



Unit Unpacking Tool

DESE INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING AND OBSERVATION TOOLS COLLECTION | PILOT VERSION SCHOOL YEAR 2024-2025



Guiding Question

How can intentional planning help me facilitate **deeper learning** for all students and provide equitable access to grade-level, real-world, interactive, and relevant work?

This Tool Helps Educators

- Identify the goals and targeted content, language, and practice standards of a unit
- Reflect on and mitigate adult biases
- Examine the specific strengths and weaknesses of unit materials and adapt and strengthen materials to align to instructional priorities and cultivate deeper learning
- Plan for student access, engagement, and individualized support

This tool is best used to structure robust conversations among teams, with a predetermined facilitator and with grade-level specialists, prior to teaching a unit. We also encourage you to review the Instructional Planning Tools Guidance before using it. The tools also include Lesson Internalization and Looking at Student Work tools.



Unit Unpacking Tool

- **Step 1**
Anchor in Your Vision & Focus
- **Step 2**
Align on Unit Purpose & Goals
- **Step 3**
Consider Your Students
- **Step 4**
Plan to Engage & Support All Students
- **Step 5**
Closing & Next Steps

Get Prepared

Team Members

1. Read through the unit materials, including core texts, lesson level overviews where possible and major unit assessments or culminating task.
2. Read/review the exemplar(s). If not yet available, consider what the culminating unit assessment or task would look like if completed at the depth and level of the content and practice standard(s), with alignment to the WIDA Key Language Uses. What are the components of a successful response and/or product? Reference grade appropriate [WIDA 2020 standards](#).¹

Note: In this tool, we use the term “assessments” broadly, to refer to the moments in a unit when students are asked to demonstrate their mastery of knowledge and skills. This might include both formative and summative assessments such as tests, performances, writing tasks, projects, and/or designs.

Facilitator

1. Ensure that all team members have access to unit materials, including core texts, assessments, and exemplars.
2. Determine the unit assessment or culminating task that the team will analyze in Step 3.
3. While there are no time stamps provided, the tool is designed for approximately one hour. It can be adapted for shorter or longer periods of time, as needed.
4. Determine how much time to spend on each section of the tool and where your team might need additional time or learning, based on school and/or district’s priorities, student assets and needs, the expertise of teachers participating, and the time allotted.
5. We recommend spending the majority of time on Steps 2, 3, and 4.
6. Assign a note-taker to capture notes and next steps.

Step 1: Anchor in Your Vision and Focus

Consider

- Outcomes we want for all students and district/school priorities and instructional vision
- Areas for growth that have emerged from recent learning walks and/or observations and
- Trends from recent analysis of student work or data.

Reflect

- What do we need to pay attention to as we examine this upcoming unit? Why?

¹ Refer to the following pages in the WIDA 2020 standards for language standards by grade: Kindergarten (pg. 42-53); Grade 1 (pg. 62-74); Grades 2-3 (pg. 84-97); Grades 4-5 (pg. 106-128); Grades 6-8 (pg.140-163); Grades 9-12 (pg.178-201).

Step 2: Align on the Purpose & Goals of the Unit

UNIT UNPACKING DISCUSSION

What are students learning in the unit and why?

Discuss the purpose of the unit.

- What is the overarching genuine topic, problem, issue, or phenomena that students make meaning about in this unit?
- What will a student know and be able to do after this unit? How does this unit build off of students' prior learning and how does it build towards future learning?
- What are the specific focus language goals of this unit? If none exists, the group should either add this as a next step following the meeting or identify them together. Refer to [Creating Focus Language Goals](#) as needed

Discuss what students are learning.

- How does this unit align to and support mastery of [grade-level standards](#), including WIDA 2020, and practices?
- How does the unit provide opportunities for targeted language development aligned to a Key Language Use of grade-appropriate [WIDA standards](#)? Consider social and instructional language and language for specific content.
- How does this unit support students in developing disciplinary literacy?
- To what extent is the unit grounded in a range of complex texts (text structure/discourse, language knowledge demands, meaning/purpose)?
 - What makes the text(s) of this unit complex?
 - What are the key sections or components of the text that all students should engage with independently?
 - What supports might we consider so that all students can access the text(s) and develop their capacity to do so independently?
- To what extent does the unit provide opportunities for students to drive their own learning and consider real-world connections?

ADDITIONAL THINKING

To support multilingual learners, determine what the culminating task or assessment looks like at different proficiency levels.

- What does it look like for each level of language proficiency or range of levels (i.e., ELD levels 1-2, 3, 4)?
- What types of language should students at each level be expected to use independently? For more guidance, review the proficiency level descriptors within the [WIDA 2020 Standards Framework](#) and/or the grade-level proficiency level descriptors.

