

Beyond the Lecture: Redesigning Communication Instruction for Flexibility and Engagement

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Abstract

In this talk, we discuss the ongoing evolution of an oral communication course at MIT (called 6.UAT) as we've gradually shifted from a traditional lecture-recitation model toward a more flexible, student-centered structure. In-person lectures covering a range of topics related to careers and professional development were once central to the course, but over time—through small, iterative changes each semester—we replaced most of the lectures with interactive recitation exercises and optional workshops tailored to students' interests.

When the Covid-19 pandemic prompted a shift to remote learning, we adapted further by converting all but one of the remaining live lectures into asynchronous videos that students watch offline. That experience led us to retain a hybrid format even after returning to in-person teaching.

Today, the course features six targeted lectures (one live, five video-based), aligned directly with the oral assignments, and supplemented by optional workshops that students select based on their interests, with recitations, where most of the practice and feedback occur, now replacing lectures as the focal point of the course.

This session will reflect on what motivated these changes, what has worked well, and where we still see challenges—particularly around student engagement patterns and staff consistency.

Ultimately, our goal has been to create a structure that gives students more agency in how they learn, while preserving the rigor of a communication-intensive course.

Keywords

Oral communication skills, iterative improvement, hybrid learning, course design, student-centered teaching.

