Best Practices for Recording Lectures for Online Courses

Recorded lectures, including videos and narrated PowerPoints, can be an effective way to present online course content. They provide a means for you to explain key ideas and concepts as well as elaborate on assigned readings. The following guidelines may help you prepare and develop recorded lectures for your online course:

Prepare your Script and Materials. Before you begin, write a script to help you organize and edit your thoughts before you begin recording. Outline clear objectives for your lecture—both what students should know after the lecture and why it is important and use this outline to write your script. After you have written your script, consider any extra materials you may want to use in your video such as props, pictures, charts, and graphs, or even supplementary notes as these are all things that can add extra appeal to your video. Once the recording has been produced, the script can be used as a transcript for students.

Begin with Accessibility in Mind. Learn to recognize issues that limit usability for diverse learners. For example, jumpy transitions and low contrast text and background colors may create viewing difficulties for learners with visual problems. Certain colors may be unperceivable by individuals who are color-blind.

Choose the Appropriate Setting. UofSC has several options on campus for recording online course content. However, if you choose to record at home or in your office, choose a quiet area with the door closed and that is well lit. Do not sit directly in front of a window or other powerful light source as the camera will have difficulty capturing the scene, resulting in a video that is too bright or too dark. Avoid any location with a lot of distractions, such as bright colors and patterns or moving objects. You may also want to turn your phone off and log out of your email to prevent notification beeps from interfering with your recording. Using a headset with a microphone produces the clearest audio.

Test Equipment, Sound and Lighting. Assess quality with a short test recording. Record the first few slides as a quick test before you record an entire lecture to determine if the audio is clear and loud enough and if there is sufficient lighting.

Keep it Short. Divide content into manageable chunks. Human attention span is not optimal for long presentations and students tend to quit listening and become easily distracted with long videos so keep narrated lectures short, about 10 minutes maximum. If your material requires a longer presentation, break it up into chunks by specific and narrow topics to allow learners to engage with small pieces of new information. Instead of creating one 30-minute lecture, consider two or three separate presentations.

Connect with Your Audience. Lectures should be professional, but still relatable and personable. Use a conversational style and include real-life examples to incorporate elements of your personality into your lecture and stay energetic. If you are recording a video lecture of yourself, sit up straight or stand because good posture and mannerisms come across in video and help engage your students' attention. You can also engage the audience with integrated visuals, multimedia, hyperlinks to additional information, interactive features, or other active learning strategies.

Signal Important Information to Viewers. Use on-screen text, symbols, or a change in color or contrast to highlight important information. Highlighting key information helps direct learner attention, thus targeting particular elements of the video for processing in the working memory.

Eliminate Extraneous Information. Use images to illustrate points, not as decoration. When selecting images for your slides, make sure that they complement your words rather than compete for the viewer's attention and use quality images with appropriate resolution and sizing. Similarly, avoid using music, complex backgrounds, or extra features that do not reinforce your main points nor contribute to the learning goal. Be sure to comply with copyright guidelines for images, music or any other material that is not your own.

Match Modalities. When possible, use both the audio/verbal channel and the visual/pictorial channel to convey new information, fitting the particular type of information to the most appropriate channel. For example, showing an animation or video of a process on screen while narrating it uses both channels to explain the process. Using both channels to convey information has been shown to increase students' retention and ability to transfer information and to increase student engagement with videos.

Edit your Video. Take advantage of a video editing software or the Office of Distributed Learning's editing services to put the final touches on your video. Be mindful during this process. If you spend time on the details, you will end up with a seamless, engaging video.

Be Aware of Shelf-Life. Maximize the shelf life of your presentation by avoiding mention of items that might not be current in future semesters. For example, if you want to be able to use this video lecture for a future semester, avoid speaking about dates or deadlines that fall in the current semester. Also, eliminate phrases like "last week's assignment" or "this week's football game." Be aware that website addresses may become out of date, so if you wish to refer to websites, include those links in an accompanying document.

Embed the Video. Embed the video in your course or provide the link in the Learning Management System rather than just sending the link to your students. Your students will appreciate that you made it easy for them to watch what you created.

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