

11.15 my lesson plan complete?

- * Objective: What will the students know, and be able to do, at the end of the lesson?
- * Check for understanding: How will I know what each student has learned?
- * Hook: How does the opening task (the 'Do now') get the students interested and thinking?
- * Model: Is it clear to the students what success looks like?
- * Motive: Why is this worth doing (interesting, worthwhile, challenging)?
- * Focus: What will this lesson make the students think about?
- * Access: Can every student access the main ideas of the lesson?
- * Challenge: How will every student be challenged by the lesson?
- * 3x: How will I ensure the students are exposed to key ideas at least three times?

There are many ways to plan lessons – for example, painstakingly developing resources, adapting an activity from a colleague or a previous year's teaching, or hurriedly pulling together ideas at the last moment. Whichever path I take, I can become so absorbed in a particular task (e.g. creating an attractive worksheet) that I lose sight of key aspects. This checklist is designed to ensure that, whatever approach you adopt, you don't overlook something critical. It incorporates crucial ideas I've learned from Robert Phillips, Dylan William, Daniel Willingham and Graham Nuthall.*

Pause point

Do/check – when you think your lesson plan is complete.

Example

In this example I have described things I might notice and changes I might make in response.

Objective: What will the students know, and be able to do, at the end of the lesson?

Examining the lesson objectives, I may conclude they involve too much content for one lesson and split them across two. I may decide that the students' actions do not focus on the objectives – that this attractive activity doesn't actually promote their understanding of the topic.

* See Robert Phillips, Making History Curious: Using Initial Stimulus Material (ISM) To Promote Enquiry, Thinking and Literacy, *Teaching History* 105 (December 2001): 19–24; Dylan William, *Embedded Formative Assessment* (Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2011); Daniel T. Willingham, *Why Don't Students Like School?* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009); and Graham Nuthall, *The Hidden Lives of Learners* (Wellington: NZCER Press, 2007).

Check for understanding: How will I know what each student has learned?

Firstly, I need to allow time for an exit ticket or a hinge question which can swiftly and efficiently capture what every student has learned. Then I will ensure that the question I'm asking is focused around the key elements of the lesson.

Hook: How does the opening task (the 'Do now') get the students interested and thinking?

History teachers call this initial stimulus material: tasks to open the lesson which introduce the topic in an arresting, intriguing way. For example, I might introduce Stalinist purges with airbrushed pictures of those sent to prison camps; when considering controversy over the British Empire, I could ask for possible reasons why Benjamin Zephaniah refused an OBE.

Model: Is it clear to the students what success looks like?

If I want the students to write an essay, I need to show them what a good essay (and a not so good essay) looks like, and work with them to identify the constituent parts of success. For example, to teach students an operation in maths, they will need to look at each step and understand how and why it works.

Motive: Why is this worth doing (interesting, worthwhile, challenging)?

I may seek to share the topic's interest or importance by inviting the students to look for similarities with contemporary situations as we begin and then ask them to make connections with those events as we conclude. Alternatively, I could highlight how the skills or knowledge we will be using come in handy elsewhere – introducing essay writing by promising that I will teach students to win any argument.

Focus: What will this lesson make the students think about?

I may ask students to create a PowerPoint presentation about Mesopotamian culture, but my main aim is that they understand history better as

a result. Stipulating no SmartArt graphics, setting minimum expectations for the content or shifting presentations from digital to paper might all ensure that the students learn more.

Access: Can every student access the main ideas of the lesson?

To help every student understand and contribute to the lesson, I may need to overcome barriers in literacy: I may include more visual cues, simplified text, a joint approach to understanding the text or more frequent checks for understanding.

Challenge: How will every student be challenged by the lesson?

I want this to be challenging to those who are familiar with the topic too, so I may prepare a more tricky task using the same sources for students who need less support or offer them more difficult sources.

3x: How will I ensure the students are exposed to key ideas at least three times?

How does the introduction of the lesson highlight the key points of the lesson? How does the conclusion reinforce or build on them? If I can add in additional reiteration of key points, then I will.

How else could this be used?

Similar questions affect long-term planning (see Checklist 31).

12. How can I convey my vision?

- * What can I emphasise about the lesson's content?
- * How can I tweak the lesson's content?
- * What aspects of the lesson's activities should I emphasise?
- * How can I tweak what I ask the students to do?
- * What might I want to model?
- * What stories am I telling the students?

