

The Eight Step Lesson Plan

Rod Quin

Many of the lesson plans available from www.englishcurriculum.com.au follow an eight step lesson plan. The eight steps are:

1. Teaching focus
2. Engagement
3. Scaffolding
4. Reading
5. Explicit teaching
6. Exploration
7. Application
8. Review

The eight step lesson plan is especially useful in English when lessons are text-focussed; it can be used for lessons about poems, short stories, drama scripts and a range of other text types. The eight steps are explained in more detail below.

Step 1: Teaching focus

The first step in lesson planning is to decide on a teaching focus. What is it you want students to learn from this lesson?

Certainly, you will want students to understand and possibly appreciate the text you are presenting, but a worthwhile lesson will also focus on a concept or skill which students can apply to texts they encounter in future.

Your teaching focus might be a concept such as narrative point of view or a skill such as inferential reading. Your teaching focus is your lesson objective, but it need not be a behavioural objective. Your aim might simply be to extend students' understanding of a concept or to reinforce a skill.

There are a number of ways to arrive at your teaching focus. The concept or skill might be one required by a syllabus or English department program. Or it might be a concept or skill you have noticed that students are lacking or require additional work on. In these situations, your next step will be to find a text which you can use as a springboard for teaching the skill or concept.

An alternative, and easier, starting point, a common one with many teachers, is to start with a text such as a poem or story which you think students will find engaging, and identify a concept or skill which that text lends itself to and which students would benefit from having introduced or reinforced. That is the approach which I used in producing the lesson plans on www.englishcurriculum.com.au.

As a general rule, it is usually best to limit a lesson to just one or two teaching focuses to prevent students suffering from information overload.

Deciding on your teaching focus is the necessary first stage in planning, but explaining your teaching focus will not necessarily be your first step in delivering the lesson. Your teaching focus will be made clear at the Explicit Teaching stage. So the eight step lesson plan is actually a seven step lesson delivery.

Step 2: Engagement

Before asking students to read any text, it is necessary to make them *want* to read it. This is what engagement is all about: motivation. Students learn best when they are interested enough to want to learn.

So the second step in lesson planning is to work out how you are going to engage your students in the text to be read. Your engagement strategy might not be the same as your teaching focus. Just

because you want to teach about point of view, does not mean you will be able to use this concept to get students interested enough to want to read the text. You might use something else to hook students' interest and, having hooked them into reading the text, then introduce the concept of point of view.

For example, in the [‘Llewellyn and His Dog’ lesson plan](#) an attempt is made to engage students by asking them to think about an action they have subsequently regretted. Having motivated students to read the poem, the teacher then goes on to focus their attention on the point of view of the poem.

Engagement can be achieved by arousing students' interest in or curiosity about a text. Strategies for doing this include:

- posing a puzzle
- creating suspense
- telling interesting/amusing anecdotes
- using an image or object to provoke interest and discussion.
- creating debate or controversy within the class
- connecting the text to students' experiences
- asking students to imagine themselves in a particular scenario which relates to the text
- quizzes
- games
- relating the text something students are familiar with – a recent event, a famous person or a book, film, television program or computer game they are familiar with.

For example, the [‘How Gilbert Died’ lesson plan](#) attempts to engage students' curiosity by pointing out that the first stanza of the poem poses a puzzle. To find the solution to the puzzle, students have to read the rest of the poem. In the [lesson plan on ‘The Monkey’s Paw’](#) students are asked to imagine that they have been granted three wishes and then to discuss how wishes can have unforeseen consequences. This prepares students for the scenario presented in the story itself. The [‘Flannan Isle’ lesson plan](#) attempts to engage students' interest in mysterious disappearances by relating the story of the Mary Celeste.

Coming up with a strategy for engaging students in a text requires imagination and can take time, but the time spent thinking about how to ‘hook’ students into a text will pay off in increased attention and engagement throughout the lesson.

Step 3: Scaffolding

Scaffolding involves providing students with the knowledge or skills they need to read the text and make it come alive. Teachers cannot just tell students to read a text; they have to prepare them to read it. There are five areas which might need scaffolding: background knowledge, language, text type, structure and reading purpose.

Scaffolding background knowledge

If the text requires background knowledge with which students are unfamiliar, then this content will need explaining prior to reading.

