



Lecture Strategies That Work

When deciding which instructional mode would best facilitate student learning--discussion, small-group work, cooperative learning, online learning, lectures, or another instructional mode--it is imperative to determine your goals and objectives as well as your constraints in terms of access to class material, class size and time, and the nature of the material itself. Though students benefit from a variety of such instructional modes, in many cases the lecture can be an efficient and effective way to teach.

For logistical reasons, the traditional lecture is often required at least part of the time for large classes, but there are valid pedagogical reasons for using the lecture in other instructional settings as well. In his chapter on lecturing in Teaching Tips, Wilbert McKeachie argues that lectures are most useful when providing students with up-to-date information on current research, summarizing material scattered over a variety of sources, and adapting material to the background and interests of a particular audience. It is also useful in motivating students by making them aware of the challenges or implications of specific course content (58). Additionally, lecturers can model for students the ways of approaching problems by showing a professor engaged in active scholarship. Lastly, preparing and delivering a lecture helps the lecturer integrate subject matter in ways that can contribute to his or her own scholarship.

After determining that lecturing is the best way to teach a certain concept or portion of class, the next step is to craft a lecture so that it is not only interesting to students but effective in promoting retention of material and critical thinking in students. Below is a list and description of some of the things you can do to make your lectures more effective.

- Go more slowly in the first few weeks, pausing periodically to help students with weaker backgrounds absorb the content and to allow everyone time to take notes. In general, the pace of your lectures should reflect the complexity of lecture material, especially the introduction of new vocabulary or new concepts.
- Introduce the lecture by arousing the students' curiosity. Address a gap in the students' knowledge either by raising a question or providing an example, case, or application of the material you have either already covered or are about to cover.
- Provide and stress examples. Examples are theory in practice. They can demonstrate not only how an idea functions in context but can also provide opportunities for students to discover the nuances of what is being taught. By providing examples that reflect your students' own experiences, both in their own lives and within the discipline, you bridge the gap between them and the subject matter. Metaphors and demonstrations also bridge that gap.
- Break up the lecture hour into ten-minute segments. After ten minutes, student attention begins to decrease and continues to decrease after that. Providing examples is one way to create a mental break. Asking specific questions, having students write down main points, and pairing students up for brief discussions can also refocus student attention to lectures at the same time that they provide more active learning opportunities. Relevant stories and appropriate humor also provide relief from lectures.

- Instead of summarizing knowledge, you should analyze material, formulate problems, develop hypotheses, scrutinize evidence, criticize and evaluate alternative solutions. Such activities reveal methods of learning and thinking. Point out relationships and ask rhetorical questions.
- Show enthusiasm for your subject. Try to find at least one aspect of your lecture material about which you are enthusiastic and relate that enthusiasm. Besides showing yourself to be an actively engaged scholar (as opposed to a summarizer of knowledge), you will demonstrate the dynamic nature of your field. Your enthusiasm is one of the most effective motivators for your students.
- Move around the room. Even movement from the podium to the blackboard can help redirect and refocus auditory attention as it refocuses students' eyes.
- Make eye contact. There is evidence that comprehension increases when students can see the speaker's face and lips.
- Use verbal cues. In addition to saying, "This will be on the test," also use lists to emphasize things that are important. Varying voice pitch, intensity, and pace are also important parts of the role of lecturer as actor.
- Do demonstrations and use audiovisual aids. Not everyone is an auditory learner.
- Encourage students to take notes. Discuss with them briefly what you think constitutes good note taking. Stress that notes are not dictation nor are they unorganized jottings. Good notes reflect the organization of the lecture itself. Again, stress the importance of writing down examples. Emphasize that effective note taking requires filling in the gaps after class. You can encourage good note taking by organizing your material in "chunks" (as opposed to a laundry list of seemingly unrelated facts) and by using the chalkboard, overhead projector, or PowerPoint to provide the organization outline of your lecture.
- Provide only the skeleton of your lecture, especially if you are using PowerPoint. If providing an outline before the lecture or using PowerPoint during a lecture, list only the main headings. You are providing a framework that the students will have to complete during the lecture.
- Reiterate main points. To help students determine the most important points in a lecture as well as to teach them new concepts, include periodic summaries of preceding material.
- Don't try to cover too much. Probably the greatest barrier to effective lecturing is feeling that one must cover the material at all costs. More important to getting to the end of your notes is student comprehension.
- Conclude the lecture. Review the major points, propose unanswered questions, and create anticipation of the future. Have them spend three minutes at the end of the period writing a summary of main points (the minute paper), or identifying the most difficult concept (the muddiest point).

All of these suggestions share a common goal—promoting active learning in students. Memory depends heavily on the students' activity during the learning process. By planning your lectures to include some of these characteristics, you will be encouraging your students to think about and elaborate on the new knowledge that you present.

Source: McKeachie, Wilbert J. *McKeachie's Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers*. 12th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.