Whether or not we articulate it clearly, to ourselves or others, I suspect every teacher has a greater purpose in teaching than simply helping a class to multiply fractions or use an adverbial phrase. These are important, but they are constituent parts of something bigger: fostering a joy in understanding mathematics, the ability to communicate clearly or the freedom for students to make their own choices in life. However, conveying this to students can be tricky as we can become so bogged down by the details of lessons that we lose sight of the overall aim.

Pause point

Check/do – on completing the lesson plan, but choosing only one of the changes suggested below.

The first time I planned with my vision in mind, it took me an extra hour. But I finally acted on what I'd always believed – that history could help my students understand the present better. By making explicit links between the 1923 crisis in Germany and the 2007–2008 financial crisis, I sought to show students that both have intricately linked causes and, thereby, how complex the causes of events around them are.

Example

What can I emphasise about the lesson's content?

If you want students to value scientific method, for example, and are teaching Newton's work, you could underscore the methods he used.

How can I tweak the lesson's content?

If you're teaching algebra, and you want students to value diverse cultures and religions, you might mention the achievements of medieval Baghdad. If you're teaching computing, and you would like students to value women's role in society, you could discuss Margaret Hamilton,

who wrote software for the computer which made the moon landings possible.

What aspects of the lesson's activities should I emphasise?

If part of your vision is for students to have an excellent grasp of mathematical building blocks, and you're asking them to practise their times tables, you could emphasise the value of having knowledge at your fingertips. If your vision includes teaching collaboration and you want students to hold a discussion, you could highlight how much they can learn from one another.

How can I tweak what I ask the students to do?

If you hope students will value beautiful writing, you could ask them to redraft their work paying particular attention to the elegance of their phrasing. If your vision includes students learning from each other, you could ask them to give one another feedback on their writing.

What might I want to model?

If you want students to happily experiment and be unafraid of making mistakes, you could make a deliberate mistake and model the reaction you hope they would make. If you would like students to listen to and respect one another, you could show – exaggerate even – what good listening looks like.

What stories am I telling the students?

Explaining lesson activities is a great opportunity to tell brief stories which highlight those things you hope students will achieve or avoid during the task. Getting students to ask questions is a chance to mention how useful asking questions is, perhaps by mentioning the success of a former student who asked questions relentlessly. When talking to students who are struggling to behave well, you might refer to 'turnaround' students you have taught.

13. Am I ready to start the lesson?

- * What resources (textbooks, worksheets, information sheets, etc.) do I need?
- * What classroom supplies (paper, glue, scissors, etc.) do I need?
- * Do I have student work to return?
- * Are the computer and projector working?
- * Have I got my lollipop sticks?
- * Is there anything special to remember? Who do I need to keep an eye on? Who has been away and will need help catching up?
- Who struggled last lesson?

The start of the lesson has always seemed the most tense moment to me: if there is any doubt about students' mood or focus, any worries they've brought with them or any major flaw in my preparation, it is most likely to be exposed at the outset. A smooth beginning sets the tone for a solid lesson, so it makes sense to allow yourself to concentrate on students and their needs rather than whether or not you've remembered all your equipment. This is a simple, effective way to allow teachers to focus on the things that matter most.

Pause point

Do/check – a few moments before the lesson begins.

We are three minutes into the lesson and things have started well. While students write their thoughts about the hook, I start passing out the sheets they will need next. After the first five, I realised I haven't printed enough and that the rest of the stack is with my resources for the next lesson. Cue wasted time at the laptop printing more worksheets, asking a student to fetch them and filling time while I wait for their return.

How else could this be used?

Similar checklists could be developed for the beginning of any task you regularly perform, such as assemblies, experiments and specific lessons.

14. Is the teaching assistant ready to start the lesson?

A teaching assistant (TA) needs:

- * The aim of the lesson and specific aims for the students they are supporting.
- * The most important two or three takeaway points from the lesson.
- * The resources to hand to take a look at during the start of the lesson.
- * To know who else might benefit from additional support, besides their assigned students.
- * A sense of the one or two likeliest errors students might make.
- * To know what students should have completed by the end of the lesson.

In an ideal world, teachers would plan lessons with TAs long in advance, or at least TAs would receive, digest and adapt lesson plans long in advance. In reality, there rarely seems to be enough time on the part of teachers or TAs, let alone a slot when both are free. This checklist would work at any stage, including a week in advance; but if such advanced planning can't be achieved, at least taking time just before or during the start of the lesson will increase the effectiveness of a TA dramatically.

Pause point

Do/check – if possible, when you complete your lesson plan; if not, check/do while students are settled on the 'Do now'.

