used to show the interactions, as follows:

- *TS* = *Teacher Student*
- *SS* = *Student Student (pair work)*
- *SSS* = *Student Student Student (group work)*
- *TTT* = *Teacher Talking Time*.

The presentation stage is going to include much more TTT than the production stage. Make sure you keep this in mind when planning the timing of the activities. Remember you want to focus on SS and SSS activities the most.

Different students flourish in different kinds of environments, so varying the dynamics will help to ensure full class participation.

STUDENT DIFFICULTIES AND HOW THEY MAY BE OVERCOME

However good a teacher you are, at some point you will face difficulties. This will not be such a problem if you have thought about the potential problems and identified ways to solve them as part of your lesson planning.

The easiest way of predicting potential problems is to look at the lesson from a student's point of view. This is also where their background plays a part. If they are from a country where the native grammatical structure is different to English, problems are likely to arise with grammatical structures.

If their native language phonology is different to English, then problems will arise in this area. Their previous exposure to English may also lead to certain difficulties. For example, if they have only learned in a teacher-focused environment, they may find oral communication difficult, which will affect the success of any oral work.

Many potential difficulties can be avoided or overcome with advance preparation. Think of questions you can ask to check that students understand what you want them to (CCQs). Teachers often ask, "do you understand?" and are rather surprised when, despite many a blank look on the student faces, no one says, "no". Generally, unless learners are confident in themselves and not worried about standing out as "the one who doesn't understand", they will not admit to their lack of understanding. Similarly, if you foresee a problem with phonology, have a few words written down to give the students a little bit more practice.

To review, the difficulties can be categorised into conceptual (the meaning), structural (the grammar) and phonological (the pronunciation). The students' culture may also come into play when carrying out certain tasks. For example, some students may not be used to working with people of the opposite sex, or they may be intimidated by working with students of different ages to themselves. This can be overcome by explaining clearly how your classes work from the start. Then there should be minimal inhibitions. If it has a drastic effect on the students' production, be understanding and give them time to adjust.

TEACHER DIFFICULTIES AND HOW THEY MAY BE OVERCOME

Just as important as thinking of ways to overcome students' difficulties is thinking of potential problems you may have and how they can be overcome.

Running out of material, or having too much

This is a common problem as it is very difficult to know exactly how long each and every activity will take. Obviously as you get to know your students and your teaching style better, you'll get a more accurate idea of how long certain tasks are likely to take. It's clearly better to have too much that too little, like in any situation, whether it be preparing for a dinner party or packing for a holiday.

Always plan your lesson as if it were going on for longer than it actually is. In this way you will have activities on hand if you go through the lesson more quickly than expected. It is more beneficial if this additional material is put into different categories (presentation, practice, production). In doing this, you will have further material if they don't understand the language, if they need more practice or if they could handle extended practice.

The students are not showing any interest

This is something that can happen to anyone at any time. It doesn't even necessarily relate to the lesson being taught (for example a student might have a hangover or difficult personal circumstances). Although you may not be the cause of the problem, you need to have possible solutions. Again, think of activities that will act as fillers for the lesson, whether it be at the start, middle or end of the lesson.

A student asks a question that you don't know the answer to

Whether it is a question relating to the content of a lesson, English in general or any question the students may throw at you, you need to be prepared. If the question relates to the content of the lesson, hopefully you will have identified it as a potential problem when planning the lesson so you will have an answer. Even if it isn't relevant to the lesson, you must not ignore it. You need to judge whether it can be dealt with quickly and clearly, whether all students have the same question and how you explain the answer without adding to the list of questions. Remember, everyone is human. Don't give an inaccurate or incomplete answer; students will be much more grateful if you admit that you don't know and then return with the answer at a later date.

