A GUIDE TO CREATING MORE ENGAGING LECTURES

During a lecture information can be disseminated to a large number of people at one time. Those people present (or accessing the lecture through recordings) receive the same information. Lectures can generate interest in a topic, provide students with a solid foundation for learning, and open students' minds to new ideas. Most often lectures are used to provide material to students for future discussion and application in other, smaller learning groups such as tutorials or workshops, lab sessions or through a placement.

However, it is often the case that lectures may offer no real learning experience of their own. Students may decide that not attending lectures has no real effect on their learning: as long as they read their materials and attend related classes they can pass the course or perhaps perform even better. In this case, what is the real benefit of the lecture?

The good and the bad about the traditional lecture

Positives	Negatives
Lecturer can teach a large number of students simultaneously	"Physical layout (bolted down rows of chairs), large classes, and limited time, prevents sufficient interaction between the students and the [lecturer] to foster an active learning environment" (Meibom, Sadler, Moses & Litzkow, 2008, p. 2)
Lecturer can give a consistent message to all	"More passive in nature and is less effective as a teaching tool" (Richardson, 2008, p. 23)
Provides an opportunity to generate interest	Difficult for the lecturer to determine how many students are genuinely interested in the topic

The lecture as part of the big picture

Any lecture is part of an entire course, which may offer students a variety of learning experiences. As such, treating the lecture as a stand-alone experience will not result in a flowing learning experience over the whole course for the students.

Consider the:

- course description
- rationale
- objectives (intended learning outcomes, aligned with assessment tasks)
- content

"What is the purpose of this lecture?"

There is no purpose to a lecture unless students are learning something new. Equally, there is no purpose in learning something new unless it contributes to the intended learning outcomes of the course). Finally, there is no purpose in articulating intended learning outcomes unless they are assessed (graded or ungraded).

For more information, contact the Centre for Teaching and Learning.

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CENTRE FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING

Who are your students?

Planning for students' learning relies on knowing and considering key characteristics of the students themselves. Without having done this, the lecture could be too challenging, too easy or repetitive, or not have relevance, therefore the lecture will not be effective.

Prior, or background knowledge	What knowledge, understanding and skills should your students have developed up to this point?
The learning context	What other courses are the students undertaking and what links can be made?
University experience	At what point in the program are the students? How new (or 'old') are they to university life?
Academic 'literacies'	What types of academic literacies do the students need to have developed in order to achieve the intended learning outcome?
Language	What language considerations are there?
Other	How will your students meet the intended learning outcomes? What sort of thinking experiences do they need to have?

Make it matter

The best learning experiences for students are meaningful and developmental. This means taking the following questions into consideration when designing each lecture.
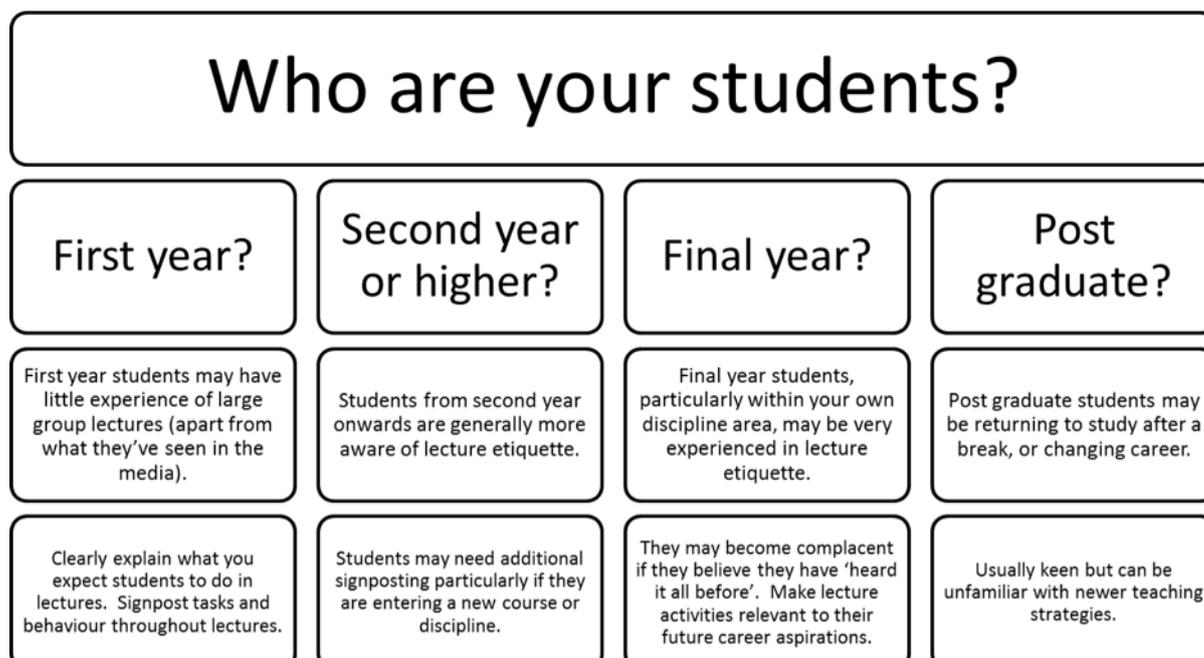
•	Why give this lecture in the first place?

