

How to Liven Lethal Lectures

The crusty old professor standing in front of a lecture hall droning on for an hour while he reads from yellowed notes is no longer the model for classroom teaching. Students' attention spans are short, and they have been primed by television and multimedia to expect excitement and variety.



Today, the challenge of distilling the plethora of knowledge into manageable bits is great, for students are inundated with a flood of new information from a variety of sources that increases exponentially every year. But they still face the same problems as Galileo's students centuries ago: too little background knowledge and not knowing which part of the lecture is important. And they deal with sensory overload in the same way—by daydreaming or sleeping in class.

Much has been written about alternative methods of teaching. There are times, though, when lectures are the best way to convey information. Linda Jones' guidelines can help teachers determine whether the lecture format is the most effective method of dispensing knowledge in their classes:

1. Is the information absolutely necessary and worthwhile?
2. Is the lecturer the best resource?
3. Is there limited time to cover the information?
4. Is the class large?
5. Will you use interactive components such as review ac-

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aid the listening and review process.

It is always helpful to tell students what you hope they will learn from the class. Either type out the objectives, or write them on the chalkboard or overhead projector as you lecture.

It is especially helpful for visual learners to have a handout with a list of the objectives and major points of the lecture. Leave space after each point for the students to add notes. This helps pupils with learning difficulties, those who are unfamiliar with the vocabulary or who are unable to take notes and listen at the same time, and those who are not fluent in English.

Providing an outline of the lecture with blanks inserted after each item will help the students follow the points in your lecture and help to ensure that all of the important topics are covered on days when you are using PowerPoint presentations, experiments, and demonstrations. Having to provide a handout like this also forces the lecturer to be organized and produces better teaching and learning.

Using varied approaches and activities will keep your students alert and interested. Breakout

activities, question-and-answer sessions, or brainstorming?

6. Will you make the content relevant to students?

7. Will you use props or costumes to hold interest?

8. Will you use advance organizers, concept maps, and lecture outlines to help students process new information?¹

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groups can provide variety and reinforcement. In even the largest classes, students can form groups of three or four and quickly discuss one or two thought-provoking questions, then report their conclusion to the rest of the class.

Other ways to break your lecture into smaller units are by having students take a moment to answer a few objective-type questions on what they've learned, or allowing for a brief period at the end of class for questions and review to clarify areas that are unclear.

Providing breaks in the lecture will enable the students to reflect on the new information or respond in an active manner, as appropriate.

Setting the Stage

What happens before class is perhaps as important as the lecture itself. When the classroom has a warm, welcoming atmosphere, the learners will be eager to listen to the professor. However, creating a community in a large group can be challenging. Here is an idea for the first class period of the term:

On a 5 x 5 grid, type in such things as: broke a bone, went to Europe, has been a student missionary, received a traffic ticket in the past 12 months, is the youngest sibling, owns a horse, likes to ski.

Have the class find members (including the professor) who fit each category on the grid and ask them to initial the appropriate grid box or boxes. The professor can give small prizes to anyone who gets five in a row.

This is a quick, painless way to have class members interact with one another and with the professor. It works as well with a class of 10 as with a class of 100.

You can also try role-play to grab your students' attention. Choose a notable person in your discipline (this works especially well in Bible, history, science, and English), and dress up in a costume appropriate for the era when the person lived. For the first few minutes of class, step into the role of the person you have chosen, and

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ask the students to interact with him or her.

Keeping Atmosphere

Once in awhile, during the term, it is good to introduce an element of surprise. Use simple ideas such as this: Place a dime in an empty olive oil bottle, then put a cork in the opening. Take the bottle to class and ask: "Without breaking the bottle, or taking the cork out, how can you remove the dime from this bottle?" Leave the bottle in plain sight until someone answers correctly; it may take a day or two, or it may take only a few minutes. This question isn't about the lecture topic, but it will help you connect with your students and make your classroom a more interesting place. (The answer to the problem: Push the cork into the bottle until it drops in, then remove the dime.)

Tie-ins to Previous Learning

A lecturer can do many things to enhance learning. If you help your students tie into their previous knowledge before you present material unfamiliar to them, they will be better able to assimilate and retrieve the new information. David Ausubel reminds teachers to ". . . integrate new learning tasks with previously presented materials."²

To help students review a previous reading assignment or lecture notes, teachers can use a **Question-Response Sheet**. While completing their assigned reading, students are to develop at least three questions or statements. They can include points they don't understand, issues with which they agree (or disagree), and topics they want to know more about.

At the beginning of the next class, the teacher collects three statements from each student. He or she can

glance through the questions and answer a few, or have a student worker organize them and prepare a list for the teacher to address. These reactions or questions can become the springboard for a lively class discussion.

