Planning lessons with speaking and listening as a focus

*No Pens Day Wednesday* is all about putting speaking and listening at the heart of lessons. We know that an effective focus on speaking and listening not only supports pupils’ learning, but also enables them to develop a wide range of essential skills such as working as a group, listening and responding to others, discussing, negotiating – the list is extensive!

Speaking and listening can be at the heart of lessons in any subject area and at any Key Stage – the first step is through clear planning.

Whether you’re a mathematician making speaking and listening count or a geographer putting speaking and listening on the map, this document outlines how you can make sure there’s a really good focus on speaking and listening in your lessons.

1. **Include a specific speaking and listening objective as part of your planning.**

These will, of course, vary according to the age of your pupils and subject area you teach. As you would with your lesson objectives, making your speaking and listening objectives clear and specific will ensure that your class know what they’re aiming for and will help you check out their progress.

Some areas of speaking and listening you might consider include:

- turn taking
- building on others’ ideas
- asking and answering questions
- making a clear and convincing argument
- asking for/ providing clarification/ explanation
- group discussion skills
- expressing ideas, explaining and describing
- persuasive arguments
- spoken narrative
- ways to engage listeners
- listening to others and responding appropriately

The *No Pens Day Wednesday* lesson plans have lots of ideas of clear objectives which are applicable to many different lessons, so you might find it useful to take a look at some examples if you’re looking for inspiration.

**Decide how you will support your pupils achieve this objective**

Where you want pupils to develop and demonstrate particular speaking and listening skills, it’s really important to ensure they know how to go about this. Many of these skills are complex; many may also be new or unfamiliar to some pupils, so it’s really important that you show them how to do it, and build in
opportunities to practice. We’d really recommend that you model the skills they’re going to use, perhaps give examples of useful phrases or key pointers, maybe some visual reminders and then some time to practise – this has been shown to be one of the most effective ways for teachers to support these skills. As with your learning objectives, clear guidance on what you’re looking for will also help them to achieve their speaking and listening objective.

Think about differentiation
Some pupils may find speaking and listening objectives more difficult than others – particularly if they have speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), or are new to learning English perhaps – so in your planning, make sure you think about how you will differentiate to make sure everyone is able to participate and achieve.

2 Plan to use speaking and listening to help achieve your learning objectives.
Talk is fundamentally important to children’s learning. No Pens Day Wednesday lesson plans have lots of examples of how speaking and listening activities and approaches can form the basis of teaching and learning for whole lessons. Here are some of the key ideas which can be included as part of any of your lessons:

Teach the words
Words are the building blocks of learning, so identifying key vocabulary for lessons is essential to support understanding of concepts and ideas. As well as thinking about subject specific vocabulary, it’s important to consider more general words which may also be necessary as part of teaching and learning in your lesson—particularly where you have pupils who may have some gaps in their general vocabulary.

You’ll need to decide how you will specifically teach these words – people learn new words best when there is a combination of what the word means (thinking all about what it is, as well as defining it and linking it to other words) and how the word sounds (what it starts with, how many syllables it has). There are a number of different ways to do this, including spider diagrams, concept maps, mind maps.

It’s also important for pupils to have lots of opportunities to hear and use new words in context.

Use speaking and listening activities and approaches
There are numerous ways in which speaking and listening activities can support teaching and learning, including for example:

- Think – Pair –Share
- Hot seating
- Watching and making videos, podcasts, recordings, performances
- Group work with allocated roles such as a time-keeper, chair-person, spokesperson, summariser
- Drama work
- Making posters
- Snow-balling – in pairs; join together to make fours; join together to make eights

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• Debates
• Listening partners
• Interviews and presentations
• Games
• Diamond ranking

The No Pens Day Wednesday activity templates and lesson plans explain these approaches and have many more great ideas on ways to use speaking and listening as a vehicle for learning.

Consider any learning challenges for pupils and differentiate accordingly
As with any teaching methods you use, it’s important when you have a focus on speaking and listening to consider potential challenges there may be for any of your pupils and ways to effectively differentiate the activities and outcomes accordingly.

3 Think about assessment and reflection
Many of the activities suggested can also be used for assessment – there are some more ideas in our document ‘ways of recording’ which includes ideas on how to use them, advantages and potential challenges that may exist.

It’s also important to build in assessment for learning in relation to your speaking and listening objectives. The Communication Trust’s booklets, Universally Speaking set out key speaking and listening skills based on age related expectations across listening and understanding, speech sounds, vocabulary, sentence building and grammar, story-telling and narrative and social communication skills. These may be useful in tracking pupil progress and planning next steps.

As well as pupils’ performance on lesson objectives, it will also be important to include opportunities to reflect on how well pupils’ achieved the speaking and listening objectives, and their views on how they found the speaking and listening activities. It’s therefore a good idea to plan this into your plenary and think about the best ways for them to evaluate their own successes and next steps in speaking and listening where appropriate.

4 Plan to make best use if your support staff.
Effective deployment of support staff is crucial in supporting positive outcomes for pupils. So, as with all of your lessons, do make sure that you plan to make appropriate and best use of any support staff working with you in activities and approaches focusing on speaking and listening. This includes providing clear and structured roles and responsibilities for them, briefing them well and including an opportunity to review how the activities went.
Speaking and listening planning checklist

- Have you planned for speaking and listening in your lesson.......?
- Have you got a clear objective for speaking and listening?
- Have you chosen an activity or approach for them to achieve this objective?
- Does this activity include opportunities for you to demonstrate or model skills and for them to have plenty of time to practice?
- Have you got a way to work out if they have met this objective?
- Are there other ways you’ll use speaking and listening to support learning or as part of assessment?
- Have you identified important vocabulary and decided on how you will teach and reinforce this vocabulary?
- Have you differentiated speaking and listening for different abilities and needs?
- Have you planned time to reflect on and evaluate pupils’ speaking and listening?
- Have you planned how best to use your support staff?

As well as having great fun on No Pens Day Wednesday, we really hope that everyone is encouraged to make the most of opportunities to use speaking and listening as part of their lessons on every other Wednesday too – and Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays too! We’d love to hear how you get on.....