

Unit 20 Planning an individual lesson or a sequence of lessons

■ How do we plan an individual lesson or a sequence of lessons?

When we plan an individual lesson, we need to think about its aims, the 'shape' of the lesson and the kind of techniques that are most appropriate for a particular group of learners. For example, if we are introducing a new grammatical structure, we might choose a **Presentation, Practice and Production (PPP)** approach or a **Task-based Learning (TBL)** approach. **Skills** lessons, too, have regular shapes that we can use to organise lesson plans: for example, for receptive skills, we usually plan tasks or activities for learners to do before, while and after reading or listening; for productive skills, there is usually an introductory stage to **set the scene** (i.e. to explain the context) and a **feedback** stage after the speaking or writing activity.

We also need to think about the connections between the aims of the lesson and the procedures we will use to achieve those aims. The available materials, the length of the lesson and the information we have about our learners will all help us to identify possible procedures. But the most important thing is to make sure that the materials, tasks and activities we select are the ones that will help a particular group of learners to achieve the aim we have identified.

A **sequence** of lessons is a number of related lessons that develop language knowledge and/or language skills over a period of time. Sequences may develop a single topic or language area, or may involve topics or language areas that are very closely connected. Here are three examples:

Structural sequence

- 1 revision: past simple
- 2 revision: present perfect
- 3 contrast: past simple vs. present perfect

Integrated skills sequence

- 1 vocabulary development: describing places (**function:** describing)
- 2 reading: choosing a holiday
- 3 writing: letter to a friend narrating holiday experiences (**function:** narrating)

Project work

- 1 reading and listening about free time activities
- 2 class **survey** and research: sport and entertainment
- 3 preparation of a poster display to show results of survey

Key concepts

Planning an individual lesson

When we plan an individual lesson, we have to ask ourselves a number of questions:

- Will the topic be interesting and motivating for my learners?
- Are the activities and teaching materials at the right level for all the learners?
- Have I planned enough for the time available? Do I need any extra material?
- Have I planned too much for the time available? Are there any stages I can cut if necessary?
- Have I thought about exactly how to start and end the lesson?
- Does each step in the lesson help to achieve the aim?

Planning a sequence of lessons

Look at these three teachers' **schemes of work** (i.e. outline plans) for a sequence of four lessons. What do you think might be the advantages and disadvantages of each scheme?

	Scheme A	Scheme B	Scheme C
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar • Vocabulary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar revision (past tenses) • Vocabulary (free time activities) • Practice exercise (from coursebook) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class discussion of advantages and disadvantages of living in the city • Revise and extend vocabulary • Focus on comparative and superlative adjectives and adverbs; practice exercise
Week 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening • Speaking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check vocabulary • Reading (emails) • Speaking – fluency activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading: personal stories: students order sections of text • Focus on text organisation • Writing: students' own stories • Peer correction (where students correct one another)
Week 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quick revision: work from Weeks 3 and 4 • Listening (e.g. holiday story) • Grammar focus (reported speech) • Writing (report of story) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listening: song – group transcription • Grammar game (snakes and ladders) to revise work on comparatives and superlatives • Pronunciation practice: focus on /ə/
Week 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Test 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speaking (role-play) • Feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of grammar and topic • Group work: producing sections of tourist brochure for students' town

A scheme of work helps us plan a sequence of lessons in the best way to cover the school **syllabus** or the units of a coursebook in the time available. It also helps us to think about what we want to achieve and what materials we might need. It also helps us to include enough variety across our lessons. Teacher and learners need clear **aims** beyond the single lesson and

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need to see how lessons are linked to each other. Here are some of the main advantages and disadvantages of the three schemes of work on page 97:

Scheme	Advantages	Disadvantages
A	Leaves teacher free to respond to learners' needs.	Gives no details of what will happen in these lessons and so does not remind the teacher of general aims or what materials to prepare.
B	Quite detailed. Some sense of direction.	Probably the most useful of the three schemes of work. Not too much detail or too little, but the teacher will probably need to return to it and add more detail week by week to turn it into a set of lesson plans.
C	Very detailed. Gives very clear sense of direction.	Difficult to predict several weeks ahead exactly what learners' needs may be, so the teacher will need to return frequently to the scheme of work and change it if necessary.

