ALL ABOUT
LECTURING
IN ENGLISH

Techniques and language
for academics in an
EMI environment

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CHAPTER 6: GENERAL SKILLS FOR LECTURING IN ENGLISH

There are some general teaching techniques and language which are useful for teaching in EMI universities. They help you communicate and work with students in a variety of situations. The areas we're going to focus on in this chapter are explaining, giving instructions, encouraging students and correcting students.

HOW CAN I GIVE CLEAR EXPLANATIONS?

Explaining is something which lecturers do a lot. So, it seems logical to think about how to do this well in English. Giving clear explanations is especially important in EMI universities because students are not using their first language. Here are some general techniques to help you.

Use images
Diagrams, pictures, photos, videos, flow charts and graphical representations can really help students to process information. They can also help with your explanations because you can point to specific parts of an image to highlight key points. With videos you can replay sections as well.

Prepare your explanations
Preparing your explanations will help your students a lot. Preparing explanations means you've thought about how to do it in advance. This is better than trying to explain something 'in the moment'. When we explain something in the moment we can do several things that can be confusing for students. For example:

> We start the explanation, then stop and start again because we think of a better way to explain it.

We give a short simple explanation and then start to add more and more extra information. This can make the explanation much longer.

We explain something more than once because we want to make it clear. It is likely that we will use different language in the second explanation.

Imagine being a student in these situations! These approaches have a high chance of confusing students. However, if you prepare your explanations, you should be able to avoid these issues. Here are some ideas to help:

- Write the explanation on the board or screen.
- Prepare a handout with explanations/ definitions of key terms. This could be for a lecture or for a module. The handout could be paper based or online.
- Use visuals to help with the explanation.
- Use the flipped approach and tell students to find out the meanings of some key vocabulary you're going to use in the next lecture.

Think about language

Try to make sure your explanations are as clear as possible without losing meaning. To do this well, think about the grammar and vocabulary you could use. Remember that explanations should use simple language as much as possible. In addition, you could use the same grammatical structures or phrases often so that students become familiar with them. Then students will be more likely to know when you give an explanation because they recognise some of the language.

Concrete vs abstract

Academic study uses both concrete and abstract ideas and objects. Concrete is related to facts and descriptions of objects and logical thinking. However, there are many terms and ideas in academic disciplines which are more abstract.

Abstract is connected to concepts which are not easy to define. They can be complex and have different meanings for different people. You should think about how to explain the more abstract terms associated with your discipline. You could think about using an example or a comparison, or maybe an analogy or a metaphor to help explain the abstract idea in a way which is easier to understand.

Discipline specific vocabulary

All academic subjects have terminology which is very specific. Your students will vary in how well they know this vocabulary. There are some ways you can help. You could make a list or 'glossary of terms' of important vocabulary for your students. This is like a mini dictionary. It could be for key terminology overall or you could do it for specific modules on the course. Making a glossary means that all students receive the same explanations. You could also use the glossary as an activity at the beginning of the academic year or the start of specific lectures. Students could discuss the glossary in pairs or small groups to check they understand the explanations. You may even want your students to help with the glossary. Students may even want to write a glossary in their own language too. If you ask your students to update or add to any glossaries, you will create a valuable resource for students in the future.

Dictionaries and other resources

There are many published dictionaries and academic textbooks which can help with explanations. Some dictionaries are for students of English (See Appendix 2 for a list). They provide useful information such as pronunciation, example sentences and common errors. Undergraduate textbooks in English are usually full of clear explanations, especially books with titles like 'An introduction to …' You may want to explore these resources to help you find good explanations or to help you develop your own explanations. Also, you should encourage your

students to use a dictionary of academic English or the academic word list (AWL) (See Appendix 2). Although your students may have a high level of general English, they may not have a very wide vocabulary of academic English. An academic English dictionary can help them develop their academic English style, especially in writing.

Reflection …

- Do you think your explanations are clear or could be improved?
- Are any of these ideas new for you? Which ones would you like to try in your teaching?
- What resources do you use to help give explanations? Which ones from the list in Appendix 2 would you like to try out?

HOW DO I GIVE CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS?

Giving instructions is something which lecturers are constantly doing. Sometimes you need to tell students how to do an experiment. In other situations, you tell students how to discuss a topic. You might want to tell students to do some research after a lecture, or prepare for the next lecture in some way. To give students clear instructions in these situations, you need to use simple and accurate language. Let's look at how you can do that.

Staging and language.
The key to giving clear instructions is to make them simple and have a system. You want to follow the same system when you're giving instructions so that it

becomes familiar to students. You don't want to give students too much to think about and process when giving instructions. Here is an example of a set of stages you could use:

1. Tell students what they are going to do and why. For example in a Biology laboratory class the lecturer could say: 'You're going to test the solution for different types of bacteria. This is so you can see which multiply faster.'

2. Set up the activity/ task. Use short sentences in the imperative form. For example: 'Switch on the microscope. Pour the liquid into the dish. Don't touch it.'

3. Use modal verbs to highlight key points (must, need to, should). For example: 'You must check the lens is clean. You need to write down what you see. You should see something interesting after a few minutes.

4. Specify the group number, roles and time limit/ deadline. For example: Work in groups of 4. You have 40 minutes to do the task.

5. Check students understand what to do. For example: How much time have you got? What are you testing for? Tell me the 4 stages of the experiment.

6. Notice the grammatical forms above. Although these phrases may sound very direct, it is important that students can understand your instructions easily. By using simple and direct language, they are more likely to understand.

Techniques for checking understanding

In EMI lecturing it is important to check that students understand your instructions. It may take a few seconds for students to process instructions so be patient. Remember that some students may not come from interactive education cultures. This means some of them are likely to be less familiar with 'doing things' in lectures. They may be used to just listening and taking notes. As a result, it may take them a little bit longer to process instructions.

To help with checking instructions, we can use some techniques that language teachers use. The first technique is to pay attention to your students' faces and body language when you give instructions. You can often see visual 'clues' such as frowning, nodding, smiling, shaking the head etc. These can help you notice if your students understand your instructions.

The next technique uses questions. You can ask students questions with 2 options to check if they understand. For example, 'Did I ask you to read chapter 4 or chapter 6? You can elicit the answer or ask students to put up their hands for

each option. Alternatively, you can ask Yes/ No questions such as 'Did I ask you to work in groups of 3 – Yes or No? Finally, you could ask students content questions such as 'What did I ask you to do first?', 'What must you NOT do?', 'What should you record in your notebooks?' These questions work better with small groups.

Another technique for smaller groups is repetition. You can ask one student to repeat the instructions back to you. For example: 'Yumi, please tell me what I want you to discuss. Sanjay – how long should you spend talking about each question on the handout?' You could ask students by name or say, 'Can someone tell me …'.

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"Did I ask you to read chapter 4 or chapter 6?"
"Did I ask you to work in groups of 3 – Yes or No?"
"What did I ask you to do first?"
"What must you NOT do?"
"What should you record in your notebooks?"
"Yumi, please tell me what I want you to discuss."
"Sanjay – how long should you spend talking about each question on the handout?"
"Can someone tell me …"

Grammar Check: Question forms

Reflection …

- How much do you think about your instructions to students?
- Could you improve the way you give instructions to your students?
- Which of the techniques would work well for your lecturing? Why?