

“A goal without a plan is just a wish.”

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944)

Planning Your Work

Planning in many branches of human life makes life easier. Heading towards the aim and knowing what you will do next saves your time. It helps you to prepare things you will need; it gives you security and confidence. Older pupils become aware of how well-prepared the lesson was and young learners feel it subconsciously.

In schools we have to do long and short term planning. **Long term planning** is what we do before each term. We plan textbooks, teaching aids, interconnection with other subjects and particular topics. Cooperation with other colleagues pays here.

Short term planning covers one topic, one unit, one week. There may be three to ten lessons. We plan not only the topic but also methods, assessment (test, comment, feedback, evaluation ...), basic and supplementary material.

Lesson planning is probably what crosses our mind when we talk about planning because it is a part of everyday teachers' life. A lesson is a type of organized event and the teacher is the main organizer though sometimes not the main visible element. Lessons vary in time, place, topic, atmosphere, methodology and materials but they all aim at learning. They involve participation of learners and teachers and should be pre-scheduled. Pupils learn more easily when they know what to expect in the lesson and what they are expected to do from the teacher. A well planned lesson with routines enables them to predict situations. Each teacher has his own way of planning the lesson; each teacher has his own style. After a few lessons pupils get to know the system, the routine and feel comfortable. Although the teachers are different and they plan their lessons in a different way, some things are common with most of them:

A carefully planned and managed lesson needs a framework: a beginning and an end and some content in between. Writing a lesson plan the teachers write the **unit** plus the **topic** of the lesson, they also write the **class** and the **date**. Then the main core of the lesson plan follows. With each **activity** planned there is **timing**, what and how it will be realized and the supplementary **materials** used. The teacher also takes into consideration the link the lesson has with the one before. He/she thinks about the lesson after. **Organization** of the activities is important. The teacher decides where individual, pair or group work is suitable. Sometimes he involves whole class activities. The time of the day is not of the lowest importance, too. There should be balance between quiet and noisy exercises. The teacher considers whether all four language skills are covered and to what extent teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil activities are used. Lesson planning is a complex process which fortunately after years of practice is not so much time-consuming.

After the lesson is over the teacher still does not forget about the lesson. Even if he/she is not focussed on his/her **self-assessment**, good teachers hardly ever forget about the lesson as soon

as they close the classroom door. The question “Did the pupils learn what I wanted them to learn?” is always besetting. The answers then become the basis for the next lesson plan.

Of course there are **things that can go wrong** and that sometimes could not have been anticipated:

- An external disturbance may appear. A wasp may be flying around the classroom; a ring-tone of a mobile phone can interrupt the activity. Then either get rid of it or make use of it. The second choice is better. The disruptive element can be a good opportunity to increase the number of new words, to train some grammar or just to do storytelling where the element is involved.
- The class might be out of control thanks to the activity done. Then use a calming activity, tell the pupils a story, let them fill in the words in the story. Rather whisper than shout.
- When the activity takes too long, when it takes more time than you have planned, shorten it. Promise to finish the thing next time (but do not forget to do it). Asking pupils to do the rest as homework is not a very clever solution. You must have prepared a different homework in your lesson plan aimed at the topic.
- You can have extra time. There always should be an emergency activity at hand. It should have been involved in the lesson plan.
- An activity does not work. Bad instruction is usually the cause. Just explain the thing once more in a clear way. But if the cassette player does not work, do not try to repair it. You may lose the time. Just change the activity.
- An activity is too difficult. Either simplify the activity or move on to something else.

Nice conclusion and summarizing at the end of the lesson may point out that if not a lot of work then at least several steps forward have been done.

“A good lesson is adaptable and flexible; is a back-up system; has clear objectives; has a variety of activities, skills, interaction, materials, caters for individual learning styles; has interesting, enjoyable content; has an appropriate level of challenge and is well prepared, well planned and well timed.” (Brewster, J., Ellis, G., Girard, D.: *The Primary English Teacher’s Guide*, Longman 2005)