

Creating Accessible Lectures

Are students getting the most out of your lectures?

How you prepare, organize and deliver your lectures affects its accessibility and how much students learn in your class.

Lecturing is an effective way of disseminating information and helping people to learn, especially in large classes. Enthusiasm, expressiveness, clarity and interaction are all characteristics of effective lecturing.ⁱ Other teaching strategies may be used in large or small classes to help you meet students' various learning styles. These include presentations by guest speakers, inviting a panel of experts, or scheduling short discussion breaks among smaller groups of students. Research on best practices in teaching and learning shows that people learn in a variety of waysⁱⁱ – so mix it up and everyone can benefit!

Tips on lecture structure

- Limit each lecture to one major topic. If this is not possible, state clearly when you are changing topics.
- Put the lecture in context. Give students the “big picture” of where it fits in to the overall course and how it relates to earlier material.
- The old adage – “Tell them what you’re going to say, say it, then tell them what you’ve just said” – is especially true for lectures. Everyone benefits when you provide a clear outline, a well-structured and informative lecture, and a good summary of the key information conveyedⁱⁱⁱ.
- Consider taking short “active breaks” in your lecture. Studies show that even highly motivated students have attention spans of only about 20-25 minutes. During active breaks, they could compare notes with a

neighbour, discuss a question in small groups, solve a problem or write a reaction. (For more detail, see pages 117-120 in [Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors](#)).

Tips on lecture delivery

- Face the students when you speak and make sure you’re not in a shadow. If you are backlit, it might be difficult for students to see your face.
- Pause frequently to allow students to keep up with their note-taking and to absorb information.
- Try not to move around too much. Besides being distracting, this can make it difficult for students who are trying to lip-read, and/or limit the effectiveness of a microphone if you’re using one^{iv}.
- Give examples of key concepts.

- Provide definitions for new concepts or vocabulary.
- Share your enthusiasm for the topic. If your research touches on the lecture topic, share your successes and challenges^v.
- Verbally explain any visual aids, such as charts, graphs, images or tables. Fully describe what they show.
- Consider allowing students to audio-record lectures, or create audio podcasts of your lectures and make them available. While these may be especially helpful for students with disabilities and for students whose first language is not English, they could be a useful study aid for everyone.
- Mix it up: is there a video, audio clip, cartoon, graph, image or chart that sums up or illustrates what you're trying to say? Using multiple methods to convey information is one of the best ways to reach as many students as possible and keep them engaged. Make sure all the formats are accessible (for example, using captions, transcripts or alternative text).
- Encourage and support different ways for students to interact with you, the material and one another through hands-on activities, discussions or technology- / internet-based interactions including clickers, or using a learning management system.
- Consider incorporating other teaching methods, such as inviting guest speakers or a panel of experts,

holding discussions, or using whiteboards, handouts, presentations, videos and audio clips. As always, ensure everything is available in accessible formats.

- Give students options for participating in activities and discussions; for instance, let them submit written questions or comments rather than speaking in class.

Large classes

- Learn to use a microphone if one is available; there is always a risk that your voice will trail off, or that students at the back of the room cannot hear.
- If you allow questions or comments from the class, repeat each into the microphone so everyone can hear.

Mid-sized classes

- Use a variety of approaches for student engagement.
- Encourage students to ask questions and seek clarifications. You can do this verbally, online, by e-mail or through note cards; it's best to give a number of options for responses.
- Follow up with students who appear to be struggling, and suggest methods of support.

Small classes, seminars and tutorials

- Use open-ended questions to check whether students comprehend the material.

- Consider inviting students to share class notes online in an accessible manner.
- Get to know your students and understand what works best to meet their learning needs.

Other general tips

- At the beginning of term, make an announcement inviting students with disabilities to approach you to discuss any accessibility needs.
- Make your lecture notes, slides or other handouts accessible and available electronically to students before class. This can be done through a learning management system, such as Blackboard, WebCT, Desire2Learn, Moodle, Sakai, by e-mail or on a course website. Students may wish to take notes on your slides, and it can help them follow the flow of the class.
- If you make your lecture notes available for each class, students might not need a note-taker, and you can ensure they will receive high-

quality information.

- If you make an important verbal announcement in class, such as a change in venue or time, consider sending it via e-mail or posting it on the course website as well.
- If you use video or audio files, consult with your disability services office. Captioning or transcripts must be provided on request, but could be beneficial for the entire class.
- Check out your classroom before the semester begins: is it accessible to students with mobility-related disabilities? Does the layout allow you to do what you need to in class? Are there distracting background noises? See what you can do to minimize barriers or distractions in the space that might make it difficult for students to hear, pay attention or take notes.
- Insist on professional, civil conduct between and among students to respect people's differences and create an inclusive and **safe** environment.

More resources on lecturing:

See the [University of Ohio's Fast Facts for Faculty](#) for a list of teaching methods and their strengths and limitations.

The [DO-IT Center](#) at the University of Washington has suggestions on accessible delivery methods, as well as [A Checklist for Inclusive Teaching](#).

For tips on varying your instructional method, see pages 117-120 of [Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors](#) (3rd ed.) by Linda B. Nilson. John Wiley and Sons, 2010.

Teachability Project at the University of Strathclyde. Scottish Higher Education Funding Council. Resource for Academic Staff on Accessible Curriculum For Students With Disabilities: [Creating Accessible Lectures for Disabled Students](#).

University of Guelph, Teaching Support Services, Centre for Open Learning and Educational Support, Universal Instructional Design Project: [UID Quick-Start Checklist](#) and the [UID Workbook](#).

University of Oxford, Equality and Diversity Office: [Creating Accessible Lectures](#).

University of Waterloo, Centre for Teaching Excellence, Teaching Tips: [Lecturing Effectively in the University Classroom](#).

To obtain this document in an alternative format, please contact:

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Web: <http://accessibilityhub.info.yorku.ca/>

ⁱ Murray in Perry and Smart in the Centre for Teaching Excellence, [Lecturing Effectively in the University Classroom, Teaching Tips](#).

ⁱⁱ Nilson, Linda B. (2010) [Teaching at Its Best: A Research-Based Resource for College Instructors](#) (3rd ed.) John Wiley and Sons.

ⁱⁱⁱ Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo, [Lecturing Effectively in the University Classroom](#).

^{iv} University of Oxford, Equality and Diversity Office, [Creating Accessible Lectures](#).

^v University of Guelph, Teaching Support Services, Centre for Open Learning and Educational Support, [UID Quick-Start Checklist](#).