

## Lesson Planning

*Many clinical tutors run teaching sessions without writing a formal lesson plan. This short learning resource makes the case for more formal lesson planning and offers some advice and tips on best practice in writing lesson plans.*

Lesson planning gives you an opportunity as a teacher to think through in detail how you will approach your teaching and what is the most effective way you can help your students to learn. For busy clinicians, the amount of time you have to spend on writing a lesson plan will inevitably be related to how useful you find them in practice.

I would argue that it is always worth devoting some time to thinking through the structure of a session, the timings, and your teaching methods. Writing this down more formally will be particularly helpful for sessions that you will run again in future. Written lesson plans can also be shared with colleagues, or used for other purposes such as in professional portfolios. The following tips and advice are based on my experience gathered over 14 years as a university lecturer of what I personally have found and find useful. Remember though that unlike PowerPoint presentation handouts or other materials you might prepare for students, a lesson plan is usually not shared with the students – lesson plans are for you, so what is helpful or useful is largely a matter of personal preference.

### What type of information might be useful to have in a lesson plan?

**The context** – The name of the session, what module it sits in, what you expect they will have studied or been taught or know already. How this material relates to what comes before and after it. What room are you in, (will the students be able to move around and form new sub-groups for example?) What equipment will be available there (will there be a laptop and data projector, access to the internet, flip charts and paper etc)?

**The timing** – How long have you got? It is often difficult to finish on time if you haven't planned the session in advance. If you don't feel what you are being asked to cover is realistic in the time available, don't try to rush through all the material. Focus on the most important parts, and explain to the students they will need to do further independent study to fill in the gaps (you could provide them with reading or a handout).

**The participants** – How many of them are you expecting (this will affect your timings – more students usually means having to allow more time to feedback). What level are they at and what can you expect them to know or have experience of already?

**The equipment** you need – It helps to write down everything you might need on the lesson plan, even marker pens. If you are teaching in a different room to your usual teaching venue you might need to remember to take things with you.

**The aims and learning outcomes** – often these are given to you as part of the course you are being asked to teach on, but if you are writing your own, there is another learning resource on this website [Making sense of aims and learning outcomes] to help you.

### Choosing your teaching methods

The possibilities and range of teaching methods you might use in a small group setting are only limited by your imagination (and the equipment and time available to you). The verbs used in your learning outcomes will often point you to the teaching methods you could use. For example, are you expecting the students to be able to list, to

recognise, to employ, to judge, to create, to assess? These verbs indicate an increasing level of complexity, and should suggest to you different ways you might teach to achieve them.

For example, you can:

- Give them something to read – a journal paper, news item, a clinical case, critical incident) and then organise a seminar type discussion about it
- Show them a video --- <http://www.healthtalkonline.org/> is full of useful resources, and even [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) has plenty of useful short clips, depending on your subject – or with permission you can make your own videos / audio clips ([see some of mine here](#))
- Get them singly or in pairs to prepare in advance a presentation about their own piece of work, such as a forthcoming essay or project
- Devise a quiz to start the sessions and then plan the rest of the session around the right answers – ‘How many people thought (b) was the right answer?’ ‘Why did you think so?’
- Organise a debate – make it more interesting by getting people in favour of something to be the ones arguing against it
- Give post it notes for people to write their thoughts on, then stick them on a wall. (This helps when you want people to anonymously air their thoughts )
- Set up role plays (best to call them ‘putting it into practice’ though!)
- Form smaller sub-groups to each work on a flip-chart poster to present to the wider group
- Do ‘fishbowl’ exercises, where a sub-group or pair are observed debating or role playing by the rest of the group
- Start ‘snowballing’ – Pose a question and ask participants to first discuss in pairs. Then one pair joins another and compares their thoughts with their neighbour. Then one group of four joins another, and so on. This is one way to identify any group consensus
- Do skills-based exercises, either using models and equipment or examining each other
- Teach at the bedside / chair side using real patients

### **Dividing up your time**

How keen one is about punctuality is quite a personal thing. Personally, I start no more than 5 minutes after the time the session is supposed to start, and I won’t repeat myself for latecomers, although I do make latecomers feel welcome and accept any apologies they offer.

If the participants / students don’t already know each other or you then it is worth devoting a few minutes to doing a round of introductions.

