**Giving your first ever lecture (or conference presentation)**

Marese Bermingham, Phil Race and Sally Brown

**What’s the issue?**

Ever since Donald Bligh asked, ‘What’s the use of lectures?’ in his seminal text, people have been querying the value of this mode of teaching. Nevertheless, lectures are widely still used in universities and colleges globally in ways that are not far different from the models represented in 14th Century paintings, with elevated lecturers speaking and students variously listening, making notes and otherwise occupying themselves. Working at CIT you may or may not give lectures, but you might at some time want to give a formal presentation at a conference, so this guide is designed to pilot you through your very first one.

**What do we know about the issue?**

Many argue that the era of lectures has passed, that it is archaic to expect students to sit physically present in the same (Brown, 2015) but it looks as if they are here to stay, if only because university systems in most nations still use the lecture timetable as the building blocks not only of the student experience but also of academic staff deployment models and this is likely to remain the case for the next decade or two at least.

Discussions of student attention spans vary from the deeply pessimistic three minutes to the more reassuring twenty minutes (Brown and Race, 2002) so we need to explore ways of ensuring students interact in large classes and hence remain engaged in live learning. There has been a paradigm shift from seeing lecturers as the fount of all wisdom to seeing teachers as managers, leaders and designers of literal and metaphorical learning spaces which enable learning to happen (Savin-Baden (2007). Nobody ever feels fabulous the very first time they give a lecture, but this checklist is designed to help you feel as good as possible about your first time and to help you make lecturing a real learning experience for your students. (This guidance assumes a 60-minute slot).

**Checklist for your first ever lecture**

1. **Be prepared**

Look at the learning outcomes for the course/ programme and work out what you need to cover in this particular session. Do your advance reading to familiarise yourself with the content, but don’t start preparing your presentation yet. Instead start by getting five sheets of A4 card and cut them in half. Punch holes in the corners and tie them together with a treasury tag or piece of string. Onto each of 7 cards you can then paste paper with up to 5 bullet points in minimum font size of 18 outlining what you really need to talk about for the five minutes allocated to the slide. The first slide is the welcome slide where you introduce yourself, set the scene of the lecture, advise them where you will be placing the presentation on the website if this is what you plan to do, and generally setting up the session. One slide in the middle should be left blank, reminding you to give them an interactive task to do (see the TACIT Tactics cards for lots of ideas on asking questions, setting small tasks, using quizzes etc). The last slide should also be blank or headed ‘Questions’. You should not be teaching right up to the last minute since in Cork IT it is recommended that you stop at least five minutes before the end of the hour to allow for students moving to the next class.

Now you are ready to prepare your PowerPoint or other presentation (if you start by doing this, it’s all too easy to put together far more material than possible to covered in a single session. Print it out in a size you find readily legible. If it helps you feel confident, you can write out everything you want to say in the form of a large-print paper, but this should be kept in your bag out of sight for use as a last resort if you have completely lost the plot. When you are ready, have a practice run in the actual room to make you feel comfortable.

1. **Be heard**

First of all, if there are voice amplification facilities, always use them to help any students using hearing loops. Ideally use a radio mic if you can, rather than a fixed mic to stop you being tethered to the lectern. If audio support is not available, some simple voice technique preparation can help. New lecturers often worry about voice, and indeed it is really important to look after your voice as it’s easy to encounter problems if you try to speak too loud too often if you aren’t used to it. It’s important not to shout, which puts a strain on vocal chords. Instead project, that is to push the sound out using effective breathing from lower down (abdominal breathing) which works much better. Practise in the privacy of your home, ideally in front to a mirror to check whether you are articulating sufficiently (if you can’t see your mouth moving when you talk, you probably aren’t, and may need to use very slightly exaggerated movements to make your enunciation clearer). Speak just a little slower than normal conversational speech (but not too slowly!) and think about your pitch. Women’s voices may rise higher in pitch when we are nervous, and men’s may go lower. It’s all a matter of practice, ideally in the place where you will be giving your first lecture. See Whitbread link below for more advice.

1. **Be comfortable**

Your first lecture is not the occasion to wear new shoes or clothes: you need to confident you are well presented but comfortable. Go and have a look round the room in which you are teaching well in advance, and have a quick run through to check your timing and make sure you feel comfortable with the layout, window blinds, room lighting, acoustics, sight lines for the presentation and so on. Locate the nearest toilet. Check you know how to turn on the data projector and PC, or plug in your own laptop and have a look at one or more of your slides from the back of the room to ensure it is all visible (some set-ups make it really difficult to see the bottom line of a PowerPoint presentation so you might want to only have text in the top two thirds of the template). Look at where you can stand and walk around comfortably and note any steps or raised areas. If possible, take a friend along who can advise you if you are sufficiently audible. More than anything, get the feel of the place so it doesn’t feel strange when you go in to teach.

1. **Be confident**

This is easy to say but not always easy to achieve! The key thing is to find your own approach that works for you and develop a persona that makes you come across as knowledgeable, capable, well prepared and welcoming. You might not always feel like all of those things, but you can project a positive image! Some people use props (one of the authors had a ‘magic’ jacket she would wear for high stress occasions that she told herself when she put it on made her wonderful!) Crucially confidence comes from good preparation, ‘risk-assessing’ the situation and working out what to do if things don’t go to plan (e.g. if the power fails, you can’t make the computer work, or you have a last minute room change, you can always work from your paper script or PowerPoint slides print out).

1. **Be interactive**

Early-stage lecturers often feel they have to keep talking for the full allocated period, but it’s much better to break up the time available into manageable chunks, with a clear idea of what you expect students to be doing in any particular chunk. They might be just listening, making personal notes, reflecting individually for 30 seconds, asking or answering questions, talking to a partner, undertaking a quick quiz, applying theory to practice, checking understanding, working on a problem, reproducing a list of pros and cons and so on: see TACIT Tips cards for detail on lots of things you can do to move your students from passive recipience to active engagement.

**Key takeaway:** You may admire others who inspire you, and fear you might never be able to emulate them. Don’t try! It’s more important to be yourself, as natural as you can. Don’t feel you need to be an ace performer or comedian, just aim to do a good job and think about the students’ needs before your own anxieties. Getting ready for your first large group session will take you far longer than any subsequent one, but you will get quicker as you grow in confidence and capability.

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