Instructors are all too familiar with student apathy in class. Whether sitting in a lecture hall or small classroom, it can be difficult for an instructor to keep students’ focused for an entire class period. There are, though, a few things instructors can integrate into our lessons to diminish the monotony and help keep our students’ attention.

1. **Give 2-minute breaks every 20 minutes**

   Even when a topic is exactly what we want to hear about, we all struggle to focus our attention on one task for extended periods of time. I’ve found that a two-minute break every 20 minutes allows me to lecture further with my students rather than forcing their attention for a continuous period of class time. These tiny breaks give students time to indulge in a mental vacation and return to the topic feeling refreshed and ready to move forward.

2. **Pepper your lecture with relevant stories/anecdotes**

   Mental breaks don’t always have to take away from lecture time, sometimes they can enhance the subject. Students remember relevant stories and have a much easier time applying concepts when it comes to summative assessments. So try telling a joke or story during your next class as a good way to break-up the lecture.
3. **Use the white board**
   Even if you are an excellent lecturer, students enjoy the novelty of different and varied teaching strategies over a daily, repetitiousness one. Hand-written notes on the board can take on an even bigger impact if you find a fun add-on, such as using multi-colored markers or personifying drawings/letters/numbers. These small details make lessons memorable.

4. **Break up your lectures and summarize often**
   There is something magical about the words “to summarize...” and “in conclusion...” that snaps everyone to attention. I use it multiple times in my lectures, often just prior to a two-minute break. Lessons can be easily broken into subsections within a single lesson, each of which can be reinforced by reviewing the major concepts in a miniature summary. A second benefit here is that students feel free to ask questions before you move into a deeper stage of the lesson.

5. **Check in with your students early and often**
   Most instructors I’ve observed check in with their students by asking “are there any questions?” and waiting for a short amount of time before moving forward. A better question is “how well did this make sense?” and have students actively respond in a non-binary fashion – in my classroom we use the gladiator scale of thumbs-up, thumbs-down, or thumb-in-the-middle if they are unsure. Each student has the opportunity to weigh in on their understanding without other students being privy to it. Another way to check in with your students is “ask me XYZ number of questions on this topic and then we can move forward/be dismissed.” Even if students understand the concepts well, this puts a little pressure on them to think critically about the topic.

6. **Hone your public speaking skills**
   A wise person once told me that the best motivation for doing something was a great sense of urgency – which is why procrastination often ends in big spurts of productivity. What greater motivation to pay attention than to have the instructor stare directly into your eyes? This, and other public speaking skills, have great application in the classroom and can make lecturing more engaging for both students and the instructor. Use voice inflection as though you are telling a story, which engages student interest and piques their curiosity. Your enthusiasm and animation will be contagious.

7. **Use a visible checklist throughout your lecture**
   This is a technique I use as the semester moves forward and motivation inevitably declines. Choose a corner of the white board to outline the things you need to accomplish that day – list everything from the classroom introduction to the final summary, and check each part off as you move forward. Students can see exactly where they are in the list and get satisfaction as you check off each item.

Like me, you might have a content-heavy course that almost necessitates a lecture-based classroom, but you do not have to be a slave to the tedium of “sit and listen”. Integrate a couple of these techniques into your lecture and ask your students for feedback on what helped. By fostering a good relationship with your audience and staying in tune to their needs you will motivate your students to resist boredom and engage in their education.