

# Graduate Teaching Assistants



## Session 3

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2016/2017

# GTA Training



## SESSION 3

While we are waiting:

Make sure you have booked yourself in on the sheet.

Make sure you have a copy of the handout.

By Andrew Davies

## Delivering an effective lecture/session

### General Strategies for Presentation Techniques

- Learn how not to read your notes.
- Prepare yourself emotionally for class.

(Task 1 page )

### Presentation Techniques

The skilled lecturer uses a variety of approaches to involve students, maintain interest and avoid a repetitive lecturing style. A number of techniques can be used to make a lecture more interactive and effective:

#### **Learn how not to read your lectures.**

At its best, lecturing resembles a natural, spontaneous conversation between instructor and student, with each student feeling as though the instructor is speaking to an audience of one. If you read your notes, however, there will be no dialogue and the session will seem formal and distant. Even if you are a dynamic reader, when you stick to a script you no longer have the expressiveness, animation, and give-and-take spontaneity of plain talking. Reading from notes also reduces your opportunities to engage your class in conversation and prevents you from maintaining eye contact. All skilled public speakers agree on this point.

#### **Prepare yourself emotionally for class.**

Some academics play rousing music before lecturing. Others set aside fifteen or thirty minutes of solitude to review their notes. Still others walk through an empty classroom gathering their thoughts. Try to identify for yourself an activity that gives you the energy and focus you need to enthusiastically and confidently teach.

(Adapted from: Lowman, 1984)



## Quote of the day



*“Effective lecturers combine the talents of a scholar, writer, producer, comedian, showman, and teacher in ways that contribute to student learning.”*

*McKeachie, W. (2005. p 69)*

*“Effective lecturers combine the talents of a scholar, writer, producer, comedian, showman, and teacher in ways that contribute to student learning.”*

An effective teacher is a good communicator and therefore thinks about improving his or her presentation skills. As we have already learnt, one of the most important aspects of communicating is shaping both content and style to fit your audience. In the classroom, if you cannot communicate in a way that is both comprehensible and interesting to your students, their learning will be greatly reduced.

To strengthen your skills, we will focus on these areas:

- 1) Verbal and non-verbal communication. (Task 2)
- 2) Getting started.
- 3)



## Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

- **Find out, all you can, about the room you will be in.**
- **Use the room as your stage.**
- **Prepare.**
- **Speak loudly and clearly.**
- **Modulate the tone, pitch, and speed of your speech.**
- **Use gestures and facial expressions**
- **Develop a teaching persona.**
- **Show passion and enthusiasm for the topic.**
- **Try not to read your notes or slides.**
- **Interact with and pay attention to your audience.**
- **Do not take yourself too seriously.**
- **Keep track of the time.**

### Verbal and Non-Verbal Communication

#### **Find out, all you can, about the room you will be in.**

Visit the room ahead of time to familiarize yourself with its size and layout, as well as the type of chalkboards, chalk, rubbers or wipes, and multimedia available.

#### **Use the room as your stage.**

Move around to engage and interact with your audience. Do not stand in one spot the entire time. Move with purpose; do not walk aimlessly.

#### **Prepare.**

Preparation is essential. All excellent teachers are well prepared for each class. Practice in the room if you can, especially if you are new to teaching. In addition, prepare yourself emotionally and psychologically by taking the time to organize your thoughts and to look forward to teaching before every class.

#### **Speak loudly and clearly.**

Project your voice and face your audience when you are speaking. Speak slightly louder than you do in a normal conversation. Use a microphone in a medium to large classroom. The class may include students with hearing problems. Moreover, a microphone will help ensure that students can hear you even when you turn to the chalkboard momentarily.

#### **Modulate the tone, pitch, and speed of your speech.**

Do not speak in a monotone. Vary the pitch and speed of your voice for emphasis and effect. Use appropriate pauses. Rather than using filler words such as “uh,” for example, simply pause before moving on to the next idea or point.

**Use gestures and facial expressions to help you explain, emphasize, and communicate the material.**

However, be careful not to develop distracting habits such as pacing or repeatedly adjusting your glasses or hair. To find out if you are unconsciously doing anything that may be distracting to your audience, have a colleague observe one of your classes or have your class videotaped.

