

CHAPTER ONE

Give Better Lectures



Simply said, the more a lecture connects with students the better it is. The rub, of course, is the word *connect*. As discussed in the next chapter, songs, props, and personal experience are distinct ways in which anyone can increase the chances of connecting with students in the temporary suspension of straightforward lecture. But what about in the lecture itself? This chapter is not about the obvious things that can be picked up from any book on how to lecture: speak clearly, make eye contact, use the board, and so on. Instead it discusses the key aspect of who you are in the classroom and some specific strategies for better lectures in liberal arts and sciences courses for nonmajors.

DO WHAT YOU NATURALLY DO BEST—PASSION WINS

A methodical, earnest, low-key professor will appeal to some students, while a larger-than-life, boisterous professor will appeal to others. There are intense professors, aloof professors, shy professors, aggressive professors, each of whom can be an excellent lecturer. The first point is that no matter what you try to be, you will not please all of your students or even the majority. Therefore, extremes aside, it would be insane for the naturally boisterous professor to try to be low-key and the low-key professor to try to be boisterous in the classroom. The second point is that there is no one ideal lecture style. There is no one personality type that every lecturer should try to measure up to. What to do? Tell stories if you are a storyteller, use media if you are a tech junkie, carefully explain texts if you are a wordsmith, or orchestrate minishows if you are a director. Do what you naturally do best, for in giving better lectures what matters is not your personality type but your genuine passion. If you do not have passion and cannot find it, you lose, and students lose.

One famous scholar and teacher whose classes were always packed had a distinct, low-key style. He would stand behind the lectern and read carefully prepared statements for five to ten minutes. Then he would stand beside the lectern and try to expand on what he had already stated. Next he would go back to the lectern, and so on, repeating the process, over and over. Student attention was taut both while he stood behind the lectern and while he stood beside it. He never paced. He never ventured out into the aisles. He rarely used the board. In responding to questions, he simply stepped again beside the podium, answered the question, then stepped back behind it. How can someone like this—who mostly lectures from behind a podium or near it, is relatively low-key, uses little or no media—be the teaching star of a large, competitive department? His connection with the students was absolutely genuine. He did not try any tricks just to please them, he was incredibly well-prepared for the lecture, which included challenging himself to think about the legitimacy of his own interpretations of thinkers and texts, but most of all, he had genuine passion for the material, and it came across to the students academically and personally. His comportment was ceremonial and ritualistic, since this came naturally to him, and the students found this structure inspiring in the way that wedding ceremonies and swearing-in rituals can be inspirational. But all of this is empty without passion.

Whatever your personal style in the classroom, the underlying key to better lectures is maintaining passion about what you are doing. Students usually note this as “enthusiasm” in student ratings reports. This passion overrides the preference that the boisterous student has for the boisterous professor or the low-key student has for the low-key one. Yet this passion is not some inward, self-absorbed emotion or feeling that on occasion is successfully shared with students. The passion I am talking about is not selfish or disengaged from the audience, and it does not translate into bullying. The word *profess* is from the Latin *profiteri*—from *pro-*, before (the public), and *fateri*, to avow—so that as a professor *you avow or affirm your beliefs publicly*. Hence, passion, fervor, enthusiasm, love for your beliefs and knowledge are in your job description, and so is attention to your audience, the public. Being a professor in the classroom means you lecture passionately, publicly connecting with students. And if you live up to being passionate in this sense, it does not matter so much if you are shy or gregarious, intense or aloof, you will be a good lecturer. So among all the elements of your personality that will make for a good lecture on a specific day, passion wins.

DO THE UNEXPECTED

How do you start your classes? A former colleague of mine, Dr. Ronald White, teaching a course on human nature, would arrive in class one day as a robot. He did not dress any differently than usual, he simply arrived and announced that he would be filling in for the regular professor. Some students would

laugh nervously; others yelled out that he *was* the regular professor! “Prove it,” he said. So started an entertaining, mind-bending class session, even more so because it was totally unexpected. The lecture included the brief story of how the professor created him to stand in for the professor when he was not feeling well, or he wanted to do some other things during class time. The robot recharges in the basement of the professor’s house, has all his same thoughts, and so on. He is absolutely the same as the professor. Of course, the lecture is a demonstration of the problems of artificial intelligence, what really makes a human being a human being, freedom, consciousness, and so on. And the professor lectures about all of this as the robot.

