

**The Lecture Approach: Benefits, Costs, and Improvements?**

Lecturing is useful for some of our student-learning goals, but not for others. *Strengths* of the lecture approach include its **ability** to: communicate instructor enthusiasm; convey large amounts of information; share recent developments not yet in print; model various practices in a discipline; communicate to many students simultaneously; permit teacher control; present minimum threat to students who are asked only to listen; and aid learning for students who learn well by listening.

*Weaknesses* of the lecture approach include its **inability** to: provide feedback to the instructor; keep students actively learning; keep students' attention beyond 15-25 minutes (according to studies); foster retention if students are too passive; vary the pace to accommodate learner differences in understanding; vary learning modalities for students who do not learn well by listening.

Can we improve our lectures? Below are some suggestions to consider.

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Prep and Organization

1. Prepare an outline of 5-9 major points. Covering too much inhibits learning. Decide minor points under each major point.
2. Select examples, visuals, and stories to illustrate your points, and fit them to relevant information you have gathered about your students.
3. Present more than one side of an issue so students understand various implications or counter arguments.

Lecture Presentation

1. Speak clearly and loud enough to be heard, avoiding distracting verbal "space holders" such as "and uh" or "you know."
2. Provide an introduction that gives your students a focus for your lecture. Perhaps start with a question, problem, or controversy. Or share a few questions that today's lecture will "answer." Relate today's lecture to past lectures, as well as to the learning outcomes for the course.
3. Present an outline of your main points on the chalkboard. Emphasize the main points and repeat them.
4. Pause – Give your listeners time to think and to write.

Feedback

1. Look at your listeners for nonverbal clues about their understanding or agreement.
2. Look around and ask if there are any questions during your lecture.
3. Periodically, ask a simple recall question to see if students are learning key concepts. They can write their answers atop their notes for you to quickly "sweep the room" to assess.
4. Create a "lecture committee" in large classes to meet with you periodically to provide feedback about how the course is progressing or to discuss future course activities.

Reference: "Improving Lectures" by William Cashin

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