With many texts scaffolding the content might require explaining when and where the text is set. This is especially important if the text is set in the past or another country. Scaffolding the setting will enable students to generate appropriate expectations of the text and to put themselves in the appropriate mindset, so that they do not automatically assume that they are reading about their own world. Pointing out that a text was set in the past can also prepare students to accept the archaic language a text might be written in or allow them to imagine themselves into the setting.

It is not just time and place that might need scaffolding. Students might need explanations of concepts or forms of behaviour with which they are unfamiliar. For example, the lesson plan on 'How Gilbert Died' suggests explaining the meaning of the phrase 'a thousands pounds on their head', as many students will be unaware of the reward system to which this refers.

Changes in measurement or value since the time of the text might need explaining. The story 'The Monkey's Paw' mentions the cash amount of 200 pounds. A straight conversion would render this as \$400, which might not seem a great amount to modern students, but when the story was written 200 pounds would have been sufficient to buy a house.

When preparing to scaffold for content, beware of assuming that students possess the knowledge you have. For example, when preparing a lesson on 'The Highwayman' it is easy to assume that all students will know what a highwayman was. Many may not. Scaffolding will also benefit those students who already possess the required knowledge: it will alert them to the knowledge they need to harness or 'foreground' when reading the text. It is probably better to err on the side of over-scaffolding for content than under-scaffolding.

Scaffolding language

Scaffolding for language involves identifying any words or phrases students which are important to an understanding of the text, but with which students might be unfamiliar. The easiest form of scaffolding for vocabulary is to write the relevant words or phrases on the whiteboard, along with their meanings.

However, scaffolding for vocabulary can be a useful opportunity to remind students of the strategies they can use to decode unfamiliar words: morphology – working out the meaning from the structure of the word, the parts it is made up of - and context – working out the meaning of a word from surrounding words.

In the case of morphology you might whiteboard the relevant word and lead students to a discovery of its meaning through 'chunking' – breaking down the parts of the word. In the case of context you might write a whole phrase or sentence on the board and lead students through decoding by using the meaning of surrounding words.

Scaffolding of vocabulary should be brisk – the aim is to deal with problem vocabulary quickly and get into reading the text.

Scaffolding text type

Different text types need to be read in different ways. If students are not aware of the text type they are reading and the most appropriate way to read it, they are likely to become confused or misunderstand the text. For example, if students are unaware that a text is a satire, they are likely to take the text at face value and miss the irony. Students might need to be taught that some short stories are event-oriented and others are 'slice of life' and character oriented, and that the story they are about to read is the latter type, rather than the former.

Scaffolding text structure

Explaining the structure, or organisation, of a text before reading makes it easier for students to follow the development of ideas in the text. This can be especially important with informational, persuasive or argumentative texts. The simplest way to scaffold structure is to provide a structured overview of the text by providing headings for the various sections of the text, writing these on the whiteboard and referring to them while reading the text with students.

In the case of narratives, scaffolding of text structure may be unnecessary if the narrative follows a chronological order. However, where flashbacks, flash forwards, parallel narratives or changing points of view are employed, students might need to be made aware of these before reading.

Scaffolding reading purpose

This is unfortunately too often overlooked. We cannot just tell students to start reading; we have to give them a purpose, something to focus on, or attend to, while reading. Some purposes for reading might be to:

- to come up with a solution to a puzzle which has been posed
- to form an opinion about what sort of person a character is
- to confirm or reconsider predictions about the text
- to focus on particular aspects of the language or construction of the text.

Examples of reading purposes suggested in the lesson plans from www.englishcurriculum.com.au include:

- For ‘Flannan Isle’: to mentally note any things the reader is told which could be used to offer a solution to the mystery of the disappearance of the lighthouse keepers
- For ‘The Monkey’s Paw’: to identify the gaps in the story and the clues which might be used to fill the gaps
- For ‘[The Inchcape Rock](#)’: to determine how the poem illustrates a particular theme
- For ‘[Jabberwocky](#)’ to determine if their ideas about the meanings of particular words still make sense while reading the poem.

