



A “HOW TO...” GUIDE TO DRAWING UP A COURSE PLAN FOR THE *OPOSICIONS*

SUBJECT AREA: ENGLISH, SECONDARY EDUCATION

by **Àngels Antorán**, IES Manuel Vázquez Montalbán (Sant Adrià del Besós)
Marc Julià, IES Thalassa (Montgat)
Oriol Pallarés, IES Salvador Espriu (Barcelona)

PART 2

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL DEFENSE

In previous issue of the APAC Journal, three high school teachers offered their advice with a step-by-step guide on how to design a course plan for the *oposicions*. The present article will look at the most stressful part of the whole process: presenting your syllabus to the examination panel. It will also pinpoint how the major changes in the Spanish education legal framework (that is, the revocation of the LOGSE law and the consequent implementation of the LOE) should be reflected in your syllabus presentation.

Presenting your course plan to an examining board can be difficult, especially if you take into account that those listeners are not mere spectators but a panel of evaluators formed by experienced teachers. This is one of the reasons why our defense needs to be carefully designed in advance.

The time given for the course plan presentation will definitely determine its structure and organization. Although the duration of a syllabus presentation may vary from one year to another, it is usually allotted as follows: an initial twenty-minute block is dedicated to giving a general introduction of the submitted course syllabus followed by another twenty minutes entirely devoted to the development of a specific unit from the course plan randomly drawn by the candidate. After that, there is still a five-minute block open for discussion or for the examining panel to pose questions. It is important to stick to the time allocations.

Designing a successful presentation

The planning of your oral presentation, just like your careful designing of your written course plan, is essential to reaching your goal: transmitting your teaching skills through a coherent and convincing presentation as well as catching the attention of the panel members. You may want to consider attending other presentations before the day of your defense. A careful, balanced structure for your speech will help you deliver the same outstanding proposal orally as you have submitted on paper. Therefore, it is highly advisable to use the first theoretical section of your written work (or even the table of contents itself) to organize the outline of your oral defense. This way you are ensuring a total and coherent connection between your submitted work and your oral presentation. You need to make sure that you cover all those aspects mentioned in the assessment criteria which your examining board will publish prior to your defense.

Presenting the course plan

Here are some ideas on how to structure your defense:

Course plan presentation: A brief introduction should present your work: its title, the school subject (English as a first foreign language, as a second foreign language...) and the stage, level and age range it addresses (ESO Year 1, Batxillerat 2...). It is recommended that you explain the reason for your course and level selection by expressing the personal and/or professional preferences that led you to that particular choice.

Consider giving an outline of your speech to the members of the panel so that they can easily follow your defense. Although the board of evaluators already has a copy of your work, it would be advisable to provide them with additional copies; this way you can invite them to go to a specific section any time during your presentation.

Structure of your course plan: Before you start defending your proposal, let the panel know the steps you followed to come up with your written work.

Course plan characteristics: Show how your syllabus is connected to the legal framework by referring to the current laws and decrees that you have used as your starting points. You should also mention the general features of your syllabus that make it original and successful (its usefulness, its flexibility, the richness of the activities in it and their do-ability in a particular classroom setting...).

Context and school setting description: Although a syllabus should be flexible enough to be implemented in different schools, the LOE advises carrying out a sociolinguistic study of the school which is to be the starting point of any course plan. It is sometimes useful to design your syllabus for a more or less specific school setting you are familiar with.

Course time allotments: Refer to the number of instructional hours your course plan covers, the units it is divided into and their approximate distribution throughout the school year.

Objectives and contents: This part should show the connection between your course plan and the new legal framework established by the new curricula¹. The new curriculum specifies the syllabus to be followed in each subject. While other subjects are dealt with in different sections of the curriculum, English as a foreign language is dealt with together with Catalan and Spanish in a general section called *àmbit de llengües*. It establishes that certain competences will be worked on in the different language subjects, promoting an integrated learning of languages. The *àmbit de llengües* general objectives are the cornerstone of the course plan.

The new curriculum contents favor the achievement of key competences (*competències bàsiques*) as well as specific linguistic competences:

- ✓ Multilingual and intercultural competence
 - We need to teach students not only those contents related to the language they are learning but give them the tools necessary to live in a multilingual and multicultural world. Our students need to learn to learn any language.

¹ Currículum d'educació secundària obligatòria – Decret 143/2007 DOGC núm. 4915.

- ✓ Communicative competence, which is divided into oral competence, written competence (reading and writing), audiovisual competence and literary competence.
 - With the new curriculum, communicative competence becomes a priority. Not only is it addressed in the language classroom but also in a cross-curricular way. In our classroom, communication will become the motor of our teaching: exposing students to real communicative situations, be they oral, written or audiovisual, will ensure successful and meaningful learning.

It is important, then, that your distribution of contents be divided according to these new categories and that it include the new terminology.