•	How does it fit into the big picture?

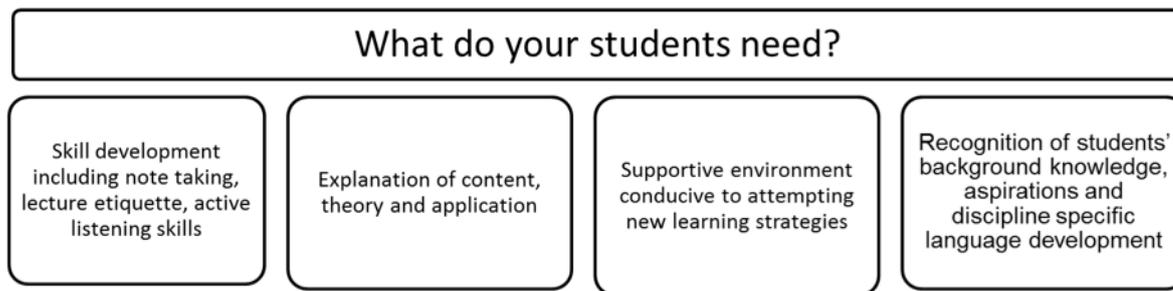•	How is this lecture important?

Think about how you can finish this statement and identify the content, strategies and approach the lecture needs to take for it to be effective:

At the end of this lecture, students will be able to ...

Pitch it right

When designing lectures it is important to consider the following:

Who are your students?

First year?	Second year or higher?	Final year?	Post graduate?
First year students may have little experience of large group lectures (apart from what they've seen in the media).	Students from second year onwards are generally more aware of lecture etiquette.	Final year students, particularly within your own discipline area, may be very experienced in lecture etiquette.	Post graduate students may be returning to study after a break, or changing career.
Clearly explain what you expect students to do in lectures. Signpost tasks and behaviour throughout lectures.	Students may need additional signposting particularly if they are entering a new course or discipline.	They may become complacent if they believe they have 'heard it all before'. Make lecture activities relevant to their future career aspirations.	Usually keen but can be unfamiliar with newer teaching strategies.

What do your students need?