Not every class can be so dramatic. But doing, saying, or writing on the board the unexpected, especially at the beginning of a lecture class can re-energize the whole course and definitely makes that day’s lecture unique. Some professors regularly start class by writing controversial statements on the board. For example, a literature professor focusing on the role of analogy in this discipline might write the following on the board to begin class, “Absolutely everything you know is known in comparison to something else.” As lecture proceeds, and questions are asked, the class might arrive at some adjustments to this claim, which can be recorded on the board. These adjustments, along with the full-bore lecture information on analogy in literature and in life, are the pedagogical aims of this session. Yet the professor has started freshly, unexpectedly, memorably.

Every so often, in the middle of a required course for nonmajors, I feel the students are just going through the motions. I get the feeling that my passion far outweighs theirs, and even some dedicated students give small signals (hardly stifled sighs, etc.) that indicate they resent the work I am assigning. Thankfully, this does not happen every term, but when it does I steel myself and do the following (which is also an example of breaking up lecture, as in the next chapter). I come into class and sit down in the chair up front, something I never do in a large class. I ask, “You’ve read the assignment for today, what do you want to do with it?” The joker in the crowd responds he wants “to throw the book down three flights of stairs.” The other joker shouts out that she wants “to get an A on the upcoming major assignment, just for reading the text.” Still sitting, I take the responses somewhat seriously, asking them follow-up questions, trying not to disagree, trying not to say things such as, “Descartes is a classic in the history of ideas. You have to be nuts to dismiss him so easily!” I nod my head and acknowledge their answers. Then I return to the question, “What do you want to do with this text?” Eventually the responses become more constructive: “I’d like to know where he is coming from. Why is he doing these meditations?” or “Why does he have to be so long-winded?” or “I don’t get why this matters to me?” I invite other students to respond to each of these questions. Throughout the process there is a lot of silence, long, quiet moments of students looking at each other, looking at me, me looking at them, and me casually looking at my text, which

they eventually do as well. The students become anxious. This may go on for a while until they have more or less decided to take responsibility for their learning and to enlist me to help them do that. Of course, this is simply a reiteration of the assumption on the first day of class: "I'm paying for a liberal arts college degree and as part of the agreement I will be exposed to work outside my major, and it's the professor's job to teach me this other information." Build in surprising moments in lecture courses, as part of the lecture, to reinvigorate a course, as in this example or to create a string of memorable nodes of intellectual excitement throughout the term.

KNOW YOUR STUFF

Some time ago I observed the class of a first-year teacher in philosophy. By all appearances, he (let us assume) knew the author he was teaching in great detail. The entire two-hour lecture (which unfortunately had only a comfort break as lecture relief, no discussion, props, etc.) was about one long philosophical argument and all of its subarguments. These were projected on a screen, and the professor proceeded from the beginning to the end, reading statement after statement, lecturing a moment or two on each assumption and conclusion. To the untrained eye, that is, the (glazed) student eye, this professor knew the subject matter in great detail. However, he did not, as became apparent in several misstatements of basic facts that nonmajor students would not know were false. This is important, but what also matters is that he did not know this text or this author well enough to genuinely connect with the students. He put together the long argument, which formed the whole of the material for the lecture session, from some exegetical source unknown to the students or from his graduate school notes, and proceeded to try to present it in an animated way. This argument projected on the screen was the curtain that separated him from the students, a curtain that kept him safe. As long as he followed this prefabricated script he would not be found wanting intellectually.

All of this is understandable for a first-year teacher, perhaps trying to teach and finish a dissertation at the same time. I remember using encyclopedias of philosophy and my graduate school notes as my lecture guides in my first year. However, this particular disconnect with students should be a one-time thing with respect to this particular material. I cannot imagine this professor teaching the same author, the same text, in the next term in the same way. It is his duty to know his stuff, to develop his own take on the author and the text, and to lecture better. The better lecture will come when he is freed from having to stand behind the curtain of formulaic ideas, ideas that are not his own. The better lecture will come from the confidence that a classroom leader, as lecturer, is able to show when he knows his stuff. In short, he will lecture well when he is able to more often pull the curtain back and say to his students, "This is what I think is important here . . ."

