

Your Monthly EMI Newsletter

EMI English Medium Instruction

EMI Language Tip of the Month – Signposting your lecture

Following a ninety-minute lecture requires a certain amount of brainpower. Doing so when the lecture is in a foreign language requires even more brainpower. Thankfully, teachers can use a straightforward approach to ease the cognitive load for students attending a lecture in a foreign language: signposts! Signposts are discourse markers, which help explicitize your line of thought and allow students to better follow your line of thought.

Transitioning

Transitions are important points during a lecture for students to take stock. The following signposts clearly indicate to students that a new topic is about to be addressed:

- *Let's move to ...*
- *This leads us to the next topic of...*
- *That wraps up this part of the lecture*

However, the most important transitional phrase may be ***What questions do you have before we move on to...?*** This explicit and transparent use of language invites students to actively take stock. It also provides you, the teacher, with some initial feedback on the students' level of understanding for a specific topic!

Highlighting/Emphasizing

Some signposts to help students understand what is important include:

- *It is important to keep in mind that...*
- *Let me just reiterate this point again that...*
- *The take-away here is...*

Connecting Dots

As a lecture is just one piece of a course (other lectures, homework, readings, group work, etc.), it is important for lecturers to explicitly connect these pieces. Here are some signposts to communicate this idea and aid students in putting together the big picture:

- *If you think back to week x...*
- *We will go into this point in more detail next week when we...*
- *This point came up in the assigned article.*

Focusing student attention

During a lecture, teachers often refer to illustrations and data on slides/the blackboard. When doing this, tell students where to look so that they do not waste time scanning the field of vision. Some signposts to achieve this are:

- *Look here at the Y axis...*
- *I would like to draw your attention to the columns in table 3 here....*
- *If you take a closer look at the image in the upper right-hand corner, you can see...*

International classroom tip

In addition to signposts as linguistic tools to make your lectures more digestible for students, there are other best practice approaches, which can help students to better follow your English-taught lectures.

1. **Repetition and examples.** These two elements of a lecture go hand in hand. Paraphrasing is a common approach to repeat key ideas using other words. A form of repetition, using examples, allows students to see

how a concept looks in practice. A step beyond examples is the use of analogies. A good analogy maps knowledge from a known domain onto a less understood domain. For instance, a teacher can use road systems in Europe (known domain) to explain similar relations for microtubules in the cytoskeleton (less understood domain).

2. **Opportunities for student questions/application.** In addition to the role a more active methodology can play in reducing linguistic and cultural barriers ([see EMI June newsletter](#)), such 'breaks' from listening are instrumental for cognitive learning in general. Just think about the last presentation you attended – how was your attention span at the beginning compared to ten minutes in?
3. **Purposeful slide design.** Too much text invites students to read, which means they stop listening. The 6x6 rule (no more than six lines of text per slide, no more than six words per line) is a good rule of thumb. Further, design your slides so that chunks of information appear AS you talk about them as opposed to all information on the slide appearing at once. Including simple slides labelled **question time** or **exam topic** or simply using powerful images also allows students to better focus on the speaker.

The upshot of implementing these practices is that your lectures in English will probably cover less material than a lecture given in the teacher's and students' first language. This trade-off is part of the challenge for teachers who have to switch the language of instruction to cater to an international student body.

To learn more about signposts and question use in lectures, check out the [e-module Micro-factors for Lecturing in English](#).

Food for thought

To wrap up this month's newsletter, we invite you to read this [blogpost](#) - written by an accomplished university teacher - on whether lecturing is bad.

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