



Teaching Notes - Planning

Introduction

Planning is an important aspect of the development of extended writing in any form of examination / assessment. Clearly, the plan is not assessed – only the final product / text can be marked and valued according to the assessment objective.

The plan has to be impressed on students as temporary forward-thinking time (3-4 minutes at most), a template for possibilities in the narrative – an anchor for initial thoughts.

Why plan?

The problem with developing effective planning skills in students is the tendency for students to see it as an extra and unnecessary stage in the development of a creative piece of writing.

The objectivity of a plan may be off-putting because it forces the student into the role of acting as their own critical analyst 'before' the piece is written.

However, the 'plan' needs to be viewed from an early stage in secondary education as a natural process of outlining the potential of a text, partly based on the experience of prior practice and partly through the formation of new ideas 'in the moment'.

Practice - Key Outcomes

Teachers should prepare students to understand the value of planning so that the following **key outcomes** are evident in all or most students planning skills by the time of the final assessments:

- quickly reacting to a title and thinking ahead to form and structure potential texts
- including some sense of authorial 'voice' and chronological structure
- focusing more on the text structure and its effect on the reader than the minutiae of the plot details
- using a practised form of shorthand to represent key points and ideas that have already been practised – for both brevity and speed
- having the confidence to see the plan as a guide to the possible – to be followed or ignored as appropriate

Ideally, we need all students to see the planning stage as a 'normal', almost instinctive part of the process of writing in an examination when the pressure to create can lead to ill-formed and rushed pieces that do not reflect the true ability of the writer.

What we do not want is a student so wedded to the idea of a detailed plan that they leave themselves inadequate time to write the piece that is meant to be assessed.

Students also need to avoid a too-formulaic approach to their writing, where they try to include previously assessed texts in the examination – this lack of spontaneity usually leads to inappropriate forms and ideas forced into given titles.



Resources – potential activities

Learning Focus 1 – Creating a Basic Plan

Learning Outcomes

- understanding that everything can be sequenced
- using personal experience to plan a sequence of events
- selecting the most appropriate sequence for a narrative plan

Resource 1a - Sequencing a Narrative

This is a student planning sheet which explains that everyday experiences can be sequenced into plans. A grid is given for the students to outline their sequential plans.

Resource 1b – Selecting an Appropriate Sequence

A drag-and-drop activity which asks students to choose the correct chronological sequence of events from a narrative.

Teaching suggestions

- Students work in pairs to sequence the narrative of a 'normal' start to a school day.
- Gather feedback on the way that experiences differ but still have the same basic structure of events.
- Use Resource 1a to further investigate the concept of sequencing with the intention that this will lead students to think about planning in a more logical way.
- Higher level students will clearly understand that narratives are not necessarily linear in their chronology. This can develop into a discussion about how everyday events do not always follow a chronologically obvious linear structure (i.e. we often have to backtrack and retrace steps or repeat something due to unexpected factors).
- Use Resource 1b to select the most appropriate sequence from a given list. Students should work in pairs so that they engage in a discussion over the rationale for each choice. This should help support the development of understanding that a plan is a guide to creating logical creative texts. Clearly, in practice, short plans are necessary in examinations – but this can be dealt with at another time.

Learning Focus 2 – Developing a Personal Approach

Learning Outcomes

- understanding that planning is an individual skill – we all do it differently
- developing an understanding of what works for the student
- developing a vocabulary that will help students to plan quickly



Resource 2 – What Works Best?

This resource gives student four different outline plans for a narrative based on the title: 'A Shocking Day'. The idea across all the plans is broadly that the writer:

- introduces themselves or the character
- explains their / the character's feelings at this point
- describes why they feel this way
- describes a specific event
- explains the aftermath of the event
- explains what they would do in hindsight.

Students are asked to create their own personalised hybrid plan from the sections in the given short plans. In effect, they are selecting what works best for them in quickly understanding a narrative sequence (and hopefully an actual narrative).

