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Show me a video

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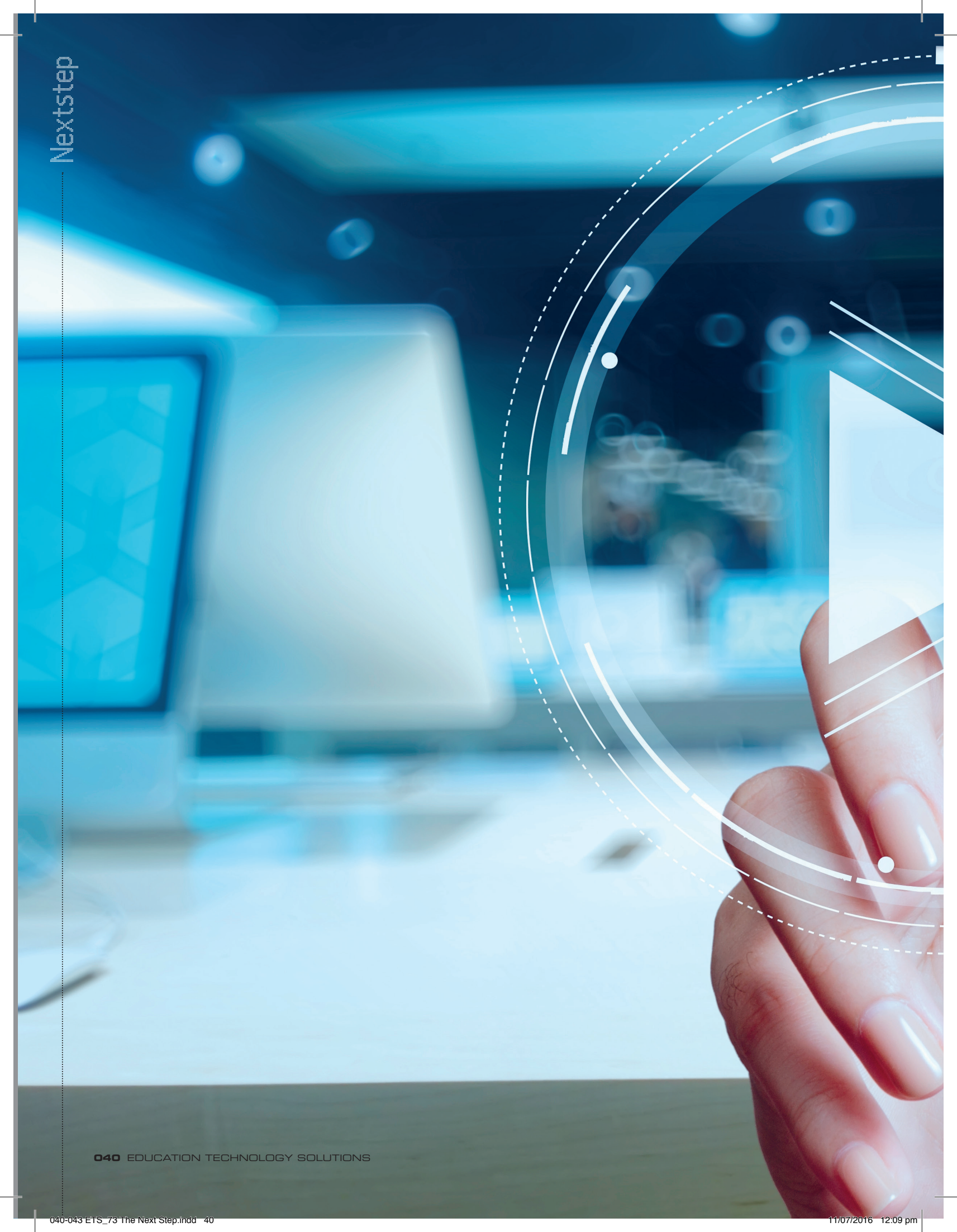*Bond University*, rorr@bond.edu.au

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Show Me A Video

| By Robin Orr and Shelley Kinash |

I remember my first video lecture clearly. The teacher came into the classroom to present a session on nutrition. The video was of another teacher standing in front of a whiteboard presenting a session with the occasional student head bobbing around at the bottom of the screen. With the technological advances pouring into the educational environment, my first thought was, 'how was this any different from a typical lecture?'. With cascading technological advancements and the availability of multimedia in classrooms, there are now plenty of opportunities to optimise learning through multimedia and, as such, video education sessions should be more than just a recorded video of a standard classroom lecture.

The Basics

If a video is being prepared as a teaching resource then (just like for any other lesson), dedicated planning (specifically for a video educational lesson) needs to take place. A key initial step is to consider what the video is to be used for. Is the video a revision of a presented session? Is it intended to enrich a given session? Is it for students to watch at home or in class? Is it a dedicated stand-alone resource? Each of these considerations comes with its own challenges and requirements. If the video is for revision, the production could be relatively short, focusing on key points as opposed to a video recording of the same session students have already attended. Whereas if the video is a stand-alone presentation, the topic may need to be covered in more depth, with opportunities taken to enrich the environment through actively increasing student engagement.

When it comes to the practicalities of the session to be filmed, there are likewise multiple considerations; from what to wear (horizontal stripped clothing being notorious for creating flickering distraction) to location. The use of location can be a valuable tool if applied properly. For example, filming a video on a local beach with the sun and surf in the background may provide a fantastic backdrop for a resource on ocean ecosystems. However, people walking across the beach, surfers on the waves and the white noise of the beach waves and seagulls may become a distraction. As such, locations should be considered in regard to potential distractions (such as people walking along a footpath) which may be avoided by taking the time to consider optimal camera angle. Even within a classroom there are considerations and the room may need to be reconfigured for optimal quality. For example, another electronic screen in the background may add a constant flicker and need to be moved or switched off. If using a whiteboard, some marker colours would be difficult to see and the whiteboard itself may reflect the overhead lighting and create a light halo.

