



## TEACHING 101

# Talking Head Syndrome

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**H**ave you ever noticed that when you instruct, that you do all the talking, and all of the students sit quietly and are attentive? Or have you noticed that the students are fidgeting in their seats, some even fall asleep? Maybe you are suffering from the Talking Head Syndrome! “I am the instructor; I do the talking, you take notes and listen.” The only time the student talks is when you ask a question in the conclusion part of your lesson plan (30 minutes into the lecture). This style of instructing does not lead to a very interesting or productive class. There is limited or no student participation and only one-way communication.

With effective two- or three-way communication, you will probably find that you can go through the material quicker and with more participation. The two things you have to do are:

- ▶ Be prepared to close your mouth and listen. You cannot actively listen and talk at the same time. Instructors just hate to be quiet for 10 to 15 seconds. That pregnant pause syndrome.
- ▶ Ensure that you maintain good class control and lead/direct the answers or discussion. Rephrase the questions and draw out the answers. If Billy gives part of the answer have Susie complete the answer; three-way communication.

### The lecture is a suitable technique to use:

- ▶ When the basic instructional task is to give information;
- ▶ When the information is available nowhere else or is difficult to obtain;
- ▶ When some content material must be organized in a special way;
- ▶ When establishing learner interest in a subject is one of the learning objectives;
- ▶ When the material presented is needed for only short-term retention; and
- ▶ When introducing a subject or giving directions for learning tasks which will be pursued or developed through some other techniques.

### The lecture, by itself, is not appropriate:

- ▶ When the learning objective involves any form of learning other than acquiring information;
- ▶ When the learning objective involves the application of skills or knowledge (learning how to use a firearm);
- ▶ When the learning objective involves changing or modifying attitudes (teaching hunter ethics);
- ▶ When the information is complex, detailed, or abstract and requires analysis, synthesis, or integration by the learner; and
- ▶ When learner participation is crucial to achieving the objective (sounds like firearms training and/or hunter education to me).

Try a new approach. Ask questions instead of lecturing from the pulpit. Use student's experience, knowledge, and interest to create an active class with two- or three-way communication. For example, instead of telling the student the three main parts of a firearm, hold up a firearm and ask the students, what are the three main parts of a firearm? If they answer trigger, bolt, and magazine, reply you have got one part, the action. What are the other two major parts? When they give you the correct answers or most of it, repeat their answers. Show the correct answers on the overhead; demonstrate those parts on the firearm. You now have created two-way and in some cases three-way communication.

For too long instructors have been trained to lecture. There are a lot of other instructional techniques. The Instructor Diploma Program of British Columbia describes a lecture as an uninterrupted oral presentation of relevant material by a qualified person; the pattern of communication is a one-way transmission of information from instructor to participant.

**S**o think about these points next time before you choose lecture as your style of instruction. You do not have to be the talking head in the front of the class. Ask questions instead of lecturing from the pulpit. A lot of students already know some of the gospel.