Teaching suggestions

- Discuss the different ways that plans have been worded by students on previous creative pieces.
- Remind students that detailed plans are not appropriate for use in an examination due to the pressure of time. Explain that this activity is designed to help them develop a personal approach to planning.
- Use Resource 2 with students. This is designed for individuals to engage with the short plans in order to create their own version.
- Once these have been completed a discussion can take place about whether any of the examples were preferred as they were presented or whether individual plans were created (and even adapted).
- As a further activity, students could discuss what they have been imagining while looking at the plans. Who was their character? What did they feel? What had happened? What were the consequences? Students could be asked to create more detailed plans, write a first paragraph or a complete narrative – depending on the individuals and their confidence and skill at the point of using the resource.

Learning Focus 3 – Reverse Planning

Learning Outcomes

- understanding how to recognise significant sections / shifts in a narrative
- being able to analyse a text in order to understand the writer's structural intentions
- developing more strategies to become even quicker at writing effective plans

Resource 3 – What Was the Plan?

This resource takes an existing narrative extract and asks students to think about what the writer may have had in mind before constructing the text. Students are asked to create their own plan for the text.



Teaching suggestions

- Read the given narrative extract given in Resource 3 with students.
- Ask students to consider how it may have been planned by the writer. This discussion can be in pairs or larger groups. The students should be told that there will be differences of opinion and no 'right' answer.
- When the plans have been discussed and written by students, they can be asked to explain their thinking.
- Differences may be seen in students' conclusions – however, these must be acknowledged as individual interpretations.
- The key differences are likely to be focused on what the students see as dramatic shifts before the fire, e.g. in the depiction of family life.
- The suggested plan in the resource can also be considered.
- Remind students that the whole point of a plan is to support the individual during the pressure of an examination.

Learning Focus 4 – Practice Planning

Learning Outcomes

- being able to take a title and plan a narrative in 5-10 minutes
- showing flexibility in the type of narrative being planned

Resource 4 – Quick Thinking – Quick Planning

This resource gives students a number of different titles that are similar to those set in examinations. The main aim is for the students to quickly outline plans for narratives and gain confidence that they can be flexible in their thinking.

Teaching suggestions

- Students should be at a point where they have relative skill and confidence in planning narratives in a short time by the time they use this resource.
 - Four titles are given in the resource. They offer different types of stimulus, ranging from a straight title to giving students a line that must conclude their planned narrative.
 - Students can be asked to plan for the different suggested titles all at once or one by one – or any combination decided by the teacher.
 - Feedback and reflection will add further learning from the practice of planning.
 - Students should have a great deal more confidence that they can be confronted with any title in the examination and be able to think through and outline a plan before writing.
1. 'Practice plans' - use actual examination titles and ask students in groups to create effective plans, ensuring that there are two groups for each title. This would lead to students discussing the structure and chronology of the piece to others, sharing ideas and agreeing on positive and negative features.
 2. 'Massive plan' activity. Give the same title to the whole group. Ask students to work in pairs to discuss the narrative potential. Here, students can create short plans that lead to different narratives. The aim here is to develop flexible thinking - which can be revisited throughout the units.



Learning Focus 5 – Multiple Narratives

Learning Outcomes

- understanding that the same title can be interpreted in different ways
- being able to summarise the key stages of a narrative

Resource 5 – What’s Your Story?

This resource asks students to work in groups in order to plan a narrative based on the same title. The result of the exercise should be that students will understand that the same title can lead to multiple ideas. Clearly, this exercise supports both planning skills and helps students develop their understanding of the many ways in which a title can be used as a stimulus for writing.

Teaching suggestions

- Give all the students the same title, e.g. ‘A Serious Mistake’. Clearly, teachers can choose any title but should have alternative ways that it may be interpreted so that groups can be guided towards particular narratives (as below).
- Each group of students can be given a different focus by the teacher, e.g.
 - reflecting on the embarrassment caused by mistaking one person for another
 - a first-person account of how a momentary loss of concentration led to serious consequences
 - describing the result of making a decision that led to a terrible family argument
- Two groups can be given the same focus so that the whole class have contrasting approaches to consider after the exercise. Use Resource 5 so students can record their planning notes.
- Give students at least 10-15 minutes to think through their ideas. Move round the room and suggest possible narrative shifts depending on the ability of the students.
- Gather feedback from the groups. Ensure that each group takes the others through their plans – with extra detail added through further explanation.
- Each student can take note of the different plans based on the same title. This can be used as a reference/revision to remind students that first ideas do not have to be those that appear in the final written text, i.e. the plan is a guide – it does not have to be slavishly followed.