

# Tips on Lesson Planning

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Your orientation and methodology class will give you lots of information on planning lessons. Below are some useful tips and reminders.

## Goals

- While planning your lesson, don't think about what you want your students to know; think about what you want the students to **say/do** in class. Plan what you will say/do accordingly.
- Try to work on three of the four skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) every day.
- Involve all students.

## Structure

- Use the 50-minute [lesson plan template](#); for each topic you teach, move systematically through the instructional sequence (see box below).
- Begin with a low-stress warm-up that involves all students. 'Low stress' means something you know the students can do/review.
- In first year, you should plan a series of activities that each take roughly ten minutes each.
- Try to close with a low-stress cool-down.
- Make sure each activity is clearly introduced.
- Make smooth transitions to new activities.
- Plan one extra activity or presentation in case you finish the day's lesson early. If you don't need it, you will have less to plan for the next day.

## Transitions

- Give clear instructions.
- Provide an advance organizer, some type of cue that alerts students to the topic/focus of the new activity.
- Have students brainstorm vocabulary that will be useful to an upcoming task.

## The Instructional Sequence for New Material

### Review

New material should build on previously studied material. Before presenting the French *futur proche*, for example, review the conjugation of *aller*; in Spanish review the conjugation of *ir* before teaching the *voy a estudiar* construction.

### Presentation

Every new vocabulary set or grammar point indicated on your course syllabus deserves an explicit presentation that you must create and plan for. Rather than a "lecture" format in which you repeat or recycle the information in the textbook, you should offer students a model of how native speakers actually **use** the new vocabulary or structure. For example, you can tell a story (narration) that uses the new items, or describe or compare people, objects, or events that your students will be familiar with. In any case, the presentation should be comprehensible, engaging, and illustrate clearly the meaning of the new items in the target language.

### Input Activities

Following the presentation, you should check your students' comprehension of the new material with structured input activities. Ask simple yes/no, true/false, or association questions that hinge on the meaning of the new items.

### Mechanical Exercises

Mechanical exercises include simple repetition, substitutions, and transformations. These may be useful for learning **about** the "nuts and bolts" of the language, but learners do not usually have to understand the meaning of what they are saying; therefore, their role in language acquisition is dubious.

### Meaningful Exercises

Meaningful activities involve communication within a controlled format. You might have students ask one another questions to practice use of interrogative words, for example. The questions are real, the answers are of interest, but you will pay attention to proper question form as they speak.

### Communicative Activities

Once students have practiced new skills in mechanical and meaningful exercises, give them a chance to have fun, to create, to take risks, to communicate using these skills. Communicative exercises include role plays, interviews, and many games. Introduce communicative activities by giving clear instructions, a model, a time limit, and a goal.

Be sure to circulate if students are in groups. Always follow up these activities to provide closure, to motivate students to stay on task, and to ensure accountability for the time spent in groups.

Do not interrupt students during communicative activities unless you are naturally interacting with them. Do a global error correction afterwards based on what you've heard as you circulate from group to group; generally many students make similar errors, and all will benefit from your feedback after the activity is over.

### Other Tips

- Avoid lengthy explanations. If you find yourself lecturing to students in front of the class, you are doing something wrong!
- Don't instruct or allow one student or a group of students to monopolize class time. This means NO reading of grammar explanations out loud from the book, NO reading of dialogues by only two or three students, and NO reading of vocabulary lists from the book by students or teacher (choral repetitions are OK in the initial vocabulary presentation). Likewise, allow for participation by several groups when following up a communicative activity.
- Include every day small group work and pair work, interspersed with presentations and explanations.
- Include ACTIVE listening practice in every class period, where "active" means that students must demonstrate their comprehension of a target-language audio or video piece.
- Try to estimate times for each activity, include details, anticipate problems while planning.
- As you create your plan, visualize yourself carrying out the plan from the students' perspective: where will you stand during presentation X? How will you arrange students for activity Y? Is activity Z better realized with handouts or on an overhead, with books open or closed?
- Evaluate your plan (1) after it is made and (2) after the class. Ask yourself right after class what you could have done to make that class better, and jot down your ideas on the written lesson plan.
- Don't expect students to do things they are not capable or prepared to do, and don't expect them to perform like or know things that native speakers do.
- Don't get side-tracked in explanations for one student.