

ALTERNATIVES TO LECTURE

INTRODUCTION

Spoken and recorded lectures have been and will continue to be a vital part of higher education, both because of their ability to explain complex ideas and because learners expect them to comprise at least part of an online curriculum. However, educational research consistently shows two limitations of using recorded lectures in online courses. First, learners tend to overestimate how much information they retain from listening to a lecture. Without meaningful reflection and interaction, learners tend to believe they retain more from lectures than their performance suggests. Second, an over-reliance on lecture does not naturally encourage metacognition and critical thinking, both of which have been shown to have a positive effect on academic achievement when learners must self-regulate their efforts.

As an instructor, should you get rid of lectures altogether? No, but you can often shorten them and use them more effectively when combined with other teaching strategies such as:

- Using written reflection questions and annotations to guide learners through assigned readings.
- Asking learners to analyze and identify concepts learned from online discussions.
- Asking learners to generate course content by researching, presenting on, and/or discussing topics relevant to a course's subject matter.


A CLOSER LOOK

You can reduce unnecessary lecture content and promote critical thinking in at least three ways.

First, supplement lectures with written material, which is faster for learners to read, easier to annotate with notes, and easier for you to update. Many effective online instructors will break a long lecture into multiple parts and put activities or tasks in between them. For example, you could introduce a topic with a brief lecture, create a question sheet with key topics to investigate as learners work through readings, and then provide a written or recorded summary for learners to watch afterward.

Second, create intentional opportunities for learners to listen to and reflect on peer analysis through activities such as fishbowl discussions. In a typical fishbowl discussion, half of the learners in a course work through a real-life scenario analysis while the others read their peers' analysis and reflect on what they've learned through an individual written assignment. See the example included in this document below.

Third, consider opportunities for learners to find and create their own content. Instructors who teach content that changes rapidly (technology, business practices, communication strategies, etc.) sometimes ask learners to investigate and present on issues from current media or research. The instructors then use these topics as a focal point for discussion and even written assignments. The instructor might lecture on fundamental concepts, such as how to analyze an issue or writing best practices, but then ask learners to apply these concepts to topics they research. In some cases, UW Extended Campus has found that integrating Bongo (<https://www.bongolearn.com/>) in an online course can provide an effective means for learners to record and share their presentations.



Good reasons to use lecture:

- Expanding on difficult content covered in readings.
- Sharing stories/experiences related to course content.
- Demonstrating something you expect learners to do.

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EXAMPLE

In an online, undergraduate human resource management class, the instructors use fishbowl discussions to help students apply concepts from readings and videos to a realistic scenario. The instructors begin each weekly lesson with a short lecture (5 to 10 minutes) that introduces key concepts. Learners then work through assigned readings, online articles, and videos taken from other sites. Then, learners split into two groups:

Learners in the fishbowl:

- Analyze a scenario related to the readings, such as a company struggling to develop a retention strategy or an HR manager developing employee profiles to identify needs.
- Respond to a series of questions about the scenario (e.g., What are the short-range, intermediate-range, and long-term staff needs of the department likely to be) through an online discussion.

Learners outside of the fishbowl:

- Read the discussions.
- Compose a written reflection that completes statements such as, “One fact that I learned from reading this discussion was _____” and “The best ‘take away’ from this lesson was _____.”
- Submit the written reflection to a dropbox.

Every week, learners switch roles so that they spend time both in and out of the fishbowl. The instructors have commented that the issues learners uncover often surprise them and give them ideas for concepts to cover in future iterations. In addition, learners have alternating ways of interacting with instructors and each other.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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Szpunar, K. K., Jing, H. G., & Schacter, D. L. (2014). [Overcoming overconfidence in learning from video-recorded lectures: Implications of interpolated testing for online education.](#) *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 3(3), 161–164.