

Creating Effective Lesson Plans

HEC Academy Training

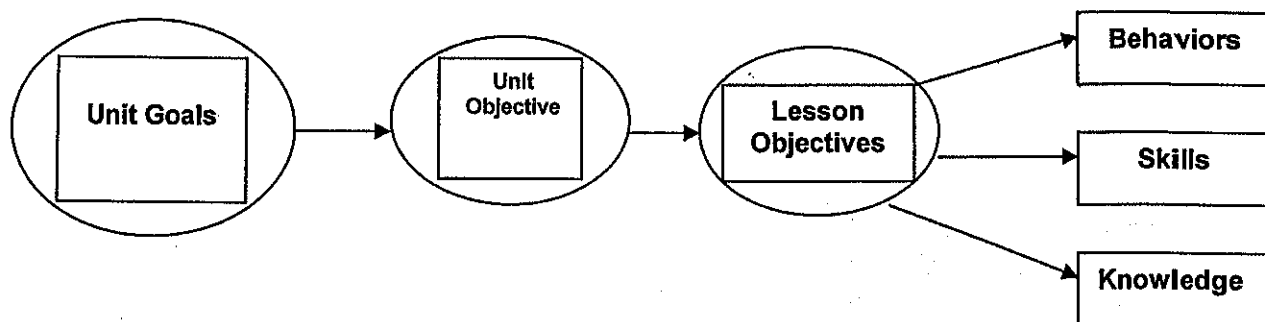
Lesson plans are the most important and fundamental component of a well-run class. In a class with a well-planned lesson, students and teachers are able to maximize what they are able to achieve in the class. Conversely, without effective lesson planning, teachers struggle for clarity and consistency of instruction, and the students strain to maintain focus and comprehend the material that is being presented. The lesson plan is the guide that the teacher uses to ensure that not only that what they want to teach is taught, but also to make sure that what is being taught is worthwhile and meaningful. Each lesson plan is a small part of a larger course and should reflect a small part of what information the students need to learn and what skills they need to develop. Without an effective lesson plan, teaching becomes no more than a few people chatting in a room, without anything to ensure that any learning or teaching is going on.

When planning a lesson, it is important to keep the larger structure of the course in mind. Each lesson should be connected back to the overall focus of the course and the direction in which it should be headed. Every course can be broken down into the following sections on a daily basis.

The example below is for a typical English class:

Content Area	Language Arts
Subject	American Literature
Unit	<i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i>
Goal(s)	Students will be able to understand the concept of conflict in literature.
Learning Objective(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Students will be able to describe different types of conflict in the novel.Students will be able to analyze how each conflict is important to the overall themes of the novel.Students will be able to evaluate which conflict in the novel, in their opinion, is most important and be able to defend their answer.
Skills Developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Analysis skillsEvaluation skills
Material(s) Needed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">TextPaper & Pen

Understanding that a lesson is a part of a larger picture helps in the actual planning of the daily lesson. Knowing in a science course, for example, that you move from one topic to the next in a specific order where knowledge gained in one chapter is built upon in the next allows for the natural progression of a class. In writing, you cannot expect a student to write a three-page essay if s/he have yet to master writing a single paragraph. Unit and lesson goals and objectives then are designed to impart knowledge, teach skills, and encourage behavior that will allow the student to be able to move through all of the material in a course.



Before each class, the teacher should have a solid understanding of each of these components for the class s/he are about to teach. In order to ensure that this happens, teachers should ask themselves the following questions before they plan every one of their classes:

- What are the students expected to learn from this lesson?
- What do they already know about this subject/topic?
- What will they need reinforcement on?
- How does the lesson I have planned contribute to the overall focus of the course?
- Does my lesson factor into it differences in learning styles?
- How will I evaluate the effectiveness of the lesson?
- How will the students receive feedback about their performance?

Each one of these questions is important to think about and answer before you plan out what skill, information, or behavior you want to teach to your students. These questions will not only help you shape the focus of your lesson, they will help to ensure that the focus of your class does not stray too far from the intended direction. For example, any high school history class is meant to be a survey course. If you are spending too much time on any one topic, then your answer to the "How does my lesson contribute to the *overall* focus of the course" will not be satisfactory. If you are spending an inordinate amount of time on any one topic in a survey course, then you are diverging too far from the course framework. This is equally true in English, math and science courses. Understanding how and how well your lesson plan fits into the overall course is vital to providing the students with the best education possible.

