

For the sake of argument— *If the conventional lecture is dead, why is it alive and thriving?*



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Straight lecturing is the least effective way to improve student learning. Students tend to remember 10 to 50% from “passive” involvement in the learning process (we remember about 10% of what we read; 20% of what we hear; 30% of what we see; and 50% of what we hear and see). Students remember 70 and 90%, however, if they are “actively” involved (we remember about 70% of what we say and 90% of what we say and do). Also, students in learning environments where lecturing dominates become more “rote learners”; students learning in problem-based or cooperative learning environments become more “deep learners.”

Recently, research was done on the effectiveness of updating courses for medical doctors. Those courses that were lectures produced no change in practice. Courses that included active learning components *did* produce a change in practice.

Since we usually want to help students remember and since we want graduates who are deep learners instead of rote learners, why do faculty still give 50-minute lectures of teacher talk? Why do universities build more lecture auditoriums—instead of flat-floor learning environments with movable chairs and tables that are more conducive to cooperative and active learning? Why do courses in teacher training focus on “how to lecture,” and “how to lecture to large classes,” instead of “how to use active learning, cooperative learning, or problem-based learning?” Why are faculty called “lecturers”?

Perhaps the answer is that lecturing is relatively easy, most of us “learned” from lectures (so what’s wrong with the lecture?), and each of us gets a sense of power and usefulness when we walk into a “lecture hall” and all eyes look at us and wait to write down our every

thoughts. Perhaps that’s the only way that we see that we can cover the material—but our role is to *uncover* material so that students learn. Perhaps we don’t want to stop lecturing even though we know there are other options available.

So if I currently use straight lectures, what might I do? One simple way to change from straight lecturing to more effective learning environments is to never have more than 20 minutes of teacher talk. Boredom sets in after 20 minutes. A suggestion is to use a timer set for 20 minutes to remind you to shift from “teacher talk” to some activity.

Examples of “active” activities include:

- *Ask individuals to write reflections (2 min.) then discuss with a neighbor (90 sec.)*
- *Have students turn to their neighbor and say:*
 - “Did you understand that?”*
 - “Do you believe that?”*
 - “The key point so far is”*
 - “A practical application of this stuff is”*
- *Ask students to compare or rework notes*
- *Use Talk Aloud Pairs Problem Solve, or TAPPS*

Other options include using “rounds” (where students sit in circles of about four or five and each comments for about 30 seconds on a topic you pose) or using cooperative learning groups.

The straight lecture with 50 minutes of teacher talk really doesn’t improve student learning. It’s time to change. □