

NEW WINE IN OLD BOTTLES: REVITALIZING THE TRADITIONAL HISTORY LECTURE

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Active learning....student-centered learning....interactive learning.... collaborative education....student-directed learning....empowerment in the classroom.

The jargon of cognitive psychology and education makes many historians cringe. While there doubtless are good educational techniques and substance lurking behind these terms, an underlying premise is that the traditional lecture¹ does not work, that by its very nature lecturing renders students passive learners, induces apathy, and runs a greater risk of boring them into not learning at all (e.g., much of the content presented via lecture "is not attended to by students and what is attended to may be distorted on its path from the lecturer's notes to the students"²). Although it is certainly possible that lecturing can contribute to a student's failure to learn, the contention here is that such results are not inevitable, that lecturing, especially history lecturing, can be made to promote learning in a way comparable to any other technique. I myself learned a great deal—certainly more than just historical facts and dead-weight information—from several outstanding lecturers. And I have gotten enough feedback over more than a quarter century of teaching to believe that I have had at least some success as a lecturer and, as well, a positive influence on many of my students who have become teachers (but not all of whom lecture).

I would contend, for the following reasons, that no single approach to teaching history is absolutely superior to all others: (1) Each of us is better at one technique or another; (2) our students are not always the same nor is the size of each class; and (3) with our goals remaining neither static nor uniform—both within a single course and from course to course—we inevitably determine the approach to use based upon how we see those goals being achieved optimally. Thus any number of methods can be used effectively, and several methods can, and should, be combined—which is part of what will be recommended here, although not that simply. That is, any method of teaching can become routine over time, and research suggests that the attention span of students

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¹Our word "lecture" from the Latin verb *legere*, meaning "gather, choose," developed semantically to mean "read" when, during the Middle Ages, students did not have books readily available to them. John Ayto, *Dictionary of Word Origins* (New York: Arcade Publishing/Little, Brown, 1990).

²Christopher Knapper, "Large Classes and Learning," in Maryellen Gleason Weimer, ed., *Teaching Large Classes Well* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987) 9.

might start to wane after the first ten minutes or so.³ Therefore, some energy, throughout a class session, ought to be devoted indirectly to reviving that attention, and even the best lecturers should regularly interrupt the spoken narrative with something a little different.

In essence, however, and fundamental to teaching—regardless of the way one teaches or the styles employed—is the ability to **engage** students, to get them involved intellectually. Some teaching techniques and styles might lend themselves more readily to engagement, but virtually all approaches can be made to work, including the traditional history lecture. To be sure, a lecturer must avoid appearing to pontificate, or merely to pass along information and fact, or to repeat what is "in the book." A lecture is not a paper delivered at a professional meeting nor a speech before a partisan audience. To present a straight, factual, chronological history is to trivialize our discipline and to transform the teacher into an abridged version of a talking textbook. Instead, success in lecturing involves interacting with students; the lecturer must make what goes on in the classroom engaging. The purpose of this essay, then, is to suggest a number of ways that can help make such success happen in history classrooms.

Goals and Philosophy

Let's start with a generalization. Regardless of the history we teach, as we approach each course we should have goals. Having goals means we should take time to be introspective, to reflect upon our courses in order to determine what we want our students to come away with at the end of the term; and when we reflect, we should think as well about how lecturing can contribute to those goals. For example, in my various history courses I have established three kinds of broad goals: First, that students come to possess some minimal knowledge base and an understanding of the subject in question. Second, that they become, at the very least, a little bit excited about the passion of history, that they come to acknowledge the importance of history for who they are and who they will become. And third, that they expand their reading, writing, and thinking skills under the heading of what can be called "thinking historically;" that is, I realize that whatever body of knowledge students may have absorbed, over time much of it will be forgotten.

So, what is it that I want them to learn over and above content? If I can help them to think in a historical way, if I can get them to ask certain kinds of questions and to challenge perceived wisdom, if I can encourage them to evaluate and analyze material,

³Wilbert J. McKeachie, *Teaching Tips: A Guidebook for the Beginning College Teacher*, 8th ed. (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1986), 72; also see Peter Elbow, *Embracing Contraries: Explorations in Learning and Teaching* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 182-94. Others suggest that attention starts to wane within 15 and 25 minutes. The number of minutes notwithstanding, the important distinction is that interest can start to slacken long before a class session ends.

if I can stir their blood, if I can push them to become more sophisticated writers, thinkers, and speakers, then they will possess attitudes and skills—even if only in rudimentary form—that they can take to other classes, and into the world beyond school.⁴ Therefore, to know where we wish to take our students—to know how to forge a link between our sophisticated comprehension and their growing understanding—is a prerequisite for trying to teach them.

Related to our sophisticated comprehension and students' ability to understand is a Darwinian-like selection we must make with regard to what should be excluded from a lecture. There is always so much we might include, especially when we know a lot about a topic, but studies have shown what François Fénelon quipped three centuries ago: "The more you say, the less people remember."⁵ Among the skills excellent teachers seem to possess are the ability to make these selections as per class level, to support these selections with sufficient examples, to make difficult material comprehensible, and to be aware that these skills are intertwined with one another.

Further, it should be remembered that we learn best when we acknowledge a need to know. Whatever method of teaching is employed, the teacher must "bring students to an awareness of their ignorance of a subject...[and since] students also learn best when they think for themselves,"⁶ lectures should be more than a conveyor belt for the passage of knowledge from the producer to the consumer. Once we determine what it is we want our students to understand, we have to involve them in discovering this for themselves. Where, then, do we start to make the traditional history lecture work as a technique to engage and involve our students? The following suggestions are divided into two broad categories: first is a menu of vital actions and considerations, second is a collection of useful strategies.

Vital Actions and Considerations

The Human Dimension: Audiences do not connect well with intellectual abstractions; they do identify with people and feelings.⁷ Concepts and events are more likely to come to life and to have meaning when they are related to the people involved. To the extent

⁴For an examination of ten different explanations of what it means to think historically and how that translates into practice, see "Teaching Innovations Forum: Thinking Historically," ed. by Robert Blackey, *Perspectives*, 33:7 (October 1995).

⁵Quoted in *The Dictionary of Humorous Quotations*, ed. by Evan Egar (New York: Dorset, 1989), 73; the studies referred to are in McKeachie, *Teaching Tips*, and William E. Cashin, "Improving Lectures," in Maryellen Weimer and Rose Ann Neff, eds., *Teaching College: College Reading for the New Instructor* (Madison, WI: Magna Publications, 1990), 59-63.

⁶Patrick Malcolmson and Richard Myers, "Pooled Ignorance, Talking Heads, and Socratic Dialectic," *College Teaching*, 42:1 (1994), 2.

⁷William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*, 5th ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 175.

possible, therefore, humanize the people you talk about. Learn what you can about their human characteristics; it is easy enough to impress students with the sometimes superhuman or out-of-the-ordinary accomplishments of the important individuals who are highlighted in lectures and texts. But without conveying a sense of what these people were like behind the scenes or between the lines, without bringing them to life in a way students can identify with—warts and all—you run the risk of lower levels of understanding.⁸

In a comparable way, presenting yourself in a human—as opposed to robotic—way should be more conducive to learning. By being enthusiastic, dynamic, and passionate you can become a model for promoting motivation, inspiration, and curiosity. Teachers who enjoy what they are doing are more likely to have students who enjoy being in their classes; enjoyment is contagious. "Enthusiasm is the most convincing orator. It is like an infallible law of nature. The simplest person, fired with enthusiasm, is more persuasive than the most eloquent person without it."⁹ Explain why you are committed to your field, why a topic is important to you, and why it is essential to study history. As you read and do research in your subject, inevitably you learn something new. Why not demonstrate an eagerness to share it? Relate experiences from your research and travel: not just "war stories" but tales that convey the thrill (as well as the tedium) of research and the discovery that usually comes from perseverance and from travel to places you teach about. To me, each group of students is a new audience to win over, to discover that mine is the most important class they have ever had and that I am their best teacher.

