

Delivering a Lecture: Learning from Actors

Preparing and Planning a Lecture

Best Practices for Teaching and Learning

Welcome back. You have now planned and prepared a lecture. And now, you actually have to deliver. Effective instructors are also effective communicators. Although organization and preparation are extremely important for delivering an effective lecture, being a good instructor also requires thinking and considering how the information is delivered.

Communication is much more than the delivery of information. Communication involves pacing, intonation, body movements, and gestures. Using visuals to support and illustrate key teaching points is also an important component for effective communication and delivery.

In this part of the session, we will think about what makes for effective communication, including verbal and nonverbal communication and visual aids. First, we can look at what actors can teach us about effective communication. Acting and teaching have some common features. They both involve persuasive communication.

When we present in front of the classroom, we are in many ways performing in front of our students. As we have already mentioned, the third most important teacher-behavior variable identified by Rosenshine and Furst was enthusiasm.

Many of us have attended a lecture on an interesting subject where the speaker's monotone voice has made a subject completely uninteresting. Engaging students involves communicating and transmitting your enthusiasm for the subject matter, which can be accomplished through verbal and nonverbal communication.

What can actors teach us about effective communication? Actors use intonation, emphasize words, and draw attention. Actors emphasize certain words. When we speak, we tend to emphasize the nouns and the verbs of a sentence. When you deliver a lecture, practice emphasizing the nouns and verbs.

Actors also use pacing to communicate effectively. Actors modulate their pacing to emphasize certain keywords and draw attention. Speech that is either too fast or too slow will result in the loss of students' attention and decreased clarity.

Actors use modulation and pace to persuade and inspire. Neither of these two recommendations might come naturally to you at first. But with time and practice, they will become integral components of your lecture.

Actors also have the ability to connect and engage with their audience. Actors do this through verbal and nonverbal communication. Nonverbal communication involves posture, eye contact, body language, and gestures. Nonverbal communication is the single most powerful form of communication.

When we communicate, we're doing it mostly through nonverbal communication, as only 25% of the information received by our audience is verbal. Therefore, if the verbal and nonverbal information being communicated to your students do not agree, your students will remember mostly what was communicated through the nonverbal forms, such as body language and gestures.

When connecting with your student audience, keep in mind the following points. Make eye contact with your audience. To make sure you do not focus on only one section within your classroom, we advise that you trace a W with your eyes, without resting your eyesight on any particular person for too long.

Use movement and gesturing to engage your students more directly. When standing in front of your classroom, do not stand in a single place without moving. Instead, use movement to transition between ideas and to engage and connect with your students.

For example, when eliciting answers from a particular student or a group of students, come closer to the same location within the classroom where the student or student group is, to better engage with eye contact and presence. Use gesturing to emphasize or to draw attention to key points or to communicate a concept effectively.

Reduce noise. It is important to remember that nonverbal communication is central to the effective delivery of your message. But used inappropriately, it can also detract from your message.

For example, constant movement around the classroom or flailing your hands can be distracting, giving the students an excuse to not pay attention to you.

Lastly, let's talk about how you can manage anxiety. Public speaking is anxiety-provoking for most people. We all get nervous whenever we have to speak in front of an audience, even when we have done it many times.

Let's try some exercises that you can do to reduce anxiety. These exercises can help by warming up your diaphragm and vocal cords, by helping focus your attention, and by relaxing you. Please stand up from your seats. We're going to try these together.

Let's start with an exercise that helps you warm up your vocal cords. You will start by sustaining your breath on a hum. Then, play with the pitch up and down the scale. Feel the vibrations resonate through your body. Are you ready?

OK, repeat after me.

[HUMMING UP AND DOWN THE SCALE]

Second, let's do a breathing exercise which can be effective for reducing and managing anxiety. Close your eyes, and focus on your breath. I will indicate when to breathe in and out. Ready? OK, let's do it together.

[INHALING]

Breathe in.

[EXHALING]

Breathe out.

[INHALING]

Breathe in.

[EXHALING]

Breathe out.

[INHALING]

Breathe in.

[EXHALING]

Breathe out.