Step 4 Reading

Now it is time for students to read the text. But how do you want them to read it? There are a number of possibilities. You could:

- read the text aloud while students follow their own copies.
- have students read the text aloud around the class.
- ask students to read the text silently

Which approach you choose will depend on the text and your students. Reading aloud while students follow has a number of advantages. As an accomplished reader, you will be able to bring the text alive for students and enhance their comprehension. Reading aloud to the students is definitely the best approach when a text is likely to prove difficult for students.

However, where you have a number of strong readers in the class and the text is not too difficult, having students read the text aloud can be a workable approach. Many students enjoy reading aloud. But forcing poor or reluctant readers to read aloud is likely to kill enjoyment of the text and impede the comprehension of all students.

As a general rule, students should only be asked to read a text silently when the text will be accessible to all students in the class.

Step 5: Explicit teaching

In this step, the teacher draws students’ attention to an aspect of the text and uses this to explain a specific concept or skill. The concept or skill will of course be the teaching focus decided at the beginning of the planning process.

With a poem the teacher might explain the rhyming pattern, the rhythm, the structure, or the use of figurative language. With a story it might be the point of view employed, a particular technique of characterisation, the role of setting, the narrative structure or the use of emotive language.

For example attention is drawn in the lessons available from www.englishcurriculum.com.au to

- the gaps in the narrative in the ‘The Inchcape Rock’ and ‘The Monkey’s Paw’ lesson plans
- the narrative point of view used and the implications of this in the ‘Llewellyn and his Dog’ lesson plan

- to the strategies which can be used to make sense of apparently nonsense words in the ‘Jabberwocky’ lesson plan

Step 6 Exploration

This step is intended to allow students to explore the concept or skill to which they have had their attention drawn. It is essentially a mini activity in preparation for the major activity at the application stage.

Activities which can be used for exploration include:

- paired discussion
- group discussion
- individual expressive writing
- notemaking
- brainstorming

For example, in the ‘Flannan Isle’ lesson plan students are asked to list parts of poems which might be used as possible clues to what happened to the men. In the ‘How Gilbert Died’ lesson plan students are asked to brainstorm reasons why Gilbert’s death is remembered even though his grave is not marked

Step 7 Application

Step 7 is where the rubber hits the road so to speak. It is where students have to apply what they have been taught. Application involves setting students a task which requires them to apply what they have learnt. This might involve setting a written or oral task.

However, teachers cannot just set the task and sit back while students undertake it. There are four parts to the application stage: setting the task, scaffolding the task, supervising the task, and sharing the results.

Setting the task

This is usually straightforward: it involves explaining what you want students to do.

Scaffolding the task

This involves giving students the skills or understandings they need to be able to complete the task. It might involve providing models, structures or sentence starters.

Supervising the task

This involves dealing with problems or difficulties students encounter while completing the task, keeping students on task and motivating them. It might involve establishing time for one-on-one conferencing

Sharing the Results

During this step students share the results of their application of the teaching focus. This might involve sharing their completed work with another student, a small group or the whole class.

Step 8: Review

This step is basically a recap. Here the teacher:

- reminds students of what they have learned
- points out how students can apply the new skill or understanding in future.

FAQs

Should a teacher follow the eight steps in the same order every time?

No. The eight step lesson plan is a series of teaching activities which can be moved around, rather than a precise formula. Obviously engagement will always come first, but the order of other steps can be varied depending on the text and the teaching focus. Some steps such as explicit teaching or exploration might occur more than once. In [‘The Incheape Rock’ lesson plan](#), for instance, explicit teaching occurs before the scaffolding of the text, because students need to understand the concept of theme before reading the text. Then there is another occurrence of explicit teaching after the exploration stage where students are introduced to the concept of filling gaps.

Does a teacher always need to scaffold background knowledge, language, text type, text structure and reading purpose?

No. Students always need a purpose for reading but the degree of other scaffolding required will depend on the difficulty of the text for students. Where a text deals with a subject or time and place with which students are familiar, it might not be necessary to scaffold background knowledge. Similarly, where the text is of a genre with students are familiar text type might not need scaffolding. Where students are unlikely to encounter any difficulties with the language or structure of a text, it will be unnecessary to scaffold language or text structure.

How long should each step take?

That depends entirely on the text, the teaching focus and the activities employed at each stage. Obviously, teachers will need to devote more time to scaffolding potentially difficult texts than they would with easier texts. The time devoted to engagement, exploration and application activities can vary considerably depending on what students are asked to do.