

Multi-Purpose Lecture Breaks

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Do you teach a 50 minute class? Or perhaps you teach a longer block of time: 75 minutes, three hours, or even six hours like I am currently doing. Lecture breaks can be used every 20 to 30 minutes to enhance student learning by providing:

- break-in at the beginning of your class session, which allows you to assess students' understanding of a homework assignment or the previous class session,
- break-up at points in each class session when students' attention is waning, and you want to restart their attention clock with a change in your teaching and learning strategy,
- break-through as students elaborate on new concepts in order to build a cognitive bridge between prior knowledge "chunks" and today's learning objectives, and
- break-down at points throughout the class session when checking students' understanding is desirable.

Please feel welcome to modify these lecture breaks to fit your teaching and learning situation, or use them, as-is.

Double-Response, Homework Check

Before class begins, write a couple questions from the homework readings on the board. When class starts, ask students to fold a sheet of paper in half and answer both questions twice: once on the top and again on the bottom of the sheet. One half of the sheet is given to the instructor, and the other is self-corrected by the students.

Ask students to "legally cheat" by writing in corrected answers in bold as the questions are discussed by the whole class. Homework checks let you know who is preparing for class, and they let students know that you know. You might announce that if grades are borderline, consistently accurate homework checks will raise a student's grade.

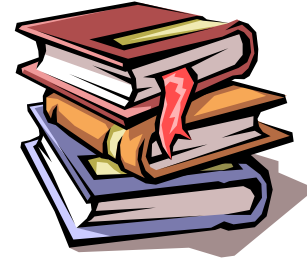
Questions that can be answered in a few words are most appropriate for this lecture break. Also, the answers to this homework check can be structured as an advanced organizer for today's class topic.



Think-Ink-Pair-Share

After 20 to 30 minutes, design a lecture break that asks students to elaborate on information from your lecture by thinking about it, writing it down, discussing it in pairs, and sharing it in a total-class discussion. This elaboration can be:

- giving a real-life example,
- summarizing key concepts,
- listing costs and benefits or pros and cons, or
- diagramming a process.



Heads Together, Random Share

After 20 to 30 minutes, ask students to form groups of four. Pose a complex question with a convergent answer. Your students then discuss the answer (heads together) for one to two minutes. Finally, randomly call a number from each group to answer for his/her group. You will want to hear from three or four of them.

For large classes with auditorium seating, walk the aisle designating rows odd or even and ask the odd-row students to turn around to group with the even-row students.

Graphic Thinking

Ask students to draw a diagram (blueprint for thinking) to organize information from your course. Graphics could include a Venn diagram, matrix, web, or compare/contrast chart.

Three-Step Interview

If your students have completed individual projects, ask them to share their efforts with a small audience of their peers. Students form groups of four and pair up: Student number one interviews number two about his/her project, while number three interviews number four. After three minutes, they reverse roles. After three more minutes, in groups of four, pairs explain their partner's project to the other pair.

Brainstorm, Categorize, And Roam

This is an excellent lecture break to foster analytical thinking. Ask students to form groups of four, brainstorm ideas on a given topic, and record them on small Post-it notes, one idea per sheet. I ask students to bring Post-its to class daily. After five minutes when 15 or more ideas have been recorded by each group, ask them to categorize all the Post-its on

chart paper (you'll have to bring this) and label the categories in a logical manner that they can explain.

After selecting one person per group to remain with the chart to explain it, all other students roam the room to study all of the groups' charts. (e.g., a World Geography instructor could ask students to generate the names of 15 important world rivers and categorize them using some defensible method.)

Send-A-Problem

Ask students to form groups of four. On a 3x5 file card, each student writes a question on one side of the card and the answer on the other. Next, as a group, they check all cards for accuracy. Then, the group's four cards are sent to the next group to be answered orally.

This can continue for a few rounds. If questions are confusing, groups send a "diplomat" to the table of origin for clarification. Ultimately, cards are submitted to the instructor for assessment.

K-W-L Reading Strategy

Either individually or in groups, ask students to predict their absorption of a topic before studying it:

K: List what we already *know* about the topic,

W: List what we *want* or need to find out about the topic, and

L: List what has been *learned* about the topic after the unit of study has been completed.

Next check L with K to see if what they knew was accurate. This is a useful strategy for introducing a topic that students think they know well, but you believe they might have some trouble with.

Group Discussion With Markers

Ask students to form groups of four to discuss a complex issue. To equalize participation, students are asked to place their "marker" (e.g., a pencil) on the desk, one at a time, to signal their turn to speak uninterrupted by group members. The marker is left there until all four students have spoken and all four markers in a pile. Then, students retrieve their markers and continue another round of discussion, time permitting.

Group Discussion with Markers and Passport

To encourage listening during “group discussion with markers,” ask students to paraphrase the key point of the last person who spoke. This restating of another’s comments gives them the “passport” to state their key point on the issue. However, the paraphraser often doesn’t capture what the preceding person intended, and clarification occurs before proceeding. This is a useful lecture break for learning about communication.

Value Lines (A Movement Lecture Break)

If you have an exceptionally long class session with 25 or fewer students who need to stretch their legs, ask them to line up according to how strongly they agree or disagree with a controversial topic. Next, ask students on the extreme ends of the value line to explain their points of view to the whole class.

Next, group students according to their placement on the value line to listen and paraphrase opposing positions. Use “group discussion with markers and passport” (see above).

Pick the False Fact

A game-like lecture break might be in order for a late-night class toward the end of the semester. Ask students to review their notes and write three “facts”. However, only two of the facts should be true. In pairs, groups of four, or with the whole class, students try to pick the false fact.



Ten Suggestions to Improve a Lecture

Lecturing is one of the most time-honored yet ineffective ways to teach. By itself it will never lead to active learning. For a lecture to be effective, the trainer should build interest first, then maximize understanding and retention, involve participants during the lecture, and reinforce what has been presented. Here are some ways to do just that.

Building Interest

1. **Lead-off story or interesting visual.** Provide a relevant anecdote, fictional story, cartoon, or graphic that captures the audience's attention.
2. **Initial case problem.** Present a problem around which the lecture will be structured.
3. **Test question(s).** Ask participants a question (even if they have little prior knowledge) so that they will be motivated to listen to your lecture for the answer.

Maximizing Understanding and Retention

4. **Headlines.** Reduce the major points in the lecture to key words that act as verbal subheadings or memory aids.
5. **Examples and analogies.** Provide real-life illustrations of the ideas in the lecture and, if possible, create a comparison between your material and the knowledge and experience that the participants already have.
6. **Visual backup.** Use flip charts, transparencies, brief handouts, and demonstrations that enable participants to see as well as hear what you are saying.

Involving Participants During the Lecture

7. **Spot challenges.** Interrupt the lecture periodically and challenge participants to give examples of the concepts presented thus far or to answer spot quiz questions.
8. **Illuminating activities.** Throughout the presentation, intersperse brief activities that give participants the opportunity to reflect about the points you are making

Reinforcing the Lecture

9. **Application problem.** Pose a problem or question for participants to solve based on the information given in the lecture.
10. **Participant review.** Ask participants to review the contents of the lecture with one another or give a self-scoring review test.