In Defense of the Online Lecture

The lecture is the traditional means of transferring content in learning programs. The lecture takes a variety of forms in e-learning programs. In live virtual classes, the lecture often takes the form of an instructor narrating a presentation of PowerPoint slides. A lecture in a live virtual class might also take the form of a videotape of an expert. In asynchronous learning programs, the lecture often takes the form of a sequence of slides that learners are intended to read in their entirety. But lectures might also take the form of recorded sequences of narration, either by an anonymous narrator or a subject-matter expert, who might be narrating a script that also appears online. In addition, an online lecture might also take the form of a reading from an original source, such as an article from a scientific or management journal.

Although much maligned in popular writing about education, the lecture continues to be popular among instructional designers and offer many benefits as an instructional technique (Arthur, Bennett, Edens, and Bell, 2002). These benefits include the following:

1. Most accurate means of communicating content (Farrah 1990);
2. Most efficient way of communicating content (Farrah 1990);
3. Most consistent way of presenting content (Farrah 1990);
4. Allows for presentations by experts;
5. Learners know how to process lectures;
6. Some lecture formats are popular;
7. Lectures are the most efficient to design and develop;
8. Some of the easiest to use authoring tools support the development of lectures.

So how does a designer make a lecture engaging? Consider these suggestions:

- Limiting the amount of information to a manageable quantity (so limit the length of a live virtual session and the number of screens in an asynchronous lesson)
- Using imaginative presentations, such as animations and stories, to maintain the interest of learners
- In asynchronous learning programs, taking advantage of an Internet connection to direct learners to original sources and address the reduced reading speed and accuracy of online readers

References