The veteran is also not excused from refreshing his or her knowledge. Listen carefully to student questions. Are they increasingly asking certain kinds of questions? Suppose over the last several years a sociology professor finds herself fielding more and more questions about the disabled or challenged populations and how we interact with them and the nature of social institutions with respect to this population, and so on. Suppose this professor is not that interested in this topic and has not researched it herself. She responds vaguely each time with something such as, “Well, there’s been some sociological work on that, but not very much has been achieved yet.” As in the case of the rookie, it is this professor’s responsibility to know her stuff. She needs to start asking students about their interest in this topic when it comes up in class: “Interesting question. Are you studying about these populations in other classes?” She needs to ask other professors in other departments whether or not this is a hot topic in their field right now. (It probably is.) She needs to do enough research to be able to give at least a minimally better response: “Yes, many fields are investigating this right now. Let me write the titles of two books on the board for you to read to find out more.”

Over the last several years, each time I teach a certain required core course at my institution, an upper-level philosophical ethics course for non-majors, more and more of my students have asked specific questions about the political philosophy of the classic and modern authors they read. In the past, I handled the questions as best I could and moved on. But the authors are a closed set—Aristotle, Kant, and Mill. They are included in any philosophical ethics course across the United States. This means with a one-time investment of targeted research, I could refresh myself on this topic enough to perennially connect better with what students are learning in their other courses (business, management, cultural studies, economics, literature, history), disciplines that have more recently featured political philosophy. Therefore, it is incumbent upon me not just to answer their questions as best I can but also to learn some political philosophy and rework lectures to draw out connections between ethics and politics and between courses for students. This connecting is a connecting to students that makes for better lectures.

CARE FOR QUESTION AND ANSWER

In our rush to get through our lecture material, we sometimes miss the significance of that moment when a hand goes up, and a student is ready to publicly enter into a discussion with the professor. We also often fumble the invitation for students to ask questions in the midst of a lecture.

Suppose a student raises his or her hand just as you are about to announce the amazing conclusion you have been building to for fifteen minutes. You have momentum, you have the class connected with you, but now everyone notices this hand. This is not an “interrupter” student (described in chapter 6). This is a good, well-meaning student who simply

has a question at what for you is the wrong time. What do you do? You are not obligated to answer every question as it comes along, and given this scenario, interrupting your crescendo works against good pedagogy. Let us say you stop and invite the student to ask the question. Suppose it turns out that the next thing you were about to say was going to answer this question anyway, or that the student asks something totally offtrack. Now it is too late. The wind is gone from the sails, and you will have to tack to regain momentum. The first point is that as a lecturer you are under no obligation to immediately answer a student's question.

Let us say you waive off this student's question. Exactly what gesture do you use? All eyes are on you. Do you look at the student while you gesture or do you make the gesture in the student's general direction, in your peripheral vision? Do you hold up your hand to the student, with a "number one" index finger extended, and whisper "just a minute"? Do you make this gesture while looking exasperated at the interruption? Of course, all of this matters for classroom atmosphere for student questions. That is, each question matters in this way. Others will judge whether or not to participate and use this occasion as evidence. Your tone and demeanor are important in responding to a student question. Students rightly hate dismissive professors, professors who talk down to them from the supposed heights when they ask what they think is a decent question, so we should firmly but kindly ask a student to wait, when appropriate, rather than being dismissive. The second point, then, is to take care in how you ask a student to wait. Make eye contact, be firm, be kind, and do not make a big public deal out of it.

Sometimes you invite questions. Inviting questions as a way of breaking up lecture could have been discussed in chapter 2, but it is more pertinent here. At some point, every lecturer has asked, "Does anyone have any questions?" There are better ways to invite students to participate, but there is nothing wrong in itself with this phrase, any more than the standard retail phrase, "Can I help you?" The customer in the retail store knows the game and gives the standard response ("Just looking"). What matters in these cases of invitation is what happens next. Just as the retail salesperson should follow up with another kind of invitation ("Great, a new shipment of spectacular widgets has just arrived. Let me show them to you"), so should the professor. In the classroom, this invitation could include the very powerful tool of loud silence.

