THE K. PATRICIA CROSS ACADEMY

INSTRUCTOR'S GUIDE

Teaching Technique 15

Translate That!

ACTIVITY TYPE

- Reciprocal Teaching
- Engaged/Active Learning

TEACHING PROBLEM ADDRESSED

- Poor Attention/Listening
- Surface Learning

LEARNING TAXONOMIC LEVEL

- Application: Critical Thinking
- Application: Creative Thinking

Translate That!

In *Translate That!*, you pause your lecture and call on a student at random to "translate" the information you just provided into plain English for an imagined audience that you specify.

1 Clarify your teaching purpose and learning goals for *Translate That!*

2 Decide what students should observe about their engagement

3 Set assignment parameters (how you will choose students randomly, etc.)

4 Determine if and how you will assess or grade *Translate That!*

5 Communicate assignment instructions to students

6 Begin the lecture, pausing for students to "translate" what you just said

7 Reflect upon the activity and evaluate its effectiveness

Step-By-Step Instructions

In this section we provide you with guidance on each of the seven steps involved as you consider this technique.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

When we hear the term "rehearsal," we typically think of strategies that involve continually repeating information. For example, if you want to remember a person's name, you might repeat it over and over again to yourself until you have stored it in your short-term memory and can retrieve it immediately. If you have used this approach, however, you know that it is still fairly easy to forget that name, even after this "maintenance" rehearsal effort. That shows us that even with purposeful rehearsal effort, information can fade from short-term memory before it is stored in long-term memory.

There is also a second kind of rehearsal, however, and that is "elaboration." This form of rehearsal involves associating new information with information existing in long-term memory. Such a rehearsal strategy is necessary to help remember information that is more complex than a name or phone number. It requires understanding the information in a way that can be retrieved later. Elaborative rehearsal strategies enrich and enhance understanding information. An example of elaborative rehearsal is trying to explain a concept to a friend, so that you must communicate and thus test your own understanding. In this chapter, *Translate That!* is a technique that engages students in elaborative rehearsal.

In *Translate That!*, the instructor pauses a lecture and calls on a student at random to "translate" the recently provided information into plain English for an imagined audience that the teacher specifies. The goal is for the student to restate what they just heard in the lecture in a manner that remains true to the original idea but using his or her own "voice."

The activity benefits the translators by having them rethink what the instructor has just said and to express it in a new way. This action helps students to check their own comprehension and to solidify the new knowledge. Hearing information a second time in words that match their level of understanding, as opposed to the expert level of the professor, is beneficial to students. Because students may be called upon at any time, it motivates them to stay involved and attentive. *Translate That!* also provides professors with a quick check of student understanding, which allows them to revisit areas that students are not fully comprehending and to feel confident moving forward when students seem to have understood.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

Students restate what they just heard in the lecture in a manner that remains true to the original idea but using his or her own "voice."

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

- Review your lecture content to identify potential opportunities for integrating this technique, approximately every 10 minutes. Ensure that each segment is a logical, coherent whole that students can remember and repeat.

- Identify a potential target audience so that students can modify the language of their responses accordingly; obviously their peers are an audience, but students could translate the information, for example, to a younger sibling or to someone planning to take the course next term. This small role-play can result in students feeling less self-conscious than they might if they had to explain to one another.

- Decide how you will choose students at random. You may, for example, have students count off and then draw a number from a hat, asking the student whose number was called to do the translation. The goal is for random selection so that the choice seems fair, but it is important to use an approach so that students cannot "hide" or pretend they were not the ones called upon.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

Choose if and how you wish to assess or grade *Translate That!* If you decide that you want to assess or grade, a plus, check, or minus in a column on the roster may be sufficient.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

Announce the activity and tell students that you will be selecting people randomly to interpret what you have said in a lecture. Explain that many students will be called on during the activity and that you are not trying to single out any one student. Also explain that after the initial translation, other students will be invited to provide additional information to support the original translation. If you have decided to assess/grade their translations, communicate this as well.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

- Begin your lecture. At about 10 minutes, announce that it is time for a translation and provide everyone with approximately 30 seconds to one minute to organize their thoughts.

