

Session Aims

By the end of the session, you will:

- Understand the factors to consider when planning an exam preparation course.
- See how student profile, class size, age, learning context, time, and class composition affect course planning decisions.
- Get an overview of the types of published exam preparation materials available.
- Learn considerations for selecting appropriate materials for your course.
- Explore ways you and your students can generate your own exam preparation materials.

Factors to Consider in Exam Course Planning**Task 1: Factors to Consider in Exam Course Planning**

Read each statement carefully. Mark the statement as either True (T) or False (F).

1. The exam itself should not influence course planning. (T/F)
2. The number of students in the class has little impact on teaching methodology. (T/F)
3. Adult learners are usually more motivated than younger learners because they chose to take the exam themselves. (T/F)
4. Students preparing for an exam in an English-speaking country can benefit from language-specific materials. (T/F)
5. Cultural factors may influence students' comfort with certain exam task types. (T/F)
6. Courses with more preparation time can start with a greater focus on general English before moving to exam-specific work. (T/F)
7. When some students in a class are not taking the exam, it's best to avoid all exam-style tasks. (T/F)
8. Students with prior exam experience will likely need just as much exam technique practice as first-time exam takers. (T/F)

Activity type: True and false

- ☐ Is this activity useful for you?
- ☐ How might you adapt it?
- ☐ What learning points can you take away with you?

Task 2: Example/Case Study*Case Study 1: Student profile*

Three sixteen-year-old Spanish-speaking girls are preparing for the Cambridge ESOL Certificate of Proficiency in English in Spain. There is little variation in their level as all three girls took the Cambridge ESOL FCE two years ago and received grades A or B.

They have all been registered for the exam by their parents. The girls are concurrently doing their final year of secondary school and preparing for university entrance. All three are highly motivated and have their own computers.

The course begins in early October, and the exam will be in early June. There will be approximately 32 classes, with one 3-hour class each Saturday morning. All the students are willing and able to devote approximately 6 additional hours a week to homework and study.

Case Study 2: Planning Decisions

A group of ten adult learners aged 25-40 are preparing for the TOEFL exam in an English language school in the United States. The students come from various language backgrounds, including Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, and Russian.

Most of the students are planning to apply for graduate programs at American universities, while a few are taking the exam for professional reasons. The students' levels range from intermediate to advanced, and they all have access to computers and the internet.

The course is intensive, with classes meeting for 4 hours per day, 5 days a week, for 8 weeks. The students are expected to dedicate an additional 2-3 hours per day to self-study and homework.

Task 3: Discussion

1. *How might the teacher approach course planning differently for these two groups?*
2. *What factors should the teacher consider when selecting materials and activities for each group?*
3. *How can the teacher effectively use class time and self-study time in each case?*

Task 4: Following and Understanding Instructions in the IELTS Exam Rubric

In the following ten sentences, identify the key words and highlight or underline them.

1. Complete the diagram below by writing ONE or TWO words in each space.
2. You should spend about 20 minutes on this activity.
3. Summarise the information by selecting and reporting the main features and make comparisons where relevant.
4. You borrowed some books from a library. Unfortunately, you have to leave Chennai to visit a sick relative and cannot return the books on time. Write a letter to the library. Explain what has happened and tell them what you want to do about it.
5. Without capital punishment (the death penalty) our lives are less secure and crimes of violence increase. Capital punishment is essential to control violence in society. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this opinion?
6. You should write at least 250 words.
7. Give reasons for your answer and include relevant examples from your own knowledge and experience.
8. Read this prompt. You have one minute to prepare. Here is a pencil and a piece of paper. You may make notes if you wish.
9. Using no more than three words for each, identify two types of women that regularly experience discrimination when seeking private rental accommodation. Write the names of one group each in boxes 6 and 7 on your answer sheet.
10. Do the following statements reflect the claims of the writer in the reading passage? In boxes 14-17 on your answer sheet write: YES if the statement reflects the claims of the writer; NO if the statement contradicts the writer's claims and NOT GIVEN if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

Discussion Question: Factors Affecting Exam Course Planning

Imagine you are teaching an exam preparation course for a group of learners in your context. Consider the following factors:

- Learner age and language background
- Class size and proficiency levels
- Availability of resources and technology
- Time constraints and course duration
- Learner motivation and goals

Questions:

1. How would each of these factors influence your approach to course planning and design?
2. What specific challenges might arise from each factor, and how would you address these challenges?
3. How would you prioritize these factors when making decisions about course content, materials, and activities?
4. What strategies would you use to ensure that your course meets the needs of all learners, given the constraints and opportunities presented by these factors?
5. How would you adapt your course plan if one or more of these factors changed during the course (e.g., a sudden change in class size or a reduction in available resources)?

