

## PRACTICAL POINTERS ON PREPARING AND GIVING LECTURES

*These tips are designed to optimize the learning potential of lectures, in particular with reference to teaching and learning processes, and to remind you of the way in which large-group sessions can pay real dividends to students.*

**1. Make the most of opportunities when you have the whole group together.**

There are useful benefits of whole-group shared experiences, especially for setting the scene in a new subject, and talking students through known problem areas. Use these sessions to develop whole-group cohesion, as well as to give briefings, provide introductions, introduce keynote speakers, and hold practical demonstrations.

**2. Make sure that lectures are not just 'transmit-receive' occasions.** Little is learnt by students just writing down what the lecturer says, or copying down information from screens or boards. There are more efficient ways of providing students with the information they need for their learning, including the use of handout materials, textbooks and other learning resource materials.

**3. Be punctual, even if some of your students are late.** Chat to the nearest students while people are settling in. Ask them, 'How's the course going for you so far?' for example. Ask them, 'What's your favorite topic so far?' or, 'What are the trickiest bits so far?'

**4. When you are ready to start, capture students' attention.** It is often easier to do this by dimming the lights and showing your first overhead, than by trying to quieten down the pre-lecture chatter by talking loudly. Do your best to ignore latecomers. Respect the courtesy of punctuality of those already present, and talk to them.

**5. Make good use of your specific intended learning outcomes for each lecture.** Find out how many students think they can already achieve some of these - and adjust your approach accordingly. Explaining the outcomes at the start of the session, or including them in handout materials given out to students, can help them to know exactly what they should be getting out of the lecture, serving as an agenda against which they can track their individual progress during the minutes which follow.

**6. Help students place the lecture in context.** Refer back to previous material (ideally which a short summary of the previous lectures at the beginning) and give them forewarning of how this will relate to material they will cover later.

**7. Use handout material to spare students from copying down lots of information.** It is better to spend time discussing and elaborating on information that students can already read for themselves.

**8. Face the class when using an overhead projector, or computer-aided presentations on-screen in the lecture room.** Practice in a lecture room using your transparencies or slides as an agenda, and talking to each point listed on them. By placing a pen on a transparency you can draw attention to the particular point on which you are elaborating, maintaining vital eye contact with your students.

**9. Work out some questions which the session will address.** Showing these questions as an overhead at the beginning of the session is a way of helping students to see the nature and scope of the specific learning outcomes they should be able to address progressively as the session proceeds.

**10. Give your students some practice at note-making (rather than just note-taking).** Students learn very little from just copying out bits of what they see or hear, and may need quite a lot of help towards summarizing, prioritizing, and making their notes their own individual learning tools.

**11. Get students learning by doing.** Just about all students get bored listening for a full hour, so break the session up with small tasks such as problems for students to work out themselves, applying what you have told them, reading extracts from their handout material, or discussing a question or issue with the students nearest to them. Even in a crowded, tiered lecture theatre, students can be given things to do independently for a few minutes at a time, followed by a suitable debriefing, so that they can compare views and find out whether they were on the right track.

**12. Variety is the spice of lectures.** Make sure that you building into large-group lectures a variety of activities for students, which might include writing, listening, looking, making notes, copying diagrams, undertaking small discussion tasks, asking questions, answering questions, giving feedback to you, solving problems, doing calculations, putting things in order of importance and so on.

**13. Ask the students how you are doing.** From time to time ask, 'How many of you can hear me clearly enough?', 'Am I going too fast?', 'Is this making sense to you?' Listen to the answers and try to respond accordingly.

**14. Use lectures to start students learning from each other.** Getting students to work in small groups in a lecture environment can allow them to discuss and debate the relative merits of different options in multiple-choice tasks, or put things in order of importance, or brain-storm possible solutions to problems. After they have engaged which each other on such tasks, the lecturer can draw conclusions from some of the groups, and give expert-witness feedback when needed.

**15. Use lectures to help students make sense of things they have already learnt.** It is valuable to make full use of the times when all students are together to give them things to do, to allow them to check out whether they can still do the things they covered in previous sessions.

**16. Use lectures to help shape students' attitudes.** The elements of tone of voice, facial expression, body language and so on can be used by lecturers to bring greater clarity and direction to the attitude-forming shared experiences which help students set their own scene for a topic or theme in a subject.