You can see that schemes of work are less detailed than lesson plans. Like any individual lesson, a sequence of lessons should have a logical and learning-friendly progression and a good balance of approaches and activities. Like a lesson plan, a scheme of work helps us to identify our aims and make sure we choose materials and **procedures** that match those aims.

■ Key concepts and the language teaching classroom

- It's a good idea to make lesson plans look as simple as possible, so notes are better than full sentences, and there's no need to describe every step in great detail. However, we may want to write down some important things in a **complete** form – for example, prompts for drilling, questions to check learners' understanding, instructions, etc.
- A lesson plan should be clear and easy to read during the lesson. Different colours, boxes, underlining, etc. are useful. It is often helpful to include drawings of the way the blackboard (or whiteboard) will look at different stages.
- **Variety** is very important both in a sequence of lessons and in a single lesson. We should avoid always doing the same kinds of things in the same order, e.g. always beginning the lesson with a conversation or always ending with a role-play. There are several different ways of introducing variety into lessons. Here is a list of things we can **vary**:

pace	→ quick and fast-moving or slow and reflective
interaction pattern	→ individual, pairs, groups, whole class
skill	→ productive or receptive
level of difficulty	→ non-demanding or requiring effort and concentration
content	→ changing from one language point to another; from one subject to another
mood	→ light or serious; happy or sad; tense or relaxed
exciting or calming activities	→ 'stirring' (lively and active) or 'settling' (quietening down)

(adapted from *A Course in Language Teaching* by Penny Ur, Cambridge University Press 1996)

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- Learners may well require more frequent revision than the coursebook provides. A scheme of work is a good way to make sure that we **recycle** language (i.e. use it again) and include regular revision activities during a sequence of lessons.
- Coursebook units are often arranged around a specific topic (such as sport or relationships), which may be a useful way of linking together a sequence of lessons. This kind of sequence gives us the chance to develop particular areas of vocabulary, but learners may feel that the lessons are repetitive, so we need plenty of variety of texts and **tasks**.

See Units 5–8 for skills-based lessons, Unit 18 for identifying and selecting aims and Unit 19 for identifying the different components of a lesson plan.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES (See page 174 for answers)

- 1 The lesson summaries 1–6 below are part of a scheme of work to introduce and practise language for describing people, clothes and places. Complete the scheme of work with the correct summaries (A, B or C) for lessons 1, 5 and 6.

A Project work: groups prepare poster displays (magazine photographs) Writing: descriptions of people and places (further practice of functional language)
B Listening: descriptions of people Present new vocabulary and check pronunciation: lexical sets for describing people (flashcards and board drawings) Writing: descriptions of students in class
C Video (TV police drama): focus on descriptions of people Role-play in pairs: police interviews (practice of new language) → whole-class correction

<i>Scheme of work</i>
1
2 Reading: descriptions of clothes (from teenage magazine) Vocabulary: dictionary work Writing: descriptions of people and clothes → peer correction (pairwork)
3 Vocabulary: descriptions of places and people (photographs) Practice exercises (coursebook) Speaking: describe-and-draw activity (pairwork) Writing: descriptions of places drawn in speaking activity
4 Vocabulary: pictures of people, clothes and places Grammar: comparative and superlative adjectives Practice exercises (coursebook) Speaking: general knowledge quiz (whole class)
5
6

2 In the scheme of work in Activity 1, which lesson or lessons:

- A has/have a variety of pace?
- B use(s) different interaction patterns?
- C practise(s) receptive skills?
- D practise(s) productive skills?
- E increase(s) the level of difficulty?
- F has/have a change of topic?
- G has/have a change of language focus?
- H is/are lively and active?
- I is/are calm and quiet?