

A Production Process for Library Help Videos

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When it comes to the editorial process, video content does not differ fundamentally from other published content. Videos must be vetted and edited with a scrupulous eye to ensure quality of construction and validity of content. The University of Houston Libraries govern their video program using a procedure designed to track videos through development, production, and distribution. This rigorous editorial process frees librarians from agonizing over logistics and technical issues so they can spend the bulk of their efforts on content development.



In 2010, the University of Houston Libraries posted their first video to YouTube. This first video, produced by the Marketing Committee, was an orientation video that gave an overview of the libraries' locations, collections,

and services. In three years, the libraries have posted approximately 90 videos, added over 100 subscribers, and received more than 40,000 views. In 2011, the Help Videos committee was created to oversee the migration of an older set of how-to videos into YouTube (e.g., How to use Interlibrary Loan, How to use Course Reserves) and to manage new video creation. Despite the committee's best efforts, videos often stalled in production or languished post-publication. It became clear that a standardized publication process was needed, so that the committee could maintain production consistency, delegate responsibilities, vet prospective videos, and ensure quality.

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Maintain Production Consistency

Because the libraries intended to create many videos over a period of time, it was necessary to establish a consistent viewing experience for patrons. For example, each video now uses the same basic color scheme, and is branded with the libraries' wordmark.

Production consistency is not limited to the video itself; consistency is also of vital importance in the hosting environment. For instance, all UH Libraries' videos are posted to our YouTube channel, tagged with a common set of metadata, and are Creative Commons licensed.

One of the hidden benefits of production consistency is that it eliminates the need to start from scratch with every new video. For example, the libraries produce approximately 20 videos every year for the university's reading series, Poetry & Prose. In 2011, a reusable color scheme, standard font, and branding was formulated for Poetry & Prose videos. This saves hours of editorial work, as editors can simply copy and paste the template and drop in the new footage.

The last, and perhaps most important element of production consistency, is that each video should be designed around a clearly defined outcome. Many of the videos that stalled in production did so because they either had no stated outcome or because they tried to accomplish too many outcomes in a two-minute time frame. Consistent outcomes have the potential to be multi-purpose, or to fuel learning across multiple videos. In this way, librarians are not limited to teaching one concept or procedure per video, but can layer learning through a series of videos. The Libraries' "Developing Keywords" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ui-iFnS-9hs>) and "Search Using Keywords" (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tUqc4gnxc8>) videos illustrate this principle.

Delegate Responsibilities

The video publishing process typically involves several librarians or staff members. This created two specific problems at UH: the same people made all the videos, and it was difficult to train or involve additional collaborators. Our solution was to create three primary production roles—producer, director, and editor. The producer is the individual (or individuals) who proposes the video and writes its initial script. The producer may or may not be a committee member. Directors and editors are always members of the committee, because their responsibilities require a specialized skill set and/or depth of experience. The director is responsible for keeping the production moving forward or on schedule, and the editor puts the video together.

This system meant that producers focus on crafting effective outcomes and content, while the committee concentrates on providing expert advice and technical support. The committee shoulders the responsibility for developing the necessary hardware and software skills instead of trying to train every librarian who proposed a new video. Most of all, it meant that each participant had a clear understanding of their responsibilities and expected investment in any video project.

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Vet Prospective Videos

While video is an excellent communication medium, it is not the appropriate tool for every situation. The hours required to produce a quality video are significant, and that time should not be wasted producing videos that no one will watch or that are ineffective. Therefore, it is necessary to vet video ideas before dedicating staff time and resources to the production process.

Sometimes, the best way to vet a video is through “self-weeding.” At Houston, several librarians experienced this after failing to produce videos introducing our discovery platform. A brief reflection on our attempts revealed that we could not establish a clear outcome, target audience, or promotion platform for the proposed videos. Also, it was difficult to conceive of a video that provided meaningful coverage of any of the platform’s features within our target length of one to two minutes. Instead, we produced a short series of videos that modeled the use of specific features (e.g., RSS feeds and citation tools; <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLbiKDGQR5r5RZVv1atijlQJUucBreMN5>). However, there have also been times when a video concept never fully materialized, and the committee has discarded it.

