

Locked room lecture activity

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Abstract

Using Creechan's (2021) template, I used OneNote to create a locked room lecture activity, in which students had to solve a series of puzzles, each solution unlocking the next section of the lecture, until a final code-word was revealed. The intention behind this activity was not only to deliver a new subject in a fun and interesting way, but to combat poor lecture attendance and promote student interaction with their peers. The results show that students were six times more likely to engage with this activity than a pre-recorded lecture, which was the standard lecture format for this module, and I argue that it is highly adaptable for other academic subjects and lesson types.

1. Background

In semester 2 I co-lead a Part A Creative Arts module (ACA922). Throughout the course, students research a series of case-study images presented in lectures and, in week 10, are then given a shortlist of these images to work on for their assessment. This frequently causes **lecture attendance in week 11 to decline dramatically**, as students do not see the lectures as relevant once they have their shortlist. Moreover, due to the pandemic and the size of the cohort (273 students), all the lectures this year were delivered as pre-recorded, on-demand sessions, and the module overall provided **little opportunity for students to interact with their peers**.

Having seen a Twitter post by another academic about a locked room lecture they created for an English Literature class, I decided to adapt this for my week 11 lecture on AI and cyborgs in visual culture. I was concerned that students would be even less likely to attend what they perceived as a niche and 'irrelevant' lecture, and thought that having an unusual, fun session might **increase attendance, and give students the opportunity to interact**.

2. Methodology

The locked room lecture activity follows the basic principle of an escape room: participants must **solve a series of puzzles** to unlock the door and leave the room. For a locked room lecture, students must solve a puzzle at the end of each section of the lecture. **The solution acts as a password that unlocks the next section**. Once the student has solved all the puzzles and made it to the end, a code-word is revealed, which they then give to the tutor in a following lecture or seminar session.

To produce the locked room lecture, I **used OneNote** to create a series of tabbed sections. I used the first of these sections to explain the activity and introduce the key aims and topics of the lecture. The remainder of these sections corresponded to the different parts of the lecture, plus a 'help' tab that gave students clues for each puzzle in case they got stuck. In each section, **students read and looked at the text and images, and then worked out the puzzle at the end**. These puzzles took the form of anagrams, codes, maps, questions, and picture puzzles. Once I had filled all the sections, I password protected each one (except the introductory section) with the answer to the puzzle from the preceding section.

Once the OneNote file was finished, I **uploaded it to the module Learn page**, ready for students to try. The introductory tab encourages students to **attempt the activity with a group of friends** if they wish, enabling it to be an interactive exercise between peers.

3. Issues

The OneNote software itself was a barrier. Not all students had access to it and were unable to open the document on Learn. To resolve this, I transferred the content into a power point and recorded the session as a typical pre-recorded lecture. During the recording, I asked the students to hit pause at certain moments so that they could attempt each puzzle and when they restarted the recording, I revealed the answer. This meant that the power point version was easier to work through, and technically a student did not have to do any of the puzzles to get to the end. However, I was willing to compromise on this point if it enabled

engagement and accessibility.

4. Benefits

Unlike Creechan's version where the students had some knowledge of the topic prior to attempting the locked room lecture, my students were completely new to the topic. My approach was therefore to have the puzzles **apply or build on the knowledge students gained** through reading the text. For example, two of the puzzles required students to look up online resources mentioned in the text to find the answers. This strategy also ensured that students read the text and thus **engaged with lecture content**, rather than skipping from puzzle to puzzle, and **familiarised them with key resources**.

5. Evidence of Success

The Learn data shows that 49 students marked the OneNote version of the locked room lecture complete and a further 46 marked the power point version complete, showing that 95 students in total completed this activity. Though they didn't all attend the following webinar, a number of **students were able to give the code-word**. By contrast, the other session for week 11 – a pre-recorded lecture – drew just 40 students, only 15 of whom watched the whole recording. Thus, even though the number of students who completed the locked room lecture represents just over a third of the cohort, **it drew six times as much interest** as the pre-recorded lecture session. It was not possible to assess whether students worked together on the activity.

6. How Can Other Academics Reproduce This?

This is a **highly flexible format** that can be **applied to multiple disciplines** as the puzzles can be **adapted to fit any subject matter**. Equally, it could be used for a content-driven session, a problem-based lab or workshop, or a revision session. I would still recommend using OneNote for this exercise, but the mode of delivery could be different depending on the subject and/or session type.

For example, using a computer lab for a STEM problem-based session would enable each individual student to attempt the locked room, as each computer would have the OneNote software. Alternatively, for Arts and Humanities subjects, which rely heavily on conventional teaching spaces, the tutor could project the OneNote locked room lecture onto the room's screen and spilt the students into groups, giving them a set amount of time to solve each puzzle within their group. This is perhaps the most favourable method, as it allows the greatest potential for student interaction, but is better suited to smaller classes and seminars. However, it could still be adapted for use within large, lecture theatre groups. Again, the tutor projects the locked room puzzle, and the students have a set time to work on the solution. But, in this scenario, the tutor would set up a padlet page and send the page link to students in advance so that students then post their answers to the puzzle on the padlet page. This would still enable student participation and interaction and give a voice to students who might otherwise be too intimidated to speak up within a large group.

7. Reflections

The software availability is a key obstacle for using this activity for independent online study, and it is also difficult to assess whether it enabled student interaction in this format. I think it would work better as a **tutor-led activity**, whether online or in a physical teaching space, though it should ideally be **delivered in a way that promotes student interaction**, as discussed above. The locked room lecture is quite **time consuming** to produce, so tutors should think strategically about when best to make and use this activity in their course.

8. References

Creechan, L. (2021) *Jekyll and Hyde escape room* [online]. Available at: https://strath-my.sharepoint.com/personal/louise_creechan_strath_ac_uk/_layouts/15/Doc.aspx?sourcedoc={32ee4cd7-4036-455a-aa88-284677228944}&action=view&wd=target%28Introduction.one%7C37f55c20-56e2-4c8d-b6e8-586752a944c1%2FThe%20Strange%20Case%20of%20Dr%20Jekyll%20and%20Mr%20Hyde%7Cb91c412f-4755-41fc-b7bb-0cbe545587a6%2F%29, (accessed 03/03/2021).

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