- Randomly select a student and ask the student to "translate" the lecture segment for the designated role-play audience, such as students who enroll next term.

- After the translation, if necessary, ask other students to clarify or add in missing information; you may want to continue random selection, or you may at this point take volunteers.

- Repeat the process every 10 minutes or so, as time allows.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

When reflecting on the activity and how effective it was, consider the following questions:

- Did the technique match the course learning goals and objectives?

- Did it meet my goals for this learning module?

- Was it appropriate for the students?

- Did the technique keep the students engaged?

- Did it promote student learning?

- Did it provide me with information about student understanding?

If you answer yes to all or most of these questions, next consider how you might improve the activity for the next use.

Support Materials

The materials in this section are intended to help you with the process of implementing this technique. For *Translate That!*, we provide additional guidance and variations.

ADDITIONAL GUIDANCE AND VARIATIONS

In *Translate That!*, the goal is for the student to restate what they just heard in the lecture in a manner that remains true to the original idea but using his or her own "voice." The translation should move beyond a simple reversal of the sentence structure or replacement of some of the words with synonyms to a restatement that communicates the true meaning of the original but in more accessible, easily understood language. This is why it is often helpful to identify a specific audience, such as students enrolling in the course in a subsequent term. This small role-play can result in students feeling less self-conscious than they might if they had to explain to one another.

Also, using this technique over time will provide an opportunity for students (and you) to see progress. Students' sophistication at summary should improve over the academic term. Finally, this technique is most useful for complex topics, as it asks you to build in stopping points and provides repetition of complex ideas by students.

Here are some ways to vary the activity:

- After presenting the lecture segment, ask students to write down their translations in their own words prior to sharing verbally. While this variation takes more time, the benefit is that it provides students with adequate thinking time so the paraphrases are likely to be better and more polished.

- To provide students with an opportunity to improve or correct their interpretations, put them in pairs or small groups to rehearse their translations prior to sharing them with the full class. This variation can reduce student anxiety and be particularly useful if you prefer to stop less and have them paraphrase more content at once.

Technique Template

Following are two templates to assist you as you think through how you might implement this technique in your own class. The first is a completed template, providing an example of how Elizabeth Barkley adapted *Translate That!* in her course, *Music of Multicultural America*. The second is a blank template for you to fill out to tailor this technique for your course.

Technique Template

Sample *Translate That!* Completed Technique Template:
Content from Elizabeth Barkley

Music of Multicultural America

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online?
How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes,
prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you
consider this technique?

My course is an on-campus section of a lower division General
Education course. The course meets my institution's United States
Cultures & Communities requirement and also the Humanities
requirement. It enrolls about 60 students, and these students
come from a wide range of academic backgrounds. Many of them do
not have good academic skills.

STEP 1: CLARIFY YOUR TEACHING PURPOSE AND LEARNING GOALS

Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

I am looking for an activity that will help me check student
understanding and also help ensure that they are attentive during
lecture. Additionally, I am always looking for opportunities for
students to review information so that new learning can be
reinforced and more likely remembered.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY THE LEARNING TASK'S UNDERLYING PROBLEM AND PROMPT

What is the question you want learners to address, or problem you want them to solve?

I will pause my lecture at various times and ask students to "translate" what I have just said in their own words for students who missed class that day.

STEP 3: SET ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS

What are the assignment logistics? For example, will this be assigned individually or is it group work? How long will the assignment take? Will students be submitting a product? What materials, resources, or additional information do you anticipate needing?

I will make a copy of my roster and use this to track student participation. The roster is numbered, so I will put matching-numbered slips of paper into a small box and draw the numbers and then refer to the roster for the name. This way I hope the selection process will be randomized and students will feel it is more fair.

