

Types of Lectures – Planning for Interactive Teaching and Learning

Several authors describe different types of lecture (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; Broadwell, 1980; Woodring, 2004). In reviewing a range of different classifications of lecture, we believe lectures may be categorized in terms of the level of student interaction, the classification of content, and the medium by which information is disseminated.

Categorized by Levels of Student Interaction

- **Formal lecture.** The lecturer delivers a well-organized, tightly constructed, and highly polished presentation. This type of lecture works well for teaching large groups of students and has been popularized by outlets such as TED Talks (Donovan, 2013) and, more recently, massive open online courses (MOOCs), such as those offered through Coursera or EdX. In the formal lecture, students hold questions until the conclusion of the lecture.
- **Socratic lecture.** This type of lecture, which typically follows a reading assignment to give students a baseline of knowledge, is structured around a series of carefully sequenced questions. The instructor asks a single student a question sequence. The questions require the student to use logic and inference skills.
- **Semi-formal lecture.** This is the most common type of lecture. Somewhat similar to the formal lecture, the semiformal lecture is less elaborate in form and production. Occasionally, the lecturer entertains student questions during the presentation of material.
- **Lecture-discussion.** This type of lecture encourages greater student participation. The instructor presents the talk, but he or she stops frequently to ask students questions or to request that students read their prepared materials. The direction of interaction can occur in one of three ways: (1) instructor to class, (2) instructor to individual student, or (3) individual student to instructor.
- **Interactive lecture.** In this version of lecturing, the instructor uses mini-lectures about 20 minutes long, and involves students in a range of brief content-related activities in between. Interaction may occur between instructor and students or between and among students.

Categorized by Content

- **Expository lecture/oral essay.** The lecturer begins with a primary thesis or assertion and then proceeds to justify it, typically putting the most important information or supporting examples first and proceeding in descending order of importance.

- **Storytelling lecture.** The instructor presents concepts and content through a story to illustrate a concept. The lecture proceeds in typical narrative form, with an exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Characters are presented and developed through the presentation of the story line. The goal is to present critical content in a way that students will remember it.
- **Point-by-point lecture.** In this type of lecture, the instructor presents information about a single concept, question, or issue. The organizational structure is typically an outline format, with a hierarchical organization of major and minor points.
- **Lecture-demonstration.** The content involves a demonstration of a process or activity. The lecture typically proceeds in chronological order, with the demonstration presented in a sequence of events that the lecturer highlights and explains.
- **Problem-solving lecture.** In this type of lecture, a problem serves as the focus. The lecturer outlines the main problem, the key known elements, and the elements that remain to be discovered. During the lecture, the instructor typically works through the problem and demonstrates a solution or various possible solutions.

Categorization by Medium

- **Naked lecture.** The term “teaching naked” was popularized by Jose Bowen (2012) in his similarly titled book. Bowen argues that teachers have much to gain by taking technology out of their classrooms. He argues that teaching without technology, “naked,” will improve student learning. Instructors who adapt this approach talk directly to students without the intervening agency of technology; alternately, they use technology outside of the classroom and reserve in-class time for direct communication with students.
- **Chalk and talk lecture.** This approach is so named because of early uses of lecture in a classroom with a blackboard and chalk. While some professors still use a blackboard, whiteboards and markers and smart boards are supplanting the earlier tools. Regardless of the tools used, the key characteristic of this approach is that the instructor lectures while generating notes on a medium that students can see.
- **Multimedia lecture.** A multimedia lecture, once called the slide lecture because of the slide-talk approach, is one of the most commonly used approaches today. Instructors use audio-visual software packages such as PowerPoint or Prezi to highlight key points of text. The term “death-by-PowerPoint” is one that teachers should keep in mind, particularly as something to avoid, when using this approach.

- **Video lecture.** This type of lecture is one in which an instructor lectures and is captured on video as a talking head. At times, the video may alternate between showing headshots of the instructor and full screen visuals of the slides. This type of lecture is often used in the service of online learning and blended learning. More recently, this approach has seen increased usage as part of the flipped classroom strategy (Ronchetti, 2010).

Lectures across different categories work together. Thus, an instructor may give a semiformal, problem-solving, chalk and talk lecture, while another may offer a lecture-discussion, point-by-point, multimedia lecture. Although different disciplines exhibit norms around a common combination, the full range of combinations appear across college and university classrooms.

Advantages	Disadvantages
Provides teachers with control of information and pacing of session	May not be as effective for higher order thinking
Is rewarding for the teacher to be seen as expert	May not improve student long-term retention of information
Provides the teacher with a chance to model desired level of thinking	Presumes students are learning at the same pace
Allows teacher to model enthusiasm	Does not allow for personalized instruction
Provides all students with a common core of content	Can create opportunities for students to be passive
Provides an opportunity to enliven facts and ideas from the text	Relies on student attention span
Provides teachers with ability to clarify issues	Can be a disincentive for learning (if done poorly)
Provides an opportunity to develop ideas (that may be later used for publication)	Can lead students to believe that it is a complete learning experience
Provides most immediate recall of information by students	Can lead to boredom on the part of professors and students

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