Working in Japan as an assistant language teacher sometimes meant a day standing at the back of the room wondering what was going on and whether I might have a role to play. In some teachers' lessons, clueless as to what was going on until I watched the lesson unfold around me, I became very good at making faces at students. With other teachers, however, time to plan in advance and an invitation to participate allowed me to play a far more active role – and make lessons better and teachers' lives easier in the process.

Example

The aim of the lesson and specific aims for the students they are supporting.

'I want all students to be able to explain the three main causes of the First World War, so if the students can remember all three, then that would be a great start.'

The most important two or three takeaway points from the lesson.

'The key content is on the worksheet – for example, the tensions that existed in Europe in the early twentieth century.'

The resources to hand to take a look at during the start of the lesson.

'This is the main sheet the students will be working from.'

To know who else might benefit from additional support, besides their assigned students.

'As well as helping Anna and Alfie, I noticed that Ahmed struggled last lesson; if you could keep an eye on him and step in if he seems to get stuck then that would be very helpful.'

A sense of the one or two likeliest errors students might make.

'One thing I imagine students may get mixed up about is whether these long-term causes made war inevitable, so explain that it would be great if they could challenge this idea.'

To know what students should have completed by the end of the lesson.

'At the end of the lesson, the students will write a summary paragraph.'

'Is there anything you'd like to ask?'

How else could this be used?

This checklist could be adapted to fit various tasks, especially when you are working with a team of adults.

15. What does it take to ensure a lesson starts well?

As a student:

- * I understand what I have to do to start tackling the problem.
- * My emotions are managed.
- * My physiological needs are met.
- * I am confident that I can engage productively with the problem.
- * I am motivated to try to address the problem.
- * If I have more pressing problems, they are either solved or acknowledged.
- * I have a safe and trusting relationship with my teacher.
- * I have or can get all the equipment I need to engage in learning.

This checklist takes the idea of a good start covered in Checklists 10 and 13 and examines it from another point of view – that of the student.

Although this checklist offers a list of conditions, a healthy supply of one condition might allow for a deficit in another. For example, students with a history of positive experiences and a strong relationship with their teacher are more likely to be tolerant of unclear instructions or deliberately tricky initial tasks.

Pause point

Do/check – one helpful way to use this checklist would be asking a peer to pop into the lesson in the first few minutes to examine this for you.

Two years ago, at a TouchPaper Problems Party, I spent an entire day puzzling over this question with fellow teachers: what are the necessary and sufficient conditions under which students will enter a classroom and most speedily engage in productive problem-solving? This checklist is the result.

Example

I understand what I have to do to start tackling the problem

If students find instructions unclear, break them into simple, sequential tasks using economical language.

My emotions are managed

If students arrive to the lesson upset, angry or worried, offer brief reassurance, remind them of their capability in the subject (or your expectations) or promise to speak to them about the issue at an appropriate time.

My physiological needs are met

If students are tired, hungry or urgently need the toilet, you may be able to solve some of these immediately and address others in the longer term.

I am confident that I can engage productively with the problem

If students feel lost on a particular problem, or have no history of success in the subject, briefly boosting their confidence or starting with easier problems (then moving on to more difficult ones) may work.

I am motivated to try to address the problem

If students are not interested in the problem, or can't see the value in trying it, brief reminders of why this topic or problem matter may be helpful.

If I have more pressing problems, they are either solved or acknowledged

If students arrive with pressing concerns that you can't address right now, promise to discuss them at an appropriate pause in the lesson or afterwards.

I have a safe and trusting relationship with my teacher

We should all be working towards this goal, but there is no short-term way to address its absence.

I have or can get all the equipment I need to engage in learning

If students lack pencils, rulers, their book or paper, provide these or remind students where they can be found.

How else could this be used?

At any transition in the lesson, a similar checklist might be useful to ensure students move into the next activity successfully.

16. Does this action merit a sanction?

- * Intent: At a best guess, was the action deliberate?
- * Degree of disruption: How did the action affect the student's peers or the class?
- * Persistence: Is this the first time this lesson? First time this week? First time ever?
- * Comparison: How did I respond to a similar action during period 1?
- * Rest of the lesson: Had the student been working hard up until this point?
- * Possible effect: Will giving a detention send an important message? Will it cause more trouble than it's worth?
- * Urgency: Does this need to be dealt with now, or could it wait until the end of the lesson?

