

Teaching with Lecture

Regardless of the size of a class, there are times when content must be provided directly, and lecturing is often the most efficient method of doing so. Unbroken lecture, however, jeopardizes engagement and learning—not to mention being exhausting for the instructor. To ensure active learning, employ lecture purposefully, mix it with other pedagogical tools, and build in regular opportunities to test understanding with student participation.

Some ways to promote active learning during lecture:

Frame lecture to maximize understanding.

- Explicitly teach students how you expect them to take notes, and strive for their objective to be more than merely transcribing your speech. Model, for example, using symbols to mark content that's surprising or confusing, just as you would in annotating a text.
- Overview the day's material and its sequence at the outset, to prime students for building connections between segments.
- Consider providing the lecture's outline in a handout or by jotting it on the whiteboard, so that students can locate each moment in a larger whole.
- Begin and end with an explicit articulation of the most important takeaways.
- Lecturing is performative. Over time, then, develop your own public speaking skills to best utilize your voice, hands, and body. Consider strategies like moving throughout the room as you speak, making clear eye contact, and counting off lists on your fingers.
- Provide visual aids (in the form of notes on the whiteboard or slides) that anchor and emphasize content.

Intersperse lecture with other activities designed to **foster participation** and seek students' **performances of understanding**.

- Incorporate brief **in-class writing** activities that ask students to, for example, respond to your questions, summarize prior content, document key takeaways, or practice applying something you've introduced. Invite students to share these in **small groups**, or ask for one or two to speak to the whole class.
- Especially in very large classes, consider using clickers to assess student comprehension in real time.
- Pause occasionally for students to discuss in groups, and ask a few to share findings before moving on.
- Ask targeted questions, including open-ended ones that demand synthesis or reflection.

References

Ardalan, Kavous. "The Philosophical Foundation of the Lecture-versus-case Controversy: Its Implications for Course Goals, Objectives, and Contents." *International Journal of Social Economics*, vol. 35, no. 1/2, 2008, pp. 15-34.

Davis, Barbara Gross. *Tools for Teaching*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009.

Stanley, Christine A. and Erin M. Porter, eds. *Engaging Large Classes: Strategies and Techniques for College Faculty*. Boston, MA: Anker Publishing, 2002.

See also

Fostering Participation

In-class Writing

Performances of Understanding

Teaching with PowerPoint