

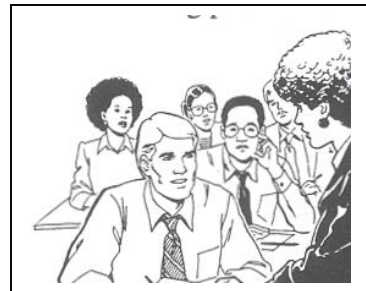
Lecturing with Informal Cooperative Learning Groups

The following procedure will help you plan a lecture that keeps students more actively engaged intellectually. It entails having **focused discussions** before and after the lecture (i.e., bookends) and interspersing **pair discussions** throughout the lecture. Two important aspects of using informal cooperative learning groups are to (a) make the task and the instructions explicit and precise and (b) require the groups to produce a specific product (such as a written answer). The procedure is as follows.

1. **Introductory Focused Discussion:** Assign students to pairs. The person nearest them will do. You may wish to require different seating arrangements each class period so that students will meet and interact with a number of other students in the class. Then give the pairs the cooperative assignment of completing the initial (advance organizer) task. Give them only four or five minutes to do so. The discussion task is aimed at promoting **advance organizing** of what the students know about the topic to be presented and **establishing expectations** about what the lecture will cover.

2. **Intermittent Focused Discussions:**
 - a. **Lecture Segment One:** Deliver the first segment of the lecture. This segment should last from 10 to 15 minutes. This is about the length of time a motivated adult can concentrate on a lecture. For unmotivated adolescents, the time may be shorter.

 - b. **Pair Discussion 1:** Give the students a discussion task focused on the material you have just presented that maybe completed within three or four minutes. Its purpose is to ensure that students are actively thinking about the material being presented. The discussion task may be to (a) give an answer to a question posed by the instructor, (b) give a reaction to the theory, concepts, or information being presented, or (c) relate material to past learning so that it gets integrated into existing conceptual frameworks (i.e., elaborate the material being presented).
 1. Each student **formulates** his or her answer.
 2. Students **share** their answers with their partner.
 3. Students **listen** carefully to partner's answer.



4. Pairs **create** a new answer that is superior to each member's initial formulation through the process of association, building on each other's thoughts, and synthesizing.

Randomly choose two or three students to give 30 second summaries of their discussions. It is important that students are randomly called on to share their answers after each discussion task. Such individual accountability ensures that the pairs take the tasks seriously and check each other to ensure that both are prepared to answer.

- c. **Lecture Segment 2:** Deliver the second segment of the lecture.
 - d. **Pair Discussion 2:** Give a discussion task focused on the second part of the lecture.
 - e. Repeat this sequence of lecture segment and pair discussion until the lecture is completed.
3. **Closure Focused Discussion:** Give students an ending discussion task lasting four to five minutes to summarize what students have learned from the lecture. The discussion should result in students integrating what they have just learned into existing conceptual frameworks. The task may also point students toward what the homework will cover or what will be presented in the next class session. This provides closure to the lecture.

Informal cooperative learning ensures students are actively involved in understanding what they are learning. It also provides time for instructors to gather their wits, reorganize notes, take a deep breath, and move around the class listening to what students are saying. Listening to student discussions can give instructors direction and insight into how well students understand the concepts and material being taught (who, unfortunately, may not have graduate degrees in the topic you are presenting).