

## Using Advance Organizers to Facilitate Learning

Lecturing has been criticized for fostering intellectual passivity, discouraging critical thinking, and hindering the task of “making meaning.” The advance organizer is used, on occasion, at the beginning of a class or session to provide students with “intellectual scaffolding” which structures the ideas and information they will encounter during the session. Three major premises underlie the use of advance organizers:

- The way the content of a course is organized can affect the understanding and retention of that content.
- The use of the advance organizer implies that the mind works in particular ways to process new information. The advance organizer concept is built on the premise that the processing is facilitated if learners can see in advance the organization of the concepts, issues, and information of the course.
- Large amounts of content cannot be conveyed meaningfully and efficiently without some way of helping the learner see the structure of that content. The important and difficult task in developing approaches to teaching that are presentational in their form (e.g., lecture) is to stimulate the learner's active involvement with the material. The advance organizer can contain questions, or problems, or suggest a procedure for thinking through the material as it is being presented.

It is important to note that the advance organizer is most effective when the information or concepts outlined are related to already existing concepts or ideas that the learner has about the subject. The opening session(s) in a course could, therefore, be better used to clarify the extent of understanding and information that students in the class already possess about the course. Related to this is the observation that effective advance organizers use language familiar to the student and appropriate illustrations or analogies.

The advance organizer “sets up” the course, prompts the learner to recall information or ideas they already possess about the subject, and suggests ways by which ideas will be explored in the course or session.

As part of the advance organizer, students can be asked to think about the following through the presentation or course:

- Describe how the concepts/information of the session or course relate to some aspect of their existing knowledge.
- Give additional examples related to the material.
- Examine the concepts from other points of view.
- Relate the concepts given to contradictory material.
- Identify underlying assumptions or inferences in the concepts presented.