Light Weight Lesson Planner

Intro

This manual has the following structure:

- This Intro.
- Getting Started, installation and best practices.
- Creating holiday files
- Some examples
- Tips and tricks

By the way, this tool runs on Windows.

Success

Luc Orbons
Math and Physics Teacher at Baken Trinitas Gymnasium, Almere, the Netherlands
Owner of Connetic.eu

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 Luc.orbons@connetic.eu

Inhoudsopgave

Preface

Are You a Teacher and do you have a need for?

- Reusing last year's planning.
- Change the order of your planning.
- Mix lesson modules.
- Use your colleague's lesson planning.
- Reschedule your planning.
- Incorporate your planning into a planning document for your students.
- Share your planning with your students over the internet.
- Make improvements on the go and retain them.
- Import/export from/to excel, calendar or other formats.

Then, consider using the Lightweight Lesson Planning Tool. It is designed for convenience to do the above mentioned.

It uses the icalendar format which is a standard supported by all serious calendar applications e.g. Google Calendar, Microsoft Outlook and many others.

This makes your lesson planning portable to almost any platform available and there is no technology lock-in with this tool. You keep full control over your planning.

How it works:

Basically this tool manipulates calendar items in a special way, more suited for education. One of the features is that planning dates are fixed, but the contents of the appointment/lesson varies. A lesson series is in fact a number of fixed timeslots with varying content. You can select a week-rhythm, a time-period and a holiday calendar and your lessons are planned accordingly.

- You can import/export the desired icalendar files from/to the agenda tool you like and share it with your students.
- A reporting feature is available allowing you to merge the planning with a word document. This document may contain an introduction to the lessons series.
- In Mix/Merge mode you can drag/drop calendar items from/to different calendars.
- You can also copy/past the URL of your Google Calendar. No need to download stuff.

This tool is developed based on my own needs, so you may find some sharp edges here and there. An example of this is the working name of the tool: Calendar2Planner.

I'm aware that there are some great planning tools already available, if you're familiar with them don't be shocked by this tool. However those tools provide much more features than I need and use a proprietary format, making it more difficult to share.

Please let me know your comments/findings and suggestions,

Luc Orbons

Luc.orbons@connetic.eu

Getting Started

Installation

Simply unpack the application, you should see the following files:

Double click on the setup.exe and the tool will install itself. The actual program that is installed is called "Calendar2Planner".

Windows will warn you about the fact that the application is not signed, please ignore this.
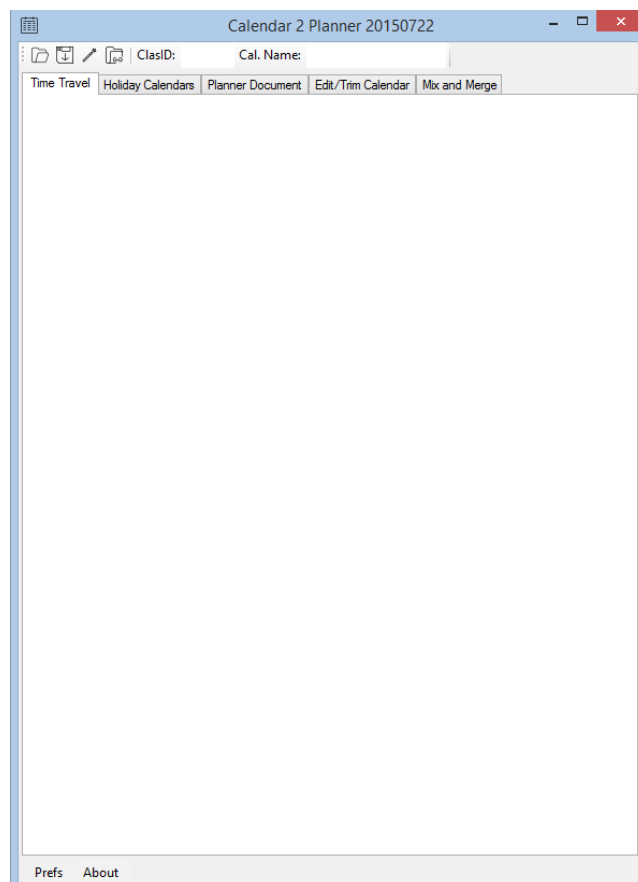
For convenience I added some examples, a lesson planning, G4 Na 2015 v2 G4 Na.ics, a holiday calendar and an example of a planning document.

