STARTALK: From Paper to Practice

Research and Writing Team

Gregory Duncan, Myriam Met

Management and Quality Assurance Team

Scott Nichols, Kathleen Kilday, Matthew Jenkins

Why Is Lesson Planning Important?

Many educators believe that lesson planning is a critical element of effective instruction. As an old adage says, "Failing to plan is planning to fail."

Lesson planning helps ensure that classroom instruction aligns with curriculum goals and objectives and therefore enables students to demonstrate their successful learning on unit or curricular assessments. Lessons not only shape how and what students learn, they also impact student attitudes toward language learning. In the long run, it is the lesson—not the curriculum or the unit plan—that students actually experience. It is through the lessons they teach each day that teachers communicate what language learning is all about and what they believe matters in language learning. As they experience the lesson, students may decide whether they will or will not invest their time and energy to learn the material.

Classrooms are busy places with many things happening all at once. Teachers are challenged to monitor multiple classroom events simultaneously while at the same time collecting and analyzing data on student performance. In the course of teaching lessons, teachers must make important instructional decisions almost continually: What question should I ask next? Should I call on a particular student or not? What does this student's answer reveal about their understanding or skill? Are my students showing that they are ready to move on, or do I need to clarify information for them?

Clearly, just remembering how the lesson should unfold can be challenging when teachers are simultaneously trying to monitor student learning while also making significant instructional decisions. Lesson planning—well in advance of the actual class meeting—allows for the luxury of time. Teachers need time to think through their lesson goals and objectives. They need to consider the logical progression of the lesson as it unfolds to lead students to improved knowledge and performance.

The decision-making process of lesson planning requires teachers to pull together an array of knowledge and understanding: What do I know about learning in general? What do I know about language learning? What characteristics of my students will affect the choices I make about my lesson experiences? What are the many ways I know to help my students achieve the lesson goals, and, of all the ways I know, which ones should I choose and why?

Lesson planning is also an opportunity to think about the kinds of teaching that result in student learning. Foreign language educators are generally in agreement regarding a repertoire of teacher

behaviors that result in improved student learning. If these behaviors are key to successful language learning, then teachers must ensure that these behaviors are consciously planned for in each lesson.

This guide provides a framework for thinking about the elements essential to foreign language lesson plans and guidelines for developing plans that reflect theory and practice in language education today.

Before You Begin

Lessons are parts of a unit. Each unit lasts for a period of time, and each lesson contributes to bringing the learner to the end goal and objectives for the unit. Most units culminate with some form of assessment. In the course of the unit, individual lessons each have an objective that is a step toward the unit's larger goals. Often, teachers will assess student progress toward the unit's end goals as part of each lesson.

Units of instruction are packages of instructional material that are derived from a course syllabus or a curriculum guide. Depending on the length of the instructional period, a syllabus or curriculum may have many units. For example, in schools, the instructional period is a year, and a curriculum may have as few as four units, as many as eight, or even more. In contrast, a one-week summer program may have just one unit. A school curriculum may cover just one academic year or several years.

For the purposes of this guide, a lesson is defined as a single class session (learning episode) lasting no more than ninety minutes. Longer blocks of time will involve several learning episodes and lesson plans.

What Matters in Lesson Planning? Strategies Common to All Disciplines

Effective teachers in all disciplines plan lessons. Much of their planning requires attention to features of lessons that have been shown to make a difference in student learning, whether the subject is mathematics, art, or foreign language. Other aspects of lesson planning are discipline-specific.

In this guide, we look at a number of factors teachers consider as they develop lesson plans. First, we look at those that are common to all disciplines, and then we will look those that are specific to foreign language instruction. Some factors are organizing principles, some are critical features of effective lessons, some are teacher behaviors, and some are instructional decisions that reflect student characteristics. All are important for planning and implementing lessons that lead to student learning.

