

In this exam there are two short reading passages, and each reading is followed by a prompt to write an essay based on the reading. Each essay is worth 50% of the test grade.

PASSAGE 1

Let me begin by sharing two critical incidents with you: (1) Last year, the Head of a school complained that the team of professional development teachers working with his teachers overemphasized the need for detailed lesson plans. All of his teachers taught almost all of the seven periods every day and also had additional responsibilities, such as collecting fees and meeting with parents. He felt that it was an unfair demand and wanted to know how useful lesson planning was in enhancing student learning outcomes.

(2) Recently, at a teachers' meeting at which teachers were sharing their teaching plans with their colleagues and the school's Head, the tyranny of the lesson plan was brought home to me starkly. Saleema, who was teaching a novel to class VIII, was sharing an activity that she would use for teaching a particular chapter: "I will ask the students to close their eyes and imagine the differences that have taken place since the last scene (chapter) 18 years ago."

At this point she stopped to share that in the previous lesson she had given the students a list of adjectives and asked them to match the adjectives to the characters introduced in the first three pages. "You know some students said that though the word 'aggressive' was not given in the list, it perfectly matched X (a character in the novel) as depicted in the movie."

That's when it occurred to me that the students had already seen the movie based on that novel. She continued: "My students are really good. They have all read the novel already and have even searched for materials relating to the novel on the Internet."

"Then why are you teaching this lesson designed to help the students to read and comprehend the text?" I asked in a puzzled tone.

"Because that's what it says in the lesson plan given to me," the teacher replied innocently, looking at the Head for confirmation.

During school hours, teachers' non-teaching time is consumed by administrative work. Lessons are herefore assumed to be planned outside school hours, but the reality of teachers' lives in Pakistan precludes long hours of lesson preparation at home. Most of the school teachers in Pakistan, particularly at the primary level, are female. In Pakistan (and probably elsewhere in the developing world), women are encouraged to take up teaching as a profession with the common understanding that it involves shorter hours of work limited to the school day only. It is often assumed that women teachers are married with children, have accepted greater responsibility for caring for their families than their male counterparts, and have taken on more duties as wives and mothers than do husbands and fathers. As a consequence of their families' expectations, teachers are often unable to spend any time after school hours planning lessons.

In a few schools, Saturdays are declared as non-teaching days to allow teachers time for planning lessons, professional development activities, and other administrative matters. This is clearly an insufficient amount of time for planning four to six lessons per day for a whole week. Some schools have tried to deal with this situation by asking each individual teacher to plan only a few lessons, which are then put in a central resource for use by all teachers. The pre-prepared lesson plans are used as a tool for 'standardization' of teaching and learning across different campuses of a school and for monitoring the 'performance' of the teachers. The result is an understanding of teaching that assesses quality of teaching in relation to a teacher's ability to use these pre-prepared lesson plans 'effectively.'

While I am firm in my belief that lesson-planning is an extremely useful activity in teacher education programs and even in later in-service and professional development, I am uncertain about how we can enable teachers to plan for their teaching in the context of teachers' lives in Pakistan and elsewhere.

PROMPT FOR PASSAGE 1

After reading the passage above, write an essay that does both of the following:

1. summarizes the position of the writer of the passage and
2. makes the argument for or against the assumption that a teacher should always make detailed lesson plans

Your essay will be evaluated in terms of focus, organization, coherence, logical development, and form. That is, you will be graded on how well you summarize and make your argument, not on whether your answer is "correct" according to certain theories. You should probably spend some minutes planning your essay before you begin writing. Write as much as you can. Avoid copying sentences from the passage or prompt. 50%.

PASSAGE 2

One day, near the end of my lesson, I asked 20 students in my speech course of our language center to describe the characteristics of their favorite English teachers. These students were a diverse group, representing East Asia, Latin America and South America. All of them were studying English in the United States to prepare to take academic courses as undergraduate or graduate students. Their answers surprised me, because they seemed to value many of the same traits. As a group, they preferred teachers who create a comfortable classroom atmosphere by encouraging student input and by giving students ample time to express ideas freely. They also commented about the importance of classroom humor. They appreciated teachers who would teach them jokes in English and help them to have fun in class, to help them see the humor all around them. Of course, this also helped the students to feel relaxed and to learn to enjoy American humor. Finally, they appeared to cherish teachers with clear communication skills, those who could teach lessons in a variety of ways, including traditional lectures, oral drills, video tapes, audio tapes, web pages, field trips, and the like.

Conversely, they did not like teachers who fail to plan lesson carefully. Spending a lot of time reviewing things that the students already know, later rushing through new material, was cited by the students as especially unhelpful. Another beef was about teachers who fail to manage the classroom well. When students talk out of turn, other students may feel confused about the focus of the lesson, or cannot hear what the teacher wants to say.

PROMPT FOR PASSAGE 2

Most of us have some ideas about what a good teacher should do to be effective in the classroom. Drawing upon your personal experience as a student of English, write an essay that identifies and explains several traits of what *you* think it takes to be a good English teacher. We will evaluate your essay for its focus, organization, coherence (flow), logical development, and form. That is, you will be graded on how well you summarize and make your argument, not on whether your answer is "correct" according to certain theories. You may want to spend a few minutes planning your essay before you begin to write. Write as much as you can. Be sure to avoid copying sentences from the prompt. 50%