

| Teaching Commons

# Lecturing Guidelines



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## LECTURING OVERVIEW

The best lectures, like any good talk, invite students to think imaginatively and conceptually about a significant theme or problem. They do more than “cover the material.” Professor D. History reminds us that a good lecture always offers a point of view and an entry into a field of study. It is not, however, the ideal platform for a complex scholarly argument or a massiv

You should also try for a relaxed, conversational tone; allow yourself to think out loud, and engage with the material as you present it. It's usually a mistake to rely extensively on a verb result in the kind of mind-numbing performance often parodied in television and movies.

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## LECTURING GUIDELINES

### Preparation

Thorough preparation of a lecture will increase your confidence, improve your delivery style, and enhance the effectiveness of your presentation. When preparation time is limited, foc

- Craft an introduction that will set a clear and engaging agenda.
- Create an outline of your main points, examples, or demonstration.
- Prepare and practice a short conclusion that will tie the strands of the lecture together and place the lecture in the wider context of the course.
- If you plan to use technology aids, prepare backups in case of technological difficulties.

### Keep Your Focus

- Limit the main points in a lecture to five or fewer.
- Create effective visuals, analogies, demonstrations, and examples to reinforce the main points.
- Share your outline with students.
- Emphasize your objectives and key points in the beginning, as you get to them, and as a summary at the end.

### Basic Presentation Skills

You don't need to be a charismatic showman to deliver a strong lecture; begin by refining your basic presentation skills.

- Avoid reading your lectures verbatim; if you must refer to your notes frequently, combine this with lots of eye contact.
- When making eye contact, actually look at specific individuals while you make a point; don't just continually scan the room. Individuals seem most comfortable with about five second contact.
- When you lecture, speak clearly and not too rapidly. If students are busy taking notes, go even slower.
- Face the students as much as possible, rather than facing the blackboard, projection screen, or laptop.
- Try taping your lecture on a tape recorder and listen to yourself.

### Engage Your Audience

- Focus attention early on using a quote, a dramatic visual, an anecdote, or other material relevant to the topic.
- Integrate visuals, multimedia, discussion, active learning strategies, small-group techniques, and peer instruction.
- Link new material to students' prior knowledge, such as common experiences or previous coursework. Can what you're teaching explain a phenomenon that students may have won what you're teaching contradict ideas that students may have about how the world works?
- Show enthusiasm for the topic and information. Remember, you are modeling your discipline.
- Give students time to think and genuine opportunities to respond.
- Plan for diverse learners. Use verbal, visual, and kinesthetic approaches such as hands-on exercises and simulations.

### Get Feedback

- Observe students' non-verbal communication: note taking, response to questions, eye contact, seating patterns, and response to humor. Are they “with” you?
- Use the “minute paper” or other assessment techniques. Ask students to respond in one or two sentences to the following questions: What stood out as most important in today's lec confused about? Do this every few lectures—it will take you about 15 minutes to review the responses and you'll learn an enormous amount about your students.
- Give quizzes periodically on lecture objectives, not obscure material. Are they getting it?
- Conduct midterm teaching evaluations or simply ask the students for suggestions and comments at the midpoint of the quarter.

## Handling Questions

You should go out of your way to encourage questions, although instructors have different preferences for how they take them. Let your students know if they can interrupt with questions for the end of the period. In either case, avoid going overtime, so there is a reasonable chance for students to formulate and ask questions. Here are some tips for encouraging, an questions:

- When asking if there are any questions, don't simply ask "Any questions?" with your back turned to the audience. Phrase it as a genuine invitation, such as "What parts of this are still confusing for you?" or "What do I need to explain again?" or "What are you wondering about that I haven't yet addressed?"
- Make sure you understand the student's question before launching into a long explanation. Restate the question and let the student clarify, if necessary.
- In a large class, repeat a student's question so that all the students know what question you're answering.
- Consider reserving two- to three-minute blocks for questions at transition points in your lecture. Let students have the full time to think, even if nobody asks a question. This reinforces to answering questions and will encourage students to review the material recently covered.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, don't bluff. You can let the student know that the question goes well beyond what you can address in lecture, volunteer to find the answer, ask the student to investigate and report back to the class. Or, consider trying to work out an answer with the students, if the question seems solvable.

## Handouts

If you give out copies of your lecture slides or notes, go out of your way to make sure students are actively engaging with the material. Use the note-taking time you have saved to increase participation and other active learning exercises.

- Handouts can be particularly effective for presenting complex data, detailed material, examples, and diagrams. Focus on material you think there is a good chance students will need if they need to apply it in an assignment.

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## SEE ALSO

For further information about effective lecturing, including preparation, basic presentation skills, variety of presentation, and tips from other faculty, see:

- [Preparing and Delivering the Lecture \(1-hour talk by Lanier Anderson\)](#)

From *Tomorrow's Professor*:

- [How a Stanford Professor Liberates Large Lectures](#)
- [Designing and Delivering Effective Lectures](#)

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## RESOURCES

### Teaching

[Planning Your Approach](#)

[Teaching Strategies](#)

[Great Beginnings: Things to do early in your class](#)

[Checklist for Effective Lecturing](#)

[Lecturing Guidelines](#)

[Laboratory Teaching Guidelines](#)

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[Real-World Learning](#)

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[Small Groups and Discussions](#)

[Evaluating Your Teaching](#)

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