

So You Want Me to Give a Lecture?

Jennifer Kanapicki, MD FAAEM
Vice President, Young Physicians Section

Very often in our careers we are asked to lecture. It might be a CPR class to the EMS group, a chest pain talk to medical students, or Grand Rounds to your entire department. Regardless of the topic, lecturing can bring anxiety and be an additional burden to your already heavy workload. Nonetheless, you still want to deliver more than just a good lecture. You want to rock it! You want to impart knowledge to your learners to stimulate and motivate them.

Lecturing others is an important aspect of our careers, allowing us to inspire our colleagues and future colleagues in emergency medicine. It is an art to be mastered. The goal of this article is to give you the tools to enhance your lecture skills. I'm going to keep it simple: four easy P's.

1. Prepare

As coach John Wooden said, "failure to prepare is preparing to fail." Many lecturers fail because they never developed a game plan. Develop an outline for your talk. What do you hope to accomplish? What are your objectives? By knowing where you want to end up, you can plan how to get there.

A good maxim for preparing a talk is to tell the learner what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you just told them. I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but most learners will only remember three things about your talk. So it is essential that you start your talk with an outline, deliver the body of your talk, and end with a summary slide of take home points. Tell them what three points you want them to remember when they walk out of your lecture.

2. Perfect Your Slides

You have 20 seconds — most learners will only give undivided attention to the first 20 seconds of a lecture. Secure their attention by telling a story or asking a question. Tell your learners why your topic is important to them and why they need to know it.

Let's talk about slides — many lecturers try to fit too much information into one slide. Use the "rule of 6's" for slides: no more than six words per line; no more than six lines per slide. Following this rule ensures that your audience isn't overwhelmed trying to read rambling slides, but is instead focused on you. Your slides should be a guide, so aim to use bullet points, rather than paragraphs.

Also, don't overdo your slide design. If you use different color sets, make sure that people can read the slides from the back of the room. Use only 28-point font and above. DO NOT USE ALL UPPERCASE LETTERS — see how annoying that is? Edit your slides. It is very distracting to listen to a lecture while seeing glaring typos on screen; it detracts from the lecture and makes the presenter look careless. Don't be afraid to spice it up — consider including videos and interactive tools in your presentation or try polling your audience during the talk. Keep your learners engaged and active.

3. Practice

We've all seen renowned speakers deliver seemingly effortless, captivating talks. It makes you wonder — how do they do it? The secret is simple: practice. The best speakers practice many, many times, until it feels natural. You should do the same. Use that expensive smartphone to time and video your talk; this will help you identify distracting behaviors you would not otherwise have been aware of. Make sure you are not too short or too long on time. Try to avoid nervous habits such as: "um's," swaying, apologizing frequently, reading your slides, leaning on the podium — basically anything that distracts the learner from your message.

Go the day before to familiarize yourself with the location and AV equipment, and practice on site if you can. Make sure you look better than your audience. As for the lecture, make sure you have multiple copies of the lecture for back up. Cloud drives such as Dropbox allow you to access your lecture anywhere via the Internet, but also bring your talk on a flash drive just in case. As a final backup, bring a paper copy of your slides for the off chance that all electronics fail and you need to go "old school." Act like you are in the ED, and plan for any emergency possible.

4. Post-Lecture Assessment

Learn from the experience of giving a lecture — you don't want to repeat the same mistakes. Immediately after your presentation, write down what worked in your talk and what did not. Was there a section that lost the audience? Do you want to make any slide changes? Things are always easier to remember when they are fresh in your mind.

These four steps should enhance your lecturing skills and benefit your future learners. Remember, it's an honor to be asked to lecture. So, the next time you are asked, "Do you want to give a lecture?" — jump at the chance! ■

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