

DESIGNING ACCESSIBLE LECTURES



Lecture classes can be challenging for ESL students because they require extended concentration, often without any opportunity to regroup mentally. In addition, taking written notes while listening can be very taxing for second language speakers. Fortunately, many techniques that make lectures more accessible for ESL students are helpful for native speakers with a range of learning styles. The key is to give students a hook, a way to grab onto the material as it goes by, whether that's by providing an image, or simply a pause for reflection.¹ These techniques may slow down your lecture slightly but will greatly increase the chances that students are able to actually grasp and retain the material. Here are some suggestions:

Provide an explicit structure for your lecture. Display or hand out a written outline of the main points in your lecture for students to refer to. Consider posting this in advance so students come into the lecture already oriented to what they are going to hear. Providing this structure gives students something to “hang onto” as they are listening, increasing their ability to assimilate the new information and make connections between ideas. Refer back to the outline as you lecture.

Provide key information in writing. Reinforce information delivered verbally with selective written materials. In addition to a lecture outline, consider handing out or posting key terms so that students can look them up before the lecture. Or include

them directly in the course syllabus. As you lecture, be sure to display key terms and names or write them on the board. Names in particular are hard for second language speakers (as well as many other students) to write down as they come up, even if they are spelled out verbally. Seeing these names correctly spelled allows students to look them up afterwards.

Make use of visuals. Images, of course, abound in OCAD lectures. Consider also using charts and maps, anything that visually reinforces the material students are hearing verbally.

Make opportunities for active processing. Give students breaks from listening and a chance to process what they've heard. For example, consider stopping periodically and asking students to summarize key points. They can do this in pairs first so everyone has a chance to participate.

Provide key cultural information. Provide very basic information about cultural landmarks that come up in your lectures, explaining their cultural significance and relevance to the material. Everything from the Vatican to John F. Kennedy can be less familiar to ESL students than students who have grown up in North America. You may be surprised how many students

¹ Some information in this article was inspired by: Wlodkowski, Raymond and Margery Ginsberg, *Diversity and Motivation: Culturally Responsive Teaching*. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1995.

raised in Canada will also benefit from these explanations.

Reinforce information. Look for ways to slow down and reinforce information, such as by rephrasing key information in multiple ways, including concrete examples and anecdotes, and summarizing key points periodically. Refer students to relevant parts of the readings. Consider pausing at key points in film or video clips to reiterate key points or to quickly check comprehension.

STUDENT STORY



For Liberal Studies, I really hope professors can post lectures on My Courses. Because some names are not English, maybe French, sometimes they're spelling it but it's very fast and you can't really write it down, and that's your only chance to take notes. For me, I am an ESL student. English is already a second language... After you put a French name or those courses with French artists or paintings you really can't write it down, and then I don't know how to spell them.

Qiao Zhang, Integrated Media

FAQ

Should I allow ESL students to record lectures?

Absolutely. This isn't an “easy way out” for students. The student who records the lecture is likely doing more work, not less – they will very likely be listening to it several times over. Having the recording may mean the student can really concentrate on following the lecture without trying to take notes at the same time. Or that they can highlight in their notes points that they didn't quite catch and listen again for them afterwards.