After installing, the application will launch automatically and you should see the following screen.
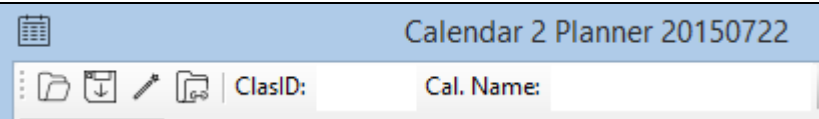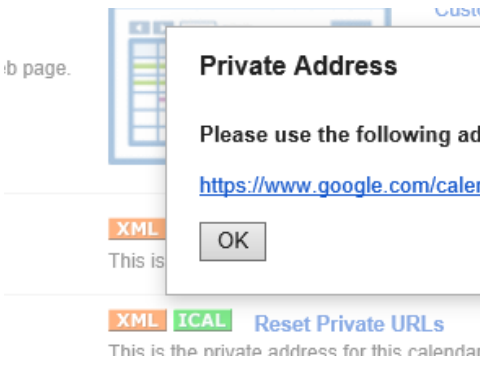
First-Run

As you can see it is quite empty at the first start. There are a number of Tabs:

- Time Travel, this option allows you to take an existing icalendar file and change the start date and week rhythms. More on this later.
- Holiday Calendars, allows you to create edit and save your own holiday or busy days calendar.
- Planner Document: Merges your lesson planning with a word document.
- Edit/Trim Calendar: Allows you to rearrange and edit the calendar entries.
- Mix and Merge: Here you can select two calendars and drag and drop events from one to the other. In fact you almost the same options as on the edit/trim tab.
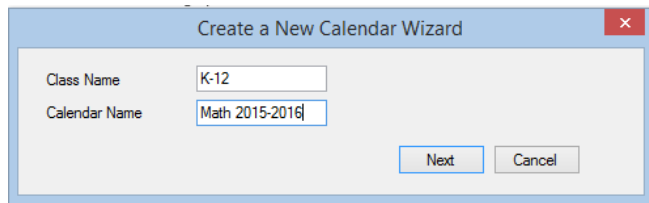

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On the top of the screen you will find a toolbar offering the following options.

Calendar 2 Planner 20150722 ClasID: Cal. Name:	
	Open File, select an icalendar file (*.ics) and it will open. The planners details will be visible on the time-travel tab.
	Save, it will save the current planning file to disk. The current planning file is the file you are working on, it can thus also be a holiday file. The filename is derived from the ClassId and the Calendar name which you can edit freely.
	Wizard, takes you through the motions of creating an empty lesson plan. Specify classid, calendar name, start date, end date, week rhythm and holiday calendar and it will give you a number of agenda items you can edit.
	Paste Weblink butten, an Alternative for open file. You can your agenda's private address to the clipboard as this example for Google Calendar shows. Note you need the green Ical button calendar (green ICAL button) to the clipboard. Next, press the Paste Weblink button and the calendar will open.
ClasID Cal. name	These two fields contain the calendar and class names when a specific calendar is opened.

On the bottom of the screen you will find a preferences tab.

KickStart, using the wizard

To get a quick feel, use the wizard. Subsequently the following options will be presented to you:
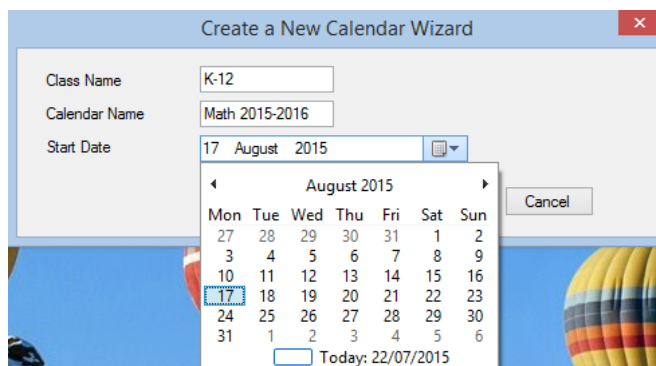

Entering the Class name and Calendar name, you are free to choose any name you like. Be careful not to select characters that are illegal in a filename it will lead to problems saving your work later (filename checking is something to be added later).

