10 Suggestions for Enhancing Lecturing

By Ray Heitzmann

Criticism of the lecture method remains a staple of discussion and writing in academia—and most of the time it's deserved! Those interested in improving this aspect of their teaching might wish to consider some or all of the following suggestions for enhancing lectures.

1. Lectures must start with a "grabber." Regardless of class size, motivation remains a major prerequisite of an effective lecture. Projecting a chart, a short reading, a problem, or a political cartoon and asking thought-provoking questions provides an "anticipatory set" for learners. This permits, encourages, perhaps even forces students to focus and react mentally. The instructor should then integrate it into the presentation. In some cases, there may be some benefit to emailing the "grabber" (a.k.a. "bell ringer") prior to class, depending upon the course, lesson, and students. *A Berkeley Compendium of Suggestions for Teaching with Excellence,* from the University of California at Berkeley, advises teachers to plan the beginnings and endings of lectures so that you can "open with gusto" and "finish strong."

Cartoons are valuable "grabbers." Projecting an illustration on a screen as students arrive in class focuses attention on the day's topic. One proviso: Spend some time instructing the class on interpretation skills prior to using this methodology. This will enable students to operate at a higher cognitive level. I suggest exposing students initially to concepts such as caricature, symbolism, and satire, and then, after some instruction and practice, proceeding to more sophisticated activities. The latter would include providing the class with a cartoon that omits the cap-

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tion or dialogue and asking them to provide a caption or dialogue with a justification of their position. This is critical thinking at its finest! A number of websites offer cartoons on current happenings and a number of books provide classic selections.

Starting class with a "grabber" satisfies the demands of students who would like classes to be stimulating, entertaining, and interactive. The "bell ringer" cartoon strategy is a powerful instructional and behavioral strategy encouraging students to stop talking with friends, close their laptops, focus on the visual, and think.

2. Lectures must be interactive. Interactivity is a component of everyday students' life, ranging from iPhones and email to Twitter and the Web. How can a lecturer tap into this world for the instructional benefit of students? Pop quizzes, asking discussion-prompting questions, and providing problems for students to solve in class can help avoid nonparticipation, but much more can be done.

Visual aids, particularly film, provide opportunities for interaction with students. For example, when showing a video, stop periodically and ask questions rather than waiting until the end of the film. The instructor might write a series of questions on the board or email them to students prior to class. Some teachers provide students with a handout with questions as they come into class. Students prepare answers and turn them in at the end of class for grading. This works particularly well with students in the habit of napping during a film.

Case methodology can enhance teacher-student and student-student interactions. Introducing a case focused on dilemmas (e.g., approving the Treaty of Versailles or dropping the atomic bomb on Japan) can energize the class and result in excited interactions, motivation, and learning. Case methodology has a history of success in college, but it must be used with care to maximize its success. Creating a positive classroom atmosphere remains key to providing a climate for learning, and interactive lessons can contribute to this.

3. Lectures must not rehearse the textbook. To encourage students to use their textbooks, instructors should make frequent references to texts. Most importantly, they should select portions of the text to use as springboards to an in-depth explanation of an event.

After instructors introduce the interpretations, students can be given opportunities to develop their own interpretations or to validate a specific interpretation.

This strategy liberates students from the passive behavior so common in traditional lecture-plus-textbook-based pedagogy. Instructors

must remember that a textbook should serve as a supplement to a lecture, not vice versa. Interactive lectures mitigate against passive behavior.

4. Lectures must represent the latest thinking and research. This suggestion defines the essence of the scholar-educator who shares new developments in the field with students. In her book *Changing College Classrooms*, Diane Halpern suggests avoiding the "sage on the stage role." Rather, instructors can model how scholars frame questions and pursue answers through decision making and problem solving. Students can utilize this model in their work, internalizing critical thinking as an academic and personal skill. Scholars develop new knowledge based upon serious research and reflection, a scenario students can and should, mimic.

5. Lectures must contain humor. History houses a wealth of stories that provide amusing anecdotes. But there are caveats. Taste dictates a note of caution relative to the selection and explanation of "stories," particularly those that fall into the domain of legend as opposed to fact. Recognizing that positive physiological and psychological benefits result from humor, "comic relief" can and should form a natural part of the classroom.

Research endorses the use of humor in the classroom, listing benefits such as attentiveness and interest, positive student-teacher rapport, improved individual and group productivity, and most importantly, retention of material Many instructors have observed that humor decreases academic stress and anxiety; however, they should avoid ridicule and sarcasm as well as sexist, racist, and ethnic jokes.

