

Interactive Demonstrations

Demonstrations are one of the cornerstones of art and design classes. They allow us to show and physically guide students through the steps of a process. Demos also provide both visual and auditory input, which is particularly helpful for students who process and remember best by listening and seeing.

Though they have their place in the repertoire of teaching activities, live demos also face some challenges: Student attention starts to wane after 8-10 minutes. (Hartley & Cameron, 1967) Additionally, live classroom presentations are a one-shot deal; a short lapse in attention and students can find themselves lost.

Here are some suggestions to overcome the challenges that demos present for students:

Plan your demo like a cooking show

You rarely see chefs wash, peel AND chop every vegetable, or wait for the dish to cook. They demo the highlights of the procedure and then bring out the final product to show what you're aiming for. Follow their example and skip the steps students have already learned or can figure out for themselves. This will save time and keep students engaged.

Break the demo into parts

Keep an 8-minute attention span in mind. For complex processes, demo several steps then stop to let students ask questions and try it out for themselves. Walk around to see how students are doing and provide additional clarification if needed, either individually or to the class. Continue with your demo; then repeat the process.

Check comprehension

Ask a variety of questions to find out how much students are absorbing and whether they can remember or predict the steps.

- ⇒ Is this tool appropriate?
- ⇒ Show me how to use that tool.
- ⇒ What do I do next?

This keeps students engaged and shows you whether or not students are ready to proceed on their own.

Review, review, review!

Students are not likely to remember techniques after seeing them just once. Repeat the steps a few times to reinforce them. Have students merely watch the first time. Then demo the same process again, encouraging students to take notes. Invite students who feel confident about the process to demo as an additional review.

Be aware of your audience

Rearrange students to make sure everyone can see and hear the demo. Invite shy or soft-spoken students to sit up front. Hold up the sample every now and then for everyone to see. Consider doing the demo twice for one half of the class at a time so that that everyone see and hear more easily. Pause between steps so that you can give students a chance to take in what you've presented. Watch for cues that students are losing focus (e.g., yawning, having private conversations) or not understanding, and maintain eye contact to keep students engaged.

Support key ideas in writing

Students can follow along more easily and remember more if they have a map of the process. Write key steps and important reminders about materials or tools on the white/chalkboard.