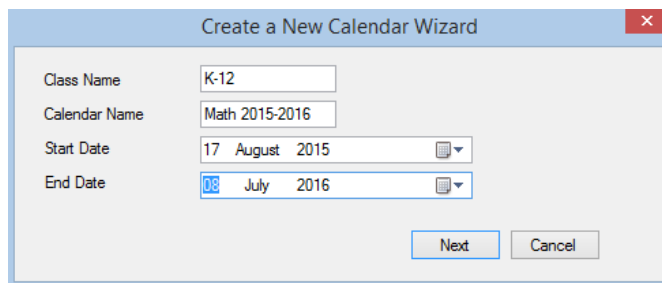Next you will be asked for a start date, just select the date you need.
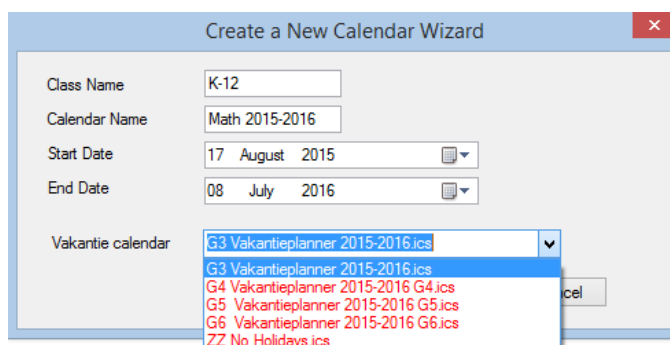
Likewise for the end date

Next you are asked to specify the appropriate holiday calendar

You can select one of the calendars in the dropdown list. This list is composed of the files that are present in the "Holidays" directory that you have prepared before. How you can do that I will explain later. If there's nothing can be selected here, that's fine for now.

Next you can select the timeslots you have available for your class.

In this example I assigned 2 timeslots on Tuesdays and 1 timeslot on Fridays.

Please notice the "Auto Time Slots" checkbox, this is checked by default. Unchecking it allows you to use the time controls on the screen thus determining the start time of the lesson. The Allow out of Rhythm checkbox will be explained later (action: disable this feature in the wizard).
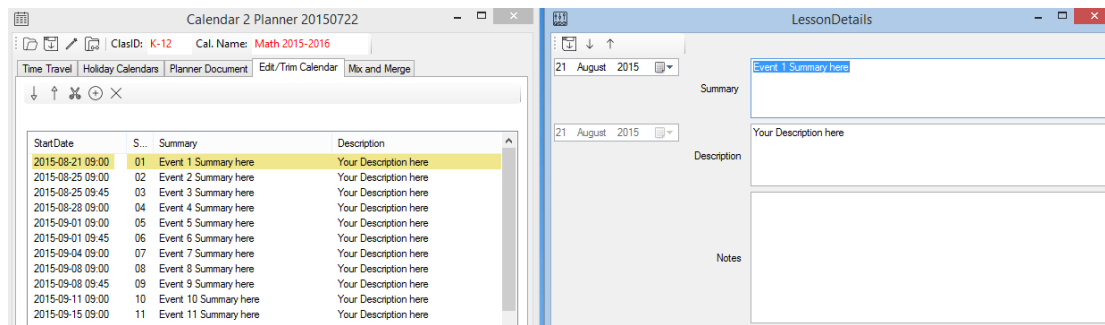
The wizard completed and informs you of the results.

Next on the main screen the Trim/Edit Tab is opened displaying the resulting schedule.

Trimming and editing your planning

After completing the wizard, the following screen will be displayed.