Be yourself and allow who you are to characterize your style and to free you from conventional and predictable boundaries. There is no single way that can work for all of us because none of us are the same. Each person's style is like a fingerprint, unique to that individual. Find yours and make it work. (In my first couple of years teaching, I recall imitating those of my own history teachers who left a lasting impression. In time, I adapted their styles to suit me, and I allowed who I was to evolve into the teacher I have become.) Analyze your own personality and learn to make use of your most

⁸The following, in addition to standard and popular biographies, are useful for learning about individual historic figures: Anne Commire, ed., *Historic World Leaders*, 5 vols. (Detroit: Gale Research, 1994) [It contains some 620 biographical sketches of prominent figures throughout the history of the world.]; Ken Wolf, *Personalities and Problems*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1994) [It contains 21 essays that compare contemporaneous figures in world history.]; J. Kelley Sowards, ed., *Makers of World History*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995) [It includes biographical information, coupled with historical interpretation and documentary source material, on 28 historical figures.]; Dorothy M. Johnson and R.T. Turner, *The Bedside Book of Bastards* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973) [It includes tales about the notorious activities of 36 figures in world history.]; Ronald D. Smith, *Fascinating People and Astounding Events from the History of the Western World* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1990); *Dictionary of American Biography* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973-94).

⁹Richard L. Weaver II and Howard W. Cotrell, "Lecturing: Essential Communication Strategies," in Weimer, ed., *Teaching Large Classes Well*, 63-64.

positive and endearing characteristics, including your vulnerability, in order to help make what you do add to your appeal. Reduce anxiety—which can conceal passion and distort your public personality—by imagining and visualizing how you wish to be perceived, by reminding yourself that you are more knowledgeable than your students, by believing that you can and will improve, and by adequately preparing yourself.¹⁰

Teach By Example: Teach by example, critically approaching your subject. How does the way you lecture both teach and encourage students to think in the ways prescribed by history? The history we teach should be argued, not simply narrated; whole courses, as well as individual lectures, should focus on problems and puzzles (some of the pieces of which have become distorted over time or are even missing) and not be a mere chronology of events, even when a course is designed to cover a specific period in a country's or a region's history. During a lecture introduce various interpretations and alternative or conflicting explanations (and not just one when several exist—although these should be limited for lower-division students, in order to make the point without overwhelming them). Similarly, it is crucial to emphasize periodically the difference between interpretation and fact in history (e.g., the United States's dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki at the end the World War II is a fact, whereas the reasons for our doing so is subject to interpretation). Knowing that something happened is generally easier to determine than why it happened, which is also different from deciding whether what happened was good or bad, right or wrong. "Students must be made aware that although there is an inescapable subjective dimension to the study of history, not everything is up for grabs or a matter of opinion."¹¹

Motivate students by alerting them to problems and by challenging ideas they have previously taken for granted. Draw upon your own research and reading to show how alive and fascinating our discipline is. Demonstrate what is involved when you weigh and consider evidence and when you make connections and see relationships, especially unexpected connections and relationships. Surely we should all seek to demonstrate that there is not a single, unchanging version of history. Lectures should be used to create frameworks and expectations that might assist students as they read materials for your course, and this can be supplemented by providing students with a list of several questions to think about—some questions to help them understand the material and others to encourage them to think critically about it—as they do their assigned reading.

In class, ask rhetorical questions, and be relaxed enough in your presentation to allow for spontaneous discussion. Raise questions that challenge the subject matter,

¹⁰Ibid., 57-59.

¹¹Gerald N. Izenberg, "Teaching History," in Keith W. Prichard and R. McLaren Sawyer, eds., *Handbook of College Teaching: Theory and Applications* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994), 265; also see Samuel S. Wineburg and Suzanne M. Wilson, "Models of Wisdom in the Teaching of History," *Phi Delta Kappan* (September 1988), 50-58.

especially as it appears in textbooks, in supplementary readings, and among commonly-held beliefs; then model answers to these questions, eventually with students' involvement. Think out loud and walk them through your thought processes. Suggest to students that while they rarely have the opportunity to question the author of their textbooks, they do have regular access to you both in and out of class. (Incidentally, if you ask thought-provoking essay test questions, such modeling in class should eventually help students to respond more effectively on your exams.)¹² Also, allow students to walk you through their thought processes as well; this is educational for you and for them.

The mention of modeling and textbooks calls to mind the once time-honored but now, I expect, little used teaching technique of textual analysis (*explication du texte*). We all may assign readings, but many of us no doubt devote insufficient attention to analyzing them thoroughly. It would be more instructive, however, for us first to model reading and analyzing passages out loud and then to encourage students to do the same—while providing constructive criticism in the process. Even in large classes students can follow their teachers in this act of modeling (of their books, with handouts, or via transparencies), and then be divided into small groups of three to five in order to try their hand and to provide their own feedback. This same approach can be used to teach analysis of graphs, charts, tables, political cartoons, maps, census data, parish rolls, and the like, as the work of Peter J. Frederick and Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. has demonstrated.¹³ Our job, let us remember, is to help students to become more vital human beings, to teach them to learn and to think. And this means we must involve them in "analyzing materials, formulating problems, developing hypotheses, bringing evidence to bear, criticizing and evaluating alternative solutions."¹⁴

Modeling, not incidentally, is also a way to reveal ourselves as passionate, human creatures, with deeply held beliefs and convictions that cannot necessarily be proven or disproven objectively. In turn, this becomes an opportunity for teachers to show themselves as subjective beings who can tolerate and respect alternative opinions. History is, in fact, not as objective as we might like to believe, and realizing this can perhaps help us to be more honest with ourselves and with our students. More than a

¹²Robert Blackey, "A Guide to the Skill of Essay Construction in History," *Social Education*, 45:3 (March 1981), 178-82; Robert Blackey, "Bull's-eye: A Teachers' Guide for Developing Student Skills in Responding to Essay Questions," *Social Education*, 52:6 (October 1988), 464-66; John C. Bartul, "Teaching the Value of Inquiry Through the Essay Question," *Perspectives*, 27:8 (November 1989). These articles are reprinted in Robert Blackey, ed., *History Anew: Innovations in the Teaching of History Today* (Long Beach: The University Press, California State University, Long Beach, 1993).

¹³Peter J. Frederick, "The Lively Lecture—8 Variations," *College Teaching*, 34:2 (1986), 47-48. For detailed directions and guidance on how to teach textual analysis, see Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., "Demystifying Historical Authority: Critical Textual Analysis in the Classroom," *Perspectives*, 26:2 (February 1988), reprinted in *History Anew*.

