THE K. PATRICIA CROSS ACADEMY

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Teaching Technique 43

Punctuated Lecture

ACTIVITY TYPE

- Active/Engaged Learning
- Reflecting

TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED

- Poor Attention/Listening

LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL

- Learning How to Learn

Punctuated Lecture

During a *Punctuated Lecture (PL)*, students listen to the lecture for approximately 15–20 minutes. At the end of the lecture segment, the teacher pauses and asks students to answer a question about what they are doing at that particular moment.

1 Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for the lecture

2 Identify exactly what you want to know and consider the question format

3 Determine how students will respond to the lecture prompts

4 Develop a plan for learning assessment or grading

5 Communicate assignment parameters to students

6 Implement the technique

7 Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness

Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section, we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Punctuated Lectures help promote student engagement during a lecture through the process of asking students to be more self-aware of their own involvement (Angelo & Cross, 1993). The activity also can help students refocus attention if their minds have wandered, which can improve active listening. Over time and with practice, students can develop skills as self-monitoring listeners. In short, *Punctuated Lectures* can help students develop metacognitive skills, or the ability to think about their own thinking and learning.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

During a *Punctuated Lecture*, students listen to the lecture for approximately 15–20 minutes. At the end of the lecture segment, the lecturer pauses and asks students to answer questions about what they are doing at that particular moment. Before implementing a *Punctuated Lecture*, consider exactly what you want to know. Some options include:

- How much students were focused on the lecture content at a given point.

- How distracted students were by technology or by each other.

- What students were physically doing, whether listening or taking notes or doing something unrelated.

Also consider your question format. You might ask students to respond to an item based on a scale (5=extremely high, 1= extremely low) with prompts such as:

- How would you describe your level of focus on the lecture?

- How would you describe your level of distraction from the lecture?

- Or you might also ask an open-ended question such as: Describe what you were doing when the lecture paused.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

You will need to determine how students will respond to the prompts, whether by choosing a response or supplying the answer on their own. You might have them respond on an index card, or you might use an automated response system (clickers) or an online survey.

Step-By-Step Instructions (CON'T)

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

Punctuated Lectures also are a useful method of providing instructors with information about what learning strategies students use during the lecture. In turn, instructors can use the information to help guide students during lectures, such as directing students to attend to important content or reviewing a concept for understanding. The answers to the prompts, then, serve as useful data.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

Simply tell students ahead of time that you will pause the lecture occasionally an ask them to record what they are doing. Tell them also how they should record their responses.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

- Begin the first section of the lecture, which should last approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

- Stop the lecture and ask students to think about what they were just doing.

- Ask students to answer the question(s) you have developed.

- Resume the lecture, and repeat every 15–20 minutes for the duration of the class.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?

- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?

- Was it appropriate for the students?

- Did the technique keep the students engaged?

- Did it promote student learning?

- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique. For *Punctuated Lecture*, we are providing you with ideas to vary it.

OBSERVATIONS & ADVICE

Students new to higher education may find this activity particularly beneficial, as it teaches them self-monitoring, which is a skill that can help them in other courses as well.

This activity can be effectively scaffolded. You can begin by using it at each class session and then reduce to using during half of the class meetings. Also, you can start by breaking every 15–20 minutes and move to longer lecture segments.

You can also ask students to journal their responses over time. Take up their journals to assess them periodically. This variation will allow them, and you, to see changes over time.

Online Adaptation

This section is intended to help you with the process of implementing *Punctuated Lecture* in your online class.

SYNCHRONOUS LIVE LECTURE

- Decide in advance exactly what you want to know when you pause your lecture at the set intervals.

- For example, you might ask students: "What were you doing when the lecture paused?"

- For examples of additional prompts, refer to Step 2 on page 3.

- Consider the manner in which students will submit their responses.
  For example: in a quiz, assignment, or through a chat pane.

- Next, determine at what time intervals you will pause your lecture, such as every 7–10 minutes, and ask students to record their response to your prompt.

- Consider having students respond by sending a private chat message to only you rather than the whole class.

ASYNCHRONOUS PRE-RECORDED LECTURE

If you are teaching an asynchronous class with pre-recorded video lectures:

- Stop at predetermined points and ask students to pause the video and respond to your prompt.

- Use their responses as the basis for a humorous observation on our current tendency to multi-task and offer comments about the importance of giving full attention to the lecture.

- Resume your lecture and repeat as appropriate.

Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how Claire Major adapted *Punctuated Lecture* in their course, *College and University Teaching*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

Technique Template

Sample *Punctuated Lecture* Completed Technique Template:
Content from Claire Major.

