

Tips on Designing Successful Lectures

Following are some essential points to keep in mind when designing and presenting a lecture.

- 1) Learners have a limited attention span. No matter how compelling the material or brilliant the lecturer or the learner, learners typically can only pay attention for around 20 minutes at a stretch. This doesn't mean that lectures cannot be longer than 20 minutes but does mean that when they are longer than 20 minutes, presenters should consider ways to break up the lecture (using various audience participation techniques) so as to successfully engage participants. (See #2, below).
- 2) In a typical 50' lecture,
 - Attention to the content of the presentation may be low during the first minute. This is when participants are still fumbling with notebooks, sizing up the speaker, arranging their seats, etc.)
 - For the next 3 minutes, attention is very high. This is the time to present the main ideas to be covered in the lecture. (see #4 below for how to present an effective opening)
 - After around 20 minutes into the lecture, attention reaches a low point. It is at this point that presenters should consider using a "break technique" to engage and involve listeners, e.g., brainstorm, small groups, self-test, etc.
 - After the "break technique", the presentation resumes.
 - At the very end of the lecture, attention may pick up dramatically. The presentation should be carefully crafted in order to reinforce key points made during the lecture (e.g., summarize, tell them what you've told them, etc.)
- 3) Understanding and retention of material presented through a lecture is significantly increased through use of **audio-visuals and various audience participation techniques**. This means that even during the 20 minute period when listeners are most attentive, it is still important, at a minimum, to use visuals, if not other audience participation techniques.
- 4) A suggested format for effective openings for lectures includes the following: Note that the opening is during the early 3 minute period described above when attention is high.
 - **For the first minute**, allow the audience to settle in by introducing yourself, telling them what materials to refer to for the talk, etc. Alternatively, you may use a device not critical to the presentation (e.g., a joke, a brief story) to capture attention.
 - **Present topic** (e.g., "How to present powerful motions")
 - **Create interest** Consider how you might start the presentation so as to engage learners. For example, "Think back to the first time you argued a motion. What are some words or phrases that describe how you felt?" The responses to this kind of question (which typically includes answers like: fear, anxiety, nausea!) leads effectively to the lecture "theme" as described below)
 - **Identify and refer throughout the lecture to a theme** (Following on the above example, the theme is "Fear to Confidence" in motion practice).

- **Plan:** Tell the learners what your plan is for your lecture (e.g., we will examine elements of motion practice from three perspectives, from that of the judge, opposing counsel and client). Post your “plan” on a flip chart so that you can refer to it during the lecture.
- **Inform listeners what they will get, do or gain as a result of listening to this lecture** (e.g., You will review seven tips on how to present powerful motions). This appeals to learners who are focused on learning material they can apply immediately.

5) **Developing content for the lecture.** When developing your lecture outline, think seriously about what learners *absolutely must know* as compared to what they *should know* or *what would be nice for them to know*. Don’t spend time on “nice to know” material in the lecture; instead, refer participants to the training materials. For the “absolutely must know” material, **try to synthesize that information into a few main points and focus your lecture on them.** Also note that in a typical 50 - 60 minute lecture, only 65% of the time is devoted to actual content. The rest of the time will be spent on your introduction, transitions and participant reflections or questions. Therefore, you must be realistic about how much you can actually “cover” during the allotted lecture time.

Staying on track. It is your job to keep the group focused on the agenda or plan for the lecture. Hopefully, you are allowing participants’ questions or comments during the course of the lecture. However, this inevitably creates opportunities to get side-tracked. If questions or comments are leading you astray, refer back to your training plan to regain focus and let participants know how you will address their question now, at the end of the lecture or later on in the training. Even without disrupting questions or comments, it is still useful to remind listeners mid-way through a lecture as to where you are in the lecture plan, where you have come from and where you are heading.

(Based on material presented by David Cruikshank, Practicing Law Institute, Training for Trainers, September 2001)