

# How to give a bad lecture: group activity

**Collection:** Large group teaching

**Resource:** Identifying good and bad practice

## Approximate duration

One hour to 90 minutes

## Learning outcomes

This activity, like the peer review activities elsewhere in this collection, is designed to prompt participants to begin thinking critically about what makes a good lecture/lecturer by observing the opposite. This is a reflective exercise which will help participants to develop:

1. an enhanced level of critical self-awareness as a teacher;
2. the ability to spell out and defend one's own values as a lecturer;
3. a nuanced insight into the specific teaching skills demanded by lecturing and by one's student constituency;
4. refine one's ability to prepare lectures effectively.

## Introduction

In this activity we set out to have a bit of fun while also providing a serious resource. The fun part was being bad 'on purpose' and thereby being able to showcase all of the lecturing bad practice we have suffered through ourselves either as students or as delegates to scholarly conferences. Indeed participants too have likely had to sit through boring or poorly organised lectures (usually by veterans who should know better!). As an exercise, writing, performing and recording a bad lecture is a great thing to do if time allows: the active nature of the task (not to mention having to watch yourself afterwards) almost guarantees one won't make certain mistakes again. Equally, it is very

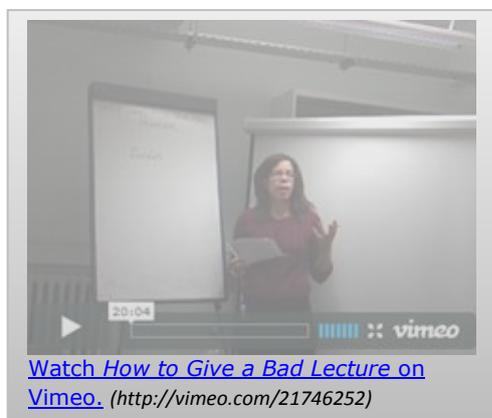
**1** | *This resource is part of a set of professional development resources for Higher Education English (including English Literature, English Language & Creative Writing) called 'The Pool'. The resources were developed by the English Subject Centre in 2011 as part of a JISC/HEA Open Educational Resources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

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good practice to record a genuine lectures and review it with a trusted friend or mentor for advice on how to improve it according to particular goals.

## The activity

In this activity the group should pay attention to their visceral reactions as they watch the the following 20-minute clip of King (English Subject Centre) presenting a mock lecture on the short story 'Brokeback Mountain' by Annie Proulx. Divide the class into small groups of 2 or 3 participants. Each group should nominate a scribe who will divide a piece of paper in half so that there are two columns. On the left side write the heading 'Observation' and on the right side write the heading 'Consequence.' As the small groups watch the video use the observation column to note down all the things that people find irritating, problematic, careless, etc. about the delivery of this lecture or which might make a student 'turn off.' Then either simultaneously or after watching the video, try to extract a consequence from each observation. For instance, if a lecturer speaks with their back to their audience, a consequence could be lack of audibility. Another consequence could be the the lecturer's actions suggest she has little regard for her students and is actually having a conversation with herself.



We are very grateful to our colleagues for allowing us into their classrooms and lecture halls to observe their teaching. Even though this is an exaggerated example of poor teaching practice, as you work with it 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. When the group has completed the activity they may wish to watch the post-lecture interview in which King provides her assessment of the



potential consequences of her lecturing techniques. Instruct participants to think about lecturing techniques as they go about their normal routines-- watching television, attending conferences, attending lectures themselves. They can expand upon this activity by taking notice of how other people approach lectures or public speaking more generally (stand-up comedians, religious sermons, etc.). By noting the action of the speaker (e.g. judicious use of pause for effect) and the consequence on the audience (engagement, anticipation), whether good or bad, participants can begin to build up a set of techniques to try out and to avoid in their own lectures. Another effect will be a growing sense of what their own style and comfort zone as a lecturer is.

## Links & References

- Gibbs, Graham, and Sue Habeshaw and Trevor Habeshaw. *53 Interesting Things to Do in Your Lectures*. Fourth Edition. Bristol: Technical Educational Services, 1995.
- Race, Phil. *The Lecturer's Toolkit*. Second Edition. London: Kogan Page Limited, 2001.
- Showalter, Elaine. *Teaching Literature*. London: Blackwell, 2003.

## Relationship to the Professional Standards Framework

- **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 (\*you are here)**
  - The written and the improvised
- Planning and evaluating your lecture: resource overview
  - The genre of the lecture: individual activity
  - Peer review: group activity