STEP 4: DEVELOP A PLAN FOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT OR GRADING

If you decide to assess learning, how will you determine that learning has occurred? For example, will you use a simple +/check/- grading system? If you use a rubric, will you use an existing one or create one? What will be your criteria and standards?

I will record a plus, check, or minus on the column next to students' names and translate these into participation points toward the final course grade.

STEP 5: COMMUNICATE ASSIGNMENT PARAMETERS TO STUDENTS

How will you communicate assignment parameters to students? For example, through a handout? A prompt on a presentation slide? Assignment instructions in your online course?

This seems to be a simple technique, so I will just take time in class so that students will understand what I want them to do.

STEP 6: IMPLEMENT THE TECHNIQUE

How will you adapt steps/procedures for your students? Are there any additional logistical aspects to consider?

I need to create the roster and the numbered slips of paper, and also decide where there are good moments to pause within my planned presentation.

STEP 7: REFLECT UPON THE ACTIVITY AND EVALUATE ITS EFFECTIVENESS

Note: This step will be completed after you have implemented the technique.
Did this technique help you accomplish your goals? What worked well? What could have been improved? What might you change if you decide to implement the activity again?

I discovered that once a student was called upon, they sometimes 'checked back out' because they did not think they would be called on a second time. I will change it next time by putting the slip of paper back into the box. If a student is asked more frequently than others, it can simply generate extra credit points. This has turned out to be a very effective assignment, so I will use it intermittently throughout the term.

Technique Template

This template is intended for use when planning to implement *Translate That!* in your class. Fill in the blanks below, and use the information provided elsewhere in the Instructor's Guide to assist you in your thinking.

_____

Course Name

COURSE CHARACTERISTICS

What are the situational factors that impact this course? For example, is it on campus or online? How many students? Is it lower division or graduate? Are there student attributes such as attitudes, prior knowledge, reasons for enrolling, and so forth that should be taken into account as you consider this technique?

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Why are you choosing this technique? What do you hope to accomplish?