It is always a good idea to start with some sort of audit of what the students know already, or what experiences they have had around the subject. Even brand new students will bring experiences of conditions and circumstances from their personal lives. This also helps you avoid pitching the material at the wrong level – either covering material they already know, or conversely assuming they know more than they do.

Most people have, at the very longest, a 20 minute attention span, so think about diving up your time into shorter chunks. Change the pace, alter the activity, get them moving around, standing up, talking to each other, reading etc. Choose from the range of options above, or innovate – do anything you can think of that will come at the material from a range of different directions – anything, that is, *except* deliver a long mini-lecture with no participation.

If your timings are written in terms of 'discussion (10 minutes)' then it can be difficult when you are running the session to see if you are running to time. Timings written in the form '2.30-2.40 – discussion' are easier to glance at while the classroom activities are going on – see example in lesson plan below.

As a rough rule of thumb, for every student activity, you should allow twice as much time to feedback as the activity itself took. So if you show them a five minute video, give them 10 minutes afterwards to feedback their thoughts.

Make sure the students get a reasonable and agreed break, depending on how long the session is.

Leave time at the end for final thoughts, conclusions, questions and feedback. One useful way to focus participants on what they have learned is to ask them 'Before we finish, can I ask you to share one thing that you are going to take away from this session, and how that will influence your practice in future'.

Finish on time. They won't be listening to what you have to say anyway five minutes (or even five seconds) after the session is supposed to have ended.

### **Conclusion**

If students recognise that you are an enthusiastic teacher, who has really given some thought to making their teaching interesting and engaging, then they will respond to that positively. If you are not getting the responses you expect, or if you are getting 'bad vibes' despite your best efforts, then you might need to think about the group dynamics – I've written another learning resource to provide you with tips and advice on managing difficulties in teaching groups.

I've argued here that writing a lesson plan down is a good investment of your time. The other advantage of having something more formal written down is that after the session you can write your reflections on how the session went on your plan (and attach any feedback). Then you can file it away, so that the next time you deliver the same session you can reflectively revisit your lesson plan and thus enhance your teaching.

I've included an example of one of my own lesson plans below – I'm not claiming this to be the best lesson plan ever, but that's the point – it's useful for me.

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## Lesson Plan for “Teaching with small groups”

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180 minute session as part of Module 2 of CILT

Training Room FB 3.11, Francis Bancroft Building, Mile End

Participants: Clinicians and others involved in supporting student learning (? How many booked)

Equipment required: Computer and data projector, presentation on USB key, flip chart paper and flip chart, blu-tack, marker pens. Handouts x1 each: PowerPoint + extra slide of Blooms Taxonomy + this lesson plan

### Intended Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this session participants should be able to:

- List the potential benefits and pitfalls of teaching in small group settings
- Describe the role of the tutor in facilitating a group
- Choose appropriately from a range of teaching methods in order to meet the intended learning outcomes
- Plan a small group teaching session

10	-10.10	Introductions, Audit of past experience of small group teaching Aims and objectives of the session
10.10	-10.20	Brainstorming – Flipchart responses What are your worries about being a tutor for a small group? What are the common difficulties in small group work?
10.20	---10.40	Lecture discussion using PowerPoint Definition of terms: What do we mean by small group teaching? What are the benefits of small group work in comparison to other forms of teaching such as lectures?
10.40	---11.05	Snowballing Activity Setting Ground Rules --- Participants to spend a few minutes individually writing how they would set up a group, then discuss with a partner, then with all the group
11.05	---11.15	Lecture discussion Planning and delivering your teaching In pairs, participants to make a bullet list of different teaching methods they could use with a small group, then feed back to main group. Flipchart responses.
11.15	---12	Activity (including coffee break) Distribute this lesson plan for this session to participants as a guide. Participants individually or in pairs or small groups are to write a lesson plan on some flip chart paper based on what some small group teaching they do, or are likely to do, using some of the different methods we have discussed (up to 4 lesson plans from the whole group)
12	---12.40	Presentations x 4 (4 x 10 mins + 5 mins feedback from tutor and group) Participants to have about 10 minutes to present their lesson plan
12.40	---1	Go back to initial flip chart of initial concerns Questions, evaluations and close