Task 5

Match each example to the corresponding factor that affects course planning. The factors are:

- a) Learner age and language background
- b) Class size and proficiency levels
- c) Availability of resources and technology
- d) Time constraints and course duration
- e) Learner motivation and goals

Examples:

1. The students are sixteen-year-old Spanish-speaking girls.
2. The class has only three students, all at a similar proficiency level.
3. All three students have their own computers.
4. The course begins in early October, and the exam will be in early June, with approximately 32 classes.
5. The students are highly motivated and willing to devote additional time to self-study.

Task 6: Making Course Planning Decisions

Instructions: Imagine you are tasked with planning an exam preparation course for the following group of students. Read the student profile carefully and answer the questions below.

Student Profile:

- Five adult learners (aged 25-40) preparing for the IELTS exam
- Mixed language backgrounds (two Spanish, one French, one Chinese, one Arabic)
- Varying proficiency levels (two intermediate, two upper-intermediate, one advanced)
- All learners work full-time and can attend evening classes twice a week for 2 hours each
- Exam date is in 6 months
- Learners have access to computers and internet at home
- Motivation levels vary (three highly motivated, two moderately motivated)

Questions:

1. Considering the learners' ages, language backgrounds, and proficiency levels, what approach would you take to ensure the course caters to their diverse needs?
2. How would you structure the course to make the most of the available time (6 months, 4 hours per week)?
3. Given the learners' access to computers and internet at home, what role would you assign to self-study and homework?
4. How might you address the varying motivation levels among the learners?
5. What factors would you consider when selecting course materials and activities for this group?

Task: Based on your answers to the questions above, outline a basic course plan for this group. Your plan should include:

- Overall approach and methodology
- Balance of in-class and self-study activities
- Key areas of focus and prioritization
- Strategies for addressing learner diversity and motivation
- Types of materials and activities to be used

Be prepared to present and discuss your course plan with your colleagues, explaining how your decisions align with the given student profile.

Task 7: Categorizing Course Materials

Instructions: Below is a list of materials mentioned in the text. Categorize each item as either electronic, home-made, or print materials by placing them in the appropriate column of the table.

Materials:

1. Coursebooks
2. Workbooks
3. Exam handbooks
4. Practice test books
5. Dictionaries
6. Grammars
7. Materials on CD-ROM
8. Online materials
9. Video or DVD
10. Teacher's own materials
11. Students' own materials

Electronic Materials	Home-Made Materials	Print Materials

After categorizing the materials, discuss with a partner or in a small group the advantages and disadvantages of using each type of material in an exam preparation course. Consider factors such as accessibility, adaptability, cost, and student engagement.

Task 7: True or False: Choosing Course Materials

Read the following statements about choosing course materials for an exam preparation course.

Decide whether each statement is true (T) or false (F) based on the information provided in the text.

- a) The age of the students is not an important factor when selecting course materials. (T/F)
- b) Course materials should always explicitly mention the exam they are preparing students for. (T/F)
- c) The number of components in a course (e.g., coursebook, workbook, CD-ROM) can affect the length of the course. (T/F)
- d) Teacher's books usually contain only answer keys for the coursebook exercises. (T/F)
- e) Workbooks are not suitable for self-study because they do not include answer keys. (T/F)
- f) Some exam preparation coursebooks are accompanied by workbooks tailored to different exams at the same level. (T/F)
- g) Exam handbooks are designed to be used primarily in classroom settings. (T/F)
- h) Authentic past exam papers should be used extensively throughout the course to familiarize students with the exam format. (T/F)
- i) Adapting exam practice tests for teaching purposes is generally not recommended. (T/F)
- j) Students should not be involved in creating course materials as this is solely the teacher's responsibility. (T/F)

In this chapter, we have learned several important points about planning an exam preparation course and choosing appropriate materials:

1. Various factors, such as the exam itself, student profile, available time, and resources, should be considered when planning an exam course.
2. Class size, age, learning context, linguistic and cultural background, and students' previous exam experience can all influence course design and methodology.
3. Teachers should carefully consider the needs of their specific learners when selecting course materials, such as coursebooks, workbooks, exam handbooks, and supplementary resources.
4. Course materials may be available in print, electronic, or online formats, each with its own advantages and limitations.
5. Authentic past exam papers should be used strategically, primarily at the beginning and end of the course, to assess progress and familiarize students with the exam format.
6. Teachers and students can also create their own materials to supplement published resources and provide personalized, relevant content.
7. Ultimately, effective exam course planning involves considering multiple factors, selecting appropriate materials, and adapting to the specific needs and goals of the learners.

Action Plan

I learned

When I get back to work, I am going to

I would like to know more about

I am going to find out this by