



I need to prepare a lesson

You find yourself standing in front of a class of 30 Year 10's. They're ready and waiting for you to start the lesson. What are you going to do? What will engage them, get them talking and thinking, and ultimately learning? How can you communicate your Christian beliefs and faith?

A good lesson doesn't happen by chance: it takes planning and preparation. This guide introduces ways in which you can begin to plan lessons that achieve these aims. Although it's been written as if planning for a secondary school lesson, you can adapt the principles to apply for other age groups.

▶ Starting points

Every time you teach will be different, however, there are key principles and techniques that you can bear in mind for any lesson. Schools workers are not expected to be professional teachers but should have a good knowledge of what is expected in the classroom, and able to perform appropriately in an educational setting. (This is not a youth group!). The challenge is to deliver lessons that not only present the Christian faith in a relevant and dynamic way, but also fit curriculum requirements and provide space for students to reflect and develop their own ideas and beliefs.

▶ Experience counts!

One of the good things about working in schools is that most of us will have many years experience of being in one as a student. That means that you'll have at least some sense of what to expect when it comes to teaching a lessons, and you'll also be able to reflect about what you felt, as a pupil, made a good or a bad lesson. It's worth thinking back to your school days: perhaps remembering specific teachers who were either brilliant or terrible, and thinking about what made them that way. You may even want to jot down a few do's and don'ts based on those memories.

The other important point to make about teaching a lesson is that it's very much a skill to be learned. In other words, good preparation, reflection and repeated practice will make all the difference. Good teaching, and in turn, good learning, will take some dedication and time. Don't judge yourself too harshly at the beginning, but be prepared to work at the different skills needed to make a lesson really work.

If you're an ex-teacher, as some schools workers are, then of course you have a huge head start. But youth workers also have plenty of experience that can be transferred to a classroom. Speaking in front of groups of 20 to 30 young people may be familiar to you from church youth groups, and basic public speaking skills may have already been mastered. Preparing material for sessions may also be a regular job. Now all you need to do is translate those skills to the different context of a classroom.

Although schools workers are often asked to take a whole lesson, with the normal teacher present but looking on, it's possible to take a part of a lesson too. Sometimes RE curricula require students to interview someone who has a Christian faith, and you may be able to come into a lesson and take some time to answer their questions. Or there may be a particular exercise or segment of a lesson that an RE teacher would like some help presenting. These kinds of opportunities are a good way to familiarise yourself with what it's like to teach and you won't have to worry about developing a full lesson's material or dealing with classroom control. If you feel unsure about taking a lesson, this is a good place to start gaining confidence.

► **Understanding the task**

If you've been asked to take a whole lesson, it's important to start by being clear about the context you're going to find yourself in. You should talk with the teacher well before the lesson and learn as much as you can about the class and the content required.

❖ **What year group is the class?**

A class of Year 7 students will react completely differently to you than a Year 9 class, as will a GCSE or A level group, and it is so important to be appropriate in the language you use and to have an understanding of the level of their abilities.

❖ **Is the class mixed ability or is it streamed in any way?**

This will affect the kind of material you might include and the depth of questions you might ask.

❖ **What's the class really like?**

The teacher will be able to tell you if they're a handful, good at group discussion, easily distracted, noisy, difficult to get involved, better in the mornings than afternoons or any other particular characteristics. This information is 'gold dust' when it comes to preparing a good lesson and developing material that will fit the group. It's no good, for example, basing a whole lesson on a class discussion when the teacher would have told you the class doesn't like discussions and tends not to participate!

❖ **Are there any students with special needs?**

This might include students who do not have English as a first language, or students with learning difficulties. It's important to know this in advance not only to ensure your lesson will cater for their needs, but also to avoid embarrassing them, and yourself, by demanding an answer to a question that they don't understand.

❖ **Should you be aware of any sensitive students?**

If your lesson includes any concepts or stories that might be distressing to some students, you should also check with the teacher whether this is appropriate. For example, if you are going to tell the story of your grandfather's death, you will want to check that a student hasn't been recently bereaved. This may not mean avoiding telling the story, but you may decide to frame it in a way that doesn't make it too emotional.

