

Lesson plan – Year 6 English

Unit 2, Lesson 1: To identify features of a biography

This lesson plan was developed by Ochre Education and English teacher Melissa Garstang-Leary. It outlines her approach to teaching a Year 6 English lesson on identifying the features of a biography.

-  [Watch the lesson video](#)
-  [Watch a video of Melissa talking about her teaching practices](#)
-  [View the English unit plan example](#)
-  [Download sample lesson plan template](#)
-  [View all other online lessons and supporting resources](#)

This lesson is part of a unit on [inspirational figures – biographical writing](#). Ochre Education and the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) have published 11 online lessons (and supporting resources) that make up this unit. This is the first lesson in the unit – you can watch the lesson video [here](#) and watch a video of Melissa talking about her practice [here](#).

This lesson plan is a supplementary resource for this work. It includes guidance on how the lesson was structured and sequenced within the unit and can be used while interacting with the Ochre resources. The plan also allows teachers to see an example of planning for one lesson within a sequence of lessons and reflect on their own teaching and effective practice. The lesson plan is annotated to explicitly show some of the decisions that are made during the planning process.

Another way to use this lesson plan is as a starting point for discussions with colleagues to build collective capacity for lesson and unit planning. Teachers can also use the lesson plan to reflect on their own planning for lessons and units and guide future planning. A blank lesson plan teachers can use and modify as a resource for their own planning can be accessed [here](#).

All the lessons from this unit can be accessed for free on either the [AERO](#) or [Ochre Education](#) websites.

Definitions

Learning objectives

Clear and easy to understand statements about what students are expected to be able to know, do and/or understand by the end of a period of instruction (not to be confused with the instructional tasks), and at what level this learning is to take place.

Success criteria

A clear statement about the measure that will be used to prove whether, and how well, a student has met the learning objectives by the end of a period of instruction. Success criteria are observable actions that a student can perform to demonstrate their understanding of the learning objectives. It is important that these elements are observable – avoid using phrases like ‘students will understand that...’ as we can’t observe understanding. Instead, the criteria could be ‘students will write, say, make or do something that indicates understanding’.

Tasks

Activities undertaken by students as part of the learning process. Carefully designed tasks can also assist students in mastering new knowledge or skills. Scaffolds and worked examples might be used to assist students with some tasks. Teachers can monitor their students’ ability to complete tasks as part of a formative assessment approach to help determine whether students have demonstrated the success criteria.

Subject English: Inspirational figures – biographical writing

Year level/Stage 6

Lesson background

This is the first lesson in the Inspirational figures – biographical writing unit. It builds on Year 6 students' understanding, knowledge and skills for composing informative text types. In particular, identifying the features of a biography.

This lesson background shows how the lesson is sequenced and positioned within the unit.

Learning objectives

To identify and define the audience, purpose and key features of biographical writing.

Success criteria

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- define the audience and purpose of a biography
- describe the key features of a biography, including text structure and subject matter
- identify the key features of a biography in modelled examples.

The success criteria are a series of clear statements that will be used to prove whether, and how well, a student has met the learning objectives at the end of a period of instruction.

Misconceptions

Some students might have the following misconceptions:

- Biographies are only written about famous people rather than an influential or inspirational individual.
- Difficulty determining the difference between fact and opinion on a subject.

Misconceptions are incorrect knowledges and understandings that students have prior to the lesson, or may obtain during the lesson. Outlining these during planning can help with monitoring student learning, and recognising when corrective feedback is needed.

* In this column, you will find prompting questions to guide your planning for each lesson stage.

** In this column you will find prompting questions to consider when monitoring learning at each stage of the lesson.

Lesson stage*	Tasks What are the specific classroom or instructional activities that you and your students will use in each stage?	Monitoring student learning**
Review of previous learning		
<p>How will you ensure that students have the prerequisite skills and knowledge to progress their learning in this lesson?</p> <p>How will you activate prior knowledge/help students retrieve relevant learning from previous lessons?</p>	<p>Independent</p> <p>A quick introductory quiz gathers information on prior knowledge about biographical writing. The focus is on general knowledge relating to the purpose and subject matter included in biographies.***</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Overview of keywords: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Subject b. Features c. Subject matter d. Chronological order 2. Opening questions and ideas:**** <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What is the purpose of a biography? b. Fact vs opinion c. What type of information is included in a biography? 	<p>How will you gather evidence that shows you where your students are at in their learning?</p>

*** Formative assessment allows teachers to monitor student learning and adapt teaching to meet the needs of the students. Formative assessment helps students to retrieve what they already know and can do in relation to a given topic. A introductory quiz provides some insight into the existing knowledge of students, including any misconceptions they may have. This information does not have to be gathered electronically.

