

21 Tips on Alternatives to Lecturing

(This is one of 21 sets of 21 tips for trainers in preparation. Some items will be duplicated, at least at first, in the sets. I may never get to 21 sets, but it is fun to try)

There is a place for lecturing. A good lecture is an art form, well structured, clearly delivered, entertaining, informative and stimulating. But lecturing and learning are not one-for-one the same thing. Those who listen are usually quite passive. After 15 minutes or so, listeners' minds are liable to stray. Much good learning is active, through analysis, discussion and reflection. There are many ways of not lecturing. Here are 21 tips and techniques. Enjoy.

(i) book a big flat room. The tiers of seats in the traditional lecture theatre are terrible trap. You are like a puppet, programmed by the set up to lecture. Go instead for a big flat room with plenty of space.

(ii) make even more space. Put tables around the walls and chairs in the middle. Leave space for walking around.

(iii) arrange informal seating. Have chairs in almost any pattern except the formal schoolroom lines. One or more U shapes, muddled up, can be good.(See 21 ways of arranging tables and chairs - in preparation)

(iv) use wall charts. Minimise overhead transparencies, and maximise wall charts. These stay there, can be referred back to by anyone, and can be copied out without rushing.(Use masking tape, not bluetak, to put them up)

(v) limit your talking to 10 minutes at a time. Seems crazy. Most people can listen and take in for 15 or so. But set 10 as a target. Announce this as a personal rule. Most of us, giving ourselves 10, take 15. Maybe if you say 10 you will manage 15. Could be worse.

(vi) don't tell people anything they can discover for themselves. (See 21 tips on analysis, learning and sharing - in preparation).

(vii) buzzes. Break into small discussion groups. Groups of 3 are good. If you say groups of 3, some will form 4s, even 5s. So go for 3. The smaller the group, the more shy people talk.

(viii) warn when a buzz is coming. Warn people that after you talk and present there will be buzzes. This encourages active listening.

(ix) walk around during buzzes, monitor, help and deal with queries. This is not exactly new for primary school teachers! Lots of positive points about this.

(x) limit or postpone feedback from buzzes. Seems crazy but can make sense, especially with large numbers. Feedback often means the same old people talking and others keeping quiet. You can instead...

(xi) collect questions to answer later. Questions and issues can be listed for later. Have a flip chart or sticky sheet on which they can be written or stuck up. A sticky sheet is best, allowing questions on cards to be grouped (Use Artist's spray adhesive on e.g. balloon material). This makes them easier to answer well and without repetition.

(xii) invite participants to answer questions first, if they can. This takes the heat off you, encourages those able to respond, and can reveal who has special knowledge.

(xiii) identify and use experience and knowledge in the group. This is so easy to overlook. People with relevant knowledge and experience may "teach" their peers much better than we can.

(xiv) facilitate lateral teaching and learning. When there are difficulties, see first if participants can help one another. This can come from e.g. asking who understands something, and who is having problems, and then pairing or who knows about something, who does not, and forming groups

(xv) be optimally unprepared. Do not plan every minute. Have a core agenda plus a repertoire of things to do, so that you can respond creatively to issues that arise.

(xvi) avoid a fixed time to end. A session that goes well may need not to end "on time". Negotiate and agree a right time to finish. Minimise timetables which run with sessions back to back.

(xvii) decentre and move around. Reduce the dominance and authority of one part of the room. Do not stay in the same place all the time. Move around and sit or stand in different places. This helps others to move and stay with it, and can reduce your dominance. Sitting away from the board can encourage conversations between participants, not just between them and you. (See 21 ways to arrange seating, in preparation).

(xviii) help others move. It helps to walk and stand, especially in the graveyards of late morning and early afternoon. Show and tell with wall charts is a good way to do this. ("Now let's go and look at the chart on the wall over there")

(xix) give yourself breathers. Use buzzes and group and individual learning activities to give yourself time to regroup and prepare for the next part.

(xx) odd rows rise and reverse. When trapped by an amphitheatre-like lecture theatre, ask odd rows to stand up, turn around, and buzz with those behind them, who stay seated.

(xxi) experiment, improvise, invent, and share your own tips with the rest of us

See also: * use learning merry-go-rounds (in 21 tips for analysis, learning and sharing - in preparation - and others in those tips)

* form and churn groups in different ways (in 21 ways of forming groups - being revised)

* change seating arrangements (in 21 ways of arranging tables and chairs - in preparation)

*** This is very much in process. Comments, suggestions, critiques invited and very welcome

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