❖ **What facilities does the classroom have?**

Will there be audio or video? What is the seating plan and can it be adapted if required.

❖ **Where does the lesson you are teaching fit into the curriculum?**

You will want to see the scheme of work the teacher is using and find out how many lessons the students have already had on the topic you've been given. Sometimes you'll find that you are introducing a new topic and you have much more freedom in what you will do: at other times, students may have already had three or four lessons on a topic and you are simply providing a further lesson. Understanding where your lesson fits is crucial to preparing the right material and avoiding the embarrassing situation where students have already done a particular exercise. For example, balloon debates (different characters in a descending hot air balloon, one must be thrown out to save the others) are a common group discussion tool used by teachers.

It can be difficult to find that the twenty minutes you had planned for a balloon debate on 'the value of life' won't work because the class teacher conducted a similar debate a few weeks previously!

❏ Does the teacher require homework to be set?

You may not be present to see the results, but it can be a great way of extending the impact of your lesson if you are able to set some follow on tasks for homework.

❏ Should any written work be done in student's books?

Many schools workers use handouts when they teach a lesson, but this can be difficult if a teacher prefers everything to be in the students workbook. Check beforehand what the teacher would like. If you do use handouts, agree with the teacher what will happen to them afterwards: they can be stuck in the back of students books, for example. There is nothing more discouraging than a lesson ending and finding students worksheets strewn around the classroom: it devalues their work and yours.

This list of questions might seem lengthy, but in reality all of them can be covered with a brief chat with the teacher well in advance of the lesson. Do your homework and you will be in a better position to deliver a great lesson.

▶ Preparing a lesson

Most schools work to a standard template when preparing a lesson called a lesson plan. A lesson plan is a framework for a lesson. If you imagine a lesson is like a journey, then the lesson plan is the map. It shows you where you start, where you finish and the route to take to get there. Essentially the lesson plan sets out what the teacher hopes to achieve over the course of the lesson and how he or she hopes to achieve it. Usually they are in written form but they don't have to be.

As a visitor, you're not obliged to submit a lesson plan to the school, and you won't have to complete some of the detail that might be required of a teacher. But it's a very effective way of making sure you prepare a lesson well and, perhaps more importantly, is something you can refer to if all goes blank in front of the class!

A good lesson plan often contains these ingredients:

❏ Lesson Objective

What pupils should know / understand / be able to do / be aware of by the end of the lesson. This is something that you can share with students and even write up somewhere visible at the beginning of the lesson.

A lesson objective might start with this kind of phrase:

By the end of the lesson students will:

- Know that ... (**knowledge**: factual information, for example names, places, symbols, formulae, events).
- Develop / be able to ... (**skills**: using knowledge, applying techniques, analysing information, etc.).
- Understand how / why ... (**understanding**: concepts, reasons, effects, principles, processes, etc.).
- Develop / be aware of ... (**attitudes and values**: empathy, caring, sensitivity towards social issues, feelings, moral issues, etc.).

❏ Learning Outcome

The evidence to show that students have achieved the learning objectives. A learning outcome might include:

- students can express their point of view

- students can identify key words from a list
- students can summarise a belief, the importance of a religious ceremony etc.

Learning outcomes are important because they show that pupils have actually learned something (!) not just that you have taken the lesson. It also provides you with important feedback as a schools worker: if students couldn't complete the learning outcomes you set, perhaps the lesson wasn't as successful as you may have thought. Learning outcomes remind you that a successful lesson isn't just one where there is good classroom behaviour, attentive students, engaging group activities or vigorous discussion: it's one where students learn!

➤ **Key Vocabulary**

These are the words you are going to use that may need to be defined and explained to students. You may also have a list of them visible during the class to refer back to when needed. In RE, for example, a schools worker taking a lesson on Easter, might have 'crucifixion', 'resurrection' and 'Passover' as key vocabulary.