The first item is selected and a Lesson Details screen opens, allowing you to modify the contents of the lessons. On the lesson details form, make sure that you save the changes you made. Saving can be done by pressing the up/down arrow which will also select the next planning element, or by pressing the save button on the lesson details form.
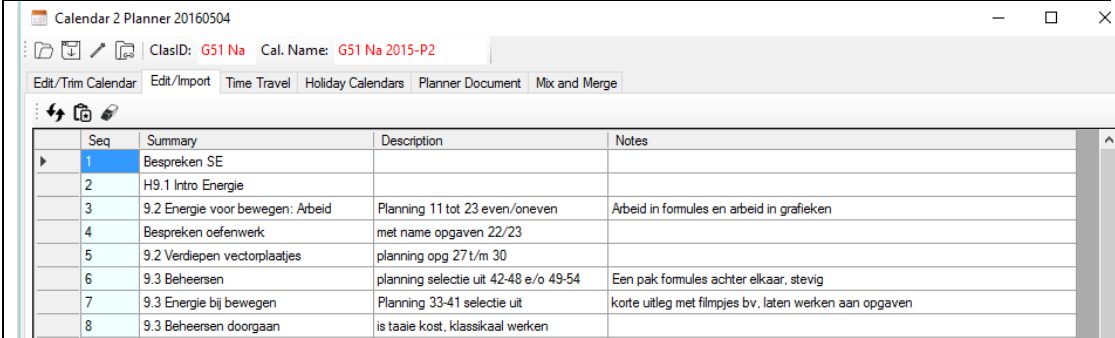
The items in the lessons list on the lift can be dragged and dropped to any location on the list. Please note that the dates are fixed, only the content of your lesson is moved. This is a major difference with regular agenda tools, there the date is moved and the contents remains unchanged. That's also why new events are placed on the bottom of the list and not in between!

Note that there is no undo for deleting an item! Deleting will also remove the timeslot for that lesson.

Trimming your planning is like trimming a video. On the left screen you select a calendar item, press on the down arrow and you have defined an inpoint. You will see the selected items highlighted.

Edit/Import

This option allows for a near "excel" user experience. Most importantly, you can copy paste information on this form. The intended usage is for importing items from external sources like excel and word. You may also find it convenient to use this screen for editing. The layout is similar to the layout of the printed planning document (see also the tab Planner Document).

	Commit changes to the planner, when you are done editing, you MUST commit your changes to the calendar, and otherwise all changes are lost. The upside of this is that it's not so easy to mess-up your existing calendar.
	Paste from clipboard, the contents of the clipboard is copied to the grid starting from the cursor position. You can use excel or word or anything as a source. Tab characters are interpreted as column separators and line feeds are treated as new planner entries. The first column on the grid is reserved for a sequence number.
	Clear All, empties the entire form! So be careful. It does NOT affect the calendar entries. So leaving the screen and returning later will result in the original calendar entries. However, if you commit these changes, all calendar items are erased.

If you want to add events or change the sequence, it is best to go to the Edit/Trim calendar tab where you can drag/drop, insert and delete events.

In case you started from scratch you may want to change the timeslots and dates of the events. You can use the Time Travel tab for that.

The table is automatically expand to accommodate the items you want to paste.

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Creating a holiday calendar

Holiday calendars reside in a special directory which defaults to \Documents\Calendar2Planner\HolidayCalendar. Any file placed there is used to populate a dropdown menu of available holiday calendars.

To create one, select the 'holiday calendars' tab. You will see the following screen.
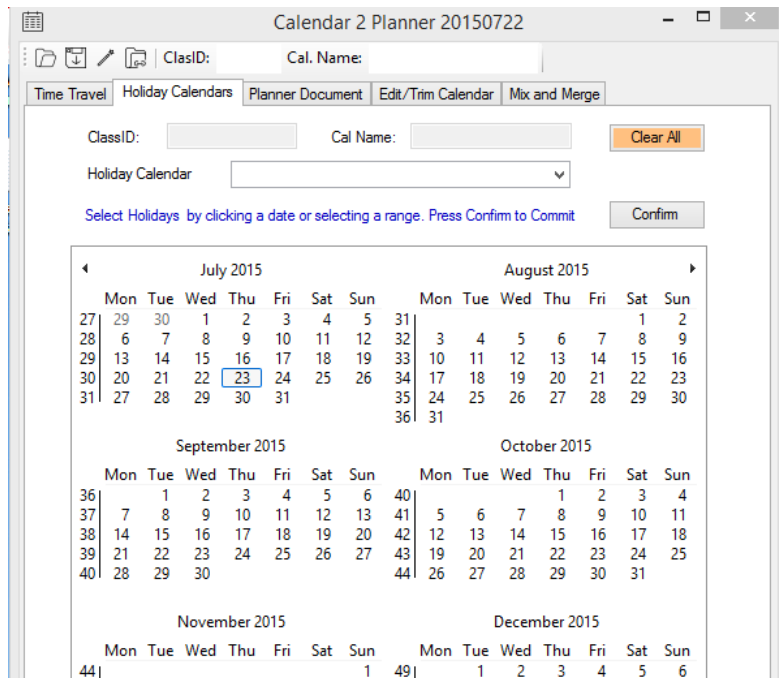
On the first run, there is no holiday calendar present, so you should make one.

