

## Lesson 1

### We are the gatekeepers!

#### We decide what we want to read

This matrix sums up the information a teacher needs to plan and deliver the lesson.

Competence training refers directly to EDC/HRE.

The learning objective indicates what students know and understand.

The student task(s), together with the method, form the core element of the learning process.

The materials checklist supports lesson preparation.

The time budget gives a rough guideline for the teacher's time management.

Competence training	As gatekeepers on their own behalf, the students become aware of their preferences for certain media and messages.
Learning objective	Both producers and users of media act as gatekeepers. The media construct our image of the world. They have the power to decide what we learn about (gatekeeping, agenda setting). But on the other hand, we, the media users, are gatekeepers on our own behalf. We choose or reject certain media, and we decide what messages we devote our attention to.
Student tasks	The students reflect on their preferences for a particular newspaper.
Materials and resources	Front pages from two different newspapers, issued on the same day. In large classes, two or three issues of the same front page should be available.  ✍ Student handouts 9.1-9.3, flipcharts, markers, scissors and glue. Collection of print media issues.
Method	Plenary presentations and discussion.  Lecture.  Group work.
Time budget	Stage 1: The teacher introduces the concept of gatekeeping. 25 min
	Stage 2: The students plan their wall newspaper project. 15 min

#### Information box

As users, the students react to the differences in the media by preferring one and rejecting another. By means of their preferences, the students act as gatekeepers on their own behalf, and they are made aware of this.

Switching the perspective, the students realise that the editors too have defined priorities and made choices. Which choices, and for what reasons? With this question in mind, the students will embark on their project. They will find the answer by making the same kind of choices – understanding media by producing media. They embark on the key task of this unit.

The teacher's lecture is linked to the students' process of constructivist learning. The teacher introduces the concept of gatekeeping after the students have seen the evidence for it. On the other hand, the students apply the new concept in the subsequent project, as it provides the key questions of their task.

## Lesson description

### Preparation of the lesson

Three weeks before this unit is due to begin, the teacher asks the students to collect print media – newspapers, magazines, journals, advertising prospectuses, etc. It is important to collect photographs as well. The students are requested to bring their materials to the classroom for the first lesson of this unit.

Depending on the space available, the materials are sorted and laid out on tables in the classroom. The students will use these materials when working on their wall newspaper in lessons 2 and 3.

The teacher also collects newspapers and magazines. In preparing the first lesson, the teacher draws on the material to obtain pairs of front pages of different newspapers. The front pages for all groups should be from the same day to allow comparisons within the groups, and also comparison of their results in the plenary round. Each group should receive a pair of front pages from different newspapers. If the students can cope, front pages in foreign languages can also be included.

The website [www.newseum.org](http://www.newseum.org) offers PDF versions (A4 format) of current newspaper front pages from many European countries. If the teacher uses these, they should be copied for the students as handouts, rather than displaying them on the board (see step 1.1 below).

### Stage 1: The teacher introduces the concept of gatekeeping

#### Step 1.1: The students show their preferences for a newspaper

The teacher attaches two front pages of newspapers to the blackboard. They form a pair of contrasts, for example:

- tabloid and quality paper;
- regional and national paper;
- papers representing different political standpoints, e.g. social democrat and neo-liberal.

If several copies of the same front page are available, they are displayed with sufficient space between them to give all students a good view. In big classes, this saves time.

The students come forward and study the two front pages in silence.

The teacher asks the students to assemble in front of the newspaper they prefer. The students form two groups, and if necessary a third that dislikes both papers. The students briefly exchange their views in groups and then give the reasons for their choices in the plenary round.

The teacher listens and facilitates the exchange of opinions, but does not comment on the students' statements or their choices.

#### Step 1.2: Instruction: the key concept of gatekeeping

The teacher gives a brief lecture to introduce the concept of gatekeeping and its double meaning. He/she links it to the context that the students have provided in step 1.1. As the students have just shown, we usually have very clear preferences for a certain paper, as newspapers differ considerably. We prefer one newspaper, and reject another. In everyday life, we may even prefer to use other media, such as TV or the Internet, as our source of information rather than a newspaper. In this very important respect, we act as gatekeepers. We decide what medium, and what messages through that medium, we give our attention to. The media depend on us – without our attention, their effort is in vain.

The teacher then switches the perspective: not only the readers act as gatekeepers, so do the editors of newspapers. They decide what we are offered to choose from. In this respect, we depend on the media – we only receive the information that they have selected.

The concept of gatekeeping therefore has two meanings: both the producers and users of media decide what messages are important. In politics, gatekeepers are also agenda setters.

Clearly the editors have also made choices – different ones, as the different front pages show. But for what reasons? The students will explore this question in the project that follows.

## **Stage 2: The students plan their wall newspaper project**

✍ Student handouts 9.1-9.3

### **Step 2.1 The teacher instructs the students on their task**

The students form groups of four to six and establish teams of editors. They spend the next two lessons on the production of a wall newspaper.

They will enact the gatekeeping role of editors, and deal with questions such as the following:

- What topics shall we include?
- What topic will we choose to be our eye-catcher, the lead story?
- What can we, or must we drop, as space is limited?

The students should be aware that these questions show what freedom of the press means in practice – enjoying the liberty, but also carrying the responsibility to solve some difficult problems.

The teacher then explains the technical side. The students may use up to two flipcharts. They write their articles by hand. They can search the print media collection for photographs or diagrams, and use the media at hand to obtain information. However, both their space and their time are limited. Their newspaper should be up for display at the end of the next lesson.

The students move their desks together to provide a surface large enough to lay out a flipchart.

### **Step 2.2 The students begin their project**

As instructed by the teacher, the students begin reading the handouts. If time allows, they take the next steps.