College and University Teaching

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

This example is from a sociology course that we described in our Interactive Lecturing book.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

In this sociology course, the professor believed that students were being distracted by personal technology. He noticed that some students were checking social media sites as well as their personal texts during class. He knew that this habit distracted them from learning and believed that it distracted other students around them. He decided to use Punctuated Lecture to help draw student attention to the issue.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

> He decided that during a lecture on inequality and stratification by social class, he would pause the lecture for a minute and ask students to use their clickers to respond to a series of items.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

> He determined that he would ask students to respond to the following prompts. When the lecture paused, what were you looking directly at (check all that apply):
>
> 1. The professor
> 2. Your notes (handwritten)
> 3. Your notes (typed in laptop)
> 4. The ceiling
> 5. The floor
> 6. Your cell phone
> 7. Your neighbor's cell phone
> 8. Your neighbor's laptop (off course topic)
>
> When the lecture paused, what were you specifically doing (check all that apply):
>
> 1. Listening to the lecture
> 2. Taking notes on the lecture
> 4. Checking social media
> 5. Watching your neighbors checking their texts or social media

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

Because students were to respond with clickers, their responses would be anonymous. He thought this anonymity coupled with the large class size would allow for fairly honest responses.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

The professor simply displayed the questions and asked students to respond using their clickers.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

When the professor implemented the technique, he noted that most students believed that they were listening to the lecture and looking at the lecturer when the lecture paused; his visual scan of the room did not confirm this assessment, however, so while he believed they thought they were paying attention, their multi-tasking was contributing to a lack of self-awareness. A few students acknowledged checking social media and texts. However, many students noted that they were distracted by other students' technology. The professor used his own assessment as well as the survey results as an opportunity to discuss the importance of paying attention to the lecture for learning and for course success. He also described some of the recent research on multi-tasking that suggests that it detracts from learning. Finally, he talked about course citizenship and reviewed the course policy on technology use during class.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.
Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

He began to implement the activity regularly. He alerted students when it seemed that they had not accurately self-assessed, and he congratulated them when they had and when their attention seemed to be at high levels. He noticed improvement in attention and fewer technological distractions over time.

Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement **Punctuated Lecture** in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor's Guide to assist you in your thinking.

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COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