Complete the entire unit assessment or culminating task to understand the bar for mastery more deeply and prepare for timing.

Review or create rubric(s) for assessments or tasks and ensure they reflect the focus language goals you identified.

How will we know students have learned it?

Review the core unit assessment(s) or culminating task(s) and exemplar(s) and discuss what students need to know and do to demonstrate mastery.

- To what extent does it require students to apply grade-level standards and practices of the discipline?
- What are the driving language demands (key language uses, communication modes, and/or priority language expectations) of the assessment or task? (refer to [WIDA standards](#))
- What are the components of a successful response and/or product if this task or question(s) is completed at the depth of the content and practice standards?
- To what extent are these criteria for success shared with students throughout the unit?
- After grounding in the exemplar, did any additional skill, knowledge, or language demands of the task surface? To what extent are these demands taught and practiced throughout the unit?

If there is no exemplar available yet, the group should add this as a next step following the meeting.

Step 3: Consider Your Students

UNIT UNPACKING DISCUSSION

How does this unit recognize, center, and affirm diverse identities, perspectives, and experiences?

Discuss whose story or experiences are centered and missing.

- Who is centered and missing? What implicit and explicit messages are communicated as a result?
- What opportunities do students have to engage with diverse perspectives and resources over the course of the unit?

Discuss what teachers and students already know about the unit topic.

- What beliefs, perspectives, and/or misconceptions might I / students have about this topic?
- How might my identity influence my facilitation choices in the unit?

Discuss how different students' identities shape their engagement and response to the material.

- How can we leverage students' cultural identities, students' funds of knowledge, and/or connections to home language

ADDITIONAL THINKING

Reflect on the seven forms of curricular bias.

- To what extent are any of these biases present in existing unit materials?
- How can we mitigate any existing bias?

Notice which questions above were harder for us to answer.

- Consider how we could build our capacity to answer them more easily in the future, e.g., through deepening your knowledge of the content and our student.



Pause and Synthesize

Record any relevant next steps for planning that have emerged from Steps 2 and 3. Ensure that no next steps undermine the coherence or rigor of the materials.

Step 4: Plan to Engage & Support All Students

UNIT UNPACKING DISCUSSION

How can our facilitation of this unit cultivate deeper learning and increase all students' capacity as independent learners?

Skim the daily lessons for the unit or review an overview of each lesson if available.

Consider the assets and needs of all students.

- What do recent data, student IEPs, ELD levels, and recent student work show?
- Related to the skills, language, and content of this unit, what strengths do students already bring?
- What will be challenging for students during the unit?

Identify supports and scaffolds students might need.

- How will students be supported to engage in deeper learning and grow their capacity as independent learners throughout the unit?
- What skills, knowledge, language, standards, or concepts from prior units might we need to spiral into instruction to set students up for success in this unit?
- Where and how will we plan to explicitly teach language through content and incorporate opportunities for language development?

Consider the strengths and weaknesses of existing instructional materials and plan for engaging all students.

- To what extent does this unit create opportunities for frequent, robust student to student discussion and cooperative learning that advances student learning?
- To what extent does the unit provide opportunities for students to reflect on their learning and revise or refine their thinking throughout the course of the unit?
- To what extent are there opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in a way that is meaningful, authentic to the discipline, and relevant to your students?
- As facilitators of this unit, what will we do to amplify these opportunities and ensure all students are engaged in learning that is culturally and linguistically sustaining, real-world, relevant, and interactive?

ADDITIONAL THINKING

Reflect upon student learning from prior units to inform any adjustments to practice or instruction.

Consider how the learning and lessons in this unit intersect with the curricula of other content areas.

- Talk to a colleague in a different content area.
- Identify any high-leverage strategies that could be aligned across content areas.

Step 5: Closing & Next Steps

UNIT UNPACKING DISCUSSION

Identify what we need to do logistically to teach this unit.

- Materials, classroom set up, content knowledge building, or student home language(s) building needed

Determine which lessons and student work from the unit we will collaboratively internalize and analyze.

- Which lessons and/or tasks engage students in authentic work of the discipline and/or build the knowledge, skills, academic language, and thinking required for the culminating task(s)?
- Use the Lesson Internalization and Looking at Student Work tools.



Synthesize and Reflect

Synthesize Steps 4 and 5:

- Based on our reflections above and considering both instructional materials and pedagogical practices, what action steps are we going to take when teaching this unit? Consider what to adjust, what to add, what to emphasize, etc. without undermining the coherence or rigor of the materials.
- Restate all next steps that surfaced throughout the tool, assign owners, and determine due dates.