



10 Suggestions for Improving a Lecture

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There is a lot more to teaching than lecturing! Learning is not an automatic consequence of pouring information into a student's head. While popular among many faculty, the downside of lecturing is that it stimulates very few of the senses that people use to learn with. By mixing lectures with other methodologies, material being introduced and discussed can reach a wider range of learners. These methods should build interest, maximize understanding and retention, involve learners during the lecture, and then reinforce what has been said. Listed below are ten suggestions that faculty can use to improve their lectures and increase student learning.

Build Interest

1. **Lead-off stories or interesting visuals** can be used to capture the audience's attention. Examples include:
 - Relevant anecdotes
 - Fictional stories
 - Cartoons or graphics
2. **Initial case problems** present a problem around which the lecture will be structured. The story can be fictitious or a real case, and the principles learned should be applicable to the learners' personal lives. Small and large group discussions take place to analyze and problem-solve the case. Remember, there is no one right answer in a case study.
3. **Questions** are the most common method to reinforce what has been presented in the lecture (Bligh, 2000). Asking learners a question will motivate them to listen for the answer. It is important to understand that the objective of asking questions is to gain their attention, not make them look or feel ignorant (Bligh, 2000). Asking for a personal opinion or reaction is less intimidating, alleviates the pressure of giving the wrong answer, and successfully gains the interest of the learners. Remember to include everyone in your questions and faculty want to make sure that all students are given the opportunity to respond. Gate-keeping comments such as "Let's hear from someone who has not had a chance to respond," can keep one or two people from dominating class responses.

Maximizing Understanding and Retention

4. **Headlines** identify major points in the lecture with key words that emphasize, itemize, and re-express what is being said; organizing thoughts and ideas in a manner that is comprehensible and easier to follow. Bligh (2000) suggests the following examples for headlines:
 - And most important . . . A significant factor was . . . unbelievably . . . naturally . . . A compelling argument is . . .
 - First . . . Firstly . . . A . . . B . . . Next . . . In addition . . . And finally . . . Turning now to my second point . . .
 - By this I mean . . . In effect this means . . . What I'm saying is . . . To put that another way . . .
5. **Examples and analogies** can be used to engage critical thinking. They teach the multiple relationships between the discussed concepts by using real-life examples comparable to the lecture topic. The learners can then compare these examples to experiences they've already had. To avoid confusion for the learners, it is important to check the validity of the material, making sure the analogy or example is comparable to

the concepts of the lecture (Bligh, 2000). Please remember that examples and analogies only “explain the reasons;” they do not justify them (Bligh, 2000).

6. **Visual backups** organize the way learners should be thinking about the lecture’s concepts. It enables the learners to see, as well as hear what is being said in an ordered fashion. Examples of visual aides include:
 - Handouts
 - Flip charts
 - Transparencies
 - Chalk or white board
 - PowerPoint

Make sure to keep it simple, large enough print for all to see, and leave plenty of white space (busy displays can be more of a distraction than a learning tool). Though a large amount of visual information can be conveyed in a short amount of time, “visual overload” is all too common (Bligh, 2000). Bligh (2000) says ten slides an hour for PowerPoint or slides should suffice, as long as learners have an opportunity to take notes after each one.

Involving Participants During the Lecture

7. **Spot challenges** are when the lecture is periodically interrupted and learners are challenged to give examples of the concepts thus far, or to answer spot quiz questions.
8. **Illuminating activities** are brief activities throughout the lecture that illustrate points being made. Examples are:
 - Role-playing
 - Simulations
 - Debates
 - Brainstorming

Reinforcing the Lecture

9. **Application problems** are problems or questions posed for the learners to answer based on the information given in the lecture.
10. **Participant reviews** are self-scoring review tests that assess the contents of the lecture. This can be performed as an individual test or discussed in small groups.

Other suggestions can be found in the references below.

References

Bligh, D.A. (2000). *What’s the Use of Lectures?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Silberman, M. 1995. *101 Ways to Make Training Active*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.