Generally Accepted Lesson Features and Instructional Strategies

The following are generally accepted lesson features and instructional strategies that should always be considered when designing lessons:

- Setting purpose and agenda
- Backward design
- Context of the lesson within the unit
- Research-based instructional strategies
- Assessment
- Feedback
- Student-centered instruction

- Brain-compatible instruction
- Differentiation
- Motivation
- Scaffolding
- Developing mentally appropriate practices
- Bloom's Taxonomy
- Closure

More information about these lesson features and instructional strategies as well as resources for further reading can be found in Appendix A.

Planning the Lesson

Lesson planning is a cognitively demanding task in which teachers bring to bear their expertise and experience to make good instructional decisions. When planning lessons teachers consider the following:

- Where are students now and where do they need to be? (What do my students need to know and be able to do that they do not know and are not able to do now?)
- What should I do and in what order should I do it? (What do I know about learning in general and second language learning in particular that will influence decisions I make as I plan my lesson? What options or choices do I have about learning experience and activities, and based on the factors above, which one is most likely to lead to the result I want?)
- What student characteristics (needs, abilities, and interests) should I keep in mind as I am planning? (What are the needs, abilities, and interests of my students?)

Because language learning takes such a long period of time and there is so little time available for school-based language learning, there is no time to waste. Teachers must make every minute and every activity count as they lay out their ideas for a lesson.

The concept of backward design is commonly accepted as an organizing principle in development of curriculum. It consists of three basic stages:

- Stage 1: What will learners be able to do with what they know by the end of this lesson?
- Stage 2: How will learners demonstrate what they can do with what they know by the end of the lesson?
- Stage 3: What will prepare learners to demonstrate what they can do with what they know?

Backward design planning is found in a growing numbers of curriculum documents and even textbook materials throughout the United States.

Recently, the idea has emerged that the backward design concept can also serve as an effective organizing tool for planning lessons, regardless of the subject matter. Backward design allows the teacher to think clearly about desired outcomes, what students need to know to get to those outcomes, what the outcomes will actually look like when demonstrated, and what instructional steps are needed to reach the outcomes. Following these steps of backward design, as outlined in the STARTALK Lesson Plan Template, allows teachers to think clearly about learning targets and what it will take to reach them.

Stage 1: **What will learners be able to do with what they know by the end of this lesson?**

Using the STARTALK Lesson Plan Template, the teacher must first think about two things: (1) what will students be able to do at the end of this lesson, and (2) what must they know in order to do that? Since lessons occur within a unit context, everything the teacher includes in the lesson plan is housed under the umbrella of the unit's theme, learning targets, and knowledge base. This means that the learning targets for a particular lesson can come directly from the unit plan or may need to be "unpacked" to include a number of subtargets that are in service to a bigger, more inclusive target. However the teacher arrives at the focus of the lesson, the target(s) should be attainable within the scope of the lesson's available time, and they should be stated in student-friendly language. Learning targets that speak to the needs and interests of students are more likely to capture their energy and commitment.

Here are some sample learning targets:

- You will be able to figure out and tell someone how to use the metro system in Beijing to get from place to place.
- You will be able to give an interviewer five reasons why your favorite Arabic-speaking country should be selected as the country of the year.
- You will be able to write a social network personal profile for yourself.

From these targets, the teacher then must determine what students need to know in order to achieve those outcomes. Generally, it is suggested that teachers think about the vocabulary, structures, and culture that students do not already know and that would be necessary to meet the objectives. It is totally possible that nothing new would emerge and that students need to spend the lesson internalizing language to be able to demonstrate the target. Or it is possible that some vocabulary is needed but no new structures. Or perhaps both vocabulary and structures are in place, but there is some important cultural information that is needed (e.g., making sure students know about the week pass available in the Beijing metro system as a more economical way of purchasing tickets).

Again, everything that is selected for students to know (and to learn in the lesson) must be achievable during that lesson within the time that is available.

