

Unit Planning

(Elementary Focus)

L.Ito 4/23



English Study in Fujieda

Every grade, from third to sixth has a set number of topics they are expected to cover during their year of English study. These topics will have established vocabulary and sentence structures for students to master. They follow the students' textbooks. All students in Fujieda use the same textbook and follow the same general curriculum. This system ensures that all students across Fujieda are generally on the same level and have met the same goals. The way in which students meet these goals can differ, but the results should be the same. All students will study the same topic but they may approach it in different ways, depending on their teacher's or ALT's plans.

Lesson Plans & Unit Plans

Lesson Plan

The lesson plan is the full, detailed description of a lesson. It covers all stages of a class from the greeting, the review/new English, the games/activities and the final comment. It's a full plan for the lesson, telling the teacher what they need to do and how they're going to do it.

Unit Plan

A unit plan is a concise and complete written document that covers a unit of study: multiple lessons taught over multiple weeks. It focuses on the final goal of the unit (topic to be studied) and from that you can plan what steps need to be taken to reach that goal and how you'll help students to take those steps.



Unit plans always come before the lesson plans!

The theory of backward planning (Wiggins & McTighe, 2008) establishes that the most effective way to plan a lesson is from the end. Instinctively (or not, depending on how long you've been doing this!) we want to start to plan from the first class onwards. In reality, we need to plan from the last class backwards.

We need to consider the final goal regarding language production. *What* are the students expected to produce and *how* will they produce it?

If they expected to talk about their summer vacation using the past tense (I went to~, I saw~, I ate~) how will they produce that? In a speech or an interview activity?

When you establish what the final goal is regarding the English language production and how it's going to be produced (via a game or activity, a speech etc.) you can easily plan backwards from it.

Unit planning as well as backwards planning allows us to make clear and informed decisions when it comes to the structure of our lessons.

Sharing!

We should share lesson and unit plans for a variety of reasons!

Firstly, being able to look at the work of our peers allows us to reflect and build upon our own work. We're constantly learning and changing the way we do things and many of us have different skill sets and interests. If we collaborate, we can expose ourselves to interesting ideas and concepts as well as new materials and games. We do not all always think alike and we can learn a lot from looking at what other people do!

Secondly, when it comes to planning the English events it's helpful to have access to lesson plans so we can see exactly what the participants have studied. While we follow the same curriculum, we have different ways of studying and sometimes we teach a unit in different orders. Having access to unit plans allows us to plan the events smoothly without having to chase people up for information on their students.





Let's Talk About Making a Unit Plan!

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(it's easier to demonstrate but let's try a written guide!)

Grade: 5th.

Final goal: students can talk about what they want to study using the question and answer form.

If we are given the above information and asked to make a plan, we should use backwards planning to make a unit plan.

To do this, we should consider the final goal expectations regarding the language. We can see that students are expected to produce both a question and an answer. So, they need to study the question, the answer and the vocabulary which is, in this case, subjects. Generally speaking the vocabulary they're asked to know covers: English, Japanese, math, science, social studies, IT, PE, home economics, music and arts and crafts. That's ten vocabulary items.

From the offset we can see that we need to teach the question, answer and ten vocabulary items.

So, we need to start thinking and how we're going to do it.

Firstly, the question and answer structure. Are students expected to ask:

"What do you want to study?" or "what subject do you want to study?"

And how should they answer?

"I want to study English" or answer with just the subject as a standalone answer, "English"?

A valid thought is that asking the students to specify "subject" in the question is unnecessary and adds to their mental load. Further, students study the same sentence structure in a later unit, "what do you want to be?". In choosing the shorter question form, "what do you want to study?" we know it's both easier to produce and that students will re-use this English in later classes.

The same situation comes up for the answer. Simply saying the subject as a standalone answer is perfectly fine but students will benefit from using the full sentence as it's going to come up in future classes and even in later grades, (for example in Grade 6, they'll produce the language, "*I want to go to~*").

Let's say we'll ask students to produce: Q: "what do you want to study?" and A: "I want to study~"

How many classes would you expect to need to teach these? Two? One class for the question and one for the answer?

OK. Let's say we will use two classes to teach both the question and answer.

Now we can think about the vocabulary. We have ten items. If we think about Miller's Magic Number, the most effective way to teach vocabulary is by introducing between five and nine items at a time. We have ten and some of the vocabulary is long and complex. Social studies, home economics and arts and crafts can be a challenge for the students to master. Even if you change it to just art, it's still a lot. Therefore we should use two classes to teach the vocabulary.

So far we need four class periods to cover the vocabulary, question and answer.

We know what we want the students to produce and we know how many classes we're going to give them. But what about that final goal activity? Will we ask the students to produce the English via a survey? An interview game? A game? They need to use a Q&A structure as the final goal is for production of both.