¹⁴McKeachie, *Teaching Tips*, 77.

hundred years ago, Nietzsche reflected on this very subject, declaring that "History unsettles the feelings....If the personality is once emptied of its subjectivity, and comes to what men call an 'objective' condition, nothing can have any more effect on it....*You can explain the past only by what is most powerful in the present...*To take everything objectively, to be angry at nothing, to love nothing, to understand everything—makes one gentle and pliable."¹⁵

All of the above, then, is to say that being a lecturer does not preclude the use of other teaching techniques and a variety of postures. Discussion can be used with most classes, regardless of size; all students do not have to participate, but the very act of discussion can encourage intellectual engagement if not vocal involvement. Ask questions, and ask for questions and comments. For this to be intellectually sound, however, instructors must explain that they will only accept comments and reactions based on an assessment of facts and on interpretations, not simply on "personal feelings"—although feelings, which cannot be discounted, might instead be used as a basis on which to broaden understanding. As R.G. Collingwood wrote, "To the historian, the activities whose history he is studying are not spectacles to be watched, but experiences to be lived through his own mind; they are objective, or known to him, only because they are also subjective, or activities of his own."¹⁶

Similarly, an instructor's questions should go beyond the simple recall of facts to include the effects of learning what it means to think historically.¹⁷ Call on students who look puzzled in order to elicit questions from those who might be reluctant to volunteer. Questions form a bridge between the two techniques—of lecture and discussion—and will help you to gauge student comprehension. Good lecturing, especially when joined by discussion, can teach compassion, tolerance, and empathy.¹⁸ Together they can also teach a love of words and for the poetry of language; and they can help you to improve your ability to think on your feet and to learn to be in command of your mind.

Organization and Connections: For any lecture to be successful the teacher must be organized, keeping in mind both the plan for each specific class session and for the entire course, and then thinking about how these are related. Lectures in which insights

¹⁵Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), 32, 33, 40, 53. In these pages, and throughout the book, Nietzsche presents an intriguing discourse on passion and objectivity.

¹⁶R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 218.

¹⁷Even the Socratic method will be useless unless students are prepared with sufficient reading and understanding. "Socratic questions rarely evoke factual information because their intent is not to challenge the student's knowledge-base but to bring information already possessed into the student's conscious awareness and help him or her reason through difficult problems." James C. Overholser, "Socrates in the Classroom," *The Social Studies*, 83:2 (March/April 1992), 78.

¹⁸An excellent work on this subject is John A. Williams, *Classroom in Conflict: Teaching Controversial Subjects in a Diverse Society* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

are scattered and not clearly connected make it difficult for students to assimilate the material, much less to understand and retain it. Even a great delivery cannot camouflage lack of preparation, whereas having one's lecture notes or outline organized will fail to help students if there is no pattern when the lecture is delivered. "Ideally students should be able to state the intended organization, and how one fact is broadly related to the rest, at any time during the lecture, firstly because they need to take notes if the amount of information to be retained exceeds the amount they can remember, and secondly because...these links are essential to understanding."¹⁹

Before a lecture, therefore, think of ways to forge links between new material and what students may already know or have learned, between lecture material and out-of-class assignments, between one day's lecture and both the previous and following ones, between a main point and other subjects or other parts of the same subject or even other disciplines. One way to create such links is through the framing device of starting the lecture with references to the last session followed by a summary of the topic for the day. This places students on familiar ground, and it enables the instructor to indicate how one lecture's material follows from the preceding one.²⁰ In addition, you should determine beforehand what you hope your students will learn as a result of the lecture.

Not incidentally, the organization of a course also includes developing a detailed syllabus, complete with the subject matter to be covered each week (or each class session), course objectives, expectations (both yours of students and theirs of you), grading procedures, a definition of plagiarism (how to avoid plagiarizing²¹ and the penalty for failing to do so), due dates for required readings, exams, and assignments, and with all assignments (including written, oral, and research projects) explained thoroughly, so that students know what to expect each week (or day) and what rules you expect them to follow—rules, say, about attendance, arriving late, talking in class. With regard to required readings, it is wise to introduce them and to explain why they have been chosen, both at the start of the course and, later, when they are about to be read, in order to pique students' interest and to explain their importance for the course. Also, plan in advance so that materials you require, such as audio-visual equipment and reading selections, will be ready.

At the start of each lecture pose questions, dilemmas, or problems, or raise a controversial issue related to the session's assignment or to the material to be covered. Allude to this during the lecture, and again at the end of the lecture. Then solicit students' ideas about the degree to which the questions have been answered, the problem

¹⁹Donald A. Bligh, *What's the Use of Lectures?* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1972), 76.

²⁰Heather Dubrow and James Wilkinson, "The Theory and Practice of Lectures," in Margaret Morganroth Gullette, ed., *The Art and Craft of Teaching* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 26-27; John P. Murray and Judy I. Murray, "How Do I Lecture Thee?" *College Teaching*, 40:3 (1992), 109.

²¹See "Note on Responsible Use of Sources" in *The Pop Culture Tradition: Readings with Analysis for Writing*, edited by E.M. White (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), 194-96.

solved, the controversy resolved (or at least sufficiently addressed). This technique provides students with a framework for grasping and organizing the lecture. And responses at the end of class provide the instructor with feedback about student learning and thinking. In other words, allow students to see where you are heading, the main points to be covered, and the purpose behind your choices. In this way, if some students miss a point or a transition, they should still be able to follow the lecture.²²

Variations on these lecture-launching techniques include the introduction of unusual or even alarming facts or statistics, the telling of an intriguing story, or the showing of a dramatic illustration, all connected, of course, to the day's material. These serve the same purpose as an introductory paragraph in an essay, the opening remarks of a speech, or a newspaper headline: They grab the attention of the audience and ease entry into the subject at hand. Remember, however, that attention does not last long. Thus, not only must thought be given to the opening of a lecture, but to retaining attention throughout as well. (The suggestions included in the next section are meant to serve that purpose.)

Consider, as well, the use of handouts, especially in large classes and for lower-division students whose skills development is unsophisticated, because they may be the best way to ensure that everyone in the class receives at least some form of the most essential information. Handouts cannot substitute for elaboration of main points and for the use of examples, but they can provide useful introductory information, they can serve to guide students through the lecture and, perhaps, reduce compulsive note taking. Later, they can help to guide students through their reading and/or reviewing.²³

During the course of every lecture always make it a habit to explain—and to get students to explain—why something was or is significant: in the short run, in the long run, as it relates to other issues and events. Show cause and effect, the impact of something. Make it clear, as well, that events rarely have just one cause and one effect. And while inevitably we must engage in simplifying a topic for pedagogical purposes, students should always be left with a sense of the complexity of the history making process. Focus on change and the causes of change while also calling attention to continuities amid the changes. Explain how events and actions fit in with long-range trends, and how the role played, at times, by contingency or accidental factors must be considered. Similar connections must be made between those actions and an individual's, a government's, or a group's goals and achievements. All this is important to help develop students' ability to think historically, to make them aware that history "is concerned with the processes of life rather than with the meaning or purpose or goal

²²Richard L. Weaver II, "Effective Lecturing Techniques: Alternatives to Classroom Boredom," in Weimer and Neff, eds., *Teaching College*, 65. Weaver outlines a variety of ways to secure students' attention, hold their interest, and develop your own desire and actions to reinforce what you teach.

²³Karron G. Lewis, "Teaching Large Classes (How to Do It Well and Remain Sane)," in Prichard and Sawyer, eds. *Handbook of College Teaching*, 336-37.

of life,"²⁴ and to help them make sense of history so they can appreciate the discipline as being far more than a sterile chronicling of unconnected, perhaps mindless events, all of equal importance (or of equal insignificance).

