

Engaging Students: We Can Do Better Than Standard Lectures

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The future of traditional lectures is in doubt, and students are voting with their feet. Many choose to listen to lecture recordings, rather than attending lecture theatres. This situation challenges teachers to make their learning activities more interactive, engaging and effective. Blended learning approaches offer one possible solution, particularly for large groups of students. We introduced interactive formative quizzes, including image-based activities, to promote engagement in both live and online lectures.

For online lectures, we used iSpring Suite to convert PowerPoint presentations into hyperlinked HTML5 modules, with slide-synchronised audio. Free Audacity software was used for audio editing. The presentations were broken up into “bite-sized” segments with interspersed quiz questions, including activities such as crossword or jigsaw puzzles, and a final formative quiz. The resultant modules are available via Moodle and can be viewed on any device. These modules can be used to “flip” the classroom, freeing classroom sessions for meaningful face-to-face interactions.

For in-class lectures, we added online interactivity via LectureTools1, which facilitates real-time dialogue between students and teachers (including image-based questions), as well as collaborative interaction between students. This software also enables asynchronous interactions, e.g. key questions and clarification of misconceptions. Moreover, it facilitates use of the lecture environment for a large-scale formative assessment exercise, with immediate feedback from the lecturer. Student feedback and engagement with LectureTools was overwhelmingly positive, confirmed by observational reports from Learning and Teaching Unit staff, leading to a planned UNSW pilot of a new version of this software (Echo360 Active Learning Platform) in S2 2015.

References:

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The future of traditional lectures is in doubt, and students are voting with their feet. While it's certainly true that improvements in lecture recording technology have been accompanied by declining student attendance, this is an opportunity for teachers to make their large group teaching more interactive, engaging and effective.

We describe the use of blended learning approaches to promote engagement in both live and online lectures.



iSpring Suite allows easy conversion of lectures
You can create an online lecture with embedded quizzes using an existing Powerpoint Presentation and lecture recording. Free audio editing software plus the built-in narration editor can work wonders. With a little bit of patience, you can build engaging, professional-looking online lecture modules, and can even add eye candy in the form of jigsaws or crossword puzzles.

Echo360 ALP allows in-class online interactions
You can use in-class questions, including image-based questions, to provide large-scale formative feedback with immediate clarification of misconceptions. Students can ask questions online which can be answered before, during or after class. Later on, you can analyse student responses to e.g. identify issues worth following up in small-group interactions.

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