ANYTHING ELSE TO CONSIDER

One further consideration is the importance of feedback at the end of a lesson. It is important for the teacher to give and get feedback. Ask yourself:

- *Did I achieve my aims?*
- *Did the students master and produce the language unassisted?*
- *Can the students use the target language in the real world?*

These questions are your chance to evaluate the lesson from a content point of view. If the answers are definitely yes, well done! If you're not sure, then ask yourself why. Make notes on the lesson and be willing to review it in the future. Also, ask yourself if there was anything you would have done differently as this will help your future lesson planning.

On a more general level ask yourself the following:

- *Did I enjoy the lesson?*
- *Did the students enjoy the lesson?*

Enjoyment is a huge factor in learning. Importantly, it's not just the enjoyment of the students. If you do not enjoy the lesson, chances are the students won't either. They feed from your energy. If you did enjoy the lesson, good! Why did you enjoy the lesson? If not, then why not? What do you need to address for future lessons?

Getting feedback from your students is valuable. Don't be afraid to ask them what they think. They are paying customers and have a right to have an input into their lessons.

Teaching can be a daunting prospect, but if you prepare well, never forget the individuals and make it relevant to both you and the students, it will be much more enjoyable.

Different types of classes

It is important to consider the different types of classes that a teacher may come into contact with. Within general English courses there are a wide range of abilities. The planning and skills necessary for a class of beginners vary considerably from those required for an upper level class. If you choose to take your teaching skills abroad, you may encounter a whole new range of teaching environments, including teaching English to children, conversation-only classes, private lessons, exam preparation and so on.

Upper and lower levels

The way a teacher approaches upper level classes is quite different from lower level classes. This is due to the differences in texts and in students' needs. Intermediate classes may require a combination of both upper and lower level approaches, depending on the level of the class.

We will look at some factors that should be taken into consideration when teaching upper level classes and give some teaching guidelines. We will also look at the most commonly defined levels, which are:

1	BEGINNER
2	ELEMENTARY
3	PRE INTERMEDIATE
4	INTERMEDIATE
5	UPPER INTERMEDIATE
6	ADVANCED

BEGINNER

The Beginner level is perhaps one of the most difficult to teach as students have no (or very little) previous knowledge of English, making it difficult for them to respond to anything but very simple questions. Students are able to communicate through gestures and a few isolated words.

At this level, you should teach concrete vocabulary (ie things that can be seen and touched). Topics typically covered at this level include numbers, the alphabet, nationalities, jobs, vocabulary of possessions and vocabulary linked to daily routines. You should also teach students very basic grammar, such as the present tense of 'to be', present simple questions, negatives and affirmatives.

Practice and repetition are key at this level for students to start to 'own' a bit of the language and it is important that you do not cover too many language points too quickly.

Your role, as the teacher, is crucial at this level: if students develop the basics early on, their language learning experience will go much more smoothly and quickly at higher levels.

ELEMENTARY

Elementary students can express basic survival needs and participate in some routine social conversations, although they still struggle often. As their vocabulary is limited to common words used in familiar situations, they can typically deal with only very limited day to day activities and do so by asking and responding to questions using simple learned phrases.

As with Beginners, repetition is crucial in helping the students to build confidence with the language.

PRE INTERMEDIATE

The Pre Intermediate (PI) level bridges the gap between the lower levels of Beginner and Elementary and the upper levels of Intermediate and Advanced. In general, the lower levels are concerned with the expression of basic facts related to everyday life, while the upper levels focus on the discussion of abstract topics. The PI level consolidates and expands skills learned in the lower levels while introducing higher level skills needed for upper levels.

Until this level students have relied on a structured approach to learning conversation – drills, repetition and so on. At the PI level, students should become more accurate and fluent with the basic structures they learned in Beginner and Elementary. At this level, students are just beginning to use their English more independently. They are starting to cope with most daily situations, such as shopping or making reservations, and to express their opinions and discuss topics at a simple level.

Teach Intermediate students to use higher level structures in their speech (eg passive voice, reported speech, conditionals, etc). Work with them to ensure that their active and passive vocabulary increase considerably, with many more colloquial expressions. Help students to develop sentences that are longer and more complex and to respond with several sentences at one time. Give students opportunities to talk about themselves and others and their environment; equip them to start talking in detail about their impressions and opinions and to give some support for their ideas.