Useful Strategies

Launching the Lecture: Begin courses by pointing to possible gaps in students' knowledge, or by challenging accepted beliefs, or by raising provocative questions, all of which will be filled, discussed, and possibly answered over the next several weeks. Each of these approaches can serve to raise curiosity and to grab attention. They can help students to know where you are headed and what is expected of them. I especially like to start each course—after I have reviewed the syllabus and other introductory items—with assorted material about the subject matter (e.g., aspects and anecdotes about the British for my courses on their history) and the distinctiveness of my approach that lets them know that both learning and sophisticated subjects can be fun and that I do not fit any preconceived stereotype of a history professor. I find this keeps them a little off balance—in a healthy way—and generates anticipation. Alternatively, it is useful to begin survey courses with a discussion of history as a discipline—perhaps building upon provocative quotations on what history is and means²⁵—and the reasons for studying the particular period and places to be covered.²⁶ One could also anticipate and counter the anti-intellectual old saw, "What can you do with history?" with a brief response to the more insightful, "What can you do without it?"²⁷

In launching a new topic or unit, one can make use of the interactive lecture, a technique involving brainstorming that has been advocated by Peter Frederick.²⁸ Students contribute to the creation of a lecture by participating in the process of structuring a topic into a rational pattern. The teacher begins by having students call out what they know about the topic at hand and, then, by writing on the board (or on a

²⁴Herbert Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1965), 67.

²⁵In addition to useful reference books such as *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, computer CD-ROM disks, such as Microsoft Bookshelf, are convenient and speedy resources for quotations.

²⁶Izenberg, "Teaching History," 265.

²⁷In building a response to this question I use quotations from Polybius ("History offers the best training for those who are to take part in public affairs."), Cicero ("Not to know what happened before one was born is always to be a child."), Plato ("Those who tell the stories also rule the society."), and George Orwell ("Whoever controls the past controls the future.").

²⁸"Student Involvement: Active Learning in Large Classes," in Weimer, *Teaching Large Classes Well*, 47-48; Peter J. Frederick, "Motivating Students by Active Learning in the History Classroom," *Perspectives* 31:7 (October 1993); Frederick, "The Lively Lecture—8 Variations," 45-46. Also see Alan Booth and Paul Hyland, eds., *History in Higher Education: New Directions in Teaching and Learning* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995).

transparency) whatever is said. The teacher might arrange these responses in groups or have students comment on the accuracy and relative importance of the items. Either way, many students get to participate and to sense what their classmates already know (or don't know), the teacher gains a sense of the class's level of knowledge and understanding, and a jointly created, even coherent, understanding of the topic is begun. To be sure, the teacher must be a subtle director, making certain the appropriate material is included, but the teacher must also be open enough to deviate from his or her preconceived ideas. One way to keep this method on track is for the instructor to ask the class, now and then, to identify themes and patterns that have emerged from the brainstorming, to make connections between and among what is on the board, and to determine what might be missing. In the end, while considerable time may be consumed in using this approach, it is probably time well spent since students tend to be more preoccupied with thinking than with note taking, and that ought to help them to understand better and to remember more. Of equal consideration, and what may determine the success of the interactive lecture, is the careful planning that will be needed beforehand in order for the teacher to be prepared to redirect the energy level that has been raised.

Attention and Imagination Techniques: Employing humor in the classroom was once thought to be unprofessional: it was unscholarly and undignified; it was frivolous and mere entertainment, the antithesis of education, which was serious business. To be humorous was to court popularity.²⁹ In our own time, however, humor in teaching not only has received better press, it is seen as well as being compatible with learning, freeing creative thinking, and reducing social distance; it is also believed to increase attentiveness, interest, and the retention of material, and it can foster class discussion.³⁰ I like to use humor as a tool to motivate students, although utilizing humor does not presuppose that one is or should be a stand-up comedian or a clown. Humor should emerge from the subject matter and the setting, which means that the lecturer maintains control over the kind of humor and its occasion. Humor relieves anxiety, both the students' and the teacher's, it breaks the ice, it helps to build trust, and it joins students and teacher together in a more relaxed atmosphere. I allow my sense of humor to be spontaneous, but I also use humor in the form of cartoons (from magazines and newspapers as well as published political cartoons that can do double duty as

²⁹John Morreall, *Taking Laughter Seriously* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983), 88-89.

³⁰Debra Korobkin, "Humor in the Classroom: Considerations and Strategies," in Weimer and Neff, eds., *Teaching College*, 81.

documents) and howlers (or bloopers), both of which I have been collecting for years.³¹ There is no harm in poking playful fun at your subject and at the blunders of those who study it, as long as it is clear to students that there is no intent to ridicule individuals.

Research suggests that students tend to remember principles and generalizations more than anything else,³² but my own experience indicates they also remember anecdotes, oddities, and curious information as well. Therefore, I like to sprinkle these throughout a lecture as a way of keeping—or even piquing—students' attention, and of making difficult material more palatable.³³ Students frequently are curious where I find

³¹For howlers in the form of essays, see Anders Henriksson, compiler, "A History of the Past: 'Life Reeked with Joy,'" *Wilson Quarterly* (Spring 1983) 168-171; "The World According to Student Bloopers," in Richard Lederer, *Anguished English* (Charleston, SC: Wyrick & Co., 1987), 7-15. As a long-time Reader of Advanced Placement examinations, for the Educational Testing Service, I have had access to an overflowing plate of howlers, but I only use them as if on a diet. A number of individual bloopers can be found in Richard Lederer, *More Anguished English* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1993), 15-17. For collections of history cartoons, which ordinarily must be found one at a time, patiently, in magazines and newspapers, see Burr Shafer, *Through History with J. Wesley Smith* (New York: Vanguard, 1950) and *The Wonderful World of J. Wesley Smith* (New York: Vanguard, 1960); also see Larry Gonick, *The Cartoon History of the Universe II, vols. 1-7: From the Big Bang to Alexander, vols. 8-13: From the Springtime of China to the Fall of Rome* (New York: Doubleday, 1990) and Larry Gonick, *The Cartoon History of the United States* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991).

³²Cashin, "Improving Lectures," p. 61.

³³For selected sources for such material, see Tom Burnam, *The Dictionary of Misinformation* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1975); Tom Burnam, *More Misinformation* (New York: Lippincott & Crowell, 1980); Richard Shenkman, *Legends, Lies, & Cherished Myths of American History* (New York: Morrow, 1988); Richard Shenkman, *Legends, Lies, & Cherished Myths of World History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993); M. Hirsh Goldberg, *The Blunder Book: Colossal Errors, Minor Mistakes, and Surprising Slipups That Have Changed the Course of History* (New York: Morrow, 1988); Paul F. Boller, Jr., *Not So! Popular Myths About America's Past From Columbus to Clinton* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Paul F. Boller, Jr. and John George, *They Never Said It: A Book of Fake Quotes, Misquotes, and Misleading Attributions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); Paul Kuttner, *History's Trickiest Questions* (New York: Henry Holt, 1990); Leo Rosten, *Infinite Riches: Gems from a Lifetime of Reading* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979); Reay Tannahill, *Sex in History* (New York: Stein & Day, 1980); Reay Tannahill, *Food in History* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988); Maguelonne Toussaint-Samat, *History of Food* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992); Sanche de Gramont, *Epitaph for Kings* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1967); Sanche de Gramont, *The French: Portrait of a People* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1969); Elizabeth Burton, *The Pageant of Elizabethan England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958); Burton, *The Pageant of Stuart England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962); Burton, *The Pageant of Georgian England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967); Burton, *The Pageant of Early Victorian England* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972); Daniel Pool, *What Jane Austen Ate and Charles Dickens Knew* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993); Otto L. Bettmann, *The Good Old Days—They Were Terrible* (New York: Random House, 1974); Thomas A. Bailey, *Presidential Saints and Sinners* (New York: Free Press, 1981); Thomas A. Bailey, *Probing America's Past: A Critical Examination of Major Myths and Misconceptions* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1973); Ted Morgan, *A Shovel of Stars: The Making of the American West, 1830 to the Present* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995); Paul F. Boller, Jr., *Presidential Anecdotes*, new & revised edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Michael Olmert, *Milton's Teeth and Ovid's Umbrella: Curiouser and Curiouser Adventures in History* (New York: Touchstone/Simon and Schuster, 1996); Kwame Anthony

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such items, since they are largely absent from most textbooks and from other history books students have encountered, which conveniently allows me to tell them that I read widely, which in turn encourages them to do the same.