National and state standards discuss what students will be able to do as a result of the language learning experience, and curriculum is usually written from that same point of view. Lesson planning should do no less. Many times, a teacher's lesson plan might look like a schedule. It might include the activities for the day as well as the amount of time the teacher thinks each activity will take. The plan serves more as a recipe for the teacher—do this first, then do that, and follow it with some of those. Deciding which activities to do is very important and is a critical part of planning a lesson (as we will see in Stage 3), but starting with activity selection before deciding what the lesson's focus is leaves the lesson's outcomes—or what student can actually do at the end of the lesson—more to chance than to forethought. If students are to end up being able to use the language they have been studying, it will require conscious thought, attention, and intentional planning.

Stage 2: **How will learners demonstrate what they can do with what they know by the end of the lesson?**

How will we know that students can do what we targeted as the lesson's objectives? How will they know that they can do what was targeted? The only way teachers will know if the learning targets have been hit is if students show what they have learned to do.

Lessons are parts of units. How we assess students at the end of a lesson may be different from how we assess students at the end of a unit. During the course of each lesson, the teacher's job is to determine if students have met the target of the lesson and also monitor progress toward the goals and objectives of the whole unit. Therefore, the teacher needs to know whether or not the students can do what was targeted. The concluding activity of the lesson may accomplish this task for the teacher. Alternatively, the teacher may ask students to prepare an "exit slip" that provides the necessary information. Simply put, Stage 2 of the lesson plan is that all-important opportunity for the teacher to see if the students were able to achieve the lesson's intent and if modifications are needed for the next day. Additionally, this part of the lesson is a chance for students to recognize what they can do now that they couldn't do at the start of the lesson as well as demonstrate to them that they are using language that has meaningful purpose in the real world. Checking for student learning does not need to take a long time, nor does it not to be a complicated process.

Here is an example of Stage 2 for a lesson plan:

Stage 1: What will learners be able to do with what they know by the end of this lesson?

You will be able to figure out and tell someone how to use the public transportation system in Beijing to get from one part of the city to another.

Stage 2: How will learners demonstrate what they can do with what they know by the end of the lesson?

As a closing activity, students will give the teacher directions* on how to get from Point A to Point B using the Beijing public transportation system.

*Students may text, e-mail, or handwrite this information to give it to the teacher.

Stage 3: **What will prepare learners to demonstrate what they can do with what they know?**

Deciding which activities will enable students to demonstrate the lesson's learning target and the order in which they will unfold is the heart and soul of Stage 3 in the backward design lesson planning process. Historically, this aspect of instructional design is what has constituted lesson planning for most teachers. In this process, however, its connection to carefully thought-out learning objectives better insures that everything the teacher and students do during the lesson is (1) connected, (2) has a clear purpose, and (3) advances the learning goals.

As teachers start to plan activities that will enable students to meet the learning targets identified in Stage 1, following the process below can go a long way towards ensuring that the lesson plan will lead to the desired results.

Step 1: Brainstorming

In considering the activities for Stage 3 of the lesson plan, ask yourself these questions:

- What are two or three ways that might work for achieving the learning target(s)?
- What do I like and not like about each of those possibilities?
- What do I know about learning in general and language learning in particular that leads me to believe that these activities will be effective?

Step 2: Asking Some Tough Questions

Once teachers have narrowed down their choices based on answers to the above questions, some additional questions must be considered. Do the activities you have selected do the following:

- give students a reason for needing to/wanting to pay attention and be on task?
- provide sufficient opportunities for understanding new words before expecting production?
- provide multiple, varied opportunities for students to hear new words/expressions used in highly visualized contexts that make meaning transparent?
- provide students with an authentic purpose for using words and phrases?
- engage all students (as opposed to just one or two students at a time)?
- vary in the level of intensity and the amount of physical movement required?
- make the learner, not the teacher, the active participant?
- build toward allowing students to demonstrate in meaningful and unrehearsed ways that they are able to use what they know?
- make the best use of instructional time to maximize student learning?
- take an appropriate amount of time considering the age of the learner?