Proceed by selecting the dates you want to mark as not available for lessons, which can be holidays, exams or other events. You can select by individually clicking on dates or by selecting ranges. After selecting a number of dates press confirm and your choice will appear in bold in the calendar.

In case you mark the wrong date as holiday, click that date again, press confirm and the date is cleared. After selecting some dates, your calendar may look like this.

Please note that the holidays are marked with bold numbers.
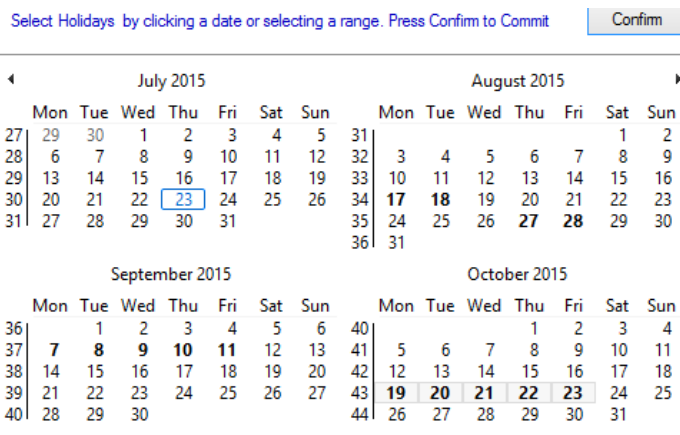
Next you can assign a name to this calendar by filling in the CalID and Calname fields in the top of the screen. Although not mandatory, it's a good practice to do so.
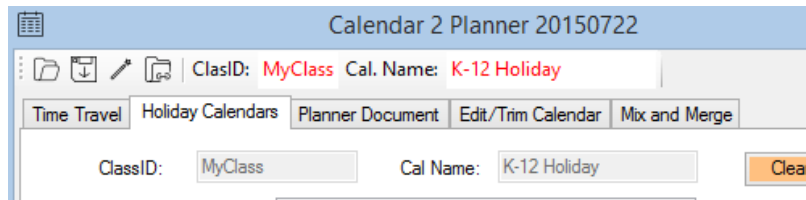
Next press the save button and you are prompted to save your file in the holiday's directory. Be aware that you select the holiday's directory.

As you can see the combination of the calendar name and classID is used to suggest a filename.

Now that you have a holiday calendar, you can commence with the actual planning of your course.

Time Travel

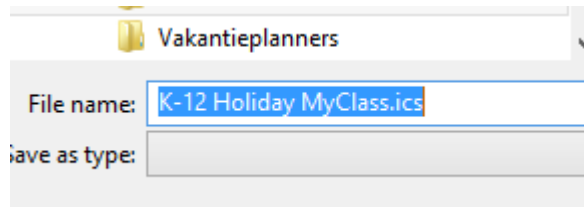The time travel feature allows you to reschedule your course. Selecting it will display the following screen.

Notice that:

- The calendar information is show, with the first and the last event displayed and the number of entries
- There is a left month panel where you can select the desired start date.
- The right panel allows you to select an end date. You usually don't need this because you are using an existing planning. When you start from scratch, then the end date becomes relevant, it acts like the wizard.
- You can select the desired holiday calendar, please check!