PI students should be able to understand if you speak simply and clearly.

INTERMEDIATE

Intermediate is a rewarding level to teach. Generally, the students have been studying English for a number of years and may have travelled or lived overseas. They are at an important point in their language learning because they usually can speak quite well, making reasonably complex sentences and using more abstract vocabulary and idioms. They have a large passive vocabulary and are reasonably fluent.

It is important, however, to remember that they are only Intermediate level and they have to make an important leap before they can become advanced communicators. They still need guidance and structured practice of new language, functions and vocabulary. They must also be exposed to freer practice and discussion, and encouraged to take more responsibility for communicating.

The challenge for the Intermediate teacher is to help students make that leap of self-motivated learning. They may have been very dependent on teachers in the past, they may have just been promoted from PI level, or they may have been in Intermediate level for a number of years. Whatever their background, it is important that you help students constantly reassess and reconfirm their purposes for studying English and motivate them towards continued and consistent study and practice.

Try to break down the teacher-student pattern and include everyone in the conversation. Interjections and advanced active phrases are important. Try to get students to agree or disagree with each other. Expansion of new vocabulary is also important. Try to use any new vocabulary as much as possible and encourage students to use more difficult synonyms instead of basic vocabulary.

UPPER INTERMEDIATE

Upper Intermediate students generally have an effective command of the language and are able to cope in quite demanding situations. Whilst they may make mistakes in accuracy, communication is rarely hindered.

At a low level, students need to break through the barriers to reach comprehension. When this happens, students feel great success and achievement. Upper Intermediate students rarely have trouble with comprehension or making themselves understood and so, as with Intermediate students, often feel like they are no longer learning and have reached a 'plateau'.

As the teacher, it is important that you continue to motivate the students and remind them that they are indeed learning as much as they did at the lower levels. Encourage them to use their English accurately and eliminate the common errors that they make daily.

ADVANCED

Generally, Advanced students have been studying for a number of years and may have lived and travelled overseas. They can speak English at length, using complex sentences (with some errors).

Advanced students have a good active vocabulary and a wide passive vocabulary. However, they may use some fossilised pronunciation and grammar. They can talk about controversial or abstract topics.

LESSON PLANNING TIPS

Remember, lesson planning will help you teach with confidence. If you think about what you are teaching (activities) and how you are teaching (stages and procedures) you will ensure there is a clear structure for every lesson.

Here is a summary of our top tips:

• PLAN ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

Always have one or two additional activities in case the material you've selected doesn't take all the time you thought it would. How would you fill an extra ten minutes? Twenty minutes?

• BUILD ON PREVIOUS MATERIAL

Try to continuously practice material that you've covered recently. It's often possible to teach the same theme several sessions in a row, and this can help to ingrain vocabulary and concepts.

• BALANCE THE CHALLENGE OF CONTENT AND ACTIVITY

If your content is challenging, choose activities that are relatively easy to do like fill-in-the-blank exercises or guided discussion questions. If your content is fairly simple, try more challenging activities like role-plays or problem-solving.

• CREATE YOUR OWN MATERIALS

Build your own library of materials to support your lessons. You can find several ideas in the lesson preparation section of this guide. Be creative. If you invest some time into developing and collecting materials, you'll cut down on your preparation time when you are actually planning lessons.

• CENTRE LESSONS AROUND THE STUDENT

Keep the focus on the learners and minimise the time you spend talking as a teacher. In other words, make the lesson as interactive as possible. Focus on communication.

• ASSESS NEEDS

Periodically take time to think through your particular learners' needs. Think about cultural factors as well as language deficiencies. This can help you prioritise what you choose to study. Are any of your students dealing with culture shock? What kind of language skills might help alleviate it? Try asking the students themselves what they would like to learn.

