

## VIDEO CLIPS/VODCASTS

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### Background and context

This paper is aimed at showing how video clips can help your communication with students. But first I will set out what I mean by video clips in this context and then by qualifying the conditions in which they can be used to best effect. I will end by giving some examples to illustrate how I used videos for the benefit of the students and made life a little easier for myself along the way.

### What do I mean?

One thing most lecturers report is that communicating important information to students outside the lecture hall is difficult. Students are reluctant to check their Aston email accounts very often since most of the traffic is 'boring'. There are various methods that we might use to get round this blockage – announcements in class, email, text, Blackboard™ announcements – but somehow the important messages are still difficult to get through. Having tried all the means I could think of, I experimented with simply recording a video clip of me making the announcement and then uploading it to Blackboard™. The upshot is that this is popular with students and has been mentioned specifically in their feedback. Sadly, I cannot report exact statistics on usage since it appears that this facility in Blackboard™ is not available at present. I have, however, noticed a distinct decline in the number of emails asking basic questions which indicates strongly to me that they have been effective.

### When can they be used?

The main condition is that you need to be using Blackboard™ as the primary communication means with students on a particular module. From my personal perspective, this tends to mean large groups and is more likely to be undergraduate rather than postgraduate - the latter of course usually being in smaller groups and perhaps not needing so much handholding. In my undergraduate group, I set out my 'contract' with the students at the start of the module and part of this 'contract' is that the primary source for answers to questions is the discussion board. I make guarantees in return that all threads will be checked every day (weekends included) so students quickly realise that the fastest way to get a response is via the discussion board rather than email. This seems to have a spin-off effect of getting the students acclimatised to finding things out for themselves. The pull to Blackboard™ is reinforced by providing a vast array of support material on Blackboard™ so students also find that they don't need to ask so many questions. For example, I upload documents with advice on study skills, links to websites, book reviews, video clips not used in the lectures and details of resources on campus. Apart from the educational benefit, there is a pragmatic benefit to the lecturer as there are far fewer emails to answer.

### What sort of clips worked?

The main usage I found was in terms of how the module operated – what the coursework was, when it needed to be handed in and so forth. I also used video clips to cover frequently asked questions about essay writing techniques or, perhaps, a particular point made in the lecture had been misunderstood and needed to be made again in a different more detailed way. By way of illustration, I have uploaded one such video clip to YouTube which you can find at <http://youtu.be/H8MVYIt9C08> or search on YouTube for "essay writing tissie" and you should get there.

## How do I know it worked?

My key success criterion was a reduction in questions by email – especially many similar questions. Another success has been the reduction in plagiarism cases from a peak of about 20 (out of 1000) to about 3. Admittedly, this is not an infallible measure but it is one indication that students now understand more about how to write essays correctly.

## What I found did not work (although it might in other circumstances!)

The predecessor to the use of video clips was a series of audio clips. These included short lecture summaries as well as material on essay writing and so forth. I had positive feedback about these but an analysis of access showed extremely limited usage (it seemed about 3 students were listening to them). This of course begs questions about the actual audience for the video clips and when this becomes possible, I will carry out that analysis. But the indirect evidence leads me to believe the video was far more popular.

In the past I have also run a Facebook group based solely on the lectures which aimed at generating discussions in a less formal setting than Blackboard™. My reasoning was that one has to make a definite decision to log in to Blackboard™ whereas the students can, of course, access Facebook more readily. Surprisingly, this initiative had almost no take-up which I suspect is due to the students thinking of Facebook as their private social space and not for university work. Oddly, many students are keen to be my Facebook “Friends” but apparently don’t want to use the medium for their learning.

I also conducted an experiment using “opt in” text messaging. This was useful in a smaller group to prompt the group to do the reading before lectures. But other techniques – in particular making a point of discussing the week’s reading at the start of every lecture – seemed to have more success.

A further possible development was a dedicated lecture Twitter feed but I carried out some research into the usage of Twitter amongst students, and it was almost non-existent at about 5%. Things move so fast in social media that it is possible that this figure (from a survey three years ago) has changed. I suspect, however, to date, very few students have signed up to follow my general Twitter feed which I have promoted in the lectures on Blackboard™. My sense is that the social media of choice remains Facebook with almost total usage amongst first years (well over 90% usage). Recent experience with second years applying for placements indicates very light use of LinkedIn at least before the final year, so the most effective method of electronic communication with your students remains Blackboard™.

## Some feedback

Students reported that they liked the informal approach of the clips. I did no editing – if I made a complete mess I would re-record them but almost all were done in one take. This means there are imperfections and I made no real attempt at high production values – I recorded using the built in camera on my desktop or laptop. They also reported that they liked that I recorded them from different places (sometimes from a hotel room, sometimes my office, sometimes from my “garden office” – i.e. shed). In fact, I recorded them wherever I happened to be. This had a side benefit of showing students that we academics do lots of things besides lecturing which several students reported was interesting and not something they had previously thought about.

## Finally

This brief paper was written with the aim of sharing one personal perspective on the use of short video clips to communicate with students. It is by definition subjective and colleagues may well have had different experiences. If so, I would really like to hear what other people’s view is. Please do contact me either on [p.a.tissington@aston.ac.uk](mailto:p.a.tissington@aston.ac.uk) or via LinkedIn (it seems there is only one Patrick Tissington listed) or on Twitter (@tissington).

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Example used with Undergraduate students on BH1107: Introduction to Organisational Behaviour