The experienced professor and salesperson know to silently wait in the midst of the invitation ritual and not try to fill the space just because the silence is slightly uncomfortable. A former colleague once invited me in to her (let us assume) class to observe the level of student participation. She said, "The problem is that students are very passive. They are not asking questions or making points in class, even when I invite them to." After about fifteen minutes of lecture, she asked, "Does anyone have any questions?" Two seconds later (not an exaggeration), she said, "Well then, let's continue."

Unlike the case where the lecturer is hoping that no one really has questions, this lecturer genuinely wanted them. The silence was too uncomfortable for her. Wait, look around, wait some more. Then rephrase the question, “What more can I tell you about this topic? What am I leaving out for you?” There may not be any questions, but you have made a solid invitation. If you truly want to have questions from students, if you want them to ask for clarifications, or to bring up problems, you need to ask carefully, and you will get them. And a major part of this care is learning to live with silence.

A big mistake professors can make in the lecture situation is to not answer the question asked and to take too long to do it. In certain lecture atmospheres, created by the professor, many students will not accept an invitation to ask a question for fear of becoming the “target” of the professor’s lecture for the next fifteen minutes. I am not advising that you be curt, but try to be concise in responses. This concision will also greatly relieve pressure on getting all the course content accomplished for that day. Solving the problem of actually answering the question asked can require some brief preliminary questioning of the student by the professor to make the question more precise. This is time well spent. Without this, your five-minute answer, valuable time in many course formats, could be completely offtrack of the student’s needs. For example, the student asks, “I don’t understand how Marx’s political theory is supposed to lead to a utopia. What am I missing?” The professor responds, “What exactly do you disagree with? Is it the determinism in his theory, the idea of a utopia, or something else?” The student continues, “I don’t disagree. I just don’t see how alienation is connected with utopia.” Now the request has become more specific, and a relevant answer can be made.

AVOID LECTURE TRAPS

There are many more lecture traps than the four I discuss below. I choose these four because they are both common and seductive. In the same way an animal falls into a trap, pursuing some lure that proves satisfying, these lecture traps each come with powerful lures that keep the professor in a loop of mediocre teaching or wasteful time management.

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK TRAP

A common lecture trap, the “fill-in-the-blank” lecture style goes something like this. The professor asks, “Napoleon was imprisoned because . . . ?” and some student fills in the blank. “Right,” says the professor. “And they imprisoned him on this island rather than put him to death. What was the name of the island, and where was it?” Students respond; the professor continues. “This led Napoleon’s friends to do . . . what?” And so it goes on and on. Sitting through a class session of fill-in-the-blank lecturing is exhausting. The stops and starts make the presentation fragmentary rather than cohesive, and

the fill-in-the-blank approach to “classroom participation” is more appropriate to some level of precollege education, perhaps even middle school. The professor will argue that there is class participation throughout the session, but there is no full flowering of participation, just very formal and controlled sprouting followed by constant pruning.

RUBE GOLDBERG TRAP

Another trap is to use elaborate means to explain something very simple. But if you have spent a lot of time preparing an exercise or piece of media or working out this cluster of related concepts, it is very difficult to move it to the back of your preparation folder for the course. For example, in a section of a course dedicated to critical thinking, I spent some time preparing an elaborate exercise to explain a relatively simple and minor point about logic. I kept subjecting classes to this exercise because I thought it was brilliant. It took half of a class session to explain to the students what to do and how to do it and to lecture about it. Behind the scenes I spent way too much time fine-tuning this exercise. How could I give it up with so much invested, and since the students seemed to enjoy it? Keeping an exercise like this is seductive, but it is also like building a Rube Goldberg machine. (This is the annual engineering contest where some mundane task is accomplished using many more steps than necessary, just like making a major deal out of a minor point.) Therefore, as a professor, keep in mind return on investment as you start spending inordinate amounts of time on a boutique type of preparation for lecture.

COVERING ALL THE MATERIAL TRAP

It is better to deeply introduce your students to less material than superficially introduce them to more material. You do not have to cover it all. Do not allow yourself to be oppressed by the full weight of the material or by the need for completeness of the material to be covered. Your students are not being prepared for some proficiency exam in your discipline, unlike a civil engineering student who may have to pass a test. Yes, you must impress your students with the material but not by the fact that there is a lot of it. They know that the field is large, and if they already think that the discipline is marginally important in their lives, then adding more quantity just increases the sense of marginality. When you try to cram in too much material, there is no space for silences, for question-and-answer periods, for dyad and triad discussion groups, for breaking up lecture.