Apart from the practicalities of the session, there are some media-specific considerations to take note of; perhaps the most important of which is file size. Larger files are slower to download and may take up too much space on the user's system. As such, if the session is intended to be one of notable duration, longer than 15–20 minutes for example, consider splitting the session into small chunks. This would allow the student to download (or buffer) and watch one video while another is downloading. In the classroom, this break can be used to re-engage with the students. Students could be given the opportunity to ask questions on what they have seen so far, rather than waiting for a protracted period where the context of the question is forgotten. Another consideration when preparing the video file is the type of file to be created. There are a variety

of file types available and they all have their own benefits and detractors. However, failing to have a dedicated IT department to consult, use files that are well recognised and generally do not require additional codecs or software to run (for example avi, flv, wmv and mp4).

In essence, take time to plan for the session (as a video session), and ensure aspects like the reason for the video, the practicalities of the session and the length of the sessions and potential file sizes and types are considered.

Engaging the Student

With adequate preparation and consideration of the basics, the educator can move on to the fun part – engaging students. With creative thinking, there are multiple strategies that can be used to engage the student, from 'pause for thought' and 'knowledge checks' to quick quizzes and 'choose your own adventure' ideas.

Self-reflection is an important piece of the educational puzzle; the magical 'what is in it for me?' On this basis, video presentations can be designed to purposefully direct self-reflection moments. After a point is made (for example, *scents can be used as a form of communication*) an icon of a question mark can appear with a 60-second countdown timer. The student is then asked to 'pause for thought' and reflect on what a given statement, question or fact would mean in a given context. *What scent would you use to describe the colour blue to someone who had been blind from birth?*

Knowledge checks are micro-revision points along the video presentation that can be used to check that the student is still engaged and has been paying attention. Before progressing beyond a given topic, students could be asked to answer a progressive series of questions that confirm their knowledge so far and then lead into the next topic. For example, following a discussion on the muscles of the thigh, tables, pictures and text could be provided asking the student what muscles are displayed or are missing from a list. A following question could then focus on movements the student thinks these muscles may perform in a given sport, thus leading into the next topic being *What movements do these muscles perform?* One potential benefit from this approach would be to provide figurative 'sandwiches' whereby students are asked a question (or series of questions) to assess their initial knowledge on a topic, then watch the video presentation before answering the same questions. The student can then be guided into comparing pre- and post-video question answers to discover what they learnt from the session. Of course, the knowledge checks could also be quicker and simpler – following the above muscles of the thigh topic, the teacher would quickly confirm knowledge by asking, "What muscle was this again?" when showing a picture of a footballer kicking a ball before using that same picture to discuss the muscles in action.

Of course, engaging the students' creativity will be the key and teachers should try and capture the interests

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that would be most applicable to their audiences. Considering this, there are a multitude of ideas available, such as quick quizzes done in the form of a game show or 'choose your own adventure' where students can choose the means in which they wish to explore a subtopic – *How would you like to explore gravity, as a spaceship, a dinosaur or a dancer?*

Pitfalls to Teaching via Video

Before rushing ahead with exuberance to create a series of video sessions, potential pitfalls should be discussed. One notable pitfall is the loss of direct student contact and therefore engaging with the student can become a greater challenge. Some educators have experienced decreased student attendance when content videos are provided, thus reducing student–educator interaction and engagement. While there is always the capability to have funny embedded videos, snappy quips and amazingly detailed photographs, another key consideration is how to engage the student in the learning process when watching a video. Teachers cannot see or hear key cues that they are attuned to during face-to-face teaching sessions, like a puzzled look or student falling asleep. There are also other potential losses to video sessions, whether they are to a group or for the individual to watch at home. The separation from the teacher and student/s provides a barrier to questions

and, more importantly, informal learning. Consider a live student asking a question. Other students hear that same question, see a potential different view of the information, consolidate their own knowledge when hearing the teacher answer or gain new knowledge when the approach or answer was not one previously considered.

Another potential trap is to use video sessions to provide more work, with the video becoming a backup if the student does not understand the session or, if the video is to be watched in the student's own time, it is not considered as part of the daily curriculum work load. As such, care should be taken to consider the video, whether provided during program time or personal time, as part of the entire educational package for a given topic.

Some Production Tips

When creating the video:
• Where possible, use video production software (like Camtasia) as this will allow for the ability to edit but, more importantly, enhance (a well-timed arrow highlighting a key point in a photo, for example) the presentation.
• Check your background to see what is behind you (or may move behind you) when filming.
• Check props to see if they are clearly visible (and readable if required) on a typical computer or laptop screen. Remember some multimedia screens are not very large.

When using a PowerPoint:
• It is preferable to record the PowerPoint presentation separately (using production software) rather than have it in the background. This will reduce background flicker but, more importantly, allow for a clearer image of the presentation.
• Text (and text in tables) needs to be large and clear sans serif fonts (for example, Tahoma, Arial).
• Avoid overloading a slide with too much information and design to supplement (rather than replace) what is being heard. Avoid reading the PowerPoint presentation line for line.
• Use the PowerPoint as a tool, but not the only tool to enhance the presentation, and avoid the dreaded 'death by PowerPoint'.

Conclusion

With these potential pitfalls acknowledged, video sessions can and should be carefully prepared to minimise any educational opportunities lost through this medium whilst seizing the exciting and engaging opportunities that can be gained. When prepared with care, video presentations can be so much more than just another session and, if they are to form part of a teaching repertoire, they should be. ⊕

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