

Do you create weekly or monthly plans for your classes? This lesson looks at some of the reasons why this can be useful for you and your students and gives you an idea of what to look for when you plan over longer stretches of time.

Task 1 – A questionnaire



Look at the different ways of planning on a day-to-day basis and decide which approach is closest to your own.

1. I arrive at school and spend a long time working out what I'm going to teach each day – nothing seems quite right.
2. I just do whatever is next in the course book.
3. I don't really bother planning at all – I just go into the classroom and see what happens.
4. I use the same lessons from the last time I taught the level I am teaching now.
5. I grab an authentic text - usually something in the newspaper - and use that.
6. Nothing here reflects the way I plan.

Then check the answer key below. 



Task 1 Feedback

1. If you chose this approach, you could save yourself a lot of time and trouble on a day-to-day basis by working out an overview for each class and decide, in a general sense, what you plan to cover each day.
2. This can get a bit boring and predictable. It also raises the question of whether everything in the course book is suitable for your students.
3. While you could argue that you are very responsive to your students, are you sure that you are providing them with balance and variety?

Task 1 Feedback (cont'd)

4. This makes your planning easier to manage on a daily basis, but is every group of students the same? Don't some things need to change with a new group?
5. This probably means that your teaching programme contains a lot of topical material, but you perhaps run the risk of overemphasising reading skills.
6. Perhaps you have a more varied approach to planning, which is a good thing. However, do you plan on a day-to-day basis? Could you benefit from creating an overview of what you want to cover over a longer stretch of time.

Key Skill

The skill of planning an overview of lessons (sometimes known as “a scheme of work”) that you will teach over a longer stretch of time (e.g. a week on an intensive course, or a month on a part-time course) is often known as timetabling. If you can train yourself to timetable, your day to day planning is very likely to become easier.

Task 2 – Why should I bother timetabling?



Numbers 1 to 8 are a series of verbs associated with timetabling. Letters a to h are ideas. Match the ideas to the verbs to create a list of reasons that outline the value of timetabling.

Verbs	Ideas
1. motivates ...	
2. allows you to achieve a ...	
3. makes you think about ...	
4. encourages ...	
5. provides ...	
6. looks ...	
7. ensures ...	
8. saves ...	

Ideas

- a. ... continuity for students if you are away for a day or two
- b. ... a sense of direction for students
- c. ... professional to students and colleagues
- d. ... students if they know where they're going on a weekly or monthly basis
- e. ... a critical evaluation of the course book as you use it
- f. ... lesson planning time on a day-to-day basis
- g. ... having a variety of materials and topics
- h. ... balance of language input in relation to language skills practice

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

While there are many administrative reasons for timetabling which benefit teachers and their colleagues, the main benefactors are the students. Giving more thought to the overall shape of their programme is likely to result in better learning opportunities and, as a result, increased student motivation.

Task 3 – What you should keep in mind?



Numbers 1 to 8 are points you should keep in mind when you are creating a timetable. Letters a to h are questions that go together with these points. Match the questions to the points.

Points to keep in mind	Questions
1. students' learning pace	
2. the length of the lesson	
3. the time of day of your lessons	
4. the course book	
5. materials that can supplement the course book	
6. sequencing of activities	
7. balance of materials	
8. topics	

Questions

- a. What kinds of activities should you do first in the lesson if students are likely to be tired?
- b. Do the lessons have the same theme running through them?
- c. Is there a logical progression from one activity to the next?
- d. How much material can your students cope with?
- e. Have you got enough or too much language input in relation to skills work?
- f. What are achievable aims in the allocated time?
- g. Is there something you can substitute or add to increase student motivation?
- h. If students have paid for it (or it is included in the fees), can you reject it out of hand?

Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Key Skill

Task 3 could be summarised in one phrase: as you timetable, keep the students in mind. You need to think about them in their learning context and think about how you can exploit the teaching materials you have available to you so that you motivate your students to learn as much as possible.


ESOL Teaching Skills TaskBook

Timetabling a sequence of lessons: Unit 5 b)

Task 4 – Evaluating a timetable



Below is an example three-day timetable for a pre intermediate level class. They are studying on an intensive part-time course in the evening from 6.00pm until 8.00pm on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. The page numbers refer to the course book students are using. There are some problems with this timetable.

Look at it carefully and write your evaluation on a note pad. Say what the problems are and what changes you might make. Check your ideas in the answer key. 

Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Reading MP3 Revolution p. 61	Grammar 'will' for spontaneous decisions (deciding about food) p. 64	Vocabulary / Speaking Talking about your favourite food p. 65
Speaking Restaurant role play p. 63	Functional Language / Pronunciation Requests: e.g. 'Could / Can I have ...?' p.63	Listening People describe different food p. 65

Thinking about your teaching ...

You can sometimes timetable together with one or two other colleagues. Your students are likely to be different, but often they are similar enough to make this feasible. It is a good way of brainstorming and sharing ideas. Try setting this up and see what benefits and insights you gain from working collaboratively.

Note your conclusions in your *Teaching Log*.

Taking it to the classroom ...

Not all teachers give their students a copy of their weekly or monthly timetables. However, students usually appreciate it if you do. At the end of each week or month, you can ask them to evaluate the timetable. You can talk about what you have and haven't done (it's not always possible to do everything!) and ask them for feedback on what they would like more or less of the following week or month.

Want to find out more ... ?

On pages 109 - 145 of *Learning Teaching* (2nd edition) by Jim Scrivener (Macmillan 2005), there is further reading on planning lessons and courses.

Pages 375 to 378 of *The Practice of English Language Teaching* (4th edition) by Jeremy Harmer (Pearson 2007) contains extra reading on timetabling (here referred to as "planning a sequence of lessons").

Answer Key



Task 2 – Feedback

- 1) d
- 2) h
- 3) g
- 4) e
- 5) b
- 6) c
- 7) a
- 8) f

Task 3 – Feedback

- 1) d
- 2) f
- 3) a
- 4) h
- 5) g
- 6) c
- 7) e
- 8) b

Task 4 – Feedback

Across the 3 days, there is a good range of language input and skills practice. At first glance, the timetable seems quite varied. However, closer inspection reveals the following issues:

- The teacher seems very stuck in the course book, and, with one exception (Wednesday) seems to follow the page order of the book.
- On Monday, the reading and the speaking seem to have no thematic connection with each other. Perhaps the reading comes from one unit and the speaking from the next unit. It would be a good idea to think of a speaking activity that relates to the reading; for example, students could create and conduct a questionnaire on MP3 use.
- On Wednesday, there is a lot of language input: grammar, functional language, pronunciation. Most of this language seems to be related to Mondays' speaking activity. One approach would be to do the speaking activity on Wednesday and in the second hour, the teacher could focus on either 'will' or the functional language, depending on what students found most difficult when doing the role play.
- If, for example, the teacher does the restaurant speaking and the 'will' grammar input on Wednesday, they could then focus on the functional language on Friday and find another speaking activity that gave practice of this language in another context.
- If the teacher decides to keep Friday as a speaking and listening lesson, it might be a good idea to think about doing the listening in the first hour. Students will be quite tired by 7.00pm on Friday evening and listening requires a lot of concentration and effort.