**Develop a teaching persona.**

Whatever persona is right for you, aim to convey confidence and ease. Move with certainty and assuredness, and be careful not to seem pompous or intimidating.

**Show passion and enthusiasm for the topic.**

If you are not interested in the subject, you cannot expect your students to be interested, either. Point out the fascinating aspects of what they are learning.

**Try not to read your notes or slides.**

Doing so will lower your energy level and lead your audience to feel less engaged.

**Interact with and pay attention to your audience.**

Make eye contact with the students, not with the wall or chalkboard. Build a rapport with the class. Make sure the class is with you (following and understanding what you are discussing). If they appear to be lost, take additional time to explain points and to ask and answer questions.

**Do not take yourself too seriously.**

Be able to laugh at yourself and your mistakes. Feel free to bring humor into the classroom, but direct it at yourself, rather than at your students' questions and ideas.

**Keep track of the time.**

Do not start early or end late. Students often do not recall or listen to information presented after the session is technically finished.





## Getting started

### **Avoid a "cold start."**

Go to **your** class a little early and talk informally with students. Or walk in the door with students and engage them in conversation. Using your voice informally before you begin to lecture helps keep your tone conversational.

### **Minimize nervousness.**

A certain amount of nervousness is normal, especially right before you begin to speak. To relax yourself, take deep breaths before you begin or tighten and then release the muscles of your body from your toes to your jaw. Once you are under way your nervousness will lessen.

### **Grab students' attention with your opening.**

Open with a provocative question, startling statement, unusual analogy, striking example, personal anecdote, dramatic contrast, powerful quote, short questionnaire, demonstration, or mention of a recent news event.

Here are some sample openings:

- "How many people would you guess are sent to prison each week in the state of California? Raise your hand if you think 50 people or fewer. How about 51 to 100? 101 to 150? Over 150? (Pause) In fact, over 250 people are placed in custody every week." (sociology lecture)
- "Freddie has been with the company for nearly four years and is considered a good worker. Recently, though, he's been having problems. He's late for work, acts brusque, and seems sullen. One morning he walks into the office, knocks over a pile of paper, and leaves it lying on the floor. His supervisor says, 'Freddie, could you please pick up the material so that no one trips over it?' Freddie says loudly, 'Pick it up yourself.' If you were the supervisor, what would you do next?" (business lecture)
- "The number-one fear of Americans - more terrifying than the fear of death - is public speaking." (rhetoric lecture)
- An economist shows a slide of farmers dumping milk from trucks or burning cornfields and asks, "Why would people do this?" (economics lecture)
- "Watch what happens to this balloon when the air is released." (physics lecture)
- "Take two minutes to complete the ten true-false items on the questionnaire that I'm distributing. We'll use your answers as part of today's lecture." (psychology lecture)
- "How many of you believe that high-rise housing means high-density housing?" (architecture lecture)

- "Nearly three-quarters of all assaults, two-thirds of all suicide attempts, half of all suicides, and half of all rapes are committed by people under the influence of what drug? How many think crack? Heroin? Marijuana? None of the above? The correct answer is alcohol." (social welfare lecture)

**Vary your opening.**

Any dramatic technique loses impact upon repetition.

**Announce the objectives for the class.**

Tell your students what you expect to accomplish during the class, or list your objectives on the board. Place the day's lecture in context by linking it to material from earlier sessions.

**Establish rapport with your students.**

Warmth and rapport have a positive effect on any audience. Students will feel more engaged in the class if the opening minutes are personal, direct, and conversational. (Source: Knapper, 1981)

**Task 4**

Think about the subject you are going to or do teach, suggest a provocative question, startling statement, unusual analogy, striking example, personal anecdote, dramatic contrast, powerful quote, short questionnaire, demonstration, or mention of a recent news event that you could use in your next class.

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Discuss with your partner their idea and yours. What do they think and what do you think?

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## References

McKeachie, W (2005) *Teaching Tips: Strategies, Research, and Theory for College and University Teachers*. 12th ed. Boston: Houghton Mifflin,