- The week rhythm allows you to select the desired number of time slots for each day. You can unselect a day by pressing on the weekdays button e.g. "Tue".

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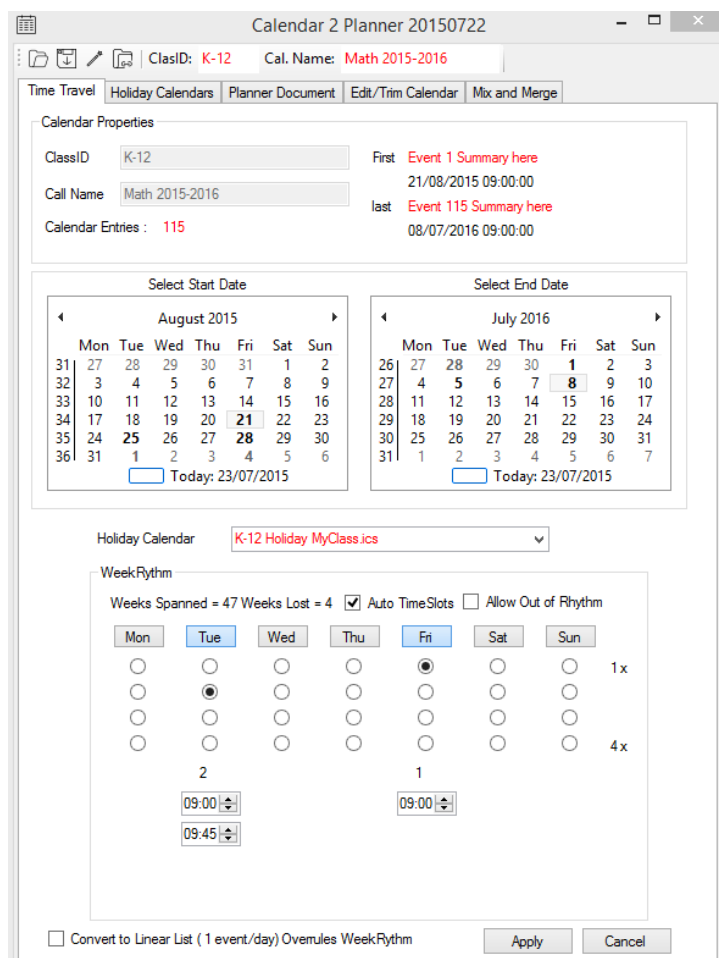
- Auto Timeslots will automatically insert non overlapping timeslots for the lessons. Unchecking this box will allow you to manually set a start time using the up/down controls.
- Convert to linear list will create a planning where each day has exactly one lesson.
- Finally the "Allow out of Rhythm" checkbox. When checked it will not touch appointments that are scheduled in holiday periods. I use this for including examinations. At my school there are no classes during a so called examination week. These periods are marked as "Holiday" in my holiday calendar.

No changes are made until you press the "apply" button. When satisfied with the result you can save it with the save button on top of the screen. Please don't forget this.

Create your planning document

In this step you merge your planning with a word document of your choice. In my case such document contains an introduction to the course and the planning is inserted at the end of the document. On this screen you select a document from a pre populated list or you can select the planner and the desired document manually.

There are some options available to influence the amount of information that is copied to your document.

Mix and Merge

Mix and Merge offers you the option to load two separate planning's and drag/drop items from one to the other. This enables you to quickly change the order of the subjects you want to cover.

Furthermore you can borrow from colleagues who use the same planning approach. The nature of the drag and drop is a little different than you might be used to.

Since we are dealing with a lesson planning with fixed timeslots, dragging and dropping will not affect the timeslots. Only the contents of the lessons is dragged and dropped.