6. Lectures must humanize history and the social sciences. Integrating biographies into one's teaching brings to life historical events as well as activities in other disciplines. Individual lives can become stories for our classrooms. Discuss presidents such as Ulysses S. Grant, Teddy Roosevelt, and Bill Clinton; international leaders Catherine the Great, Winston Churchill, and Golda Meir; activists Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Delores Huerta. Discussions such as the impact of rainfall on communities or of a family faced with a water shortage helps students retain knowledge while providing insight into historical or current events.

7. Lectures must respect the audience by utilizing students' multiple intelligences and learning styles. Research suggests that faculty should consider students' individual differences in the preparation and delivery of lectures. Presentations enhanced with visuals, sound, and class interaction enable students to increase their learning, understanding, retention, and enjoyment by tapping

into multiple intelligences and addressing diverse learning styles. For instance:

- visual learners learn through seeing;
- auditory learners learn through listening; and
- tactile/kinesthetic learners learn through moving and touching.

In his book *Multiple Intelligences*, Howard Gardner provides models of the intellect. His categories include:

- logical/mathematical—numbers, clear thinking;
- verbal/linguistic—writing, poetry;
- rhythmic/musical—creating, enjoying music;
- bodily/kinesthetic—physical world, athletics;
- interpersonal—understanding, working with others;
- visual/spatial—mental view of relationship;
- naturalistic—nature, botany, zoology;
- emotional—maturity; and
- spiritual—world beyond one's self, religion.

In addition, the Internet can be a valuable resource offering collections of speeches, interviews, media coverage of events, and related information to enhance students' understanding and assisting faculty to achieve lesson and course objectives.

8. Lectures must be interdisciplinary. Instructors can use many bodies of knowledge to support their pedagogy. Consider the unique contributions that each of the humanities (art, literature, music, philosophy, religion, and others) and social sciences (anthropology, economics, geography, political science, psychology, sociology, and others) can add to the learning environment. They can enhance investigation of issues as well as understanding of events.

9. Lectures must motivate, challenge, and inspire. The changing pedagogical paradigm, which emphasizes student learning as opposed to our teaching, permits instructors to challenge students intellectually, perhaps inspiring them to take advanced coursework and graduate studies. Pacing instruction through visuals, props, questions, and such should be keyed to the nonverbal behavior of students. Utilizing questions, reading quotations, or planned movements by the instructor can stimulate a class that might start to drift. Often a positive comment in class or an encouraging annotation on a paper or test can serve as a preemptive motivational strategy.

Class size often dictates how an instructor can challenge students. In a small-group setting, the lecturette (15-20 minutes) is a natural. This setting permits an instructor to springboard into a discussion that involves most students. But teachers can also challenge students in large-group settings. ▶

In his book *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, Peter Frederick reports: "Not all students talk, to be sure, unless I ask them to take five minutes and talk about a (primary) source in a pair or trios first before inviting the whole class to comment . . . I have chosen to use this class time for helping students learn the important skills of doing history rather than covering content . . . these methods of engaged, deep learning, usually thought to be possible only in tutorial or in a small class, can occur even in large classes."

Frederick challenges his students with pedagogy "outside the box," which encourages critical thinking.

10. Lectures must summarize and preview the next lecture. The new world of learning emphasizes what students have learned rather than information delivery. This major change embraces and expects summarization (or closure) at the end of a lecture to enhance learning and retention and invites asking questions at the close of class, hinting that some of them might appear on a future quiz or test. Some teachers require students to turn in an index card at the beginning of the next class or at the close of a class, drawing from that day's materials. Instructors might pose a question from lecture material for use on a test or quiz or as a "grabber" at the beginning of class. An end-of-class review and assessment can also help to eliminate the frenzied closing of laptops and the rush to escape as class ends.

A technique used by the media to entice an audience to continue to watch or tune in for the next show provides another motivational and learning strategy. For example, an instructor may say: "At the start of our next class, a librarian will be here to assist you with your research paper and to answer related questions." Or, "I will be showing a *Saturday Night Live* skit on Congress and separation of powers at the beginning of our next class prior to our discussion of checks and balances."

Conclusion

Can the lecture as a teaching strategy survive in the 21st century? The answer is yes, if the pedagogy moves from teacher centered to student centered and incorporates some of my suggestions. Of course, the whole process works (perhaps only works) when the lecturer is dynamic, confident, highly motivated, and, most importantly, enthusiastic. The following concepts define enthusiasm: quality vocal delivery, good eye contact, natural body movement, strong gestures, vibrant facial expressions, descriptive word selection, acceptance and encouragement of ideas, and an exuberant energy level. Using these components in a lecture will result in much personal and student satisfaction. ■