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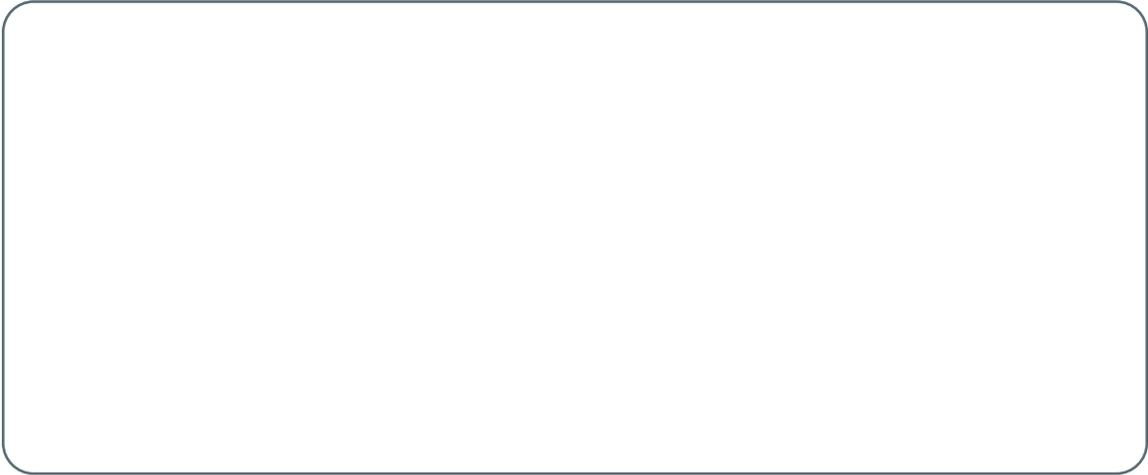
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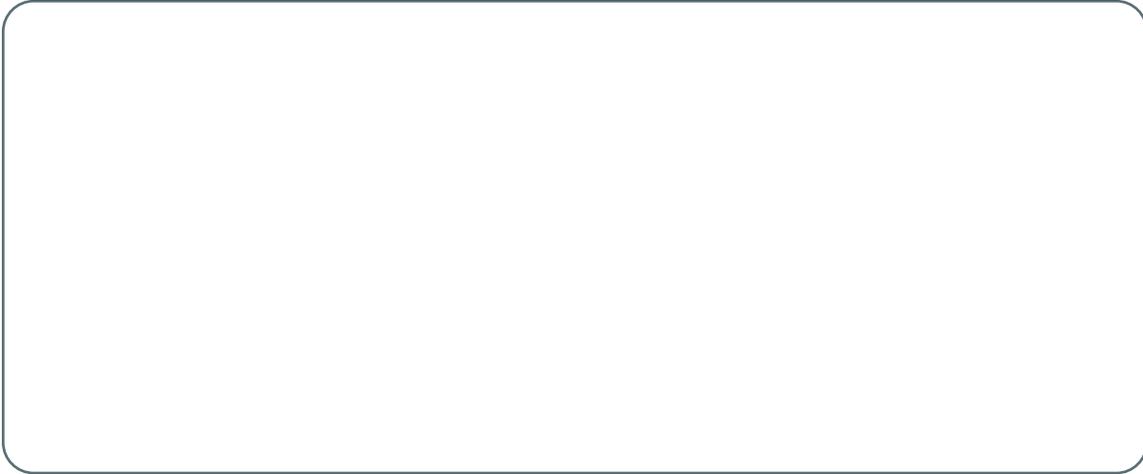
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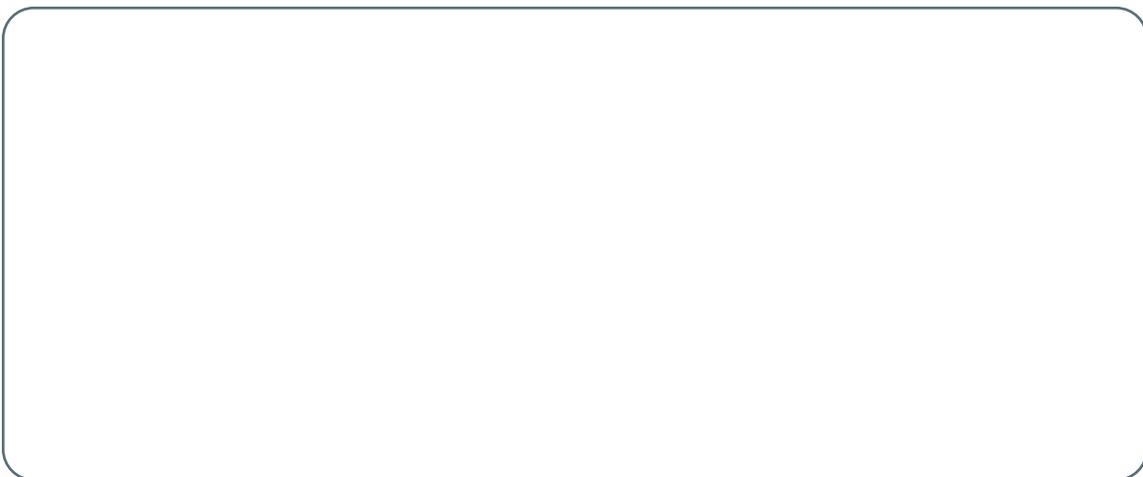
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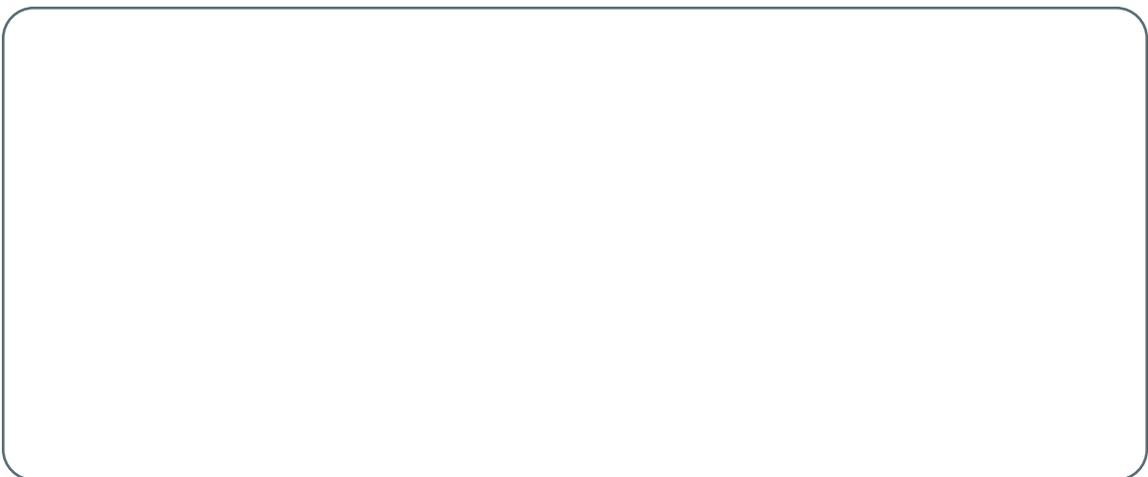
References and Resources

PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from "Interactive Lecturing ALT 29: Punctuated Lecture" in *Interactive Lecturing: A Handbook for College Faculty* (Barkley & Major, 2018), pp. 189–194. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in both on campus and online courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E. F., Major, C. H. (2018). Interactive Lecturing: A Handbook for College Faculty. San Francisco, CA: Wiley/Jossey-Bass.

CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Angelo, T. A., & Cross, K. P. (1993). Classroom assessment techniques: A handbook for college teachers. (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Cashin, W. E. (2010). IDEA paper #46: Effective lecturing. Retrieved from *http://ideaedu.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/IDEA_Paper_46.pdf*

- Duke University, Center for Instructional Technology. (n.d.). Lecture busters: Keeping students engaged. Retrieved from *https://mclibrary.duke.edu/sites/mclibrary.duke.edu/files/public/research/lecturebusters.pdf*

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