

Conceptual Unit: A Definition

In *Teaching English by Design*, Peter Smagorinsky offers the following definition of a conceptual unit:

- A conceptual unit of instruction dedicates a period of time to sustained attention to a set of related ideas. These ideas are pursued through a variety of texts, both those read (usually literary) and those produced (usually written). This sustained attention allows students—and given a provocative topic, the teacher—to consider a related set of issues from a variety of perspectives with increasing understanding.
- A conceptual unit may focus on a *theme* (social justice), a *period* (the Victorian Era), a *movement* (Romanticism), a *region* (The American South), a *genre* (satire), a *single author* (Langston Hughes), or *learning a key strategy* (how to read Shakespeare).
- Your conceptual unit will last 2-3 weeks of 50-minute class periods and include a rationale, a statement of goals/guiding questions, a list of texts, 10-15 lessons, some form of assessment, and all necessary materials. It is unlikely that you can get through a book-length work in this time.

Introduction

In 4-5 pages, explain why you have chosen to teach your particular conceptual unit. Your audience for the rationale consists of future employers and administrators. Using subheaders, include the following:

1. **Context:** describe the location and type of school, the socioeconomic status and diversity of your student population, and the grade level and academic ability of your students.
2. **Theoretical approach:** describe your theoretical approach to teaching literature. What assumptions about reading literature will shape your teaching? Referencing course materials/scholars is a good idea.
3. **Objectives:** list the learning goals your students will achieve by the end of the unit plan. Objectives should arise from the type of conceptual unit you plan to teach. You should have at least 4-5 goals. You may also use guiding questions to supplement or replace your goals.
4. **Texts:** List and cite the texts you cover in your conceptual unit.
5. **Activities and Assessment:** explain how your class will run and how you will measure what students have learned.

Lesson Plans

10-15 50-minute lesson plans that follow a consistent format and include the elements of the model lesson plan. If you anticipate teaching a block schedule, you may include fewer lessons, provided that they cover roughly ten hours of instruction. Borrowing lessons from Wilhelm or another source is fine, as long as you modify their ideas to suit your purpose and give credit on the bottom of each plan.

Materials

All handouts, assignments, discussion questions, writing prompts, rubrics, notes, and literature (short works only) you use. The goal is for this unit to be completely self-contained. Online resources should be printed and included (first page only for large sites).

Technology

Since this course has focused on integrating technology into the English language arts, I would like to see both teacher and student use of technology in your plan. This might mean incorporating a podcast, wiki, digital text, blog, or another technology. You should also upload your entire conceptual unit (zip file) and include it in the MCTE archive with a brief paragraph about its content (see my example).

Title

Title your lesson plan in a way that summarizes the lesson. Since others may be using your lesson plans in the future, try to be as specific as possible. For example: *Day One: Examining Stereotypes* Please note that it is not necessary to list Michigan standards. Good teaching will cover the standards by default.

Overview of Procedures

In one or two sentences, give a quick picture of the lesson by describing its key procedures. For example: *Using their writing journals, students will free write about what stereotypes they see in our school. Large group discussion will follow.*

Objectives

State the learning goals for the lesson in explicit, student-focused language.

- Use bullet points to highlight objectives and keep them brief
- Having only one objective is fine, but avoid going beyond four or five.
- The difference between objectives and procedures can be subtle. Remember, you're stating what students will learn, not what they will do.
- Objectives may be cognitive, affective, ethical, or otherwise.
- Objectives typically begin with *Students will . . .*
- Examples: *Students will get to know their classmates; Students will look critically at stereotypes within the school; Students will understand the requirements of the assignment.*

Materials/Resources

List any materials that you and the students will use during this lesson. You need not include items typically present/available. Place materials after the lesson plan in which they are used.

Activities/Procedures

In step-by-step detail, describe the activities you plan. There is no need to follow one specific model, though such models exist. ITIP (anticipatory set, objective, modeling, monitoring, guided practice, independent practice) or ROPES (review, overview, presentation, exercise, summary) are two followed by many educators. It is more important that the activities you plan demonstrate what you have learned about the way students learn to write. Incorporating methods from Wilhelm and other books is a good idea. When you do borrow an idea, give credit at the bottom of the plan. Be sure to indicate how much time you think each activity will take.

Accommodation

In three or four sentences, explain how your lesson will accommodate one of the following: a student with a learning disability (e.g. dyslexia), a second language learner, a gifted student, a student with an emotional impairment, a student with a physical impairment, or a student with a disorder such as ADHD or SPD. You may have to do some research, but I'm not asking you to rework every single lesson plan. Rather, just show that you are sensitive to students with differing needs. You may include accommodations on every plan, or in a short narrative at the end of the unit.

Assessment

In three or four sentences, explain how you will know that your students have achieved your goals. Assessment may be formal, as in homework collection, rubrics, quizzes, or tests; or informal, through observation and discussion. Assessment does not need to occur every day.