Lecturing Guidelines

The best lectures, like any good talk, invite students to think imaginatively and conceptually about a significant theme or problem. They do more than “cover the material.” Professor David Kennedy of History reminds us that a good lecture always offers a point of view and an entry into a field of study.

Preparation

- [ ] Craft an introduction that will set a clear and engaging agenda.
- [ ] Create an outline of your main points, examples, or demonstration.
- [ ] Prepare and practice a short conclusion that will tie the strands of the lecture together and place the lecture in the wider context of the course.
- [ ] If you plan to use technology aids, prepare backups in case of technological difficulties.

Keep Your Focus

- [ ] Limit the main points in a lecture to five or fewer.
- [ ] Create effective visuals, analogies, demonstrations, and examples to reinforce the main points.
- [ ] Share your outline with students.
- [ ] Emphasize your objectives and key points in the beginning, as you get to them, and as a summary at the end.

Basic Presentation Skills

- [ ] Avoid reading your lectures verbatim; if you must refer to your notes frequently, combine this with lots of eye contact.
- [ ] When making eye contact, actually look at specific individuals while you make a point; don’t just continually scan the room. Individuals seem most comfortable with about five seconds of sustained eye contact.

- [ ] When you lecture, speak clearly and not too rapidly. If students are busy taking notes, go even slower
- [ ] Face the students as much as possible, rather than facing the blackboard, projection screen, or laptop.
- [ ] Try taping your lecture on a tape recorder and listen to yourself.

Engage Your Audience

- [ ] Focus attention early on using a quote, a dramatic visual, an anecdote, or other material relevant to the topic.
- [ ] Integrate visuals, multimedia, discussion, active learning strategies, small-group techniques, and peer instruction.
- [ ] Link new material to students' prior knowledge, such as common experiences or previous coursework. Can what you're teaching explain a phenomenon that students may have wondered about? Does what you're teaching contradict ideas that students may have about how the world works?
- [ ] Show enthusiasm for the topic and information. Remember, you are modeling your discipline.
- [ ] Give students time to think and genuine opportunities to respond.
- [ ] Plan for diverse learners. Use verbal, visual, and kinesthetic approaches such as hands-on exercises and simulations.

Get Feedback

- [ ] Observe students' non-verbal communication: note taking, response to questions, eye contact, seating patterns, and response to humor. Are they "with" you?
- [ ] Use the "minute paper" or other assessment techniques. Ask students to respond in one or two sentences to the following questions: What stood out as most important in today's lecture? What are you confused about? Do this every few lectures—it will take you about 15 minutes to review the responses and you'll learn an enormous amount about your students.
- [ ] Give quizzes periodically on lecture objectives, not obscure material. Are they getting it?
- [ ] Conduct midterm teaching evaluations or simply ask the students for suggestions and comments at the midpoint of the quarter.

Handling Questions

- [ ] When asking if there are any questions, don't simply ask "Any questions?" with your back turned to the audience. Phrase it as a genuine invitation, such as "What parts of this are still a little unclear or confusing for you?" or "What do I need to explain again?" or "What are you wondering about that I haven't yet addressed?"
- [ ] Make sure you understand the student's question before launching into a long explanation. Restate the question and let the student clarify, if necessary.
- [ ] In a large class, repeat a student's question so that all the students know what question you're answering.
- [ ] Consider reserving two- to three-minute blocks for questions at transition points in your lecture. Let students have the full time to think, even if nobody asks a question. This reinforces your commitment to answering questions and will encourage students to review the material recently covered.
- [ ] If you don't know the answer to a question, don't bluff. You can let the student know that the question goes well beyond what you can address in lecture, volunteer to find the answer and report back, or ask the student to investigate and report back to the class. Or, consider trying to work out an answer with the students, if the question seems solvable.

Handouts

- [ ] Handouts can be particularly effective for presenting complex data, detailed material, examples, and diagrams. Focus on material you think there is a good chance students will need to review, especially if they need to apply it in an assignment.