➤ **Differentiated learning**

This term is often used in education to describe alternative learning activities that cater for students with different needs: either those who are particularly gifted and will want to more challenging tasks, or those with learning difficulties. This is also the section in which you would note how you would cater for any students who do not speak fluent English.

➤ **Lesson Outline**

This is an overview of what you will do in the lesson itself, together with estimated timings. We will look at this in more detail in the next section.

➤ **Resources**

A list of the materials and resources you need for the lesson.

▶ **How to develop a lesson outline**

So you've been invited in to a school to take a Year 8 lesson on 'prejudice' from a Christian perspective. Where do you start?

- Let's assume you have met the teacher and asked all the relevant questions. You've also set out a learning objective and some learning outcomes. Here's an example:

Learning Objective: By the end of the lesson the students will understand how Jesus dealt with prejudice and be aware of how Christians have battled and compromised on the issue of prejudice over the centuries.

Learning Outcomes: Students will be able to describe an incident in the life of Jesus involving prejudice and be able to name a historical Christian figure who has battled against prejudice.

- A good lesson will involve the students saying and doing more than you. If you're planning a 45 minute presentation, think again. Even if it's highly entertaining and informative, it isn't what a good lesson is there to achieve. In an hour long lesson, work on the principle that you should speak from the front for no more than **15 minutes**. The only exceptions to this are activities like an interactive question and answer sessions with you at the front of the class.

- A good lesson often starts with something to catch students attention. As a visitor, you have an advantage of already being something out of the ordinary. A short, fun activity could set the tone and feel of the lesson to come and create the interest and expectation you need to engage everyone. As an example of this, how about being prejudiced yourself and handing out sweets to pupils but only to those with certain coloured

eyes or hair. After you've done this, ask how students felt to be included or excluded, and what they thought of you too!

- A good lesson also starts with an opportunity for pupils to reflect on what they already know. So the beginning of a lesson on prejudice might include an activity designed to get students to reflect on when they've experienced prejudice themselves or with others. As this is the beginning of the lesson, it may be too early to get students into groups for an activity, but you could spend a few minutes asking students for their stories and ideas.
- Since it's vital to the lesson for pupils to understand what the word 'prejudice' actually means, you could also ask how would they define 'prejudice'... at this stage you might simply write their different answers up without commenting on whether they are right or wrong since this part of the lesson is about giving pupils the chance to think about what they already know.
- At this stage of the lesson, it would be easy to be tempted into giving a talk about Christians and prejudice losing the interest and engagement of pupils. Instead, how about getting them into some group work to discover what Christians think about prejudice. We'll divide the class into groups of three or four and give each group a different sheet containing a brief story about a Christian who has fought prejudice in some way. The groups are set a series of tasks: they must summarise what they think the person's view was of prejudice, how impressed they are by their actions (on a scale of 1 to 5) and what they imagine they would have done if they had been in the same situation as this person. They have some time to complete this task and must then choose one person from the group to report back to the class. During this feedback would be a good time to admit that Christians have not always been so consistently good at fighting prejudice, and continue to fail miserably in some cases!
- As the lesson moves into it's final section, it's often helpful to introduce some more reflective work that stretches students a little more. In this case, this might involve presenting one of the more well known stories told by Jesus: the parable of the Good Samaritan, a story not only about the kindness of the samaritan but also the prejudice of those who passed by the injured man. There are lots of possible ways to present the parable using video, drama, dramatic readings or whatever style best suits your skills. Following this it may be appropriate to set an individual task to engage pupils with the story. For example, you could ask them to re-imagine the parable in the present day in their town or school. Students could be given the opportunity to either draw or write their version. Finishing the task could be a possible option if any homework needs to be set.
- You will also need to consider how you are going to introduce some of the key vocabulary that will be used during the lesson. Will you explain words like 'Samaritan' yourself, have definitions written up for students to refer to, or have some other way of making sure everyone understands the meaning of key words?
- A good lesson will end with time to summarise what's happened, allow for any questions and perhaps ask a few questions to the class to check that they've understood everything. It might also, in this case, include briefly returning the students' initial definitions of prejudice and deciding as a class which comes closest to what they now understand 'prejudice' to mean. Perhaps a reflection would work well with music and slides, asking students to make a personal response to the lesson's theme. Make sure you stick to time and leave space for students to finish a reflection before a bell sounds.

