



# Literacy Connects

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## Interactive Lectures

Brain research has shown that the working memory (attention span) of preadolescents is approximately 5 – 10 minutes, while adolescents and adults average 10 – 20 minutes (on average, working memory parallels age: 2 years/2 minutes; 12 years/12 minutes; etc.). This means that the average secondary student is unable to focus on information for more than 15 minutes without a change in the way the learner is dealing with the information (*David Sousa, 2001*). Faced with curriculum overload and excessive assessments, teachers often rely on lengthy lectures as their preferred mode of teaching large bodies of information. Although direct instruction is often the most efficient way to impart information, without breaks for students to think, write, discuss, and process what has been taught, it is not the most effective. Following are a few ideas to make lectures more interactive and more brain compatible.

1. **Guided Lecture:** Provide students with a list of objectives for the lecture. Have them put down their pencils and listen carefully to the lecture for 20 minutes. At the end of the 20-minute lecture, give students 5 minutes to write all the information they can recall individually. Next, involve them in small discussion groups (pairs also work well) to reconstruct the lecture using their notes. Help students fill in the missing information as a class.
2. **Responsive Lecture:** Devote one class period a week to answering open-ended, high level, student generated questions on any aspect of your topic or unit of study. All topics have to be presented as questions; students must specify why they think their question submission is important; the class orders the questions in terms of class interest; and, the lecturer answers as many of the questions as time allows.
3. **Pair/Share Lecture:** Deliver a 20- minute lecture and have students take notes. Every 5 to 10 minutes, pause during the lecture, and give students no more than 2 minutes to share their notes with a partner and fill in any missing information.
4. **Think/Write/Discuss Lecture:** Prepare a set of 3 related high-level questions to ask students throughout the lecture.
  - a. Give the first question (a motivational question that helps set the stage) before the lecture and have students write a 2-minute response.
  - b. During the middle of the lecture, pose another question to clarify the information being given. Ask students to write a short response; share some of the questions aloud.
  - c. At the end of the lecture, ask a reflective question that encourages connections and applications.
5. **Feedback Lecture:** Provide students with a reading and outline of the lecture notes in advance. Lecture for 10 minutes, and then divide students into study groups (2 to 4 in a group) for 20 minutes. During this time, students should be discussing a high level question related to the material. Reconvene for another 10-minute lecture and address the study questions in your comments.

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