

Lesson Planning for Small Groups*

General Planning Tips

- Aim to maximize interaction and your learner's use of English.
- Provide opportunities to practise and use material in more than one way.
- Build a repertoire of teaching methods and incorporate them into lessons.
- Plan for a mix of activities that give learners a chance to improve both fluency and correctness.

Goal Setting

Set specific, measurable goals for the lesson. For ideas, look in a Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) manual and check the skills listed under each benchmark's Profile of Ability column.

Make goals specific and measurable

Break vague goals like "I want to learn grammar" into smaller and smaller sub steps. "I want to use the past tense correctly" is easier to achieve, and "I want to use 20 new irregular verbs correctly" is even better. Then ask yourself how learners will demonstrate that skill. Will they **recall** 20 irregular verbs? Will they **categorize** the verbs by grouping them into similar patterns? Do you want to hear them **used correctly** in spontaneous chat?

Once you have two or three goals for the lesson, it's easier to plan activities and give feedback. Having a copy of Bloom's Taxonomy with its list of sample verbs and assessment ideas is helpful.

A Typical Lesson Sequence with Activity Suggestions

1. Present your goals.

At the start of class, let everyone know what the goals are for that lesson. Explain which skills you plan to work on. As you go through the lesson, connect the strategies you teach directly to the goals.

2. Do a quick warmup.

Before you begin a topic, refresh the learners' memory about the topic and provide any background information needed to fill gaps in their knowledge or experience.

- Brainstorm with the class. What do they already know about the topic?
- Do they have questions about the topic? What do they still want to know about it?
- Read a chapter or story title and ask your learners to predict what it will include.
- Begin with a low stakes mini quiz or fun trivia quiz based on the previous lesson.
- Watch a video clip on the lesson's theme.
- Pre-teach vocabulary.

3. Give instructions and demonstrate.

Explain what learners need to do in a few short, specific steps. You could write them on the board as you repeat them. Ask a confident learner to help you demonstrate if needed. Suggest a time limit and check for problems or questions. Be sure to give instructions for group activities before learners divide up into groups.

4. Do activities and practise.

Options for Mixed Ability Groups

These sample activities maximize learners' English use while keeping your preparation time to a manageable level. By tweaking the language, difficulty, length, and type of activities learners do, you can use one reading or listening passage for a whole class.

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Many of the activities below give extra support to beginners that the more advanced learners can use to supplement or correct their work. Groups or pairs can meet, discuss answers and correct their work before you go over it all together to check understanding.

Here is a selection of ideas presented by Rossiter & Abbott (2008) for planning multilevel activities. They also offer a sample lesson for a class with learners at CLB 1, 3, and 5.

- Adjust language complexity.
- Form-filling practice: Group A (lower level) completes a medical form with basic biographical information; Group B (higher level) fills in the same information plus a brief medical history.
- Adjust the mental challenge.
- Picture stories: Group A tells a story with a set of picture cards given to them in the correct order; Group B sequences scrambled cards first, tells the story, and adds an ending to the story.
- Information text: Both groups read cold and flu information. Group A underlines flu symptoms; Group B reads an extra list of patient symptoms and decides whether the patient has a cold or the flu.
- Adjust the communicative challenge.
- Reading and writing: Group A matches foods to correct categories; Group B brainstorms the list of food for each category.
- Vary the difficulty of the response required.
- Give both groups the same reading, but have Group A answer matching questions, have Group B do multiple choice, and have the most advanced learners in Group C fill in short-answer blanks. Then they can get together to share answers and correct their work.

You can find great examples of how an instructor can use the CBC EAL website materials to create multilevel materials at <https://www.atesl.ca/resources/resource-library/a-teachers-guide-to-learning-english-with-cbc-radio/>

Several Activities in Same-Level Groups

You could also plan by theme and divide into same-level groups at different tables.

Theme: Job safety	Theme: Field Trip
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group A: Match letters or first sounds to pictures. • Group B: Match or write words under pictures. • Group C: Match an instruction to a picture. • Group D: Sequence pictures and write or present a set of instructions. 	<p>After a group trip, learners can create different level-appropriate books using pictures taken on the trip.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group A: Label pictures. • Group B: Write simple sentences under the pictures. • Group C: Use one picture to illustrate a story about the trip.

Solo Activities

Don't forget solo activities. Learners need time to read, write, listen, and do practice drills when they can quietly concentrate.

5. Give feedback/make corrections.

Ask learners to share or report back on their activity. Get them to explain or show how they found an answer. If the group is supportive, use writing samples for the class to analyze and correct. Post a pre-made answer key, and more capable learners can self-correct while you help the beginners learn to compare their answers to the correct ones while you correct their work.

6. Review and close.

Before everyone scatters, touch base with the class about the lesson.

- Connect your activities to the day's goals.
- Point out specific improvements or learning that you noticed.
- Ask your learner to tell you three things he or she remembers best, or ask your learner to write down three questions he or she has about the lesson.
- Suggest related practice to do before your next meeting.

References

Rossiter, M. & Abbott, M. (2008). Planning for and instructing multi-level classes using the CLBs [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <https://www.atesl.ca/resources/resource-library/planning-for-and-instructing-multi-level-classes-using-the-clbs/>