LESSON PLANS

PURPOSE

Lesson plans give direction to instruction. This tool explores the principles underlying lesson plans, reviews common characteristics of various lesson plan formats, and discusses lesson planning in the context of higher education.

DESCRIPTION

There are a number of formats for lesson plans. When developing your own lesson plan, include what elements work best for your own purposes. Structurally, most lesson plans have five common characteristics and are no longer than a page.

1. **List of learning outcomes or learning objectives.** Identify the goals you would like to accomplish stated in terms of student outcomes.
2. **Pre-class preparation.** List items for the lesson. These can include: technology, handouts, saved files, videos or DVDs, etc. Also note student preparation to be completed before class.
3. **Sequences of in-class activities.** Many instructors use an outline to organize or architect a sequence of classroom experiences. Remember that the activities selected should align with your learning objectives. Using a lead-in or hook to arouse interest in the topic is a common opening strategy. As you plan, decide on the amount of time you anticipate spending on each subsequent activity. Include a list of discussion questions, case studies, group activities, or practice problems. This section is more than a list of topics to cover in a particular order. Here, an instructor separates the classroom time into discrete activities based on outcomes or on natural points of transition within the class time.
4. **Wrap up.** Record any final thoughts or open questions you would like to leave with the students. When appropriate, plan time for a student reflection activity. At times, you may want to remind students of any homework to complete or new preparation for the next lesson.
5. **Notes.** Consider any special needs that individuals may have. List the names of specific students to call upon as well as specific source material you will refer to in class.

Remember that the first lesson plans you write and use will not be perfect. To refine and improve them for future semesters, evaluate them alone or with peers. It is often helpful to review a lesson plan immediately after teaching. Make a note of what worked well and what didn't. Share lesson plans with others who are teaching the same course. Not everything that works for others will work for you, but this is an excellent way to learn new approaches and compare results.

The pieces and parts of a lesson plan template can be changed and modified according to the needs of the instructor. The purposes of instructional planning, however, should remain constant. Those purposes are *alignment*, *effective execution*, and ongoing *reflection and refinement*.

Alignment

At its most basic level, a lesson plan attempts to ensure effective alignment among:

1. The stated learning outcomes
2. The activities undertaken to achieve those goals
3. The way in which achievement of the goals will be recognized and assessed

You've probably seen classes designed around an engaging activity that has little to do with the course objectives. Likewise, you've probably experienced the difficulty of assessing against the stated outcomes, when the classroom experiences didn't align well with those outcomes. Planning helps align answers to the following questions:

1. What are the students supposed to learn?
2. What will be done to promote that learning?
3. How will I know when learning has occurred?

Effective Execution

Lesson planning, when done well, not only improves alignment, but aids in the successful execution of a lesson. A plan allows for you to check the activities you have designed against the

time available so that the most important activities don't get pushed aside. It reminds you of the quiet student you need to call upon and the one with whom you need to follow up. It helps you insure continuity between lessons, linking past learning to current ideas while preparing for future classes.

Planning even allows you or your whole department to integrate a curriculum across a sequence of courses, ensuring that each class builds upon those that preceded it.

Reflection and Refinement

Lesson plans also act as a concrete record of the class experience from which you can take notes, indicate what worked last time, and polish the plan for the next time. This kind of record is necessary if an instructor hopes to develop professionally by reflecting on past performance.

Perhaps the most important role of a lesson plan is that it helps you move away from the coverage model of education and the teach-by-telling model of instruction. It serves as a reminder that the lesson needs to be experienced by the student, not just heard.

A lesson plan is *not* a list of the material to cover. It shouldn't remind you to "cover chapter 12"; the syllabus does that. Rather, it will urge you to consciously design how students are going to effectively engage and experience the material in chapter 12.

Through instructional planning, information becomes the precursor to learning rather than its substitute.

EXAMPLE

For many instructors in higher education, lesson planning can seem overly time-intensive if not superfluous. While no one expects an expert in his or her discipline to create a five-page lesson plan for every class period (although some do), a one-page plan is not an outrageous expectation. Beyond the one-page plan, there are many simple ways to implement the principles of instructional planning into a college course. For example:

- An instructor might expand the standard syllabus columns to include "Purposes" and "Learning Outcomes," "Planned Activities," or even "Central Questions" to the class experience.

Week #	Date	Outcomes	TEACH ONE ANOTHER/PONDER Topics & Activities	PREPARE Preparation Assignment	PROVE Due Today

- If formally planning each lesson seems too rigid, an instructor might choose to plan at the unit level. Unit planning captures the sweep of an entire section of the course and can be profitably modeled on the learning model process of **Prepare**, **Teach One Another**, and **Ponder/Prove**.
- Deciding on a reflection activity for the end of class helps an instructor to tighten the content presentation and avoid the tendency to talk until the time is up.

TIPS

- **Examine other templates.** 1000s of lesson plan templates exist on the internet, each with strengths and weaknesses. Planning is the most important thing, not the form itself.
- **Understand the plan's purpose.** A lesson plan is like a budget; it is a good place to start. Remain flexible.
- **Utilize your peers.** You need not start from scratch; tap peers and Internet resources.

PITFALLS

- **Plans dictate the course.** Lesson plans that are too detail-oriented can become overly prescriptive and leave little room for real-time adjustments.

KEY ARTICLES

Prégent, Richard. (2000). *Charting your course: How to prepare to teach more effectively*. Madison, Wisconsin: Atwood Publishing.

Skowron, Janice. (2006). *Powerful lesson planning: Every teacher's guide to effective instruction*. Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press.

RESOURCES

- Lesson Plan Template
- Lesson Plan Template Variation
- Lesson Plan Template Pathwise
- Lesson Plan Template Stopme+
- Board Plan Template

http://www.byui.edu/learning-and-teaching/instructional-tools