Breaking a class into units is an effective way to promote learning. Breaking a larger class down in this way is effective because it allows teachers to divide up a course into smaller more manageable chunks. It also gives the students a sense of completion when they finish each section. When creating a unit you should ask yourself the following questions:

1. What is the central **theme** of the unit?
2. What is the **duration** of the unit?
3. Are the **goals** of the unit stated clearly?
4. Have you created **learning objectives** for the unit?
5. What are the instructional **procedures**?
6. Is there an **introductory activity**?
7. Are there **developmental activities** in the unit?
8. Is there a **culminating activity** to the unit?

Once you have a general idea of how the lesson you want to teach fits into the larger framework of the course, you then must plan specifically what you want to achieve in the class. When you first begin teaching, it is important that you are over-prepared for each class. As with any skill, the more you practice over the years, less is required for you to be fully prepared. Until that time, when you plan a class, you should plan for the entire duration of the class. The procedure is the set of directions the teacher follows that helps them get from the start of the class to the end of the class in a way that facilitates student learning and allows for the teacher to gauge the progress of his or her students. A lesson's procedure should be able to be followed by anyone; it should be written in a manner that uses objective terms and looks for quantifiable results. Additionally, the procedure for each lesson should contain four parts:

- A review or re-teaching of previously covered material.
- An introduction of the new material.
- Guided practice in the skill the students are to learn that day.
- Independent student practice so that the students can better internalize the concept to be mastered.

The example below is the procedure for the English class shown previously:

9:25 – 30	Review yesterday's lesson. Ask for questions/comments. (Comprehension & evaluation skills)
9:30 – 40	Introduce the concept of conflict in literature. Different types of conflict. Why is it important? (Note taking skills, evaluation skills, & discussion skills)
9:40 – 50	Application of the concept in <i>One Flew...</i> What are some examples of each kind of conflict in the novel? Where is the evidence? (Text analysis skills, discussion skills, & application skills)
9:50 - 10:10	Group work – Debate: Which is the important conflict in the novel? The students are broken into two groups. Assigned to find evidence to support their position. Groups debate their positions- present their evidence and rationales. (Group work skills, organization skills, synthesis skills)
10:10 – 15	Review of the lesson. Student evaluation. Teacher feedback on student performance. (Self-evaluation skills)

The above procedure is a very basic example. In a more formal lesson plan, more detail would be included for each part. For example, what are the different types of conflict in literature? What are some common examples in literature and/or film? The more specific and detailed the lesson plan, the more certain the teacher can be that the material that s/he intended to cover is addressed in class.

Another important component of planning a lesson is making sure that the students are being asked to use higher order thinking skills (H.O.T.s). In addition to being able to recall and understand information, students need to be able to manipulate that information in other ways. When students practice these skills they are more likely to be able to apply them in different settings. In order of complexity, the thinking skills are:

1. Knowledge (remembering previously learned material)
2. Comprehension (the ability to grasp the meaning of material)
3. Application (the ability to use the material)
4. Analysis (the ability to break down material)
5. Synthesis (the ability to put parts together to form a new whole)
6. Evaluation (the ability to judge the value of the material for a given purpose)

****See attached sheet for tasks that require each of the thinking skills****

Most traditional school assignments and tasks do not ask students to use higher order thinking skills. For example, asking students to read a passage and explain what they have read or answer questions about it is considered comprehension and is a lower order thinking skill. By asking students to use H.O.T.s in your lesson, you allow students the chance to grow in their ability to think critically about the subject and about the world around them.

Once you have planned your lesson, incorporated H.O.T.s, ensured that the students' different learning styles are accommodated, and facilitated guided and independent practice, you must evaluate how well your students have grasped the material presented. Evaluation is the only way if you can assess whether or not the students have grasped the material, skill, or behavior you were trying to teach. There are many methods of evaluation, including:

- Teacher observation
- Tests & quizzes
- Student assessment
- Labs
- Homework
- Check sheets
- Portfolios

Not every unit needs to end in a test or quiz. Evaluating students in a variety of ways better assesses how well they have understood the lesson as well as discovering where students' strengths lie. For example, if a student seems to do better when given a task that requires them to be verbal, then that probably is the best way to evaluate them. If written work is difficult for the student, asking them to complete a traditional test would not be effective, it would be unfair. Students should always know how they are being evaluated before the task is assigned and, when possible, take part in some sort of self-evaluation. Having students think critically about their own performance is an important part of the lesson.