

39 Tips on what makes a good lecturer

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Our “first class” lecturers were asked what they did to excel in the classroom. Below is a composite of the overwhelming number of responses we received. Treat them like a smorgasbord: pick out the tips that will help to improve your lectures.

LECTURER ETIQUETTE- THE IMPRESSION A LECTURER MAKES

- It's not about you; it's about them.
- Find a style of lecturing that suits your personality.
- It isn't a popularity contest so don't pander to the class.
- Confidence and a good sales pitch go a long way in the classroom. If students get the impression you don't really know what you are talking about you will lose them.
- Don't try to impress with your knowledge.
- Set expectations from the beginning.
- Don't be intimidated. If you don't know the answer to a question the "academic hand on chin pondering moment" does work remarkably well, or just be honest and say you'll check it out either during the break or after the lecture and get back to them. Never try and bluff them. They might pretend otherwise but they aren't stupid and will see through it. Your credibility will suffer as a result. If a student makes a point you hadn't thought of, say so, and praise them!
- Make it clear to students that you are REALLY interested and ENTHUSIASTIC about each topic in the module.
- Work on the principle that students will only be enthusiastic about a topic if the lecturer is too.
- Never be aloof and unhelpful, never put people down nor do anything to discourage questions (even if you think they are stupid Qs).
- Be approachable and available as much as possible.
- Treat students as adults and with respect. Be as polite to them as you would be to the editor of a journal you have submitted a paper to. Try and get to know as many names as is possible.

THE REAL WORLD AND RELEVANCE:

- Use plenty of recent examples from your own practical experience - preferably amusing tales.
- Case studies are perfect teaching tools. They are down-to-earth real life examples with lots of detail.
- One aspect of my teaching they like is the link with the "real" world of finance, so this is probably what I would advise other teachers to do. I often provide a real-life example related to the theoretical concept I am illustrating, which hopefully paints the picture in attractive colours, making learning more exciting for students.
- Try to refer to a recent article or two from the FT at least twice in each class to emphasise or reinforce points. It also sends a message that they need to read the FT or the Wall Street Journal EVERY day both at Cass and when they start working.
- Does your module involve “dry” theoretical/technical material? One key reason students attend a business school is to get a good job. So begin with a pep talk on why the material is worth learning and/or relevant to the workplace.

BE ORGANISED

- Have a schedule of lectures and classes and stick to it as much as possible. At the same time it is important to be FLEXIBLE: The first priority of a good teacher is not the breadth of the material delivered, but the full attention of the audience. It is better to deliver half of the material in the initial plan and have an impact than to overload your audience and put them to sleep.
- Keep it simple and structured.
- Talk to the appropriate course director and/or ensure degree course management meetings include a brief on what lecturers are covering in other modules. Not only will it help you but if you occasionally mention that X is an issue covered by lecturer Y in a few weeks it makes the students feel as though they are on a course which has a modicum of coherence.

COURSEWORK

- At the first lecture, students should be told what the coursework is and when it is due.
- Give prompt feedback on submitted work. This may not be feasible if you set large tasks. I tend to set many smaller ones, which I can mark and return within a short period. The online submission tool in CitySpace is very useful here: I can sit at home marking the work of those who submit early so that the delay between the expiry of the deadline and the time when marks/feedback are available is as short as possible.
- Ensure coursework is returned rapidly by blocking off time to mark.

TECHNOLOGY

- Technology is a great asset but use it when appropriate. It isn't a replacement or substitute for being a good lecturer.
- Students really appreciate having material in the format of on-line lectures.
- If the CitySpace page has a constant supply of new material, students will tend to look at it regularly, which helps increase their engagement.
- Limit the use of PowerPoint.
- IT in the classroom changes rapidly. Keep up to date on what is available/what best suits the needs of students by speaking with E-learning (level 1 in the Cass LRC) and reading the T&L Newsletter.

CHALLENGE AND MOTIVATE

- Continue to challenge students. If you're successful in motivating them the majority will respond.
- Let them Debate: Students learn better while debating as opposed to listening. Before lecturing students on what a firm should do in a particular case study, I ask them what they think. As in most real life situations there is generally no one obvious solution. Students tend to have different ideas regarding how the firm should act. I like to let the students argue their points and try to convince their class mates. This exercise enables them to learn how to use facts, theory and their experiences to formulate an argument. Also it teaches them the fine balance between persistence (to keep on arguing their point) and flexibility (to change their minds in the face of convincing arguments). Most important: when I tell them a potentially more effective way to think about the issue, they listen very carefully.
- Teaching is the best form of learning if a lecturer adopts the attitude that "students have a lot to teach to me and each other". Letting them make their arguments, discuss their points of view enables me to see managerial

problems from a different, more practical, less theory laden perspective, which is always refreshing; it also helps me prepare more relevant classes.

- Students need to feel comfortable asking questions and they are often highly valuable. But don't get side tracked and/or allow them to cause loss of focus. If you get a bizarre question which is unrelated to what you are covering or if one question prompts a flood, say you will discuss it after class, or it will be covered in a minute, etc.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Below, views differ on how to pitch a lecture, which demonstrates how important it is to KNOW the general background of the group you teach:

- 90 students in a class are all looking for something different out of the lecture. Some know the academic content from previous studies but have no idea about practical applications; some have worked and know all about, say, trading strategies but don't know why they work; and some just haven't got a clue. You have to cater to each of them. Related to this, some students prefer mathematical treatments of an issue, some want intuition and some like a model. Do all three and there is a good chance that the majority will understand.
- Never over-estimate the ability of students. Assuming prior knowledge can be fatal so make sure they know the basics of what you are talking about. When starting a new topic pay particular attention to whether you are quickly losing students and if so backtrack rapidly to get them on board.
- Don't pitch the material to the lowest common denominator, or even to the middle, more like two-thirds to three-quarters of the way up. This means that the majority of students are being challenged and will (eventually) feel like they have got something out of the lectures and the course. I always feel it is better for a student to say two years after starting work that they got a lot out of a course and now realise the importance of issues than to get good evaluations at the time. If you're lucky you will get both!

CLASS SIZES

- Lecturing 25 students is very different from 150. You have to change the style accordingly. Lecturing small groups is like being a movie/TV actor, whereas a large group is like acting on the stage.
- Subtlety works well in small groups but you need to be a bit more expressive and to some extent over the top with larger groups to get and keep their attention. However, take a tip from me: falling off the stage in the auditorium only works if done occasionally.

LONG LECTURE SLOTS

- 2-3 hours is a long period for a lecture - it is difficult for anyone to concentrate for that long. Try to break it up with several "breakout periods": ask students to discuss a question among themselves for 2-3 minutes, and then ask for an answer.
- Take a break for a minute or two every 15 - 20 minutes. Crack a joke if you can think of one, or introduce an aside of some sort. Anything to relieve the stress of concentrating on new and possibly complicated material.