Let's say the final goal is a survey. Students can select one subject they want to study and interview their peers. They interview each other, make a memo of their fellow students' answers and tally the results at the end. Realistically, this requires little preparation for the students. Therefore, the final goal activity will take one class period.

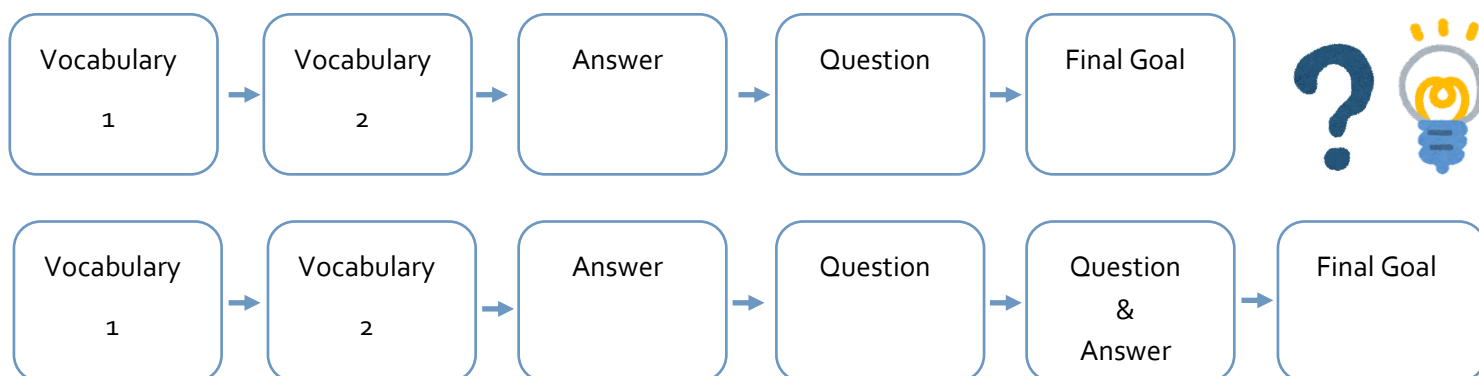
In total, to achieve the goal for this unit we will use five class periods. We know what language we need to teach and we know what the final goal activity will be. We can now prepare five blank lesson plans and on the last page, we can fill in the final goal activity and work our way backwards from that.

Things to Consider

There is rarely a perfect, one size fits all unit plan. What works for one HRT/ALT might not work for another. They're personalized for certain homerooms, taking a specific school's academic calendar into account. We should always consider our students and their unique situations when we make our plans.

1 On the previous page we looked at how backwards planning works in regards to the unit plan. We chose to use five class periods in total, four of which were studying the language and final, fifth class was for the final goal and final goal activity.

We decided on two class periods for the vocabulary, one for the answer and one for the question...do you think this is enough? Will the students be able to freely produce the English during the final goal activity or do you think they would benefit from another class between the question class and the final goal class? What would you choose and why?



2 Sometimes units can be combined or split up. For example, "I want to study" and "I want to be" are considered to be part of the same unit. However, due to the risk of overloading the students they are usually split up. Some teachers consider them separate units and therefore make two unit plans, some keep them as part of the same unit but lower the expectations regarding the final goal language production.

What would you do? Why would you do it?

It's not as simple as deciding to combine units or separate them. There are lots of things to consider!

For example, more often than not, a student liking a subject doesn't have much bearing on their future dreams.

Someone can like math but want to be a soccer player—where's the connection? Do we want students to combine the subject they want to study and what they want to be as the final goal? Or just what they want to be?

If you were to combine the two units, what language would you expect the student to study out of the two topics? What questions would you want them to produce?

There are lots of things to think about!

3 Part of unit planning is looking at what language the students are expected to master and produce.

Sometimes the textbook or existing plans add English that doesn't feature in the final goal. Students might study something they're not expected to produce. Sometimes this can come close to overloading students, other times it's a fun, added bonus. We should think about what's necessary to study. We want to keep our students motivated!

We should look, think and plan with a critical eye, always considering the final goal.



Sometimes it's easy to mix up thinking about the final goal activity and the final goal in terms of language production. We should establish what the final goal is regarding language production first and foremost.

References:

Wiggins, G. P., & McTighe, J. (2008). *Understanding by design*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Bowen, R. S. (2017). Understanding by Design. Vanderbilt University Center for Teaching. Retrieved [04/12/2023] from <https://cft.vanderbilt.edu/understanding-by-design/>.

Final note...

Unit planning and lesson planning can seem intimidating at the start. We talk about not overloading our students but sometimes we overload ourselves! If you're just starting out, take your time and practice making some unit plans. Reach out for support, check out fujieigo.com for examples as well as our storage drives. Nobody makes a perfect plan on their first, second or even third try. It's all about trial and error but everything we do to try helps us develop as teachers!