Text Reading Preparation

If a teacher knows a lecture topic will be especially difficult or complex, then assigning students material to read before class enables them to listen to the lecture with some familiarity. Again, the teacher's preparation is crucial for active learning and retention. This can be accomplished by using a brief organizer.³

Two useful organizers are the **KWLN Chart** and the **Anticipation Guide**.

The KWLN chart is a student-made four-column chart. The first column (K) is labeled "What I Know." The second column (W) is "What I Want to Know." The student fills out these two columns before reading the assignment.

The third column (L), "What I Learned," is a list of major points the student learned while reading the text. It can contain answers to the questions in the second column (W) or major facts learned about the topic.

In the fourth column (N), "New Things I'd Like to Find Out," the students list additional questions they have after doing the reading.

The KWLN Chart keeps students focused on the reading and actively engaged in learning.

Another way teachers can connect students' background knowledge to new information is to use the Anticipation Guide, a quick preview of the next reading assignment. It can be as short as three or four questions. Asking questions about the major concepts in the next reading assignment can pique interest and activate prior knowledge, commonly referred to as schema.

One way to use the Anticipation Guide is to list statements and leave spaces for "Agree" and "Disagree" beside each statement. Before reading an assignment, the students read the state-

ments, then check the “Agree” or “Disagree” column. After reading the assignment, they can change their response on any of the statements.

These simple tricks will enhance students’ ability to understand and review important concepts.

Introducing the Textbook

If a textbook is the cornerstone of your course, then it is helpful to introduce the students to it.

To find a good book to read on

your vacation, you look for one you’ve heard about, that a friend recommended, or whose author you’ve heard interviewed on a talk show. Why, then, do we expect our students to pick up a textbook with enthusiasm if they know nothing about its contents or author?

An interesting way to introduce the contents and feature of a textbook is to use a game similar to “Balderdash”:

List 10 to 12 factual questions that students must use the textbook to answer. For example:

1. Find a page with a map/chart/diagram. What is its title?
2. Find the name of someone the authors thanked for help or advice in writing this book.
3. Choose one word from the glossary that begins with “M”.
4. Name one book that is recommended in Chapter 2.


Group four or five students together. Give them 15 minutes to answer the questions. The goal is for each group try to pick an answer that is dif-

KWLN Chart			
Reading assignment:			
What I Know	What I Want to Know	What I Learned	New Things I’d Like to Find Out

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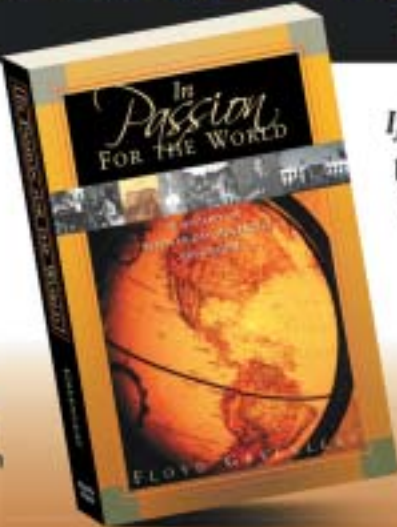
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ferent than the other groups' response. Groups receive one point for every unique answer. If an answer matches that of another group, no points are awarded. The group with the highest number of points wins.

This simple yet fun way of introducing a textbook's features can also be used to introduce specific chapters by using content questions.

Conclusion

If you have decided that lecture is the best mode of presentation for your topic, then include interactive components to build background, create interest, and enhance the listening process of students to help ensure student success.

Lectures can be powerful, but they must be more than one-way communication from teacher to student. Reception learning is not pas-

sive. If students have been prepared, and the material is well organized, learning will take place.⁴

The greatest Lecturer of all time knew the secrets of group communication in a lecture format: "Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives, and all the people came early in the morning to hear him at the temple."⁵

Jesus used the lecture effectively. He prepared His listeners by meeting their physical and mental needs. His teaching was relevant because He understood what they needed. He spent time with them in their domain and received power to meet their needs from daily communion with His Father. Teachers who follow His example will be successful, too. ✍



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3. *Ibid.*, p. 148.
4. Bruce Joyce, Marsha Weil, and Emily Calhoun, *Models of Teaching* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2004), p. 190.
5. Luke 21:37, 38 (NIV).

The image shows a promotional graphic for a book titled "DINOSAURS: Where did they come from... and where did they go?" by Elaine Graham Kennedy, Ph.D. The book cover features a detailed illustration of a dinosaur skeleton against a blue and yellow background. The text on the cover includes the title in large yellow letters, the author's name, and a foreword by Jerry D. Thomas. A quote at the top reads, "Too many Christians don't know the truth about dinosaurs." The bottom of the graphic contains promotional text: "Available at your local Adventist Book Center AdventistBookCenter.com From Pacific Press ISBN: 0-8163-2155-8. Hardcover. 80 pages. US\$15.99" and "Special Introductory Price: \$12.99 until August 31, 2006".