📌 Lesson Plan Example

- **Learning Objective:** By the end of the lesson the students will understand how Jesus dealt with prejudice and be aware of how Christians have battled and compromised on the issue of prejudice over the centuries.
- **Learning Outcomes:** Students will be able to describe an incident in the life of Jesus which involved

prejudice and be able to name an historical Christian figure who has battled against prejudice.

‣ **Differentiated Learning:** One student has difficulty with understanding spoken English so the key questions, and group and individual tasks will be written down in advance and given to the student to read at their own pace.

‣ **Key vocabulary:** prejudice, parable, Samaritan, Pharisee.

‣ **Lesson content:**

1. Opening attention grabber (3 minutes).

Handing out sweets to some students in a highly prejudiced way!

2. What do students already know about prejudice (5 minutes).

Simple questions to the class about their experiences of prejudice.

3. What do we mean by prejudice (5 minutes)?

Following on with the question 'what is prejudice' ... "I'll write your thoughts up here and we'll come back to them at the end of the lesson and see which ones work best."

4. Christian stories of fighting prejudice (20 minutes).

Group work and reporting back to the class.

5. The parable of the Good Samaritan (20 minutes).

Individual reflective task.

6. Summary and questions (5 minutes).

‣ **Arriving for the lesson**

Make sure you have the exact details of when and where the lesson is. If you are not in school already that day, arrive at least half an hour before the lesson is due to start, so you know where the room is and can check you have all the resources you need.

‣ **Developing and finding resources**

If you are taking lessons as a visitor, you'll want your lessons to be exciting and engaging, full of good exercises and activities. But where do you find these resources? You'll discover links to many good web sites at schoolsworkwork.co.uk, together with our **Resource Toolkit**, a searchable database of good ideas for lessons and assemblies. You can also use the **Community Blog** to ask other schools workers for help in finding the right materials.

‣ **Classroom Behaviour Management**

Keeping control is a necessary skill for effective teaching. It shows students you know what you are doing and that they need to pay attention to you. Some classes will need almost no behaviour management, others will be incredibly demanding from the beginning of the lesson right to the end! There's no substitute for experience and most schools workers will find they grow in their ability to engage with a difficult class over time. There are some excellent books on behaviour management including one listed in the schoolsworkwork.co.uk's resource **10 Books Every Schools Worker Should Read**.

However, it is the teacher who is ultimately in control of the class and so you will want to talk with them beforehand about how much control you want them to assert during your lesson. Some teachers are more

pro-active with this than others! Better to know what the score is before the class start a full-scale riot!

Remember that praise is more powerful than criticism. Aim to encourage students to behave well and engage with your lesson by responding positively to their contributions, even if they are incorrect. For example: "That's an interesting idea, but I'd think of it like this..." is better than "No, that's wrong!"

▶ **Evaluation**

It's good practice to evaluate your lesson in order to learn how to be more effective in teaching. For example, you could:

- ▶ Ask a team member to sit in on your lesson and then reflect on it with you afterwards.
- ▶ Ask a retired teacher from your church to observe a lesson and give you feedback.
- ▶ Ask the teacher whose lesson you are taking for feedback.

▶ **Some general do's:**

- Observe experienced teachers. Once staff in the school realise you are serious about wanting to be able to communicate effectively with students and you want to develop your teaching skills, most teachers will happily welcome you into their classes.
- If you work in a team, start off supporting a more experienced team member, and gradually increase the amount of the lesson that you lead.
- Reading other lesson plans, even for completely different subjects, will help you get the idea of how to prepare better ones for your self.
- Keep taking lessons and don't give up, even if some experiences are difficult or discouraging. Taking lessons is a great privilege for Christian schools workers and the young people we meet deserve the very best we can offer.

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