• KEEP A LOG

After each class, write a brief log of what you did. Include notes about what worked or didn't work with ideas for improvement. Write down specific page numbers you covered in a textbook. You could also keep your lesson plans collected together, making sure to write notes on them about the success of various activities and whether you modified the lesson during the class.

SAMPLE LESSON PLAN

This is how your lesson plan should look:

Teachers Name	Sue Jones
Date of Lesson	07th August 2013
Time and length of lesson	9am – 10am (1 hour)
Level of Class (ie Beginner):	Beginner
Number of Students	14
Make up of the class: (ie age, nationalities, mixed abilities?)	5-7 year olds, Chinese, majority are beginners although some appear to be early elementary
Aims of the lesson	To enable students to ask questions and introduce different animals using "What is it?" "It's a _____"
Secondary aims of the lesson	To enable students to understand and use unusual animal vocabulary – jellyfish, starfish, octopus, sea horse
WILF	What I'm looking for is students to be confident in asking and introducing animals and other objects
WALT	We are learning to ask and introduce different animals

Assumptions about the class	Students will be unfamiliar with the new language Students will have a basic knowledge of some animal vocabulary
Anticipated difficulties	1. Students may be familiar with the new language and find the lesson boring. 2. Problem student (Wing Chuk Shin) may be very disruptive during the production stage and not use the material provided appropriately. 3. Students may be sleepy as the lesson is in the morning
Strategies to overcome difficulties	1. If students find the lesson too easy/boring then I will expand the language (add more unusual animal vocabulary, introduce "What are they?" and use other objects in the classroom and not just animal vocabulary) 2. I will pair Wing Chuk Shin with an older, mature student and ensure they are seated near the teachers table so they are monitored carefully. An alternative could be to restrict the material students have on their table at one time. 3. The lesson will start with an energetic task and throughout the lesson I have planned activities to ensure they have fun and keep motivated.
Materials to be used	Flashcards, plastic bags – cut into strips, paper plates, scrap paper, scissors, glue and colouring pencils

Timing	Stage / Procedure	Inter-action	Reason for doing the activity	How it went (record)
5-7 mins	WARM UP Animal ladder race. Put students into two teams and draw two ladders on the board. Students take it in turns to write the names of animals on each ladder rung. The first team to finish are the winners.	SS	1. As the lesson is first thing in the morning it is a good idea to re-energise them and get them out of their seats 2. To review existing animal vocabulary and get them thinking about the topic of animals	
5-7 mins	PRESENTATION Using flashcards present and drill new animal vocabulary. Ask the question "What is it?" and encourage students to reply with "It's a _____" and repeat the word. Write question and answer on the board.	T-S	To introduce new animal vocabulary and how they can ask/introduce them	
8-10 mins	PRACTICE Put the flashcards around the classroom. Get students to ask "What is it?" and respond with an animal. Students have to run to that picture and say "It's a _____". The first student to reach the picture and say the correct answer is the winner.	T-S	To check students understand the new animal vocabulary and how to use the language introduced in the presentation stage	

Timing	Stage / Procedure	Inter-action	Reason for doing the activity	How it went (record)
20-25 mins	PRODUCTION Make an animal. In pairs get students to make their own animal. Get students to write their name on the back. When finished all students wander around the class asking each other "What is it?" and answering "It is _____". When students have finished asking/answering then put everyone's animals in the middle of the room and get students to vote for their favourite.	SS	1. To strengthen students motivation by allowing them to work with a partner on a fun task 2. To allow students to use the presented language freely around the classroom	
5-7 mins	WRAP UP Odd one out Hand students worksheet that has pictures and/or animal words and they have to circle the odd one out	S	A quiet activity to bring the class together, sitting down and using old and new animal vocabulary	
Fillers (if needed)	BINGO In groups students complete the bingo grid with names of animals. Teacher calls out the name, if they have they cross out. The first group to cross out all animals calls BINGO and they are the winners.	T-SS	To re-use old and new animal vocabulary	

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