Now producers must complete several requirements in a checklist (Appendix 1) in order to ensure that vetting occurs before video production begins. The checklist requires producers to complete essential steps, such as writing a script or stating a learning objective, before the video reaches later—and more time-intensive—stages of production. If a producer struggles to complete parts of the checklist (e.g., unable to secure visuals that effectively illustrate the script), then video production ceases via self-weeding. Producers receive support for problem-solving from members of the committee or other experts for relevant portions (e.g., the Libraries' Instruction Team for developing learning outcomes). Despite best intentions or conscientious effort, some videos will never make it past the drawing board. Vetting is a vital part of the publishing process, and while it can foster disappointment, it can also end cycles of failure or halt an unsupportable project before it starts.

Ensure Quality

Many YouTube videos are simply unwatchable because of their sound and/or video quality. In consultation with a member of the School of Communications faculty, the University of Houston Libraries invested in some basic, affordable equipment that would mean that our videos would be both seen and heard, including a HD video camera with audio inputs, two microphones, and the creation of a green screen room. In addition to this equipment, the libraries' Learning Commons is home to a recording studio that can be used to create crisp, professional spoken audio tracks. Many universities have such a space available for campus media production, even if it is not located in the library proper. In the end, the greatest content in the world can be ruined by a cheap microphone or a grainy image. A standardized production process is an excellent opportunity to establish uniform benchmarks of product quality.

The production process has standardized the basic task flow for video creation, which has allowed committee members and producers to focus on content creation and placement. The committee is using assessment data to adjust the publication process as needed. The committee's Video Assessment Plan outlines four criteria for the assessment of video efficacy:

1. Find: Users should easily be able to locate videos, especially at point-of-need.
2. Watch: Users should stay engaged throughout the video.
3. Learn: Users should learn a process, concept, or about using products or services at their disposal.
4. Promote: Library staff will use videos in their instruction and reference work, both in person and online.

Currently, the group is working to shorten all video introductions to less than three seconds based on data mined from YouTube analytics. This change responds to evaluation of the second criteria, Watch, as it should decrease the initial fall-off in viewership many of our videos experience in the first seven to ten seconds.

The UH Libraries also continues to develop its production process through meeting with producers to solicit feedback concerning their experiences with both creating and utilizing videos. Our last feedback session affirmed that producers find the process useful overall. However, they made several suggestions for improvement. Several librarians asked for a set of best practices to assist in the early stages of video development. One librarian commented that, “It would be nice to know from the onset that videos are most useful if they don’t exceed this amount of time, and they meet these goals.”

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In addition to supporting producers’ needs, the committee’s role as the in-house experts is important to the process. One librarian stated that, “We went into our videos clearly wanting something very short and concise and I don’t think that is what everyone goes into the video with. So if you have someone whose role is to proofread and cut down, I think that it is helpful.”

No editorial process is self-contained; instead, it is built on levels of expertise that work together to produce the best possible publication. The University of Houston Libraries’ video production process has simplified the creation of effective help videos through the implementation of basic editorial principles and practices. The process will continue to evolve as the committee solicits feedback and evaluates assessment data.

Appendix A

Video Production Checklist

Name of Video:			
Producer:			
Director:			
Editor:			
Learning Objective(s):			
	PRODUCER	DIRECTOR	EDITOR
PRE-PRODUCTION	Create a file repository in the 'O drive		
	Write script		
	Create storyboard		
	Collect all graphics and still images needed for the video		
PRODUCTION	Create live video	Film all live video	Create screen captures
	Create voice over	Assist with voice recording	
POST-PRODUCTION	Proof the video		
	Request any changes		
PUBLISHING	Tag video	Save & share embedd code	Upload video to YouTube
	Describe video	Create captions	Obtain Creative Commons license
	Assign video to playlist		
			Add video to requested playlists