



An effective unit is comprised of carefully designed, interrelated lessons that collectively support and guide students in reaching specific learning objectives. A unit can range from a few to several lessons and can span days or weeks. Unit planning allows the teacher to strategically plan how lessons should progress throughout a year. When teachers effectively plan units, it provides students with opportunities to discover relationships and focus on the interdependence of concepts being taught. The power of an effective unit plan lies in its ability to enhance student learning and build competence and understanding. Unit planning is an organizational approach that helps teachers reflect upon what students need to accomplish in each unit, and how and when they will accomplish it. A unit plan is a “roadmap” that provides direction on how to reach the curriculum standards of the unit and contains “mile markers” (checks for understanding, quizzes or assessments) that keep the teacher informed on what students need to be successful. The district has some supports in place on the HISD Curriculum website that will assist teachers with creating a unit plan. Effective unit planners plan backwards. This best practice is reflected in the backwards approach in the steps below.

### *How do I organize objectives to maximize student learning?*

#### *Step 1: Prep Work*

- Review the HISD Unit Plans and the checklist at the end of the document to provide direction for creating unit plans.
- Use the Annual Plan and select a unit to plan in detail.
  - If a unit plan is available through the HISD Curriculum Department for the subject area taught, tailor the unit plan using the guidance below and consider the interests and skill levels of students.
- Determine the curriculum standards and the timeframe allotted for the unit.

## Step 2: Draft Plan

- Craft essential questions that guide students to understanding the crucial ideas of the content.
  - McTighe and Wiggins identify four overlapping connotations for essential questions: questions that reappear throughout life, questions that relate to core ideas and inquiries of a topic, questions that help the student make inquiries and make sense of a topic, and questions that will engage the majority and/or a specific set of students.
- Identify the key concepts and skills students will need to master the curriculum standards and prepare a list of key vocabulary terms. The HISD Unit Planning Guide provides key concepts, skills, and vocabulary for each unit.
- Determine and Track Student Progress throughout the unit.
  - Select or develop a unit assessment to accurately measure student mastery. These assessments serve as a target of what students should be able to master after the unit is taught.
  - Choose a variety of formative assessments that will give data during the unit to gauge student understanding. Assess Mastery and Checkpoints are examples of effective practices that can be used to assess students. Identify points within the unit to use these formative assessments.
- Design a sequence of effective lessons that lead students to mastery of unit level content and skills and ultimately success on the unit assessment. It is sometimes helpful to use a calendar to assign lessons to specific days.
- Consider what resources and materials will be needed for students to successfully engage with the key concepts and skills.

### *Step 3: Evaluate the Plan*

- Ensure the components of the checklist are included in developing unit plans.
- Plan to adjust according to student needs. Anticipate when and where students will have challenges and plan extra time for remediation.

#### *Checklist*

- I have developed essential questions to guide instruction.
- I have created a list of key skills, concepts, and vocabulary.
- I have developed an assessment aligned to selected curriculum standards.
- I have checkpoints planned throughout the unit.
- I have created a calendar with sequenced lesson progression.
- I have compiled a list of needed resources and materials.



#### *TIPS*

- Once a list of needed resources and materials have been identified, decide the best way to organize those materials to maximize instructional time.
- Unit planning is a great opportunity to involve other teachers. Collaborating with other teachers will provide a multitude of ideas and will lighten the workload. Discuss within the PLC learning activities or strategies to foster student engagement and depth of learning.



## BURNING QUESTIONS

### *Do I have to create units from scratch?*

Of course not! Use the District Curriculum and other resources whenever available. Additionally, many experienced teachers have already created units and are willing to share. However, no pre-designed unit plan will be perfect (as is) for every classroom, so teachers can use pieces from resources available to create a unit plan that meets the needs of their specific students and teaching style.

### *Are unit plans adjustable?*

Teachers may think unit plans must be adhered to strictly; however, unit plans are living, breathing documents. Unit plans serve as a guide, so teachers should budget time wisely and plan time for adjustments based on student needs. Reflect on units done in the past and use that knowledge to plan better in the future.

### *Is unit planning time consuming?*

Some teachers shy away from unit planning because they feel it is time consuming. Creating a unit plan will actually ensure that more time is saved for instruction. A unit plan takes away the necessity of planning day to day and it allows for teachers to address student and classroom needs more strategically and purposefully. The length of time needed to write an effective unit plan should vary depending on the timeframe allotted for the unit and the complexity of the material.