DISTANCING TRAP

Another lecture trap is teaching from a distance. Teaching from a distance is when you can get through a lecture (or a course) impersonally, safely. There is no risk, no “professing.” A codependent relationship forms between pro-

fessor and students such that the students enable the professor to be a mediocre lecturer. Once this pattern is established students will allow you to teach from a distance, to teach disinterestedly. Early in a course, they will naturally resist detached, disinterested teaching. The students take the initiative, before routine is established, to show you that they do not want to be bored in class. Various students will ask questions in class; various students will approach you after or before class. Yet as the term proceeds, the students will allow a comfortable routine to develop in which they silently consent to be less engaged, while you silently consent to teach impersonally. They are students at a distance, and you are a teacher at a distance. Everyone is more or less waiting out the end of the term.

For example, I once taught a large, required, upper-division course for nonmajors in which 10 percent of the students happened to be autistic (see also chapter 6). This was my first real experience with autism in the classroom. The course ended up being a mediocre experience for almost all the students and for myself, because they answered “yes” to my quiet request to let me teach safely, at a distance. Since I had taught this particular course a lot (once I taught it six times in an academic year) I always tried every trick I could to keep it fresh for myself. I changed books, read new background material, tried new assignments, and generally self-motivated to give the students a first-rate experience. But this term I took the easy way out. It was the end of a seemingly endless academic year, I was bored and distracted, and I was confused about how to be both naturally inspired for nonautistic students and clearly procedural for my autistic students, who were recording the course lectures. I chose to squelch sparkle in the classroom for the dullness of being thorough. This choice was not my only option, and it was not even clear to me at the time that this was the choice I had made. The students eventually followed my lead. I taught at a distance. Instead of engagement between us, I let them go, and they let me go. Ever since, when I feel the distance increasing between me and my students, and me and my material, I become very uneasy and deeply question how I am going to shake the feeling of comfort and safety of business as usual and resume professing.

EXPLOIT ANALOGIES AND DIAGRAMS

St. Thomas Aquinas famously claimed that human thinking is primarily analogical. It is somewhat difficult to produce analogies, yet no one thing sparks the imagination of an audience better than a well-struck analogy. All of the disciplines in the liberal arts and sciences work with difficult, sometimes abstruse concepts. It is your job to find analogues to use in your lecture. Analogies used in lecture can uniquely crystallize a complicated concept and lead to insightful questions about that concept’s rightness or wrongness. There are several standard or general structures for analogical representation that can be great places to start. Many are well worn, such as the mechanical

analogy (a deterministic process, step-by-step, build-up and release of pressure, etc.). But within such a general analogy others unfold, perhaps equally well worn, such as a cog in the wheel or a computer hard drive. There are nature analogies (flowerings, nurturing, cyclings, icebergs, geological strata), animal analogies (packs, nestings, stalkings), biological, chemical, musical, historical, theatrical, linguistic, literary, and so on. Choose your analogy with your audience in mind. For example, to target economics majors in your classroom use a business analogy, to target nursing majors use a medical analogy. As a lecturer, one of your most important jobs is to find good illustrative parallels that light up a clearing in the mind of the student. Analogies are the bullet-train to this station.

Diagrams can also be very powerful. Most professors in the liberal arts have occasion to draw a diagram on the board. It could represent a hierarchy, a cluster, a correspondence, cause and effect, a network, a Venn diagram, and so on. For example, a professor wants to draw a cause-and-effect relationship between two things. The professor asks, "How does the mind influence the world?" On one side goes a circle with eyes (the mind), and across from it the word *world*, with an arrow in between. He or she reverses the arrow for the world influencing the mind or makes a double arrow. One can imagine that versions of this rudimentary causal diagram are used in sociology class (institutions affecting groups), in psychology (mother on son), in communication arts (media on consumer), in history (war on peasant), and so on, with the arrow direction switched when needed. A professor may leave this diagram up for the whole session and refer back to it often. It will certainly be recorded into the student notebooks. The trick is to push yourself beyond this kind of standard diagram so that the complex relationships between concepts in a theory, or in a book, can be linked in visual ways for the student. For example, straight lecturing in a political science class on the concept of 'welfare' and its related themes is very different than slowly building a diagram on the board of the relationship between the welfare concept and themes as the lecture unfolds. It takes intense, creative reflection and more preparation than usual, but the payoff is huge. Where to start? Is the concept of welfare more like a circle in a circle, or is it more like a network of relationships? Is it both, or neither? Is it part of a hierarchy, a hierarchy and cause and effect, and so on? Even if the diagram is half-baked, this is fine. Students will be happy to help you clean it up, modify it, and add to it, if invited.