Different studies show that all languages are learnt when they are studied from the point of view of their social use. The need for communication is what facilitates learning. Our curriculum reminds us that some studies have shown that the mere teaching of forms and rules, or teaching component by component, like the teaching of grammar, or even the isolated teaching of the languages studied at school have proven to be not as successful as they were thought to be.

Methodology: As well as justifying your teaching methodology, in this section you should explain all the different types of learning activities you have designed for your syllabus. Make sure to refer to audiovisual and ICT activities since they have become a priority in the recently published curricula. Other methodological remarks to be included in this part of your defense could deal with classroom configuration, student groupings, learning spaces, equipment and resources, and other such issues.

Diversity: At this point, you should give evidence of how you deal with special-needs students in your course plan by mentioning the measures you have designed to reach them, that is, structural, methodological and assessment measures which will be clearly displayed during the later development of the course unit.

Assessment: Since assessment is one of the most important parts of the teaching and learning process, it is important to put special emphasis on every one of its aspects by, for example, making a good definition of it, establishing its aims (that is, evaluation of both the students' progress and the teaching practice), referring to the wide range of assessment tools you have included in your course plan and mentioning the different stages of the evaluation process.

The new curriculum establishes the assessment criteria for foreign languages. Make sure, then, that your assessment plan addresses the evaluation of oral interaction, the understanding and production of oral, audiovisual and written documents, the observation and inference of language rules, the use of ICT for researching, managing and presenting information, the use of strategies for promoting autonomous learning, a respectful and curious attitude towards language and culture, and a willingness to engage in collaborative learning.

Unit plan outlines: This section is intended to justify the distribution and organization of your units plans. It is important to show the panel a sample unit from your syllabus so that they become familiar with the unit structure and layout which you will be asked to develop more in depth later on. As we explained in our previous article, you can design a unit plan in many ways. Here is an example:

UNIT I	Title (or topic, starting point...)	Time allotment:
Objectives: At the end of this unit, most students will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 	Working towards the “basic competences” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 	
CONTENT (The communicative dimension / The literary dimension / The multilingual and multicultural dimension)		
ASSESSMENT CRITERIA		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • • • • 		
General end-of-ESO objectives:		

	Possible learning activities	Groupings	Methodology	Assessment strategies and tools
Introductory			Strategies and techniques	Initial evaluation
Systematic			School facilities and resources Teaching resources + supplies	Formative evaluation Summative evaluation Self-assessment
Reinforcement			Stimuli	Reaching all students
Extension			Prior learning	
Synthesis				
Problem anticipation:				

References, resources and annexes: To conclude with your first twenty-minute presentation, you can pinpoint any particular meaningful references or resources you have used in developing your proposal.

Developing and presenting a unit from your course plan

The development of a unit from your course plan is a crucial part in the whole examination process for the candidate, since during these twenty minutes you are to display all your teaching skills by bringing together everything included in your course plan and putting it into practice. This is the time for you to show the panel that your proposal is do-able, that it can work in a real classroom, so be ready to justify everything in the most convincing way.

It is important to know that, after randomly drawing a unit number, you will be given an hour to prepare the final presentation of the unit lesson plan. Given this limited amount of time, it is highly recommendable that you do advance preparation of all the materials you may want to use to put the presentation of your unit plan together or that you may want to show the panel in your presentation. During this hour you are allowed to have as many resources as you want with you. But make sure you have them well organized so that you can manage this nerve-wrecking sixty-minute block as efficiently as you can.

Although it may vary from one year to another, the candidate is usually allowed to write an outline of the unit development, which can later be used during the oral presentation. Be advised that this is only a sketchy outline, not a summary of your speech.

Besides writing an outline of everything you will want to tell the panel, we advise you to draw up a calendar-type table with all the sessions of your unit, in which you can sequence and distribute all the learning and assessment activities that you had listed by categories but not sequenced in your syllabus. This will help you visualize the flow of your unit and you may even want to consider writing it on the board or projecting it so the panel can follow your explanations when you speak about each of the sessions. Here is an example:

<p>Session 1</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Warm-up... ✓ Textbook ✓ Podcast: record your personal description ✓ ✓ Homework: e-mail to teacher 	<p>Session 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Warm-up... ✓ Workbook ✓ ✓ ICT: Videoconferencing (school in England) ✓ ✓ 	<p>Session 3 Split class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ✓ Jigsaw activity ✓
<p>Session 4</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Warm-up... ✓ Cooperative project ✓ ✓ ✓ Assessment: oral presentation of project + ppt 	<p>Session 5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Warm-up... ✓ ✓ Audiovisual ✓ ✓ Homework: WIKI (opinion about the audiovisual) 	<p>Session 6 Split class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ✓ ✓ ICT: Treasure hunt
<p>Session 7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Textbook reading ✓ Song ✓ Lip-singing ✓ ✓ 	<p>Session 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Unit test ✓ ✓ ✓ Assessment: self-assessment questionnaire ✓ 	<p>Session 9 Split class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ ✓ Running dictation ✓ Speaking: board games

As you can see, this visual display of your unit sessions will allow you to sequence all your learning activities and the competences and skills they address in a balanced way as well as distribute the corresponding assessment activities at the optimal time.