Step 3: Putting It All Together Into a Teaching Plan

To help teachers navigate through the process of designing lessons that focus on achieving the learning targets set out in Stage 1, use of the Stage 3 Lesson Plan Organizer (Appendix B) might prove useful, at least in the initial stages of conceptualizing a backward design lesson plan process.

The organizer leads teachers through a process in which they determine

- which learning target or objective the activity addresses,
- a name or tag for the activity,
- if the activity involves presentation or practice of new material or previously introduced content,
- why the activity is being placed in a particular spot,
- who is doing the activity (teachers or students),
- how much time will be set aside for the activity,
- which mode the activity addresses (interpersonal, interpretive, or presentational),
- which of the four skills it practices (listening, speaking, reading, or writing), and
- the discourse level the activity requires (words, sentences, or paragraphs).

Clearly, no teacher would have the time to complete such an organizer for every lesson that they design. The purpose, therefore, of the organizer—and of all of the process steps laid out for Stage 3—is to initially lead teachers through a thought process that eventually becomes second nature as they think through determining the activities of the actual lesson plan.

Earlier in this document, a number of lesson features and instructional strategies that are generally accepted within the field of education were set forth that should always be considered in designing lessons. More information about these concepts can be found in Appendix A. These elements should always be envisioned as overarching the lesson design process.

Appendix A: Generally Accepted Lesson Features and Instructional Strategies

The following are generally accepted lesson features and instructional strategies that should always be considered when designing lessons.

Setting Purpose and Agenda

The lesson begins with an overview of the intended outcomes and the learning activities that will help students achieve those outcomes.

Further Reading

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Backward Design

Each unit and lesson is designed by (1) identifying the end goal—learning outcomes, (2) determining the evidence that will tell teachers and students whether the outcomes were attained, and (3) designing a pathway of learning activities that will eventually enable students to demonstrate evidence that they have attained those outcomes.

Further Reading

McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2005). *Understanding by design (2nd ed.).* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Context of the Lesson Within the Unit

A lesson is a part of a unit. While it is expected that units will demonstrate a range of content and instructional strategies, not every lesson will include every possible strategy.

STARTALK endorses six major principles considered to be highly effective practices within the foreign language field. Units of instruction (although not all lessons) should reflect these principles.

The six principles are

- Implementing a standards-based and thematically organized curriculum
- Facilitating a learner-centered classroom
- Using target language and providing comprehensible input for instruction
- Integrating culture, content, and language in a world language classroom
- Adapting and using age-appropriate authentic materials
- Conducting performance-based assessment

Further Reading

Georgia Department of Education. (2011). Modern Languages and Latin.

https://www.georgiastandards.org/Frameworks/Pages/BrowseFrameworks/modernlang latin.aspx

STARTALK-Endorsed Principles for Effective Teaching and Learning and Characteristics of Effective Language Lessons. College Park, MD: National Foreign Language Center at the University of Maryland.

http://startalk.umd.edu/principles

Research-Based Instructional Strategies

Research in a variety of grade levels and subject matters has shown that there are instructional strategies that make an impact on student learning. Some of these strategies are

- identifying similarities and differences,
- summarizing and note taking,
- reinforcing effort and providing recognition,
- homework and practice,
- nonlinguistic representations,
- cooperative learning,
- setting objectives and providing feedback,
- generating and testing hypotheses, and

- questions, cues, and advance organizers.

Further Reading

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works: Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Assessment

Teachers use diagnostic assessment to determine what students already know and can do prior to new instruction. They plan for and use formative assessment to monitor student progress toward learning objectives and goals during the course of instruction. They also plan for summative assessment as they write unit plans so that they are clear from the outset about what students are expected to know and be able to do at the end of the unit of instruction and what will demonstrate that students met the instructional goals of the unit or course.