GIVE STUDENTS THE NOTES

Almost every professor has personal lecture notes, and it is appropriate that some of these notes remain in the professor's sole possession. But many professors in lecture classes work off of notes in the classroom and expect students to transcribe these aural sayings into good notes comparable to the original. Why not arrange to give most of the originals instead? Moreover, in many lec-

ture classes, how well the student knows the professor's notes becomes a main criterion for assessment, for example, as in-class exams. Predictably, these student notes are often pale imitations of the professor's notes. If it is very important for the students to correctly write down definitions, processes, conceptual relations, and so on, then the professor can guarantee that there are fewer misunderstandings by putting these notes together for the student.

One way to accomplish the notes giveaway is to devise a *course notebook*. (For skills-oriented classes, it can be more of a *course workbook*.) Students bring this soft-bound book to class just like any other textbook needed that day. It could contain a syllabus, including course schedule, policies, justifications for the policies (if needed), printed out in-class displays such as overhead transparencies, PowerPoint, typical formulations for a day's class that the professor expects to write on the board, assignments, and so on.

With respect to better lectures, there are advantages and pitfalls for students and for professors in giving students the notes. The advantages for students can be remarkable. First, there is less frantic note taking, and more genuine listening, including eye contact between the professor and the student. Second, depending on the medium chosen, for example a course notebook, students have a ready-made, very handy "notebook" on which to take additional, more specific notes. Third, students already have the notes and can be encouraged to look at them as they prepare for class that day; consequently, student discussion is more advanced, and student questions are better. If the notes are not the kind that students can read and understand ahead of time (because they are too schematic), there is still better opportunity for more advanced discussion in class since students are not writing large swaths of notes. Fourth, important points are sure to be in students' hands in exactly the manner the professor wants them to be. Definitions, explanations of processes or cycles, statistics, and exegeses of difficult texts are all formulated exactly as they should be, which means that the student can have confidence in the information.

Giving away a larger number of appropriate notes also holds distinct advantages for you, the professor. In addition to the obvious benefit of better learning on the part of students, creating a course notebook or otherwise organizing and making available in class most of the notes results in more efficient course management. First, your own files become more organized. Second, updating or refining course content is much easier. For example, a course notebook is prepared once and simply modified thereafter for each additional time the course is taught. This saves time, minimizes errors of omission in course content, and allows a higher-level starting point for daily lectures and course improvement. Third, the course appears more organized to students. This is obviously an advantage to students, but it is also an advantage to you. The perception and one would suppose the reality of a better organized course translates into more student independence since there is less remedial explanation about what is happening in the course and

when. This frees time for the professor. Fourth, but not directly related to improving lectures, in a course notebook the professor can include special elaborations on policy without weighing down the syllabus (see chapter 5). These might include general directions and expectations for term papers, justification for attendance policies, and examples of what counts as plagiarism. You could also include special additional information about resources such as writing or counseling centers, supplemental texts, biographies, history time lines, and pertinent quotes.

There may also be some disadvantages to giving away the notes. First, students can feel overwhelmed with too much information. Reading and learning the additional notes becomes an extra course requirement in some students' minds, in addition to other course textbooks, course Web pages, guest speakers, tests, and so on. Second, when I once took it upon myself to create a paragraph-by-paragraph exegesis of an extremely difficult text, a fair number of students reported in student ratings comments that having this in the course notebook constrained their own creative thinking. I had interceded in their authentic engagement with the text. They were right. I subsequently moved the exegesis to a Web site and made reading my commentary truly optional. Third, if a course requires attendance, an incredibly detailed course notebook can appear to work against the need for students to be physically in class on a particular day. When thinking through these three challenges in your own course, the overarching strategy is to keep the notes simple and relevant. Only include what is essential or truly helpful.