Start your unit presentation by referring the panel to your course plan and to the specific unit you will be talking about. If you are planning to use a visual presentation, project it.

Here are some aspects that you should cover during your presentation:

- ✓ Contextualize the unit (core of unit, starting point, title, number of hours, time allotment, year, term, justification, where you are coming from, where you are going...)
- ✓ Talk about the unit-specific objectives and how you will be working towards them in each of the sessions. Your unit objectives need to be very specific. You can even have smaller objectives for each of your sessions. Give examples.
- ✓ Refer to the contents that you are addressing, by either mentioning them or by explaining how they are addressed in each of the sessions or activities.

- ✓ Use the sessions chart to start explaining the sequence of learning and assessment activities and justify your decisions and choices.
- ✓ Talk about the types of activities you are using, the different learning styles they address, the groupings, the possible classroom configurations, the diversity of resources... Take this opportunity to share with the panel any original materials that you would use in your sessions.
- ✓ Justify the methodology that you will use in the classroom and give examples to support your choices.
- ✓ Tell the panel how you are going to keep students engaged and motivated.
- ✓ Explain how you reach all students' needs, how you address diversity and give some specific examples (a newcomer, a gifted student, a student with ADD...), how you work at different paces and levels.
- ✓ Explain your assessment strategies and tools and how you have distributed them throughout the unit. Relate them to the curriculum assessment criteria. Give and show examples of assessment tools (a portfolio, a questionnaire, a quiz, how you would grade participation, oral interactions, rubrics...).
- ✓ Finally, make sure that everything you have explained reflects the ideas expressed in your written course plan and tell the panel if you anticipate any possible problems and if you have any alternatives.
- ✓ You could conclude by letting the panel see what your students would have achieved by the end of your unit.

Open discussion and questions

After your prepared presentation, there will still be a short period for discussion and questions from the examining board.

If you do not understand a question, paraphrase it to check for correct understanding or ask the panel to repeat it again.

Do not start answering a question right away. Give yourself some time to think of a convincing answer and try not to mumble. If there is anything you don't know, be honest.

When there are no more questions, thank the panel for their attention and gather your materials as quickly as possible. Remember that they are examining other people after you.

Final thoughts and tips

Technical aspects

- ✓ Ask the panel about the materials and resources you will be allowed to use in your presentation the very first day of the *oposicions*.
- ✓ If they allow you to use any school equipment, make sure that it is set up and in good working order prior to the presentation.

Timing

- ✓ Use a stopwatch to time yourself in at least one rehearsal before the day of your presentation.

- ✓ Use a timer or a clock to time your presentation.

Stress management

- ✓ Some nervousness is not only expected, it is a source of productivity. Think about the tests you have passed so far in order to reach this point and remember that you have something to say that no one else in the room knows.
- ✓ You're the person who knows the most about your course plan, so you need to feel confident when talking about it. Exert your knowledgeability with confidence.

Attitude

- ✓ Present the desired image to your audience: dress appropriately for the occasion.
- ✓ Look pleasant, enthusiastic, confident, proud, but not arrogant.
- ✓ Greet the panel before starting your presentation.
- ✓ Be polite and treat and address all members of the panel equally.
- ✓ Establish rapport with your audience through sincere eye contact and body language.
- ✓ Do not read from notes, although it is quite acceptable to glance at your outline.
- ✓ Be sure to speak clearly.
- ✓ Ensure your voice is loud enough to project to the back of the room.
- ✓ Speak at a normal pace (not too fast, and not too slow to bore the audience).
- ✓ Pause. Do not race through your presentation. Allow yourself and your audience a little time to reflect and think.
- ✓ Avoid filling pauses with "uhm", "like" and "you know".
- ✓ If you make a mistake, correct yourself immediately.
- ✓ A right dose of humor can be very effective both to humanize your presentation and to catch the panel's attention.

Materials

- ✓ If you are planning to use the blackboard, limit the time your back is to the audience.
- ✓ Using a computer to project a visual presentation or transparencies on an overhead projector will allow you to face your audience all the time.
- ✓ Audiovisual aids are very effective when they are used properly.

Note: This article reflects the experience of three secondary school teachers in course planning. We hope you can take advantage of our suggestions, although there may be other valid successful approaches to course planning which you can consider.

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Oriol Pallarés is currently a secondary school teacher and teacher trainer. He has also taught in primary education and in the EOIs and worked in California as a high school Spanish teacher. He is also working in the Facultat de Ciències de l'Educació-UAB, teaching the English CAP didactics course.

Marc Julià is a secondary school teacher currently working in El Maresme. He has also been a teacher trainer at EOI Santa Coloma. He started his teaching career as a Spanish and French teacher in the United States.

Ángeles Antorán holds a degree in English from the University of Barcelona. She is currently teaching at IES Manuel Vázquez Montalbán in Sant Adrià del Besòs. She has worked in primary education and taught summer courses at the EOI.