

## LECTURES: Suggestions for action

Your lectures are likely to be more effective for international students (and all students) if you focus on:

- Transparent structure
- Essential content
- Improved understandability
- Effective note taking

### Structure

Try to be more explicit and transparent about how the lecture is organised. Instead of expecting students to spot the sections and understand the functions of each part, you could:

- Use an introduction and a summary and repeat key ideas eg. 'This is an introduction/summary....'
- State links to previous/future lectures and topics
- Signal moves between sections as in 'Now I am going to talk about how you apply this idea with an example....'. Try pointing to where you are: 'On the outline, I am now here...' or you could name the section 'In summary, this lecture has covered....'
- State the importance of ideas: 'This is a key point....'
- Repeat. 'In the last section, I talked about (a) and now in (b), I will cover....' [then] 'In (a), it was about... and in (b), about .... and now, in (c), etc'. 'This building up and rehearsal of the content of a lecture as it develops can help us to link chains of ideas together, and can work well when the lecture is structured as a story, investigation, or other logical sequence' (Gibbs, 1992, p 73)

### Content

If you devote time to structure and to making the lecture more understandable, you may well cover less material. One experienced teacher who has delivered a familiar lecture in many different contexts reports that she covers about 10-15% less material when the audience is listening to English as a second or third language; others claim smaller variations. To address this, you might:

- Provide additional readings, handouts or supplemental multimedia instruction
- Explore and develop ideas rather than only introduce new knowledge

When one teacher heard a suggestion that she differentiate between the essential and the supplemental in what she covered (then to focus on the former), she replied that this was impossible sometimes – some lectures are just very detailed summaries of complex ideas and everything was essential. In such cases, the argument for making an audio or video recording and for encouraging students to review the content themselves, perhaps several times, becomes especially strong. You might warn students beforehand of the need to make a recording of a particularly content-full session which is coming up or arrange for an audio version to be made.

### Understandability

International students may only understand 50% or less of lectures at the start of their studies (see <http://www.llas.ac.uk/events/archive/2513>). You will lighten the students' 'language load' so they can attend to the content of the lecture if you try to:

- Be aware of your own use of English. Using a slower pace (but not too slow) may help all your students.
- Use plain English and straightforward sentence structure. One way is by cutting out introductory clauses ('So, whilst not wishing to underestimate the importance of xxx, I think it is important to stress yyy'). Another is by choosing vocabulary that is in common use as in 'living in' rather than 'domiciled at'.

- Seek out and use concrete words. Metaphors are often camouflaged within ordinary speech (You probably noticed the 'camouflage' but did you notice the 'concrete'?). Jargon-busting foxes most students ..... (point taken?)
- Provide pre-reading. Consider making a discipline-specific glossary, and offer lecture notes or Powerpoint slides in advance, perhaps on the intranet or via a unit website.
- Encourage students to ask questions and seek clarification (though probably not in the lecture where students may not be brave enough to speak). Students often appreciate being able to ask individually after the lecture and where this is not possible, suggest how they can do so at another time, perhaps via email.
- Provide ways for students to record and replay lectures. Read the case story on using screen-capture movies

### Effective note-taking

Non-native speakers' lecture notes are less likely to reflect the way ideas connect together. They often do not reflect or show the underpinning structures for ideas (Clerehan, 1995). Also, many students have difficulty using Powerpoint slides as the basis for their notes. Examples provided orally by the lecturer can be difficult to record or connect to slide material. The underlying structure of ideas being conveyed may not match the slide's list-making template. Slides often use only single words or parts of phrases to represent a whole idea yet many students, especially those working in translation or within an unfamiliar cultural context, will need the full idea to be written out in order to understand its meaning when they review them later.

To improve students' notes, you could:

- Structure explicitly (see above) so the students are more likely to add headings and sections in their notes.
  - Record the lecture so that students can listen, translate and record at their own pace. One student from Vietnam described this as 'Very boring but useful' (Gosper et al, 2007).
  - Provide handouts with key information and any complex diagrams or data. Some lecturers provide gapped handouts where students can annotate or add new information as the lecture is delivered.
  - Provide pauses so students can review and reconstruct their notes during the lecture itself.
- Observation of many lectures would show that fewer and fewer students are now making notes and instead, are perhaps relying on slides and handouts - only to find these are of limited use for later review. The changes made for international students may encourage all of them to become more engaged in lectures and to construct a written resource for later study.

### **Top Tip**

*'The pause is one of the most critical tools of public speaking. It is an important device for gaining attention. Pauses can be used as punctuation - to mark a thought, sentence, or paragraph - and also for emphasis, before or after a key concept or idea. If you suddenly stop in midsentence, students will look up from their notes to see what happened. Planned pauses also give you and your audience a short rest. Some faculty take a sip of coffee or water after they say something they want students to stop and think about. Other faculty deliberately pause, announce, "This is the really important consideration," and pause again before proceeding.'* (Barbara Goss Davis, Tools for Teaching, University of Berkeley, <http://teaching.berkeley.edu/bgd/delivering.html>)