

LECTURE Method of Presentation: “Boon or Bane” to learning by—Mark W. Hardwick, Ph.D.

*“If I always do what I’ve always done,
I’ll always get what I’ve always gotten.”*
Eric Hoffer

Introduction

Lecturing remains one of the more popular methods to transmit information and ideas by teachers, trainers and speakers. As students and audience participants we are quite familiar with the approach. Lectures can be informative, boring and overwhelming depending on the compelling nature of the message and the presenter’s style and clarity of message. The lecture method usually is one-way communication and allows for little or none audience participation. The result is audience misunderstanding, loss of information and poor retention.

Research reported by Ralph Nichols, distinguished communication professor at the University of Minnesota, reports that listening is a learned skill. His research findings indicate that most people forget fifty percent of what is said in the first two minutes, and twenty-five percent after eight minutes, and can retain the rest of the information only for about a month. To retain more information participants need to use active listening skills, try to anticipate where the presenters’ lecture is going and get an opportunity to interact with the material. In addition a study conducted by the U.S. Department of HEW, showed that we retain only 10-25% of what we hear after a thirty –day period. The lower the interaction the lower the retention. Given this information what are the reasons that so many presenters still prefer the lecture method? And how can we improve the effectiveness of lectures?

Some presenters prefer one-way communication methods, such as lecturing, because they can transmit large amounts of information to audiences in a short period of time. Presenters find lectures efficient because the flow of information can be directed and controlled with greater precision.

On the other hand, from the receivers’ point of view they experience one-way communication as being “talked at” rather than being “communicated with”. Listeners find it difficult to figure out where the speaker is going and to focus attention unless they are provided a roadmap for the lecture. The audience has little or no opportunity to get involved or provide feedback on the messages being communicated.

The question becomes how do we capture listeners’ attention and provide methods and tools to help them understand the presenter’s lecture? **We must develop techniques and messages that are perceived as involving participants and providing opportunities for interaction.**

How do you do this as a lecturer? By creatively modifying your approach to pay more attention to how adults listen, learn, and absorb new information and ideas. At the end of the day, a presenter must focus on the needs of the audience rather than on what they want to present.

Elocution Approaches and Techniques for a New Age:

- 1. Structuring presentation**—Effective presenters provide roadmaps for their speech. They design and present lectures that are well-organized and easy to follow. There's an "attention grabber" for the opening, a preview of what is ahead and three or four chunks of information that make-up the body of the presentation, and a closing that summarizes important content, information and key messages. Many closings let participants know where they have been and "wave the flag" and passionately call for action.
- 2. Repetition and restatement** of critical information and the **significant overriding goal (SOG)** for the presentation. Effective lectures use multiple and clear examples to illustrate the critical information. They keep the learning goal "top of the mind" and provide clear and concise information. Effective presenters always try to see their message from the audience point of view. A technique, which helps, is to ask—What is in it for the audience to pay attention and how can they use this information back home to make their worklife more fulfilling and satisfying?
- 3. Make the presentation appear to be interactive, engaging and a discussion.**
 - Provide individual reflection/think time, encourage pairing-up with another participants to exchange ideas and then share perceptions with larger audience
 - Ask rhetorical questions
 - Survey the audience with powerful trigger questions
 - Provide a partial outline of the lecture to help align audience thinking and tracking the presentation
 - Feed forward structuring message; for example, these three points are critical
 - Stimulus prompts; these are three important diagnostic factors for determining risks of heart attack_____, _____ and _____.
- 4. Use the make me feel important (MMFI) rule to find unique ways to connect with the audience.** Create a psychological safe climate; build closeness and openness by using people's names, nodding your head, looking people in the eye with one thought rather than scanning the room. Use natural gestures, which are experienced as inviting; for example open hands rather than pointing a "critical parent finger".
- 5. Use descriptive analogies to help the audience remember your message and visualize a complex technical issue.** The human brain is use to dealing with visual images and tying new ideas to information already known. The dictionary defines analogy "as a likeness in one or more ways between things otherwise unlike." The analogy is one of the most powerful communication techniques and yet it is the least used. One of the main reasons for it's under use is that the development of an analogy takes imagination and creativity by the presenter to tie the analogy to the technical idea being presented into the listener's language and level of understanding.

Here are a couple of examples:

- Exercising every day is as hard as saving money, but it pays off in high dividends over the long haul.
- Here's one that painted a clear picture for a non-technical audience-- After Vice President Dick Cheney came out of his latest heart incident, his physician was attempting to describe the procedures and how the angioplasty from last year needed new intervention. Dr. Jonathan Reiner of George Washington University Hospital, described how a stent works to open up clogged arteries: He said "**... it acts like a tiny stainless steel scaffold to sort of buttress the wall of the artery and keep the artery open.**"

6. **Statistical and factual evidence.** In a technical presentation statistics are the most frequently used form of evidence. Unfortunately, numbers and facts can over load the listener's ability to process and retain information. When using graphs and visual support explain each bit of information and build the slide one idea at a time. To strengthen credibility, state whom conducted the research and their credentials.
7. **Story Telling.** Your experience or others experience related by means of a story is a form of evidence because it gives the listener tangible evidence and illustrates the viewpoint of the speaker. The communicator's personal self-disclosure and involvement through stories brings the evidence to life; first-person life. Story telling helps make your presentation believable and conveys your human side.
8. **Examples make the information concrete and tangible.** Examples can take ideas from the theoretical to the practical. Because of the massive misquotes and misuse of statistics, even examples have become automatically suspect by many listeners.
9. **Communicate in audience language.** Often presenters out of habit, comfort and sometimes to demonstrate their expertise use professional jargon and lose the audience. Do not assume that listeners understand complex technical language. If you need to use technical language, provide definitions or a glossary handout to facilitate communication. In order to facilitate impact and effectiveness of presentations it is important to keep your language clear, concise and compelling. Remember your goal is to connect with the audience and impart information and ideas listeners can use to their benefit.

Summary

It is important to remember that the **single overriding goal** of a presentation is to provide meaningful content in an entertaining way so that participants focus their attention, understand material and are receptive to implementing new ideas back home. The whole preparation, presentation and content of a lecture must therefore be directed not to the speaker but to the audience needs and wants. I encourage you to try some of the techniques provided so that your lectures may be perceived as more interactive, understood, and remembered.