What happens to lectures?

The lecturer standing in front of a room full of students imparting knowledge is a dominant cultural image of university education, but the centrality of lectures to the teaching and learning process has been challenged since the post-war period. It has long been accepted that it is independent learning, rather than listening and note-taking, that offers the most effective route of access to subject knowledge for most students.

Moving online has the potential to allow us to address some of these concerns. We need to make sure that the lecture-derived content that we create is orientated to **sign-posting and scaffolding** our students' independent learning.

The most useful place to begin re-thinking scaffolding is Graham Gibbs, *Twenty terrible reasons for lecturing* (SCED Occasional Paper No. 8, Birmingham, 1981). In this classic 1981 reflection Gibbs dispels the myths around lectures and note-taking, and makes suggestions for how to reach our students that are still fresh nearly 40 years later.

Things to think about:

- **Scaffolding and Signposting.** To help students pace their learning, divide material into small, manageable chunks. Make sure that you offer downloadable class materials such as non-recorded PowerPoints and handouts. You will need to communicate with students about how the different materials you have made available tie in with each other and how they should engage with them. You will need to create weekly deadlines that help students know when they should engage with what.

- **Monotonous recordings can lead to disengaged students**. Think about how to build interaction with your material: pose questions and offer prompts, or ask students to reflect on a theme. Consider variety. Scaffold learning through written blurbs and short video recordings, further engaging students through quizzes, discussion threads, reading tasks, primary source activities or journaling. Alternatively, think about how to represent your individual presence; don't just be an anonymous voice overlaid on a PowerPoint. Try embedding videos in the PowerPoint recording in a way that allows students to see you speaking alongside your slides.

- **Be human.** Think about how you communicate with your students, beginning with narration and tone. Then make sure you have a clear and engaging hook into the lecture. You might ease students in by setting up the topic informally, saying hello, offering a titbit of less formal material. This doesn't have to be pre-recorded; if you are doing it live, you can talk about events from the week or even discuss the weather, sport or television programmes. You might try using social media - a great example by Roxanne Panchasi of Simon Fraser University can be found on Twitter through the hashtag #hist417. Or try different formats: a podcast discussion with a colleague teaching on the module or a fellow academic allow for a more spontaneous feeling.

- **It is hard not to strive for perfection**, but remember, we are not making documentaries. Be natural. You do not need to let go of the 'ums' and pauses. They show our students we are human and help create presence.

- **Delivery of recorded material**. Audio is more important than visuals. If you are recording lecture material, try to get access to a good microphone. You can record audio to accompany PowerPoint presentations and export them as a video file. Other tools include: Panoptical, Screencast-O-Matic, and OBS.

Things to watch out for:

- The move online makes it all the more important that **lecture material is accessible.** To comply with current accessibility legislation, all lecture material must be captioned and/or have a transcript available. This also allows students to feel more confident about specialist terms, names and pronunciations. YouTube and Panopto can do this for you, though other captioning software is available, and you will need to leave time to check for accuracy. The University of Washington has a useful guide for [thinking about transcription](#). Kristopher Lovell (Coventry University) has made a [video](#) on how to caption video lectures using either free software (Handbrake) or Adobe. More generally, a useful [guide to accessibility](#) (in Microsoft) can be found here.

- **Avoid streaming lectures.** Pre-recording not only allows for accurate captioning, but helps students with poor internet connections. Remember too that students may have legitimate reasons for not attending synchronous lectures. Instead, reserve synchronous slots for reciprocal and interactive sessions and post recorded materials online. Also, videos are often large files and take time to download; Panopto and YouTube offer the possibility of file compression. Ask yourself: does this content need to be delivered in an oral format? Written blurbs could be equally if not more effective.

- **Video content should not be 50 minutes long.** While conventional wisdom has it that attention wanders after 15 minutes, recent research suggests that [the first 'dip' in fact takes place beginning at 4 mins 30 seconds](#). The good news is that short 'bites' of content on well-defined sub-topics will allow students to access material in the way that best supports their independent reading.

Further Reading:

1. [Seven Deadly Sins of Online Course Design.](#) In this classic blog post from 2014, Daniel Stanford (DePaul University) walks through the pitfalls of creating a lively and engaging virtual classroom.

2. [Lecture Recording.](#) What makes this page from [QAA Scotland](#) so useful is the range of resources to assist you with lecture recordings, from practical advice to legal considerations you need to make when producing recorded content. Please note that this is from Scotland, so slightly different accessibility legislation may be in place in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

3. [Using Video in Learning and Teaching](#). Sophie Nicholls (Teeside University) has been designing and using digital platforms for 20 years. This page from her website offers practical advice, including infographics like ['How to Make Engaging Video for Learning and Teaching'](#)

4. [Widening Participation with Lecture Recording.](#) This page from the [Enhancement Themes](#) programme run by the Scottish Universities looks at how recorded lectures help can support inclusive teaching and learning.

5. Historian of Science James Sumner at Manchester has created [a series of useful YouTube videos](#) on practicalities. His first video offers tips and advice on how to set up for home recording, while others explain how to use Open Broadcasting Software (OBS) technology to gain greater control of what appears on your screen.

6. On the History UK Blog, read Kate Cooper's [Thinking about teaching at a time of uncertainty](#) and Louise Creechan's [But, what about lectures?](#)