

MAKING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS

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RECORDING VIDEO AND SCREEN CAPTURE CLIPS

Let's start with a truth. For most of us, the thought of having our face and voice recorded is scary. It's not "natural" for many of us. But evidence shows that having a "presence" in your online class can make a huge difference to students.

They'd much rather see your "bad" video than no video at all.

On the pages that follow I have some tips that can help you get better quality video, and look and sound your best. So whether you're making a trailer to get more students enrolled in your course, or explaining big-pictures ideas that just seem to not get read by students, video can help.

For this course we're going to stick with recording video from a webcam. It is a lot easier (i.e., less to think about) than using a handheld video camera, but many of these same techniques will be useful for either a webcam or a hand held video camera.

You get to be the director- and the actor - and the script writer - and the subject-matter expert - and the camera operator. Yikes! Using the webcam for recording right into YouTube simplifies the process.

RECORDING SETUP (ENVIRONMENTAL)

THE SCENE

Your office, or whatever space you're recording, sets the tone of your movie. Some things you might think about before you start recording:

- Choose a quiet location, ideally with a rug on the floor.
- Choose a room that has no exterior windows so the lighting will remain the same regardless of the weather.
- If the room has windows, make sure you have some way to control the light, covering them if needed.
- Cover large reverberant surfaces (like floors or in some cases maybe even your desk!) with a towel, or even papers.
- Unplug any unnecessary electrical appliances (they can cause hum).
- Turn off the phone ringer.
- Turn off your cell phone.

- Close doors and windows; put up a "Recording in Progress" sign to eliminate knocks from would-be visitors.
- Be aware of background noise, such as fans. Stay away.
- Remove anything that ticks, buzzes, bangs, rattles, squeaks, hisses, or otherwise makes itself heard.
- Be aware of your background; keep one corner of your office free of clutter so you can quickly record without needing a major office cleaning!

WARDROBE

When you walk into the classroom, you are probably not thinking too much about what you're wearing. But when you're thinking about recording yourself, you'll want to consider your outfit.

What **not** to wear:

- Avoid extra shiny shirts that will catch the light weird, or noisy jewelry that will cause bad audio.
- Avoid hats, unless necessary for some specific reason (they cast shadows).
- Avoid fabrics with tight patterns, like checks, pinstripes, herring bone and hounds tooth (they can create a weird effect called a moire' pattern that you've probably seen on TV).
- Avoid shirts that display brand names or commercial logos (college logos are fine!).
- Avoid bright white or extremely dark colors.

Consider your background as you choose your shirt. If you're consistently recording against the white wall in your office, avoid white shirts. If you've got a huge green plant behind you, re-think that green patterned shirt choice. The idea is to have good contrast between you and what's behind you.

Here's a tip: I knew a faculty member who recorded a lot of videos in a long, full-day session. He'd take several different shirts with him and change them between videos. He'd record weeks 2, 5, 8 wearing his orange shirt, then change to his green shirt and record weeks 1, 7, 10. That way his students wouldn't always see him wearing just one shirt throughout the semester. So even though he recorded them all on the same day, no one would know!

LIGHTING CONSIDERATION

There's almost no such thing as too much light when it comes to shooting video. But it has to be coming from the "right" place, otherwise you'll be a silhouette in your own movie.

Some simple tips:

1. Don't have bright light behind you. If there's a window with light shining through it behind you, change the angle your shooting at or close the blinds/shade/curtain on the window.
2. Having light that brightens up your face is a good thing, so if you have a light on your desk, turn it on!

Tip: If you wear glasses, light bounces right off your glasses and typically all the camera sees is glare from the light source, rather than your eyes. You can try to avoid this by changing the angle between you and the light source (either move yourself, or move the light, or both). For the future, the extra \$20 you spend on your next pair of glasses with the "anti-glare" coating on the lenses will be worth every penny.

RECORDING YOURSELF USING YOUR WEBCAM

The easiest way to record yourself is to use a Web camera. These are built-in to all Macs and are available as options to Windows computers. Most laptops (Mac or Windows) have built-in cameras.

Ideally, your nose and the webcam should align. Remember, there are two ways to make this happen: Adjust the height of your chair, or raise or lower the height of the camera/laptop.



Camera is too
low
(looking up)



Raise
laptop
(good)

OR

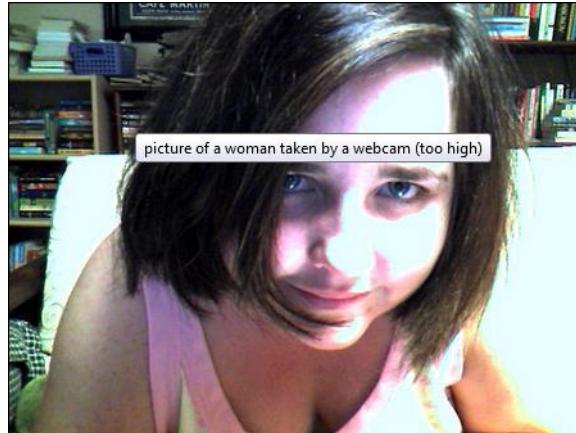


Camera is too
low
(looking up)



Lower chair
height
(good)

Be sure to adjust the angle of the camera so it's not too high (looking down on you - shown below). This is a very common mistake when using webcams. And the harsh lighting coming from one side doesn't produce very flattering results.



Creative Commons photo by Whitney Gallien-Hedges

With the webcam too low (looking up on you - shown below) you don't get the most flattering shot. Notice also that this webcam produces a pretty grainy shot because the lighting isn't great.



Creative Commons photo by Michael Whitt

This picture on the next page is from a webcam, and the angle is about right (she's at about the same height as the camera), but too often people are looking at the computer screen and not the camera! Try not to watch the image on the screen so much. This way you're talking to your audience, not your computer. To help you look up at the camera, you can tape a picture just above the camera to pretend you're talking to that person!



Creative Commons photo by Lynn Forthewin

The lighting in this shot above is quite nice. But with her hand at her face, she just doesn't look confident. Be aware of what your body language is communicating.

EXTERNAL WEBCAMS

There are only so many different arrangements you can do if your webcam is attached to your laptop. With an external webcam, you'll find that you have lots of flexibility with where you place the camera. Whether you choose to keep it at the top of your screen or find some other creative way to situate it, you might enjoy having the added options.