**17. Genuinely solicit students' questions.** Do not ask, 'Any questions?' as you are picking up your papers at the end of a class. Treat students' questions with courtesy even if they seem very basic to you. Repeat the question so all students can hear, and then answer in a way that does not make the questioner feel stupid.

**18. Do not waffle when stuck.** Do not try to bluff your way out of it when you do not know the answers to some of the questions students may ask. Tell the questioners that you will find out the answers to their questions before your next lecture with them - they will respect you more for this than for trying to invent an answer.

**19. Use some lecture time to draw feedback from students.** Large group sessions can be used to provide a useful barometer of how their learning is going. Students can be asked to write on slips of paper (or post-its) questions that they would like you to address at a future session.

**20. Use whole-class time to explain carefully the briefings for assessment tasks.** It is essential that all students have a full, shared knowledge of exactly what is expected of them in such tasks, so that no one is disadvantaged by any differentials in their understanding of the performance criteria or assessment schemes associated with the tasks.

**21. Show students how the assessor's mind works.** This can be done by devising class sessions around the analysis of how past examples of students' work were assessed, as well as by going through in detail the way in which assessment criteria were applied to work that the class members themselves have done.

**22. Record yourself on video every now and then.** Review the video to help you see your own strengths and weaknesses, and look for ways to improve your performance. Your keenest critic is likely to be yourself, so do not try to resolve every little habit or mannerism at once; just tackle the ones that you think are most important, little by little. It may also be useful for a group of colleagues together to look at each other's videos, and offer each other constructive comments. This is excellent practice for inspection or other quality assessment procedures.

**23. Use all opportunities to observe other people's lectures.** You can do this not only in your own department, but also at external conferences and seminars. Watching other people helps you to learn both from what others do well, that you might wish to emulate, and from awful sessions where you resolve never to do anything similar in your own classes.

**24. Put energy and effort into making your lectures interesting and stimulating.** A well-paced lecture which has visual impact and in which ideas are clearly communicated can be a motivating shared experience for students. Become comfortable using overhead projectors and audio-visual equipment in imaginative ways.

**25. Watch the body language of your audience.** You will soon learn to recognize the symptoms of 'eyes glazing over' when students are becoming passive recipients rather than active participants. That may signal the time for one of your prepared anecdotes, or better, for a task for students to tackle.

**26. Do not tolerate poor behavior.** You do not have to put up with students talking, eating or fooling around in your lectures. Ask them firmly but courteously to desist, and as a last resort, ask them to leave. If they do not do so, you should leave yourself for a short period to give them a cooling-down period.

**27. Do not feel you have got to keep going for the full hour.** Sometimes you will have said all you need to say, and still have ten or fifteen minutes in hand. Do not feel you have to waffle on. It may come as a surprise to you, but your students may be quite pleased to finish early occasionally.

**28. Do not feel that you have to get through all of your material.** Even very experienced lecturers, when preparing a new lecture, often overestimate what they can cover in an hour. It is better to cover part of your material well, than to try to rush through all of it. You can adjust future sessions to balance out the content.

**29. Use large-group sessions to identify and answer students' questions.** This can be much more effective, and fairer, than just attempting to answer their questions individually and privately. When one student asks a question in a large-group session, there are often many other students who only then realize that they too need to hear the answer.

**30. Help the shy or retiring students to have equal opportunity to contribute.** Asking students in large groups to write questions, or ideas, on post-its helps to ensure that the contributions you receive are not just from those students who are not afraid to ask in public. It can be comforting for students to preserve their anonymity in asking questions, as they are often afraid that their questions may be regarded as silly or trivial.

**31. Come to a timely conclusion.** A large-group session must not just fizzle out, but should come to a definite and robust ending. It is also important not to overrun. It is better to come to a good stopping place a few minutes early, than to end up rushing through something important right at the end of the session.

From Chapter 3, "Refreshing Your Lecturing" in *The Lecturer's Toolkit, A Practical Guide to Learning, Teaching & Assessment*, Second Edition, by Phil Race. 22883 Quicksilver Drive, Sterling VA 20166-2012, USA. © Copyright Phil Race, 1998, 2001.