**** The introductory quiz focuses on general knowledge of biographical writing, specifically 'What is a biography?' and 'What type of information is included in a biography?' These questions help to gain a better understanding of the starting point for Lesson 1, including the level to pitch the lesson to address any misconceptions and knowledge gaps but also deepen understanding. By gathering this information, I can ensure all learning needs are met.

Lesson stage	Tasks What are the specific classroom or instructional activities that you and your students will use in each stage?	Monitoring student learning
Explicit teaching of new learning ('I do') – what is a biography and features of a biography		
<p>How will you communicate the learning objectives to students?</p> <p>How will you break down your content into sequential steps to avoid overloading your students' working memory?</p> <p>How will you model the learning to support student understanding?</p>	<p>Whole class:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read the learning objectives and success criteria to students. Reference back to them as they are encountered throughout the lesson. 2. It is important that students all have a shared understanding of the concept of a biography. To engage students in the learning process, use a discussion prompt to start students thinking about the topic. <p>Pairs/small groups:</p> <p>Discussion prompt: What is a biography? Define this term using your own words.*</p> <p>Whole class:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Explicit explanation of the term, biography, by explaining the etymology of the word (bio + graphy). Clarify the definition of 'biography'. Check for understanding using questioning (a true or false question is sufficient if students are confident in their understanding). 2. Explicit explanation of the purpose and audience of biographical writing. 3. Check for understanding to monitor learning and engagement.** 	<p>How will you help students retrieve information learned in previous lessons and units?</p> <p>How will you check for understanding and correct any errors or misconceptions before moving onto guided practice?</p>

* Discussion prompts are a useful way to engage students in the learning process. It encourages students to communicate and share their learning with others. These discussions also provide teachers with an indication of where to start with their lesson, how to sequence their instruction and the depth of instruction required.

** It is important that students have a deep understanding of the content for them to demonstrate mastery. Checks for understanding assist with making a judgement as to whether students can proceed to the next task or if re-teaching is required. How re-teaching occurs depends on how many students did not meet the learning objective. Mastery learning is most effective where all students are learning together at a teacher-directed pace. See notes below, on pair/small groups for this activity, for ideas on how to address a small number of students requiring further instruction.

Lesson stage	Tasks What are the specific classroom or instructional activities that you and your students will use in each stage?	Monitoring student learning
<p>(Continued)</p> <p>How will you communicate the learning objectives to students?</p> <p>How will you break down your content into sequential steps to avoid overloading your students' working memory?</p> <p>How will you model the learning to support student understanding?</p>	<p>Independent:</p> <p>Students apply their knowledge of the technical terms explained (biography, purpose and audience) to create a definition that captures their understanding of what is a biography.^{***} Scaffold learning by providing an outline of prompts to consider when writing their definition.</p> <p>Pair/small groups:</p> <p>For students who require additional support, work in a small group and verbally model an example and/or display a worked example. This modelled example can also be used for display in the classroom and future reference during continued learning.</p> <p>Whole class:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students share their learning and the teacher provides feedback. Refer to the learning objective and relevant success criteria to encourage students to reflect and track their own progress. 2. Introduce the key features of a biography, including text structure, subject matter and language. Continue to reference keywords in the context of teaching as this assists students to apply their understanding in context as they learn. 3. Explicit explanation of text structure and subject matter followed by guided practice to identify these features within a modelled example (Language features are taught in detail in the next lesson)^{****}. Check for understanding to monitor learning and engagement. 	<p>(Continued)</p> <p>How will you help students retrieve information learned in previous lessons and units?</p> <p>How will you check for understanding and correct any errors or misconceptions before moving onto guided practice?</p>

^{***} This practice opportunity does not need to be a written task. It can also be completed verbally. You might like to complete the task in small groups and compile a shared definition for display in the classroom.

