

The genre of the lecture: individual activity

Collection: Large group teaching

Approximate duration

1 hour

Learning outcomes

An ability to think through lecture design and the lecture form as more than simply a container for a body of knowledge.

Introduction

This activity invites you to apply your subject expertise to the form of the lecture as well as to its content. In the overview, we suggested that the elements to bear in mind are the content (of course), the audience, and the medium or process. This activity is very simple. We invite you to take one of your own lectures and think about lecturing as a genre. You will doubtless be aware that the argument about whether lecturing as a form has any meaning, relevance, or use in the contemporary world has gone back and forth over (at least) the past 40 years. In the 1970s many of us thought that the lecture as an educational form was doomed. But then, we innocently thought the same about organised religion, or the British monarchy. It is a remarkable fact that the lecture as a form has not died out in higher education: indeed in many ways it seems as strong as ever, even in an age of notes on the VLE, and the technical ease with which students can - licitly or illicitly - record your words.

The activity

Here we invite you not to engage with the argument about the value of lectures directly, but rather to reflect descriptively on the lecture as a genre. What are its characteristics?



1 | This resource is part of a set of professional development resources for Higher Education English (including English Literature, English Language & Creative Writing) called 'The Pool'. The resources were developed by the English Subject Centre in 2011 as part of a JISC/HEA Open Educational Resources (OER) Project.

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What sort of expectations does it set up in its audience? When you have done that, make yourself some notes on the implications for your own design and delivery.

Example

One of the things that strikes us about the lecture as a genre is the way it exists on the oral / literate interface. As a very traditional form it has its roots in a largely oral culture, but one that now exists alongside not simply traditional literacy but the multi-media solicitations of the web. English has traditionally felt ambivalent about the form, and has sometimes been apt to sneer at those who were good at it as 'playing to the gallery'. There may be a truth hidden there: that we're dealing with performance, and that a lecturer (even if not a natural actor) has to think about how they are going to perform what they want to say. A core ambition must be enlisting the audience, and avoiding lecture hall entropy, the descent into passivity and lethargy. As lecturer, you are the one person in the room who is conventionally allowed to speak, move, act. You have to use your skills to enlist the energies of those whose equally conventional role is to sit still. To speak of techniques sounds artificial: but we incite you to push beyond your comfort zone. To think about how you will perform your own text or notes: about pacing, humour, silences, breaks for activity or conversation, the integration of visual or aural materials, whether you want to use PowerPoint and if so, how.

Links & References

If you have not explored other activities in this collection yet, you may wish to view on or two of the examples of lectures and interviews with lecturers we have gathered. These videos provide many examples of different lecturing techniques and approaches to the genre of lecturing.

We are very grateful to our colleagues for allowing us into their classrooms and lecture halls to observe their teaching. As you work these examples of teaching please keep your commentary focused on pedagogy and refrain from criticism that would be unhelpful or unkind in a face-to-face peer review or similar situation.



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Hannah Crawforth Lecture



[Watch Shakespeare's London on Vimeo.](http://vimeo.com/26681280)

(<http://vimeo.com/26681280>)

Hannah Crawforth Interview



[Watch Dr Hannah Crawforth Discuss her Lecture on Vimeo.](http://vimeo.com/19705644)

(<http://vimeo.com/19705644>)

Bob Eaglestone lecture



[Watch A Science of Literature Videoclip on Vimeo.](http://vimeo.com/18713741) (<http://vimeo.com/18713741>)

Sean Matthews Lecture

Part 1



[Watch the Odour of Chrysanthemums lecture- part 1 on Vimeo.](http://vimeo.com/21066940)

(<http://vimeo.com/21066940>)

Part 2



[Watch the Odour of Chrysanthemums lecture- part 2 on Vimeo.](http://vimeo.com/21067524)

(<http://vimeo.com/21067524>)



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Sean Matthews interview



Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

Reflexive work on the design of lectures relates to:

- **Core Knowledge 2:** Appropriate methods for teaching and learning in the subject area and at the level of the academic programme
- **Professional Values 3:** Commitment to the development of learning communities
- **Professional Values 4:** Commitment to encouraging participation in higher education, acknowledging diversity and promoting equality of opportunity

More information about the Professional Standards Framework can be obtained from the summary factsheet in the *Subject & Pedagogy* collection in HumBox.

<http://humbox.ac.uk/2731/>



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Resources in the *Large group teaching* collection

- Large group teaching: introduction to the collection
- Peer reviewing lectures: resource overview
 - Peer review: A Science of Literature lecture
 - Peer review: Shakespeare's London lecture
 - Peer review: The Odour of Chrysanthemums lecture
- Identifying good and bad practice: resource overview
 - How to give a bad lecture: individual activity
 - How to give a bad lecture: group activity
 - The written and the improvised
- Planning and evaluating your lecture: resource overview
 - **The genre of the lecture: individual activity (*you are here)**
 - Peer review: group activity