Make the subject matter relevant to the contemporary world, where appropriate, and make it instructive by including references to news of current events that can be linked to what is being studied. The past is always with us at some time or in some way or other, and we have the potential to demonstrate the value of history to the present more accurately—if not more effectively—than TV news reporters or pundits or politicians. While some purists would argue against this suggestion as marginal (irrelevant?) to the study of history, as pandering to fashion and the short attention span of the public, it would be wise to recall that every age writes its own history—because our interpretations depend to a considerable degree on the times in which we live and the values prevalent at that time. For example, does it not make a difference to our understanding of the importance and course of the Bolshevik Revolution, and to the history of the countries of Eastern Europe as well, that the Soviet Union collapsed in our time?

Drawing analogies can be a constructive technique, but doing so should include a discussion of both their value and the pitfalls. We should especially be aware that "there are many examples of how political decisions and developments have been based on misinterpreting and misreading past events, and how historical myths have influenced statesmen and politicians."³⁴ Analogies are a matter of interpretation, "proper" interpretation if you will, but since historians and other experts will not always agree on what is the proper interpretation of any series of events, our obligation is to acknowledge the fallibility of this approach while simultaneously using it (cautiously) to promote understanding. Or, as Herbert Butterfield advised, "the chief aim of the historian is the elucidation of the unlikenesses between past and present and his chief

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Appiah & Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *The Dictionary of Global Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997).

The role played by disease in history is a separate sub-category here for intriguing and by no means insignificant or trivial material. The following are especially useful: Hans Zinsser, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963); Frederick F. Cartwright, *Disease and History* (New York: New American Library, 1972); Theodor Rosebury, *Microbes and Morals: The Strange Story of Venereal Disease* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1973); William H. McNeill, *Plagues and People* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1976); Philip Ziegler, *The Black Death* (Wolfeboro Falls, NH: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1991); Ida Macalpine and Richard Hunter, *George III and the Mad Business* (New York: Pantheon, 1969). Arno Kaplan, *Man and Microbes: Disease and Plagues in History and Modern Times* (New York: Touchstone/Simon and Schuster, 1996). For general reference see Roderick E. McGrew, *Encyclopedia of Medical History* (London: Macmillan, 1985); Kenneth F. Kiple, ed., *The Cambridge World History of Human Disease* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

³⁴George O. Kent, "Clio the Tyrant: Historical Analogies and the Meaning of History," *The Historian*, 32:1 (November 1969), 102. Kent's essay (covering pages 99-106) is especially useful for its sober assessment of analogies as a historian's tool, especially for events of the twentieth century.

function is to act in this way as the mediator between other generations and our own."³⁵ Thus, to try to find lessons in history may be presumptuous of us, but this does not mean there is nothing to learn from such efforts; or, expressed in another way, history will not enable us to predict the future, but it can help us to anticipate it more intelligently, as long as we remember that our responsibility is not "to dogmas or creeds, but to truth and humanity."³⁶

The imaginations of students can be stimulated in a variety of ways. Crisp quotations from documentary sources and literary works³⁷ as well as from the writings of other scholars can be included periodically to enliven and enrich the spoken narrative. Likewise, there are recordings of written and spoken documents that might be utilized to punctuate lectures with a dollop of aural you-are-there authenticity.³⁸ The use of pictures, slides, and postcards from travel, museum exhibits, and published catalogues make it easier for students to visualize the places, events, and people being discussed; in addition, I regularly pass around illustrated books, along with photographic material from the likes of *National Geographic*, *History Today*, *Smithsonian*, and *American Heritage*, and from newspapers and travel magazines. Where appropriate, maps—and not just political maps and those that illustrate physical features—should be integrated into lectures, as both primary and secondary sources and as texts drawn to transmit information, ideas, and values.³⁹ Recorded songs and music—which can be used, in fact, as melodic documents—are available in order to

³⁵Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History*, 10.

³⁶Hans Kohn, *Reflections on Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 9-10.

³⁷One of my favorites, which I use to convey a sense of what it smelled like in early modern times, comes from the murder mystery *Perfume*, by Patrick Süskind (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986). It begins: "In the period of which we speak, there reigned in the cities a stench barely conceivable to us modern men and women. The streets stank of manure, the courtyards of urine, the stairwells stank of moldering wood and rat droppings, the kitchens of spoiled cabbage and mutton fat" (3).

³⁸For example, Edward R. Morrow and Fred W. Friendly's *I Can Hear It Now* (Columbia Masterworks, ML 4095, 4261, 4340) captures the recorded voices of earlier in the twentieth century, and they also recorded interviews with Marian Anderson, Gamal Abdel Nasser, David Ben-Gurion, and Winston Churchill; the Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Hollow Crown: The Fall and Foibles of the Kings and Queens of England* (London Records, A4253) offers dramatic readings of letters, commentaries, and trials in English history; *Great Speeches of the 20th Century* (Rhino Records, R4 70567) is a collection of 68 speeches, mostly from American history, but also relating to events in world history, spanning the years 1906 to 1991.

³⁹Of great value for direct classroom use are the following collections prepared by Gerald A. Danzer: *Discovering American History through Maps and Views* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); *Discovering Western Civilization through Maps and Views* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); *Discovering World History through Maps and Views* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992). For general guidance and further bibliographic suggestions, see Gerald A. Danzer, "Maps, Methods, Motifs: Cartographic Resources for Teaching History," *Perspectives*, 33:9 (December 1995). In addition to the sources recommended by Danzer, much can be learned from Anthony Grafton, *New Worlds, Ancient Texts: The Power of Tradition and the Shock of Discovery* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992).

broaden our understanding of cultures from other times and places in ways that two-dimensional representations and written words cannot; plus they add unexpected excitement.⁴⁰ (Many of us even have colleagues who occasionally break into song—or we had teachers who did so—although we need not pretend to have such talent in order to turn up the volume of student interest.)

All this can help teachers and students to feel as if they were there, or at least closer to wherever there was; and all this can be used to create images, moods, and emotions. Just as trial lawyers know that what jurors retain is enhanced and complemented by other sensory input, lecturers should be aware of the comparable impact these can have on students. There are also political cartoons,⁴¹ posters,⁴² and reproductions of works of art. For example, the paintings of Peter Bruegel the Elder can form the centerpiece for a lecture on sixteenth-century social life in Europe, while the engravings of William Hogarth can do the same for politics and society in eighteenth-century England.⁴³

⁴⁰For example, see Roderic H. Davison, "Teaching History with Song and Doggerel," *Perspectives*, 28:8 (November 1990), reprinted in *History Anew*; Alex Zukas, "Different Drummers: Using Music to Teach History," *Perspectives* (September 1996); *Folk Song in the Classroom*, a newsletter, published 3 times a year (contact Diana Palmer, Assistant Editor, 433 Leadmine Road, Fiskdale, MA 01518). *The Instructor's Resource Kit to Accompany World Civilizations: The Global Experience*, by Peter N. Stearns, et al. (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), includes a 60-minute audio cassette that contains 25 selections from different times and cultures in world history. And *History of Music: The Collection* is a four-disk CD-ROM (available for both Windows and Macintosh) of music from around the world (Zane Publishing, 1950 Stemmons, Ste. 4044, Dallas, TX 75207-3109).

