



Delivering an Effective Lecture

Have you ever worked hard to deliver a well-prepared lecture, and then been convinced by the next class period that students don't remember a thing that you've taught them? If your answer is yes, don't worry—you're not alone. It happens to the best of instructors on occasion.

The most recent brain research reveals that during a typical 50 minute lecture, students (yes—even adult learners) begin to lose attention after the first ten minutes. Students will best remember portions of the beginning and end of class, while remembering little information about the middle. The good news is that there are several strategies that you can use during class to improve your students' content retention. Most of them are simple to implement, and require only minor adjustments to what you are already doing in class.

Lecture Breaks

Consider breaking a 50 minute lecture into three or four smaller mini-lectures with a two-three minute processing activity—or lecture break—at the end of each segment. The most effective activities are relevant and help students process the content over which you have just lectured. Examples of lecture breaks are: a story with some kind of emotional hook, a funny relevant photo or cartoon, a quick small-group problem solving activity, a scenario to discuss, or an individual writing activity.

Below are a couple of our favorites (Nilson, 2016, p. 149).

- 1. Complete a Sentence Starter.** Ask students to complete a sentence stem related to the content of your mini-lecture. It can be a definition of a term, or even something more open-ended—such as considering a cause and effect relationship, an implication or rationale of theory, or a controversy related to the field. Be sure the sentence starter requires reflection and higher-order thinking—not just rote knowledge—to complete.
- 2. Support a Statement.** Provide a statement related to the course content—a conclusion, inference, theory, opinion, or description—and ask students to create a supporting argument. Sources of support may come from mini-lectures, class readings, or evidence from their independent research on the topic.

Remember—with only small shifts in your teaching, you can make your lectures more memorable for students.