

# The written and the improvised

**Collection:** Large group teaching

**Resource:** Identifying good and bad practice

## Approximate duration

One hour

## Learning outcomes

An ability to focus on the lecture medium and your own relationship to it. The confidence to deal with one of the common causes of bad lectures: the over-loaded text.

## Introduction

This is a very simple activity, but one which we believe goes to the heart of the practice of lecturing. A lot of pedagogic decisions take themselves by default. This activity invites you to think through the process by which you yourself take a particular decision, in this case about the form in which you write your own lecture. Various modes suggest themselves: one increasingly popular one involves doing the lecture as Power Point slides, and using the slides as a basis for some level of extemporisation around each slide.

## The activity

In this activity, we invite you to think about two extremes - fully written-out text, and sketch of main points (with or without slides). First draw a continuum between them, and mark where you feel you fall on the continuum. This is in a sense an issue about your own comfort zone. Then make lists of the pros and cons of your intuitive approach. These could be personal (I would feel too insecure if I did not have it all written out); or



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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pedagogic (I know that a lecturer with their head down in their text is not an inspiring presence).

We are not suggesting (especially in relation to lecturing) that you stray too far from your own comfort zone. But if - for example - your inclination is to write out your text in full, then it would be worth thinking about strategies to mitigate some of the negative effects of doing so. To think about, and practise, ways of making your audience feel that their presence counts, that they are not just an anonymous presence subject to your erudition. Can you make space to greet and acknowledge people, to look up, to risk departing from the script to explain a point? If you fall in the 'must have it all written out' camp, could you stretch your range by highlighting some points where you could look up, make eye contact with the audience, and improvise upon a point? There was a point to the apocryphal sermon writer's 'tell joke here' ....

## 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

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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



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



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