⁴¹For example, see Michael Wynn Jones, *The Cartoon History of Britain* (New York: Macmillan, 1971); Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Political Cartoons* (New York: Macmillan, 1975); Morton Keller, *The Art and Politics of Thomas Nast* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968); *Thomas Nast: Cartoons and Illustrations*, with text by Thomas Nast St. Hill (New York: Dover Publications, 1974); Herbert Block, *Herblock On All Fronts: Text and Cartoons* (New York: New American Library, 1980); *A Cartoon History of United States Foreign Policy Since World War I*, by the editors of the Foreign Policy Association (New York: Vintage Books, 1968); *Bill Mauldin's Army: Bill Mauldin's Greatest World War II Cartoons* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1983); Alice Sheppard, *Cartooning for Suffrage* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994); Stephen Hess and Sandy Northrop, *Drawn and Quartered: The History of American Political Cartoons* (Washington, D.C.: Elliot & Clark, 1996).

⁴²For example, see Max Gallo, *The Poster in History* (New York: American Heritage Publishing, 1974); Peter Paret, et al., *Persuasive Images: Posters of War and Revolution from the Hoover Institution Archives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Maurice Rickards, *Posters of Protest and Revolution* (New York: Walker & Co., 1970).

⁴³For example, see Francis Haskell, *History and Its Images: Art and the Interpretation of the Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); William Ayres, ed. *Picturing History: American Painting, 1770-1930* (New York: Rizzoli International, 1993); Robert I. Rotberg & Theodore K. Rabb, eds. *Art and History: Images and Their Meaning* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Shirley Wilton, "Art as Social History in the Western Civilization Survey," *Perspectives*, 25:9 (December 1987), reprinted in *History Anew*. A useful reference work is James Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art* (New York: Icon Editions/Harper & Row, 1979). On Bruegel, see Margaret A. Sullivan, *Bruegel's Peasants: Art and*

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Reference can be made to feature films and television programs students have seen in recent years in order to support accurate portrayals and to correct errors; use film settings to build lessons that take advantage of those big-screen visual images. The films thus can become not history per se, but vivid points of reference if you make them work for you.⁴⁴ (A colleague has told me, for example, that he has even had success referring to the Arnold Schwarzenegger science-fiction-time-travel adventure, *The Terminator*, when discussing Sidney Hook's *The Hero in History* with regard to the importance of individuals in the making of history. Another uses a short clip from *The Wizard of Oz* when she teaches about Populism in her introductory U.S. history course.)

For the more ambitious—but not much more—try to synchronize and coordinate two of these media supplements. Slides, say, might be matched with music, songs, speeches, literature, or other spoken words. (For example, along with my slide lecture on the Industrial Revolution, in Britain, I play a book-on-tape selection from chapter 15 in Anthony Trollope's 1858 novel *Doctor Thorne* that vividly pulls from the past a glimpse of a village in transition, hurt by the railway that has passed it by.) One can allot five or fifty minutes to the activity; either way, it will help to capture and set an appropriate mood and tone. Sometimes such a presentation can be used to illuminate discussion and assist in textual analysis. At other times a media demonstration might be used to conclude a lecture by allowing the mood thus created to linger.⁴⁵ In either case,

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Audience in the Northern Renaissance (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994) and Michael Gibson, *Bruegel* (New York: Tabard Press, 1989). On Hogarth, see Joseph Burke and Colin Caldwell, *Hogarth: The Complete Engravings* (London: Alpine Fine Arts, n.d.). For use directly in the classroom see *History of the World: World Art Transparencies and User's Guide* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1992).

⁴⁴For example, see Robert A. Rosenstone, "The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age" in Lloyd Kramer, et al., eds., *Learning History in America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Donald Mattheisen, "Finding the Right Film for the History Classroom," *Perspectives* 27:9 (December 1989), reprinted in *History Anew*; John E. O'Connor, *Teaching History With Film and Television* (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, "Discussions on Teaching" pamphlet, 1987); Martha J. Feldman "Totalitarianism without Pain: Teaching Communism and Fascism with Film," *The History Teacher* 29:1 (November, 1995) 51-61; Mark C. Carnes, ed. *Past Imperfect: According to the Movies* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995); Robert A. Rosenstone, *Revisioning History: Film and the Construction of a New Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Robert A. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past: The Challenge of Film to Our Idea of History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Neil M. Heyman, *Western Civilization: A Critical Guide to Documentary Films* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995); Robert Brent Toplin, *History by Hollywood: The Use and Abuse of the American Past* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1996). In addition, *Perspectives*, the monthly newsletter of the American Historical Association, regularly publishes a "Film and Media" column, and the *American Historical Review* and the *Journal of American History*, annually publish reviews of history-related films.

⁴⁵Frederick, "The Lively Lecture—8 Variations," 49.

students are engaged and the lecture is enhanced—although I would recommend paying attention so as to make sure technology does not become intrusive, an end in itself.⁴⁶

These, then, are just a few ways to encourage students to interact with history, to bring life to a subject so as to give it meaning and value to students, especially among those in survey courses whose main interest may lie elsewhere. These techniques also assist individual students in trying to make sense of, and thus to remember, new information in terms of what they know; that is, "students use their own existing knowledge and prior experience to help them understand the new material; in particular, they generate relationships between and among new ideas and between the new material and information already in memory."⁴⁷ What must be remembered, too, is that it is the use of a variety of techniques that works best to capture and hold attention.

Delivering the Lecture: When lecturing, movement should be the shadow of speech, even if it only means your shifting from one side of the desk to the other. If you can be aware of how the television camera never stays fixed on a single image, but instead shoots the same individual or scene from different angles, then you will know why it is important to provide some movement, including hand gestures and shifts in body position. An occasional theatrical gesture or over-emphasis can be good for grabbing flagging attention. In addition to actions, the use of emotion-enhancing words creates reactions, and as long as the content of the lecture is of an appropriate quality such words should achieve the desired effect. These suggestions are especially important if you teach large lecture classes, where several factors will work against you: the distance between teacher and students, especially those in middle and back rows, is not readily conducive to interaction or discussion; the seating arrangement usually transforms the student into the role of a spectator, a passive observer who expects to be entertained and informed, not involved; large-size classrooms create an atmosphere that is impersonal, one in which students are especially reluctant to speak and where the instructor appears remote; and large numbers of students make individual participation difficult.⁴⁸

While in the act of lecturing, pay attention to your audience and try to think yourself into students' minds in order to reach them more effectively. Non-verbal signs might suggest confusion or lack of attention. You should be able to sense when they are with you, or are confused, or angry, or bored. Try to adjust as you proceed. If there is any doubt about your success here, it would not be a sign of weakness to ask students for suggestions; on the contrary, such a request is more likely to be seen as a reflection of commitment and conscientiousness. In addition, build repetition of important points

⁴⁶Saul Cornell and Diane Dagefoerde, "Multimedia Presentations: Lecturing in the Age of MTV," *Perspectives*, 34:1 (January, 1996), 1, 8-10.