Three more challenges are worth mentioning. Some courses or some large modules of courses are best arranged in a way where the information is revealed slowly, composed out of simpler building blocks until the full picture is exposed. Students who see the more complex information by looking ahead in a course notebook may be disheartened or confused. Thus, the course notebook idea may not work for all courses or all parts of a course, depending on learning objectives. Also, once the notebook is published for the students, it enters the public realm. This may be a concern if the information is controversial, inaccurate or unscholarly, or it can be misconstrued, for example, because it is taken out of context. Finally, giving students the notes frees up time for breaking up lecture or using discussions, but it also streamlines timing. I have been caught off guard more than once by the efficiency of giving students the notes—for example, a half-hour left in a session with nothing planned. The other side of the coin is that once I got used to having more free time in a lecture period, I was able to break up lecture more often and facilitate more creative discussions (chapters 2 and 3).

THE CHALLENGE OF POWERPOINT

When I assign students to give a formal oral presentation to the rest of the class, I include the requirement that they use *one* form of media in their pre-

sentation. A typical list is the following: “blackboard use, a prop, audio/visual equipment (videotape, stereo, projecting computer), overhead transparency, poster, or other media.” Overwhelmingly, when my students read this list they assume that I mean they must use this one piece of media *in addition to* PowerPoint! It is not news to anyone in academia or business that PowerPoint is ubiquitous: many students expect professors to use it, and many professors use it regularly. It is also not news that PowerPoint is controversial and loathed by some users and nonusers alike. In this section, I will not tangle with the well-known advantages and disadvantages of PowerPoint or give generic advice widely available, such as, do not put too much information on each slide, and be consistent in styling and animation of slides. Instead, I will focus on one of the most interesting challenges that professors face in using PowerPoint in lecturing to nonmajors in the classroom: PowerPoint commands a student’s attention in an almost automatic way. It immediately becomes what one should focus on in the room. PowerPoint is vivid, huge, and alternately engaging or boring (just like TV). As professors how do we keep it engaging?

First, break away from PowerPoint periodically. When your students seem to be disengaged, and even to your own ears you are “droning on,” what do you do? Many of us just keep droning on, even though we know better, perhaps increasing our volume. But it just takes a moment to refresh the room. Blank the screen as a signal that for the moment the focus is no longer on the PowerPoint screen (for example, on a keyboard press the B key). Ask for questions, let there be some silence, ask how they are doing, or otherwise break up the presentation in the same way a lecture might be refreshed (see chapter 2). When you are ready, ask them if they are ready and then resume the presentation. It is amazing how effective these little breaks can be. Also, you can build such breaks into your presentation ahead of time, perhaps with a slide that gives a lovely, natural scene—an amazing waterfall or a sweeping desert. (Who says such a slide has to be on topic?) This is your classroom, it should have your style, at least subtly. In your students’ eyes, everything from what you wear to how you speak is already an expression of your unique style, so slip in a fun slide at the appropriate spot. Breaking up the presentation and reengaging students in this way shows your “human side” as a lecturer and makes sense.

Second, determine the best mechanics for notetaking when you use PowerPoint. There are lots of choices. At one extreme, a professor can give students hard copies of *all* slides and presenter notes. This is expensive and perhaps wasteful; it can also increase student passivity. At the other extreme, students must take notes while witnessing the PowerPoint presentation itself with no handouts or follow-up material and no posting of the presentation online for students to review. A better approach is for professors to provide modified notes later, for example online, perhaps incorporating student in-class questioning and response and giving attribution to students by using their names. Students then have their own in-class notes (and are somewhat