Further Reading

Duncan, G. (2015, April) *Checking for Learning in STARTALK Student Classrooms.* Available at https://startalk.umd.edu/resources/checkingforlearning/

Fisher, D., & Frey, N. 2008. *Checking for understanding: Formative assessment techniques for your classroom.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Stiggins, R. (2005, September). Assessment for learning defined. Available at http://www.assessmentinst.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/afldefined.pdf

Feedback

Feedback helps students understand how well they are making progress toward learning goals. Descriptive feedback provides students with information on how they can improve and may come from the teacher, classmates, or the student's own assessment of their work.

There are various forms of feedback that affect learning in different ways. Some forms may lead to negative gains in achievement; therefore, teachers need to be aware of the various types of feedback and their potential to assist students in reaching learning targets.

Further Reading

Brookhart, S. M. (2008). *How to give effective feedback to your students*. Alexandria, VA:
    ASCD.

Council of Chief State School Officers. (2008). *Attributes of effective formative assessment*.
    Washington, DC: Council of Chief State School Officers. Available at
    http://www.nycomprehensivecenter.org/docs/form_assess/AttributesofEffectiveFormat
    iveAssessment.pdf

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works:
    Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement.* Alexandria, VA:
    ASCD.

Sadler, D. R. (1989). Formative assessment and the design of instructional systems.
    Instructional Science, 18, 119–140.

Learner-Centered Instruction

In student-centered classrooms, students frequently interact with peers in pairs or small groups. Curriculum themes or topics may be selected to align with student interests. Students may have choices about what they learn, the learning experiences that will lead to instructional goals, and how they will show what they have learned.

Further Reading

For a review of research on cooperative learning, see the following resource:

Marzano, R. J., Pickering, D. J., & Pollock, J. E. (2001). *Classroom instruction that works:
    Research-based strategies for increasing student achievement.* Alexandria, VA:
    ASCD.

To read about choice boards as a means of addressing student interests, see the following resource:

Smith, G., & Throne, S. (2009, December 4). Tic-tac-toeing with choice boards in any classroom. http://www.istecentral.com/2009/12/04/tic-tac-toeing-with-choice-boards-in-any-classroom

Brain-Compatible Instruction

Recent research into how the brain learns has highlighted the importance of planning "brain-based" lessons. Brain research suggests that it is helpful for students to learn in low-stress environments, that the brain responds to novelty and strong positive emotions, and that periodic movement of the body's limbs increases blood flow to the brain and therefore enhances brain function.

One finding of brain research, in particular, that has serious implications for lesson planning is the primacy-recency effect: Learners remember best the first part of a learning episode. The next best-remembered is the last part of a learning episode. Students remember least what comes in the middle. The primacy-recency effect has major implications for determining where to place the activities that make up the lesson plan.

Further Reading

For information on brain research and instruction, see the following sources:

Jensen, E. (2005). *Teaching with the brain in mind (2nd ed.).* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Sousa, D. A. (2006). *How the brain learns: A classroom teacher's guide.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

For further information on the primacy-recency effect, see the following source:

Cafarella, J. (n.d.). Primacy-recency effect. Available at
http://sciencegnus.com/Primacy%20Recency%20Effect.pdf

Differentiation

Teachers address the needs, abilities, and interests of students by using a variety of strategies that make content accessible to learners. They provide choices that allow students to determine their own learning pathways or different options to demonstrate their learning.

Further Reading

Bosch, N. (2008). A different place. http://www.adifferentplace.org/classroom.htm

Tomlinson, C. A. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Tomlinson, C. A., & Imbeau, M. B. (2010). *Leading and managing a differentiated classroom*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD. Available at
http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/108011.aspx

Motivation

Motivation is an inner drive that pushes students to work toward their goals. Motivation is believed to be responsible for paying attention, investing effort in learning, and persistence when tasks are challenging.

Further Reading

Borich, G. D., & Tombari, M. (2006). Motivation and classroom learning. In *Educational psychology: A contemporary approach.* Available at
http://www.edb.utexas.edu/borich/pdfdocs/chapter7.pdf

Dörnyei, N. (1998). Motivation in second and foreign language learning. *Language Teaching*, 31(3), 117–135.