⁴⁷Alison King, "From Sage on the Stage to Guide on the Side," *College Teaching*, 41:1 (1993), 30.

⁴⁸Joel Geske, "Overcoming the Drawbacks of the Large Lecture Class," *College Teaching*, 40:4 (1992), 151.

into the lecture (more than you would in your writing), in order to reduce the possibility of confusion, and pause at appropriate moments so as to provide students with an opportunity to think and catch up.

Also while lecturing, try to use a conversational delivery, and then try to eliminate what could distract your students, such as a pace that is consistently too slow or too rapid, or pauses that are too long, or the frequent use of "a-a-a-a," "you know," "okay," or "I mean," and the like, or ticks such as tugging at eye glasses or jewelry, or jiggling change or keys in a pocket, or regularly clearing your throat. As a speech teacher once told me, a speech defect is anything that calls attention to itself. (Viewing an occasional lecture you have had videotaped will enable you to see yourself as others do and, in time, to work on eliminating those distractions.) The pace at which you lecture should be adjusted according to what students are expected to be doing. For example, your words and ideas might be spoken somewhat rapidly if only listening is required from students. But if they are to take notes and to reflect on various points of the lecture, then a slower pace is necessary. Also, the introduction of new, complex, or unfamiliar material (or vocabulary) suggests that more time is needed by students for absorption and ordering.⁴⁹

Be aware, too, that students look for cues to suggest what it is the teacher has determined is important. Speak loud enough to be heard at the back of the room, and vary the speed with which you talk, slowing and providing emphasis in order to stress a key point, increasing the pace as you move on. But delivery is not just tempo and inflection; it is also alternating between "general information and detail, difficult concepts and easy ones, gravity and humor. You can overdo the use of any: the trick is to keep all in proportion."⁵⁰ Delivery is also how you carry yourself, how you stand and move about; therefore, adopt a posture that conveys a sense of the importance of what it is you are doing.

Your attitude toward students, your demeanor, will likely affect their attitude toward you, your course, and eventually their ability to learn. We all have colleagues who are learned, bright, and capable, but who turn students away from—rather than toward—the discipline. By appearing in class on time, by being prepared and attentive, we are quietly telling students they have our respect and that we are there to further their education. When students speak, we respect what they express even when we must correct them; we offer praise when it is warranted and encouragement for an honest effort made. We develop rapport with students. To intimidate students, to try to impress them with our credentials or with an air of superiority, and to appear unapproachable

⁴⁹Marilla Svinicki, "How to Pace Your Lecture," in Weimer and Neff, eds., *Teaching College*, 71-73.

⁵⁰Dubrow and Wilkinson, "The Theory and Practice of Lectures," 30.

is only to call attention to our own inadequacies and to create obstacles to learning.⁵¹ Seek a comfortable balance between formality and familiarity.

A Potpourri of Strategies: Explode myths in a dramatic way to call attention to the mystery and the propaganda of history, to its being alive and changing, in order to create curiosity and interest.⁵² For example, I start my lecture on Martin Luther and the Reformation by asking students to visualize a movie screen, to see on that screen a sixteenth-century town square in the German city of Wittenberg, with its large castle church appearing at the top-center. The day is October 31, 1517, All Hallows' Eve, the day before All Saints' Day; it is a festive time, and town folks are setting up booths and stalls as many others are milling about. Suddenly, I say, we see an intense monk walking across the square toward the church, carrying a rolled parchment, a hammer, and some nails. No one pays him much attention as he passes by until he mounts the steps to the church, whereupon he unravels the parchment, tacks it to the church door, and leaves the way he came. On the parchment is printed Luther's 95 Theses on Indulgences. People gather in front of the door, read the theses, and start talking among themselves, with increased levels of agitation. The scene then changes to a map of Europe, with Wittenberg highlighted in bold Gothic print. We stare at the map for a moment as a crackling sound is heard and a small flame breaks through the parchment at Wittenberg. Soon all of Europe is ablaze with the challenge of Martin Luther, and the Reformation has begun. This was a very dramatic moment, I tell my students, but the problem is that in spite of what they have read and heard, this posting of the 95 Theses never really happened!⁵³ I do not tell them what, in fact, did happen until later, after we have gone into the Reformation's background. Not only does this little dramatization enable me to explode a myth and rouse curiosity, it also allows us to talk about literacy and the use of Latin versus the vernacular, historiography and historical interpretation, how events can be manipulated, and why it makes a difference where a position is argued. A gimmick or theatrics, therefore, need not be anti-intellectual. If truth be told, effective lecturing inevitably must involve some theatrics, whether it be an intimate variety associated with smaller classes or the more pronounced for larger classes.

During the course of a lecture, repeat important points several times, each in a slightly different way, from a different perspective, or with altered language; thus, build repetition into what you do. This gives slower note-takers a chance to catch up, it calls attention to particularly important points, and it enables those points to be digested.

⁵¹Murray, "How Do I Lecture Thee?," 112.

⁵²For good background reading on debunking myths and on forged and dubious documents, see Allan Nevins, *The Gateway to History* (Garden City, NY: Anchor/Doubleday, 1962), especially chapters V and VI. For specific works that debunk such myths, see the first half dozen sources in note #33.

⁵³Erwin Iserloh, *The Theses Were Not Posted: Luther Between Reform and Reformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).

Understanding will also be increased if key points are illustrated with examples—frequent examples—especially with examples that involve student participation. By way of illustration, a theme that is woven into my week-long lecture on the Italian Renaissance, in a survey course, is that that period was not simply a cultural phenomenon but rather the result of the interrelationship among economic, political, social, and cultural factors. As each of these factors is discussed and supported with examples, I call attention to the theme; after a while I ask students to identify the ways in which all the factors come together. By the end of the unit, the point has not only been made but understood as well.

Develop a sense of the students you teach. Where possible, try to link aspects of the lecture to their collective interests, to utilize examples that are vivid, curious, and intriguing, to build suspense as you advance toward resolving conflicts, and to call attention to resolutions that will create future problems. Such methods need not compromise the integrity of a subject, whereas they can serve to draw students in and secure their attention. Having a sense of one's students also means being aware of what they know and do not know; therefore, as new words, names, or concepts are introduced, be alert to the need to explain or to have students take over this task and thus involve them further.

We are all asked questions periodically to which we do not know the answer. When that happens, turn the question back to the students, to get one or more of them to look it up and report back at the next class session—but make sure you look it up too. Or use the revelation of your temporary ignorance to demonstrate that both you, and the discipline, do not have all the answers, and that professionals and experts do not always agree. Also, be prepared to learn from your students, and acknowledge that phenomenon, and be prepared as well to build on students' ideas; you will likely earn their respect, and everyone profits.

In a related way, if you blunder, stumble, or make an obvious mistake—which we all do from time to time—try to use that to your advantage; turn an apparent weakness into a strength. Acknowledge your own limitations. Do not be afraid to make fun of yourself in order to reveal this human side; your students will likely think more highly of you and be able to identify with you. Just as we cannot know it all, we also cannot be flawless.

On the practical side, provide specific directions to yourself, in your lecture notes, of any actions you would like to take, such as moving forward toward the class or using a prop. Likewise, know the classroom in which you will teach in order to figure out—in advance—how to use it to your best advantage. For example, know where audio-visual materials might, or must, be used; make sure equipment as well as outlets work; test acoustic potential and problems; determine noises that might be made by lights, equipment, student movement, desks, entrances, and exits. In other words, know your setting and prepare accordingly.