active in class) and the professor's notes. Another common strategy is to economize by printing out six of the slides on one sheet of paper, on which students can take notes. Often the print in this format and the space in which to take quality notes are both too small. One solution is to manipulate the handout by using Microsoft PowerPoint and Word together. In PowerPoint, choose File and Send To and Word to custom arrange the information for students in Microsoft Word with slides or without, with notes or without. In any case, clearly tell students when and what to write if it really matters, just as in lectures. Also, give better pacing for note takers by revealing bullets on a slide one at a time, rather than all at once. Finally, if a professor encourages or allows students to bring their laptop computers to class, then the students can take their own notes in the "Click to Add Notes" section below each slide. This is incredibly efficient and seems like a perfect solution if all students have access to laptops. However, there are at least two reasons for concern here. One, many students will secretly use social networks (Facebook, MySpace) when given the chance. (I have witnessed this countless times as a back-of-the-room classroom observer.) Two, students are now primarily engaged with their own private screens, not with the public screen up front and with the rest of the class. Since disengagement is exactly the chief problem in teaching nonmajors, I do not allow laptop use while class is in session, unless it is by arrangement for learning disabled students. It severely decreases eye contact, tends to decrease attention to what the professor and fellow students are saying, tends to increase hiding behaviors (such as students not being a part of class by hiding behind big laptop screens), and gives students too much temptation to surf the Web rather than be involved with class. Of course, each professor must weigh the pros and cons of such a policy for themselves.

Third, know your room lights, and use them well. This sounds like straightforward advice, but one of the first things many occasional PowerPoint presenters do is turn *off* the lights. When the lights go down past a certain point, the students disengage. A room does not have to be dark for effective PowerPoint viewing. Find the balance by sitting in your own students' chairs early in the term with the PowerPoint on. A room too dark encourages all sorts of hiding behaviors, including napping. It discourages good note taking, especially for some students whose eyes may be weaker in uncertain light. In a darkened room, the possibility for discussion is decreased, cues are hardly seen, and eye contact is more difficult. As with the first-year professor discussed above, it is easy for a professor to "hide behind" the PowerPoint presentation. In a dark room, the professor's gesticulations, facial expressions, eye contact, and other possibly engaging behaviors are lost.

PowerPoint can be a wonderful medium in liberal arts courses since it can present textual information vividly, and it can dramatically show photographs, artwork, or videos and even show dynamic processes through clever

slide arrangement. But like any of our vehicles of teaching, it should be used judiciously, along with lecture, discussion, and the various methods of breaking up lecture discussed in chapter 2.

BRIEFLY DEBRIEF YOURSELF

Your lecturing is bound to be better if you have more time to prepare, and you have some historical sense of how that particular lecture has fared in the past. At the end of a day of teaching, or in preparation for the next class, you should briefly write what you did in the latest class session. This log or journal process has been described by a number of authors. Although some call it a “teaching diary” this could mean a lot of things. For example, the teacher could record anything he or she is feeling in connection with that day’s class: “I was feeling nervous at first about the student presentations, because I knew some weren’t very prepared, and also because I was a little late to class today.” The kind of journal or chronicle I would like to focus on is simply a log of major events in the classroom on that day: materials used for preparation, the sequence of presentation in the classroom, general student response. For example, did you show the film clip after or before the discussion on Central America? Did the students still discuss the film, even though it was shown after the Central America discussion? For many professors, it is unlikely they will remember these details a year later, and this means more preparation time or more anxiety about how to order that day’s events the next time the course is taught. Also, next time you do not have to reinvent that session, hence less preparation. If you have sessions of two hours or longer, it is difficult and time consuming to arrange all the material into sensible events within the classroom. Keeping such a log of the series of events gives a wonderful high-level starting place for better lecturing the next time the course is taught.

When you debrief yourself each teaching day by making an entry in a log or chronicle of that day’s events, you are also creating a record of which activities are worthwhile and should be kept and which should be changed or dropped. You record winners, problems, or fixes with regard to class lectures, examples, timing, or discussion instructions. Good history repeats itself, and bad does not. Next time you teach the course, if the same materials are used, starting points in preparation are much more developed. If the course has a different time frame, for example if it moves from a longer to a shorter class session, you can better estimate what can and what cannot be achieved in the new time frame. An easy way to record the information is to use the course schedule from the syllabus as a template for the log and simply add the appropriate entry under each date of class (I thank Dr. Paul Kidder for this template idea).

At the end of the course, based on student comments in assessments, you can append trends from the student’s point of view to this particular course’s

journal and save it. It should be easy to see how powerful such a record can be the next time you prepare the course. Also, the feeling of the course and the crucial details of what went on in that course cannot adequately be reconstructed many months later. This teacher assessment of the student assessment of the course needs to be done soon after student ratings or evaluations are made available, and it has to be combined with written responses, which for most professors is easily done in a computer file stored in a folder with the course materials or appended at the end of the daily log.