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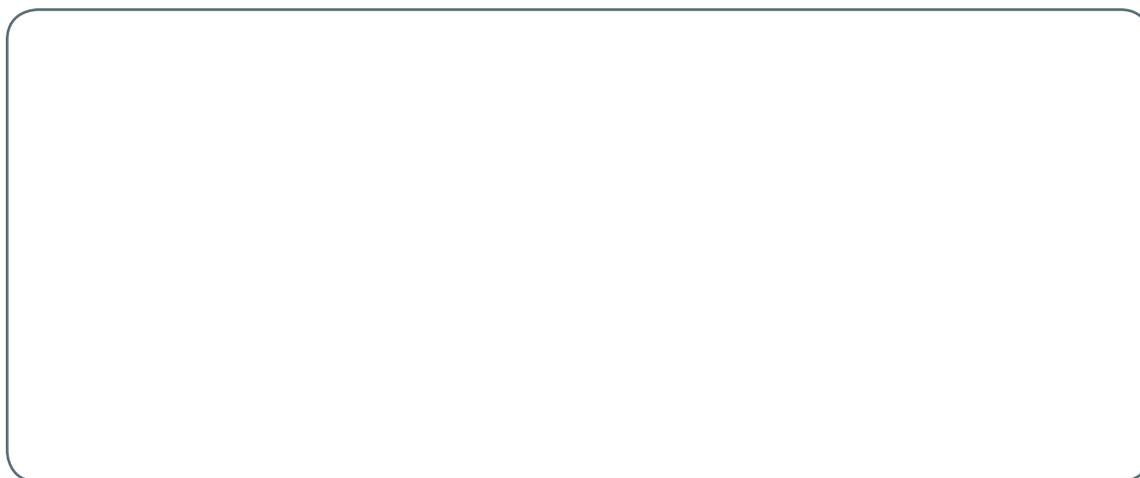
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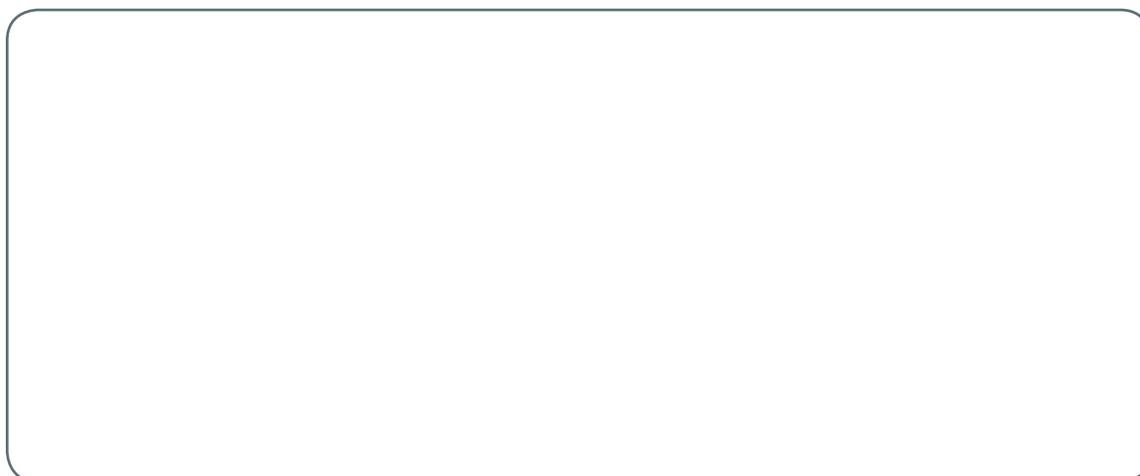
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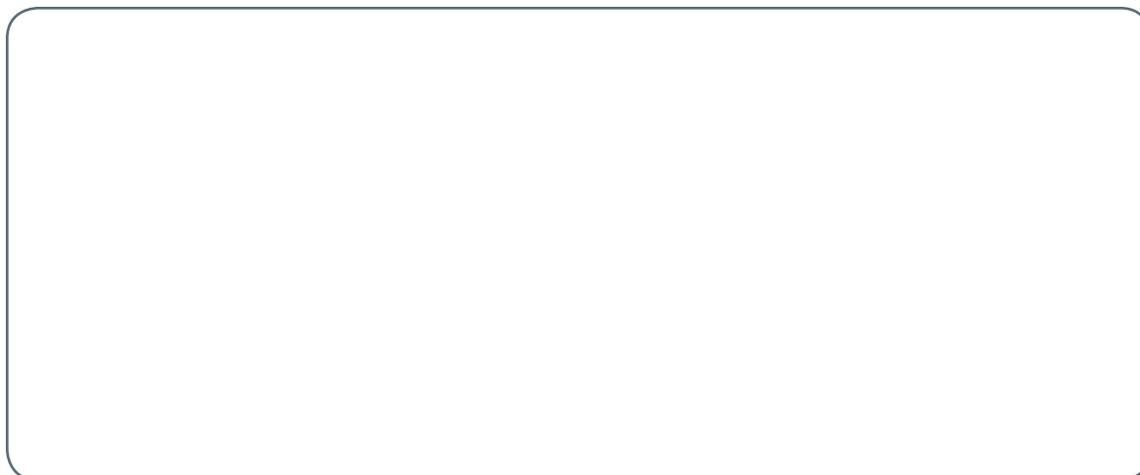
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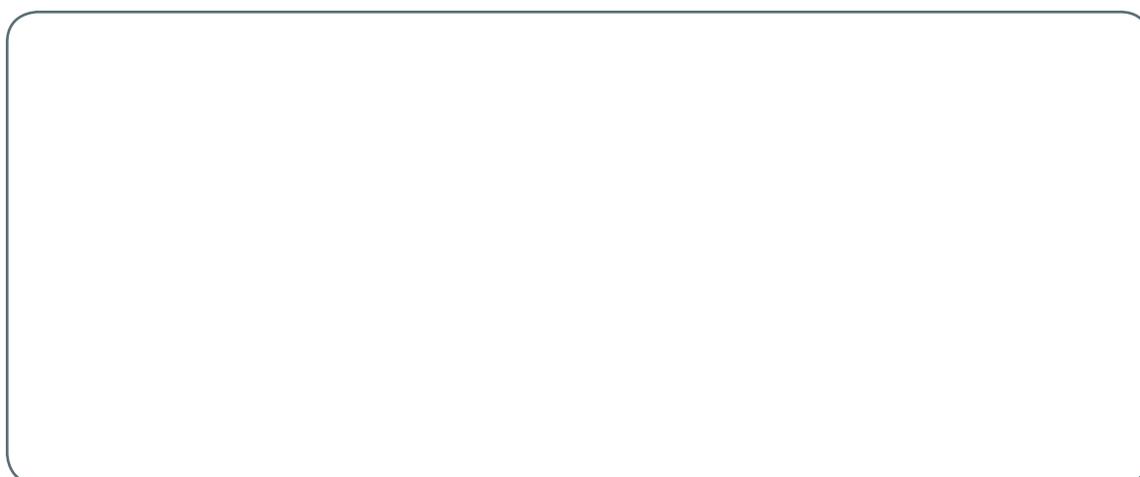
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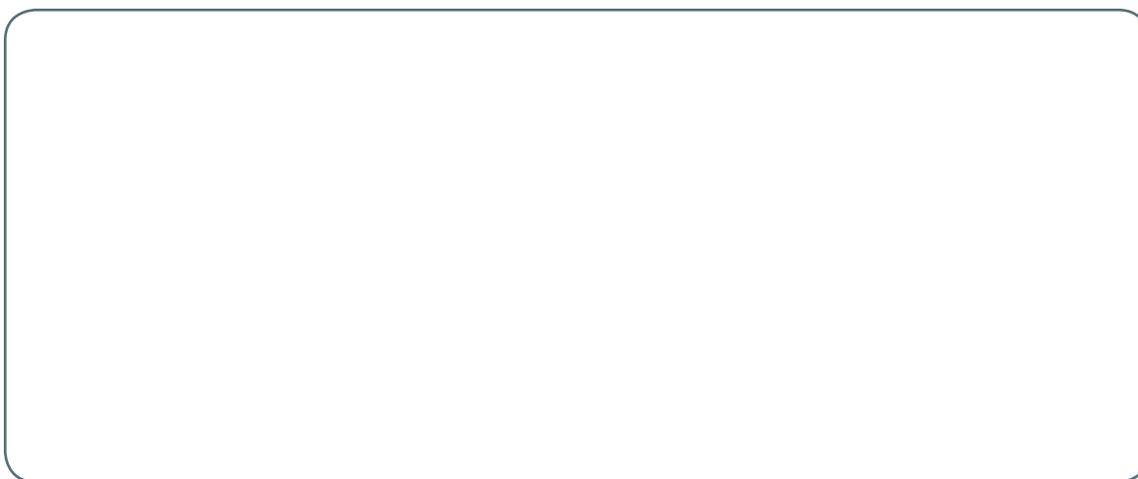
References and Resources

PRIMARY SOURCE

Content for this download was drawn primarily from "Interactive Lecture Technique 17: Translate That!" Barkley, E. F. and Major, C. H. (2018). *Interactive Lecturing: A Handbook for College Faculty.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, pp. 289–292. It includes material that was adapted or reproduced with permission. For further information about this technique, including examples in online and on campus courses, see the primary source:

Barkley, E. F. and Major, C. H. (2018). *Interactive Lecturing: A Handbook for College Faculty.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

CITATIONS AND ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

- Cooper, J. L., & Robinson, P. (2000). Getting Started: Informal small-group strategies in large classes. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 81, 17–42.

- Cooper, J. L., & Robinson, P. (2014). Using classroom assessment and cognitive scaffolding to enhance the power of small-group learning. *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 25(3&4), 149–161.

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