19. Formative assessment: is it working?

- * Do students know where they're going?
- * What does success look like?
- * What are the key steps needed to achieve it?
- * Do I know how much the students understand now?
- * Is my knowledge of the students' current performance accurate and timely?
- * Does my feedback tell the students what they need to know?
- * What do students do with it?
- * How are the students helping one another?
- * Is collaboration helping them to learn more?
- * How are the students assessing themselves?
- * Is their assessment accurate?
- * What are they doing with this knowledge?

Effective formative assessment is one of the most useful tools teachers can employ and the one best supported by the evidence. Yet formative assessment frequently suffers from misunderstanding and misapplication due to the emphasis on Assessment for Learning activities rather than the underlying spirit of the techniques. This checklist is designed to help teachers focus on the key elements of formative assessment and whether or not these aims are being achieved in lessons. If not, then there is a range of techniques available to help you achieve your underlying purpose.

Pause point

Do/check – whenever you have time to review progress in the classroom or when you can invite a colleague in to offer their opinion.

Erroneous advice about Assessment for Learning techniques came early on in my career. 'If the lesson objectives aren't on the board during the lesson, Ofsted will fail you,' was one such piece of misinformation. It was some years later that I learned about the underlying principles – like sharing the direction of the learning – which had been buried by an obsession over individual techniques.

Example

This example covers the first point in the checklist only.

Do students know where they're going? What does success look like? What are the key steps needed to achieve it?

A colleague spoke with half a dozen students and looked at their books, and found some of them did not appear to be able to explain the qualities of a good essay. Considering the underlying purpose of sharing what students are aiming for, I could:

- Share model 'excellent' and 'quite good' essays and work with students to break down what makes them excellent or good.

- Share an essay planning, or paragraph writing, checklist (like Checklists 2 and 3).
- Briefly assess their work (either individually or as a class), picking out one or two key next steps which would help them to write better and then discuss them next lesson.

How else could this be used?

Students could be asked to complete the checklist for you.

20. That lesson was a disaster - now what?

- * At what point did the lesson begin to unravel?
- * What was happening beforehand?
- * What happened, or what was missing, when the lesson did unravel?
- * What was the underlying cause(s) of the problem?
- * What can I do to address the underlying cause(s)?
- * What one thing could I change next lesson?
- * How (if at all) should I discuss this with the students?
- * Wipe the slate clean and move on.

Our instinct after a dreadful lesson may not be to sit and evaluate exactly what made it so bad, but it is important that we make the time to do so. Identifying problems and their causes can help us to find ways to fix them before we encounter them again. From an emotional perspective, focusing on these solutions enables us to evaluate our qualities as professionals and to learn from the process; if we don't do so, we are likely to keep replaying the lesson in our minds for the foreseeable future. Being able to wipe the slate clean after a bad lesson or bad day is a key habit of successful teachers in challenging schools.

Pause point

Check/do – at the first available pause after a disastrous lesson.

I went home one day in my first year of teaching upset about a lesson with my Year 10 class. I worked that evening. I woke up in the morning, still angry, and reached my next lesson with the class still feeling resentful. The moral I took from this was not to work in the evenings: a good one. A more productive moral I failed to appreciate at the time was the importance of analysing the disaster constructively and making a plan to fix it.

Example

At what point did the lesson begin to unravel?

On moving from the hook, which had worked well, into the main task.

What was happening beforehand?

Students were discussing the hook and speculating on what it suggested about the lesson question.

What happened, or what was missing, when the lesson did unravel?

I asked the students to begin reading the text and writing their responses, but some students didn't do as I'd asked.

What was the underlying cause(s) of the problem?

Superficially it appeared to be the behaviour of some of the students. But, in fact, I think my instructions weren't very clear and the students didn't have sufficient knowledge to approach the text competently.

What can I do to address the underlying cause(s)?

I could focus on changing my seating plan but, more importantly, I need to ensure that the introduction to the lesson provides the prior knowledge the students need to approach the main part of the lesson.

What one thing could I change next lesson?

Include a quick review of the relevant points from the previous lesson before starting the main section of the lesson.

How (if at all) should I discuss this with the students?

I don't think this needs talking through as it's a simple change. As we begin, I'll flag up that we'll briefly review the relevant points that have already been covered as this should make the main task more approachable.

Wipe the slate clean and move on

I am still a competent teacher. I had one bad lesson with a few students. I have formulated a way to fix it and my other lessons went well. And, anyway, I'm seeing friends this evening.

How else could this be used?

This checklist could work equally well as a framework, either for a mentor to structure a conversation or for a teacher to talk through a disastrous lesson with a colleague to gain some useful advice.