There are times when something you say or something written in one of your required readings will be challenged by a student. Not all challenges will be intellectual; some will be emotional. Rather than get defensive and spoil for a fight, learn to reinterpret challenges to what you say in order to give them an intellectual basis.⁵⁴ Make it a learning experience.

Just as we instruct students to employ transitions in their writing as they move from point to point, so too as we lecture we should be aware of a comparable need. Comprehension will improve if students can see and understand that where you have come from is connected to where you are going. Since connections that are logical to us may not be so to all students, it is generally wise to articulate these transitions explicitly, especially when they are not merely chronological. That is, it may make sense to move from the revolutions of 1830 to those of 1848, but more care should be taken to explain the links, say, between Romanticism and Liberalism.

Note-taking seems to go hand-in-hand with lecturing, and since note-taking is an aid to memory, plan and organize your lecture in such a way that as you speak you are able to think in terms of the relative ease (or difficulty) that may be involved for students as they take notes. This is where an outline (on the board or with an overhead) and your regularly writing all names and terms on the board will help students to know (and how to spell) what you expect them to remember. Plus the act of writing on the board is a welcome and helpful break in the flow of the lecture, which means it is best to cease speaking as you write.

Summarizing and Reviewing: Learning is also enhanced when a lecture is interrupted by periodic summaries of the material just presented. Students can then catch up and correct misperceptions or errors. Such summaries also serve as transitions from one topic or theme to another, which in turn helps students to see your organization and improve their own.⁵⁵ Similarly, conclude a lecture by recapitulating key points, by putting the subject in perspective relative to what the course has covered and what it will cover. Then leave students with a question or two that will help them to think about the material and, possibly, to anticipate the next class session.

Some review before exams is appreciated by students. In addition to highlighting major topics to be covered on the test and to indicating the readings for which students will be responsible and the weighting and type of the questions to be asked, I devote time to practical advice about preparing to take the exam. I distribute a list of directive word meanings (e.g., describe, analyze, compare),⁵⁶ and I discuss what it means to

⁵⁴Williams, *Classroom in Conflict*, 163-69.

⁵⁵McKeachie, *Teaching Tips*, 81.

⁵⁶Such a list is included in the Course Description booklet for Advanced Placement History (published annually by The College Board), but with the use of simple dictionary definitions and sample questions incorporating the words you use, you can easily make up your own list.

analyze the significance of something—which is appropriate for both essays and identifications—and why listing is different from comparing. I address what it means to analyze a question and the value of brainstorming and clustering related information before beginning to write; I speak to the importance, for responding to an essay question, of organization, of an introduction and a thesis statement, and of a conclusion (which is different from a summary).⁵⁷ I offer suggestions for ways to study the material to be covered on the exam, and I make good use of sample essays that I comment on in such a way that students are able to know what to expect from me. When I use multiple-choice questions, I also distribute samples, and I use them in order to discuss the structure of the questions (e.g., whether I offer them 4 or 5 options for each question, the extent to which the stem and these options include such phrasing as *all of the following except*, *all of the above*, *A and B only*) and the types relative to difficulty (e.g., recall, analysis, connections). Even the brightest of students can profit from this instruction, and what they learn about test taking can be utilized easily in other courses.

Conclusion

We should be attentive to and critical of the way in which we lecture, just as we should scrutinize any method or technique used to teach. What we should most certainly not do is abandon the lecture method in favor of new, essentially yet-to-be-proven methods (such as straight interactive learning) or technologies (such as those connected with distance learning). Assertions that the new is superior to the traditional are just that, assertions. A lecture that engages students—involves them and informs them—is a truly rewarding experience for all concerned.

Among the clear advantages of the lecture method⁵⁸ are that it provides a good opportunity for the knowledgeable teacher to present background material and great sweeps of history to students (especially to large numbers of students), or material they do not ordinarily have access to (e.g., new research or interpretations), or subject matter

⁵⁷Blackey, "Bull's-eye."

⁵⁸For a balance sheet on the advantages and disadvantages of the lecture method, see William J. Ekeler, "The Lecture Method," in Prichard and Sawyer, eds., *Handbook of College Teaching*, 88-90; Frederick, "The Lively Lecture—8 Variations," 43-50; Cashin, "Improving Lectures," 59-60. The following are some of the disadvantages, and lecturers should at least be aware of what they are and then work to counteract or minimize them: (1) The lecture method tends to be inferior to other methods in developing students' problem-solving and higher order thinking skills (e.g., analysis, synthesis); (2) it focuses more on factual or perceptual learning than on conceptual learning; (3) it fails to account for differences of interest, knowledge, skills, and intellectual ability among students (i.e., one size/approach fits all); (4) immediate feedback as to its effectiveness is difficult to ascertain; (5) all students do not "receive" equally what the lecturer imparts (i.e., students do not learn at the same pace or level of understanding); (6) it is too easy for too many students to remain passive and thus to do little to discover things for themselves; (7) it does not readily promote long-term recall of subject matter; (8) if the teacher is not an effective and skilled speaker, the lecture method will not succeed.

that is more sophisticated and complicated than they may yet be ready to handle on their own or among themselves. The lecture can promote critical thinking by calling attention to easily overlooked relationships, by raising thought-provoking questions, and then by drawing students into the process through some means of their active involvement. It may be the preferred method when the teacher wishes to define terms, to motivate students to do research, to provide students with a logical and structured approach to a subject, to organize a subject in a special way, to maintain maximum control over what happens in class, or to model a particular thinking process. At its best, the lecture can inspire a reverence for learning, and it can convey an interest in and enthusiasm for a subject. When it does most of these things well, the lecture can, according to Emerson, "set the hearts of youth aflame."⁵⁹

Critics of the lecture method have argued that a major flaw is the lack of immediate feedback⁶⁰ (with examinations as a form of feedback usually not serving as a learning experience for students). The same flaw, however, is also a characteristic of books and articles, but this does not seem to keep us from publishing or from assigning such works by others.

Besides, we can learn from and build upon the feedback that comes from student evaluations; and just as we, as writers, profit from the suggestions of good editors, lecturers would be wise to have experienced colleagues observe them in action and offer constructive criticism. In addition, by having a class videotaped, lecturers can be their own observers, to see and feel what works. It is also recommended that instructors seek permission to visit the classes of colleagues known to be effective lecturers; alternatively, there are videotapes available of skilled lecturers that can be viewed, and studied, to good effect.⁶¹

Finally, there is indirect feedback in the form of audience reactions (e.g., facial expressions)—if we pay attention to those reactions. Moreover, as we have seen, direct feedback can be built in if the traditional lecture is expanded beyond traditional boundaries. In fact, it may be that the greatest opportunity for the lecturer is interacting with an audience. Good lecturing, like painting and music composition, is part art, part skill, and a lot of planning; we can learn a certain amount by reading, but ultimately we must practice, practice, practice.

⁵⁹Quoted in Frederick, "The Lively Lecture—8 Variations," 44.

⁶⁰Bligh, *What's the Use of Lectures?*, 11.

⁶¹Lectures on videotape, including by historians, are available from the Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning (Harvard University, One Oxford Street, Room 318, Cambridge, MA 02138); Stanford Video and Electronic Media Group (Stanford Alumni Association, Bowman Alumni House, Stanford, CA 94305-4005); The Teaching Company (7405 Alban Station Court, Suite A107, Springfield, VA 22150-2318).