BRITISH COUNCIL

TeachingEnglish

Planning lessons and courses

This roundup brings together practical insights and experiences from our global teacher community on planning lessons. Which ideas reflect what you do already – and which ones might you try next?

Find out more on the TeachingEnglish website

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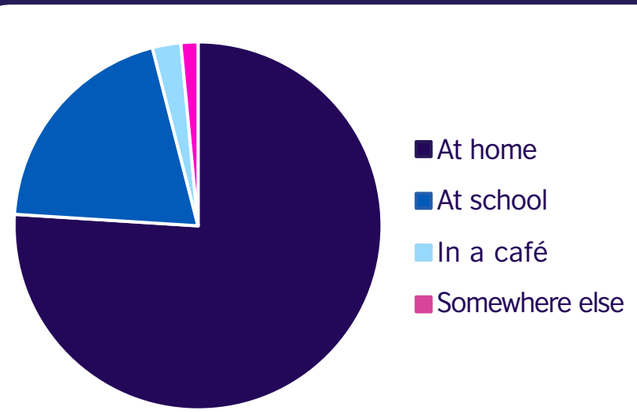
Join our Courses for teachers Facebook group

Where teachers plan and why

Most community members plan at home. They mention limited planning time at school and the need for a quiet space to think, prepare and be creative. Many point out that this often happens in unpaid hours and encroaches on personal or family time.



Based on 274 responses on Facebook and Instagram (February 2025)

> **At home. Unpaid working hours. Because I don't own a TARDIS [time machine].**
>
> – Community member, Spain

> **I often find myself doing a large portion of my lesson planning at home simply because the school timetable leaves little room for planning between back-to-back classes.**
>
> – Community member, Sri Lanka

> **Most of my best lesson planning comes either while walking or lying in bed, not the best places, as it's difficult to make notes, but they are the moments when my brain is functioning at its best**
>
> – Community member, Italy

The challenges of planning

Several community members describe lesson preparation as one of their biggest ongoing challenges.

> **Lesson preparation is a big problem in my whole career as English teacher. 🥺🥺🥺 I keep looking for help or read lots of researches, but all go in vain.**

> **I think the more we do it, and adapt what doesn't work and keep what does, the better we get. I know I am still learning and adapting 🙂.**

This helps explain why our planning tips post is one of the community's most widely shared – and why over 30,000 educators have registered for courses related to planning.

See the summary of planning tips

Find free courses about planning

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Before you plan lessons

Community members highlighted two important first steps: knowing the destination and knowing your learners.

1. Plan with the end in mind – but stay flexible

> Always begin with an end in mind (what do you want your students to demonstrate at the end of the lesson?)
>
> Ken Taru
> TeachingEnglish Facebook follower

Agree! However, be ready to move away from your lesson plan rather than sticking blindly to it.

– Community member, the UK

Indeed ... lesson PLAN is a plan, not a commandment.

– Community member, Kosovo

Not all that we prepare makes a good lesson, sometimes building a lesson according to what teacher encounters in class makes a perfect lesson ... because it is built on learners' needs.

– Community member, Algeria

2. Understand your learners' needs

A teacher in Cuba suggested starting by analysing learners' interests, levels and strengths so lessons can be meaningful and engaging. However, this isn't always easy, as this teacher in Ghana explained:

I teach five different levels every day, four times a week. Each class is not less than 15. How can I, as a new teacher [without technology] diagnose all my learners and remember them?

Planning for clarity, access and flow

Teachers across the community shared practical ideas for making lessons run smoothly and supporting every learner. Their advice ranges from planning clearer instructions and purposeful transitions to building in differentiation and inclusive strategies.

The more concise the teacher's instructions are, the easier for students to understand what is expected of them to do and the more efficient managing learning becomes.

– Community member, Morocco

I think giving instruction is also part of lesson planning. Instructions must be positive, in the form of a chunk [and] start with a verb.

– Community member, Pakistan

Don't forget inclusivity in the activities while planning lessons – broken down instructions, allocating roles in group activities, scaffolding for struggling students.

– Community member, Saudi Arabia

Find out more about transitions in a lesson

When planning lessons, it's definitely smart to budget a few extra minutes for transitions... They help maintain classroom control and focus... and reduce stress for both teacher and students.

– Community member

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General advice on planning from the community

Be realistic about how much you can do – Avoid overloading lessons with too many activities or unnecessary 'time fillers'.

> **Do not get carried away with the number of activities and content: less is more. – Community member, United Arab Emirates**

> **Avoid time fillers that serve no good purpose. You need to be able to justify every activity in terms of what it achieves within the lesson. – Community member, New Zealand**

Balance learners' wants with their actual needs – Community members noted that what learners ask for is not always what will help them progress. Setting clear outcomes together at the start can help avoid this mismatch and ensure planning supports genuine learning needs.

Plan to use learners' home languages strategically – Some teachers build in moments where the learners' home languages can support understanding, while others prefer to use them only when absolutely necessary. Either way, it's something they plan for but also apply flexibly during the lesson.

Respect colleagues' time and shared spaces – Teachers highlighted that good planning also includes thinking about what happens before and after your lesson. Tidying classrooms, organising shared materials and finishing on time help colleagues start their lessons smoothly.

Reflect on your teaching after the lesson – Community members stressed that good planning continues after the class, through reflection and small adjustments.

Explore this theme for yourself using our ready-made Pathway

Milestone for our Courses for teachers Facebook group

Teachers who take our free, open-access courses can continue the conversation in the Courses for Teachers Facebook group. This vibrant part of the TeachingEnglish community has now reached 100,000 members!

Find out what people love about it by watching this short celebration video:

100k members

Find out about our latest free, open-access courses