10 Tips for Creating Effective Instructional Videos

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Instructor presence is an important component of effective online teaching, and video can help make it happen. Instructional videos have become increasingly easy to create and can turn a good online class into an engaging learning experience. Video humanizes the online experience by letting students know their instructor as a real person, not an abstraction. Good quality webcams are available for less than $100, and there are numerous free and easy-to-use resources for creating and publishing video content so it can be streamed back into our courses.

Staring into a webcam and pressing the record button can be intimidating for some of us–after all, we're teachers, not TV personalities–but it's actually easier than you might think. Here are 10 tips that will soon have you broadcasting like a pro.

1. **Forget the headset.** If your computer doesn't have a built-in camera and microphone, buy a webcam that does both. Webcam sound quality is almost as good as a headset's, and it lets you be "you" without the Mickey Mouse ears.

2. **Keep it short.** Students have been raised on YouTube. Try to keep your videos brief. Few students will sit through videos where the instructor drones on and on. If you have a lot to say (and sometimes we do!), chunk up the message. Make a video mini-series with 5-10 minute chapters.

3. **Prepare well and then wing it.** Some people like to start out with a script, but this can feel artificial. Sometimes a brief outline taped next to your webcam is all you need to stay on track without sounding like you're reading from your notes. However, if the video is only five minutes or so, you might just re-record until you get it right— not necessarily "perfect."

4. **Position the camera above your eyes, so you look slightly up at it.** Avoid looking down at the camera. Your audience does not want to look up your nose. If you're using a laptop, put a stack of books under it so you raise the camera. Position your head to appear at the top third of the screen so the recording includes your face and most of your torso.

5. **Location, location, location.** Your work or home office are usually safe choices as a background for the recording. Outdoors can be a nice change. Try putting your back to a neutral wall with the light source in front. Avoid sitting in front of a window, as the glare will make you appear as if you're in a witness protection program. And this should be obvious but it needs to be said: don't record with your bed, pajamas, laundry, or bathroom in the background.

6. **Move it out.** Don't always shoot your videos from the same spot. Your audience will tire of seeing the same background. Start with your office, but also consider a quiet place on the campus quad or maybe your kitchen or backyard. Keep the backgrounds neutral but varied. Your audience will appreciate it.

7. **Look right at the camera lens.** Looking anywhere else looks weird. Your audience will think you have an avoidance problem.

8. **Cover your screen.** Once you get everything ready, consider taping a piece of paper over your computer screen so you're not distracted by seeing yourself while you record. Remember, you do not need to be perfect! Try not to be overly critical of yourself.

9. **Say "cheese."** Smiling helps everything. Whether you're recording a webcast of your face or just your voice, smiling makes you look and sound better.

10. **Avoid over doing it.** The wacky music, goofy fade-ins, and spinning transitions that come with some video editing software can make home-videos look corny. Leave most of those tools for the professionals (who don't really use them either).

Bonus tip:

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