Skill development including note taking, lecture etiquette, active listening skills

Explanation of content, theory and application

Supportive environment conducive to attempting new learning strategies

Recognition of students' background knowledge, aspirations and discipline specific language development

Involve the students

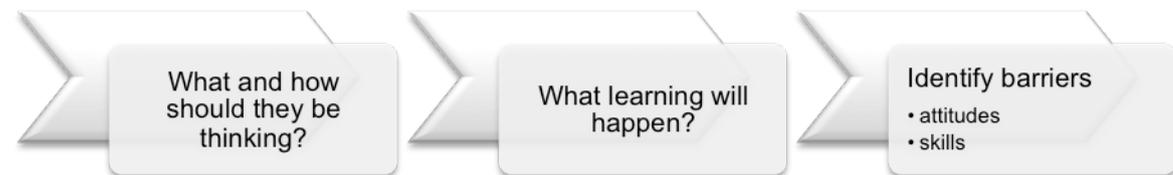Passivity is not conducive to deep learning, and interactivity can engage students more effectively.

How will you engage them within and beyond the lecture itself?

questioning

small group work

audience response systems

questions from the floor

Focus on learning

A lecture should at least consider the basic cognitive domain and consider how information is processed by the learner. However, the other domains are also important to keep in mind.

What are your learners doing (with their brains) in your lecture? What do you want them to do? How aware are the students of their own thinking processes? Do you need to explicitly model these? What emotive barriers might exist? How can you account for these?

What and how should they be thinking?

What learning will happen?

Identify barriers
• attitudes
• skills

Organising the lecture

In order to make the most of the lecture, consider what students need in order to progress and develop their understanding.

The introductory phase

• Gain students' attention
• Motivate students
• Provide stimulus for learning
• Recall relevant past knowledge and understanding
• Signpost the lecture
• Situate the lecture within course, relative to course objectives and assessments
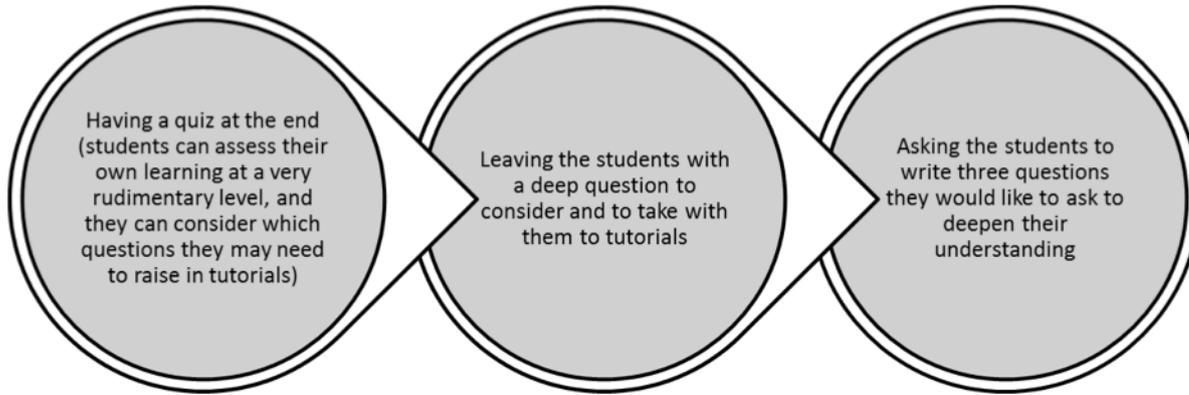
The main body of the lecture

This will depend on the intended learning outcomes, the students you have, and the types of thinking involved. This is more than the delivery of content, or a summary, although it is commonly approached that way. The student-centred approach focuses on the learning of the content, and not just delivery of the content. Start, though, with considering what needs to be covered, and the order in which aspects of the lecture ought to be covered to make sense.

The conclusion of the lecture

There is a range of ways in which a lecture can be concluded, but in general a summary of main points will help the students to consolidate their learning. It could help to recap the purpose of the lecture and its place in the course/relevance to the course assessments. The conclusion of the lecture needs to take into account the next learning experience of the students.

Here are a few things you can consider:

Having a quiz at the end (students can assess their own learning at a very rudimentary level, and they can consider which questions they may need to raise in tutorials)

Leaving the students with a deep question to consider and to take with them to tutorials

Asking the students to write three questions they would like to ask to deepen their understanding

Useful References

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