^{****} I separate the key features of biographical writing to ensure the sequencing of instruction allows students to build on their learning, without causing cognitive overload from too much new information. By breaking down the concepts into manageable learning tasks, which build on each other and provide multiple opportunities for revision and practise, students are set up for success to master their learning.

Lesson stage	Tasks What are the specific classroom or instructional activities that you and your students will use in each stage?	Monitoring student learning
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Guided practice ('We do') – features of a biography

<p>What worked examples will you provide students?</p> <p>What scaffolds and instructional supports will you introduce, and how will students use these?</p> <p>How will students work together to progress their skills and understanding?</p>	<p>Whole class:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The main scaffold used in this class is the modelled example of a draft biography on the life of Faith Bandler.* Following the explicit explanation of text structure, students are guided through the process of identifying parts of the text, including introduction, body, conclusion, title, subheadings and paragraphs. 2. Following the explicit explanation of text structure, students are guided through the process of identifying parts of the text, including key/important information, key dates and the sequencing of information in chronological order. <p>Independent:</p> <p>Provide the opportunity for further practice, by asking students to identify/highlight other key dates/information in the modelled example.**</p> <p>Pair/small groups:</p> <p>For students who require additional support throughout guided practice, students could be paired with a peer mentor or work with the teacher as a small group, so the pace of learning can be adjusted.</p>	<p>How will you check for understanding and correct any errors or misconceptions before allowing students to independently practice?</p>
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* By beginning with a modelled/worked example, it clearly and concisely demonstrates each key feature of a biography in a completed example. Students are provided with a copy to work alongside the teacher during guided practice. The students are provided with the end product (draft biography) of the composing process although further modelled examples can be used throughout the unit to scaffold students as they learn more about each stage of the composing process.

** This practice opportunity allows students to apply their learning with the gradual release of responsibility from the teacher. In the classroom during this time, it is important the teacher interacts with the students to monitor learning and provide further explanations. If the teacher identifies students as requiring further support they can use small groups, pairing with peer mentors and differentiated instruction to continue to support those students in the lesson.

Lesson stage	Tasks What are the specific classroom or instructional activities that you and your students will use in each stage?	Monitoring student learning
Independent practice ('You do') – features of a biography		
<p>How will students display that they have mastered the skills and content?</p> <p>How will you work with students to provide support and to gain insight into their learning?</p>	<p>Individual: Students identify and record the key features of a biography (text structure and subject matter).</p> <p>Small groups: For students who need more guided practice, gather them in a small group and work through one more example to clarify misconceptions before they work independently.</p> <p>Whole class or pairs: Students share their understanding of each feature by identifying and describing them to a peer or the whole class. The teacher monitors learning and provides feedback.*</p>	<p>What formative assessment will you gather to provide feedback to your students?</p>

* Feedback should always be timely and specific. In this case, as students are sharing, it provides me with an opportunity to give prompt feedback and check for understanding. I might ask further questions to extend and challenge students. This questioning enables the student to articulate their thinking using reasoning. It also allows me to clarify misconceptions and mistakes before progressing to the next stage of learning.

The feedback you provide to each student should be actionable and identify what was learned well and describe what still needs to be learnt.

Lesson stage	Tasks What are the specific classroom or instructional activities that you and your students will use in each stage?	Monitoring student learning
Lesson summary		
<p>How will you show students how far they have come in the lesson?</p> <p>How will you review their learning?</p> <p>How will you help students reflect on, or summarise the most important parts of their learning?</p>	<p>Whole class: Review the learning objective. Students reflect on their learning by using the success criteria to self-assess how successful they were at demonstrating the understanding, knowledge and skills from the lesson.*</p> <p>Independent: Students complete the <u>exit quiz</u>**.</p>	<p>What evidence will you gather from your students to understand what you may need to review next lesson?</p>

* Students can use their worksheet (completed examples) to guide their reflection and check off each success criteria. Each student should be able to make a judgement based on their engagement with each task. For example, 'How confident do I feel at describing the key features of biographical writing?'

** The exit quiz data can identify those students who have not met the learning objectives. To ensure all students achieve mastery learning, use small groups and differentiated instruction to re-teach as required. Additionally, formative assessment provides me with regular opportunities for reflection and refinement of my teaching practice. Consider for instance if there are patterns in what students are struggling to learn? You can make adjustments to instruction and then monitor student progress to determine the impact of the changes.