You can drag/drop in any direction.
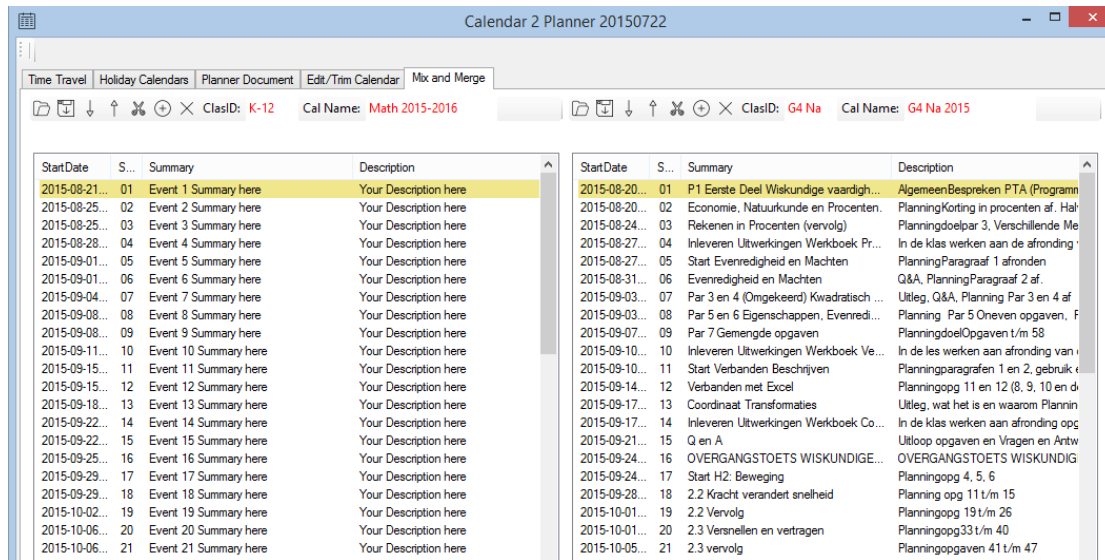
When dragging items from the left list to the right, the number of lessons increases. These extra lessons are inserted at the end of the planning range. This implies that a "time travel" is necessary to get these additional lessons in the desired week rhythm.
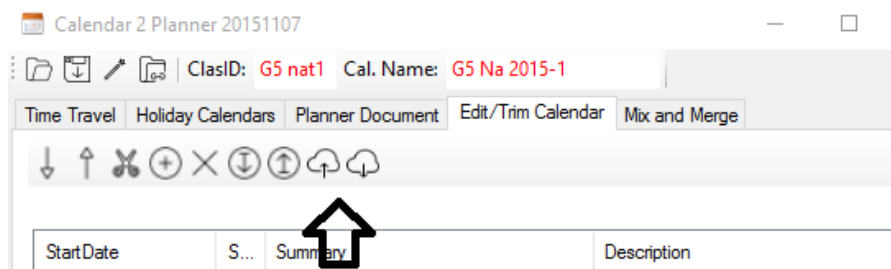
You can save your work by using the appropriate save buttons on the toolbar above each list.

You may also want to go full screen when using this feature.

Sync/Upload/Download to google calendar

In the Edit/Trim Calendar and the Mix and Merge tab you will find the following screen.

The calendar icon (above black arrow) will upload (left icon) or download (rightmost icon) this agenda to/from an agenda of a Google account. If you try this the first time, you are asked to give this application permission to use that Google calendar

What it does is as follows:

In case of an upload:

If there is no calendar with the calendar name, the calendar will be created and all events are uploaded to the google calendar.

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If there already is a calendar with the same name:

1. The google calendar will be backed up on your device (Pc/laptop).
2. All events in the google calendar will be deleted
3. The new events are inserted in the calendar.

Remark: In future a real sync facility may be provided, however there are practical limits on the number of transactions/sec posed by google.

In case of a download:

All events of the local calendar are removed. All events of the specified google calendar are downloaded to the local calendar. In case there is no google calendar with the specified name, the local calendar remains unchanged.

Tips and tricks

This tool works great for me in creating an initial planning. After that I upload it to my google calendar, make this calendar public and share it with my student. Saves a lot of paper.

The online calendar is the one I maintain through a course. By adding remarks or creating new content it is possible to retain the improvements.

At the end of the course I download the resulting calendar for reuse for the next year.

The icalendar format is not intended for handling different fonts, pictures and attachments. Where applicable I use hyperlinks. Not ideal but it keeps things simple, open and portable.

Importing from excel or other formats, I didn't try this but there are possibilities in the various mail environments. There is a planning tool VueMinder that specialises in features like this. Maybe worth a try.