Giving Better Lectures

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Three main topics

- The lecture
  - advantages
  - problems
  - enemies
- Designing better lectures
- Increasing audience engagement

ADVANTAGES OF THE LECTURE

- very efficient for expert-to-expert transmission
- can communicate large amount of material efficiently
- can be used to supplement or elaborate curriculum
- good if material has to be organized or presented in a particular way
- can provide introduction to unfamiliar area
- can be used to present material not available elsewhere or hard to discover because of originality, complexity, or difficulty
- can be used to arouse interest in the subject
- is effective if skillfully delivered, with clear, enthusiastic, modulated voice, good eye contact, and appropriate gestures
- good mainly for auditory learners

PROBLEMS WITH THE LECTURE

- student has to write notes while listening to new material
- audience attention wanders periodically and decays with time, starting at about 10 minutes into the lecture
- tends to promote lower-level learning of factual information
- makes unwarranted assumption that all students need same information, presented orally at the same pace, impersonally and without dialogue with the presenter; have high memory capacity, have same prior knowledge, good note-taking strategies and skills, and are not susceptible to information-processing overload
- students tend not to like it, though they are familiar with it
- entertaining and clear lectures can mislead listener about the complexity of material being presented
ENEMIES OF THE LECTURE

• preoccupation with outside affairs
• emotional moods of listener
• disinterest in material
• failure to understand
• feelings of isolation and alienation from others

Question

What strategies can you adopt to deal with the problems and enemies of the lecture, such as:
   – 10 minute decay time?
   – Cognitive interference of note-taking with listening?
   – Preoccupation with other matters?
   – Boredom?
What are lectures good for?

• For simply acquiring information, reading is more effective than lecturing!
• What can the lecture do that other sources cannot?
  – Provide up-to-date information
  – Summarize material that is scattered over a variety of sources
  – Adapt material to background and needs of audience
  – Guide students to read the literature more effectively
  – Open a window to the workings of a scholarly mind

Designing Better Lectures

Lecturers need to be aware of:

• Purpose of lecture
• Type of lecture
• Pacing of lecture
• Strategies for increasing engagement

Making lectures more effective

Decide on type of lecture or mini-lecture (and let students know)

– Classical: most common, explains several topics in sequence
– Problem-centered: problem is first presented and suggested solutions are evaluated
– Comparative: two or more theories or views are compared non-judgmentally
– Thesis: a position is taken and supported by evidence and argument
Getting audience engagement

- How can you get better response to your questions?
- How can you get more spontaneous questions and comments?

Suggestions

- Questions that are true/false or other one word answers are a waste of time!
- Ask open-ended questions or for ideas and opinions, not facts
- Look for non-verbal cues of students having something to say and prompt them
- Give students time to think and discuss with neighbors before asking
- Build on responses by asking for elaboration of question or comment or response
- Redirect comments and questions to other students

COMMON ERRORS IN QUESTIONING

- Not knowing why you are asking a question
- Asking a difficult question too early
- Asking questions which clearly have a ‘right’ answer
- Not using probing or open-ended questions
- Failing to build on (wrong) answers
- Failing to see the implications of (wrong) responses
- Fear of silence. Symptoms include:
  - not allowing enough wait time for audience to think
  - rephrasing questions too quickly
  - answering questions yourself

Any questions?