Gardner, R. C., & Lambert, W. E. (1959). Motivational variables in second-language acquisition. *Canadian Journal of Psychology, 13,* 266–272.

Gardner, R. C., & Tremblay, P. F. (1994). Motivation, research agendas, and theoretical frameworks. *Modern Language Journal*, *78*(3), 359–368.

Scaffolding

Instructional scaffolds are a technique in which teachers enable students to successfully acquire new concepts or to accomplish challenging tasks by providing students with supports such as guidance, modeling, and resources. Teachers frequently model for students, carry out the task along with students, and gradually have students carry out the task on their own. (This technique is also called *I do/we do/you do*.)

Further Reading

For original discussion, see the following resources:

Lipscomb, L., Swanson, J., & West, A. (2008, February 5). Characteristics and critical features of scaffolded instruction. In *Scaffolding*. Available at http://projects.coe.uga.edu/epltt/index.php?title=Scaffolding#Characteristics_and_Critical_Features_of_Scaffolded_Instruction

Wood, D. J., Bruner, J. S., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem solving. *Journal of Child Psychiatry and Psychology, 17*(2), 89–100.

For information about scaffolding with graphic organizers, see the following resource:

Cammarata, L. (2005, February). Instructional scaffolding with graphic organizers. *The
     Bridge*. Available at
     http://www.carla.umn.edu/immersion/acie/vol8/2005BRIDGE8.2.pdf

Developing Mentally Appropriate Practices
As children grow from the early grades through high school, their social, psychological, and
cognitive abilities mature. Teachers take into account these maturational characteristics as they
plan and implement instruction.

Further Reading
Education.com. (n.d.). Developmentally appropriate practice.
     http://www.education.com/definition/developmentally-appropriate-practice

NAEYC. (n.d.). Developmentally appropriate practice (DAP). http://www.naeyc.org/DAP

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. (n.d.). Developmentally appropriate practices.
     http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/methods/instrctn/in5lk5.htm

Bloom's Taxonomy
First described by Benjamin Bloom, the taxonomy has evolved from a description of learning
objectives to a means of classifying the level of thinking that certain types of questions or
tasks demand of students. *Higher order* thinking or tasks are those that require students to
analyze, evaluate, or create; *lower order* tasks involve knowing (remembering), understanding,
and applying.

Further Reading

Anderson, L. W., Krathwohl, D. R., Airasian, P. W., Cruikshank, K. A., Mayer, R. E., Pintrich, P. R., Raths, J., & Wittrock, M. C. (Eds.). (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching, and assessing—A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives.* Boston, MA: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

Bloom, B. S. (1956). *Taxonomy of educational objectives*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, Pearson Education.

Closure

Lessons end with an overview or summary of the objectives of the lesson and what students learned during the lesson. Frequently, students provide this information by responding to teacher questions, summarizing with peers in pairs or small groups, or indicating verbally or nonverbally whether they feel they have met the lesson's objectives.

Further Reading

DeBacker, T. K., & Crowson, H. M. (2009). The influence of need for closure on learning and teaching. *Educational Psychology Review,* 21(4), 303–323. Available at http://www.springerlink.com/content/57431024120v5539/fulltext.pdf

Hunter, M. (1982). *Mastery teaching.* El Segundo, CA: TIP Publications.

Wolf, P., & Supon, V. (1994, February 22). *Winning through student participation in lesson closure*. Available at http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED368694.pdf

Appendix B: Stage 3 Lesson Plan Organizer

Stage 1 Learning Targets (as many or as few as needed)

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Stage 2 (activity that students will do to provide evidence that they have accomplished the Stage 1 learning targets)

_____

Stage 3 (learning experiences)

Addresses Which Objective?	Activity Name	Presentation or Practice of New Material or Previously Introduced Material	Why placed here?	Teacher-Centered or Student-Centered?	How Many Minutes?	Mode (Interpretive, Interpersonal, or Presentational)	Skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, or Writing)	Level of Discourse Required (Words, Phrases, Sentences, or Paragraphs)