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# No audition required! Using video tutorials in the 24x7 age



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Are video tutorials the future of information literacy delivery? Certainly they offer the inexpensive flexibility the burgeoning 24x7 university culture demands, particularly with the relentless advance of distance learning courses and associative off-campus support. Indeed, taking teaching outside of the classroom suits the increasingly important medium of web-based delivery. In addition to offering an 'out of hours' service, video tutorials can supplement multiple inductions where staff constraints across subject areas prevent staff members from physically attending every session.

Consequently at the University of Lincoln the library piloted a free trial from the screencasting software Jing (<http://www.jingproject.com>), enabling us to record information tutorials onscreen and to narrate navigational instructions. Alternatives to Jing include the editable Camtasia ([www.techsmith.com/camtasia.asp](http://www.techsmith.com/camtasia.asp)) and the free web-based ScreenToaster ([www.screentoaster.com](http://www.screentoaster.com)), which doesn't require installation. If you're interested in editing it's also worth investigating the free audio-editing software Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net/>).

Deciding Jing was user-friendly, we purchased several user licences (costing around £10 per PC). After several technical glitches had been overcome, the software was installed on PCs, with users set up with a unique username and a password, allowing us to create folders, share recordings and store them on a central hosting account, with extra bandwidth because generating hits requires more memory. Jing allowed us to record either at our desks with a set of headphones and a microphone or in a quiet room without distract-

tions (the favoured option). Colleagues initially favoured Jing demos to problem-solve phone-call enquiries, for instance finding journal articles or depositing an article into the institutional repository, simply by recording a concise two-minute clip (via a URL) and e-mailing it to the enquirer. The finished product is an Mp4 file or URL available to share on YouTube, blogs, websites, virtual learning environments and intranet sites, or even on Twitter. Screencasting is assuredly more sophisticated than simply reproducing an e-mail composed numerous times before, and is succinct enough to convey the message. As our confidence grew we found it useful to upload links on the university's intranet, explaining how to use individual databases or the inter-library loan system. As it is so easy to record a demo it was unnecessary to edit (this function is more expensive), so we discarded unwanted recordings and produced others, making us feel more comfortable about the recording process. We are currently developing a set of video tutorials that deal with frequently asked questions.

Many of us were apprehensive about recording our voices for broadcast, but slowing our voices down, using fewer words, pacing ourselves and adjusting the microphone volume to suit our level worked well. Producing video tutorials generated some discussion insisting upon an apposite 'radio voice' but we concluded that acting naturally would remove several alienating barriers. As someone possessing a strong accent, I naturally believe that regional accents are a positive affirmation of character! In most cases, it usually took a few recording attempts for colleagues to be wholly satisfied with the finished product, but Schnall, Jankowski and St. Anna advise you to 'strive for "good enough", not for perfection', as 'most likely the video will need to be rerecorded a month later to keep up with changing interfaces and content'.<sup>1</sup> Besides being personable and removing barriers, Leeder recognises that it's important to 'provide the most essential information as clearly and simply as possible', and recommends that 'if we provide too much information at once, we cause cognitive overload, at which point our students shut down, lose interest, or otherwise simply stop learning'.<sup>2</sup> A weakness of video tutorials is the need to constantly update the material as database interfaces change, for example.<sup>3</sup> Alternatively Reece recognises that because of the succinct nature of web-based tutorials the script minimises library jargon and avoids 'cognitive overload'.<sup>4</sup> Vander Meer has criticised early (albeit pioneering) web-based tutorials as being too lengthy, read from a preor-

dained script and making the common mistake of overloading the student with too much information – offering small components alleviates stress and confusion.<sup>5</sup> Further benefits of computer-assisted instruction require 'intensive resource commitment in its creation' but have the 'ability to reach more students with fewer instructors',<sup>6</sup> a flexible method of anytime, anywhere delivery that facilitates an out-of-hours service.

Reece argues that a single information literacy tutorial is inadequate to cater for today's student needs.<sup>7</sup> There's nothing to lose either, because Beile and Boote's research found that web tutorials were as effective as face-to-face instruction, with students preferring to use the medium for reference purposes.<sup>8</sup> Somoza-Fernandez and Abadal recognise that web-based tutorials are at an 'early stage of development' and have not reached the critical mature stage where high-quality information literacy tutorials combine training objectives, exercises and other teaching elements.<sup>9</sup> However, sometimes such pedagogical dogmatism misses the point of providing a responsive video tutorial service to 'develop elements that favour usability and accessibility'.<sup>10</sup> When producing a video tutorial, Leeder recommends that it is crucial to identify the audience, determine goal(s) and break down the task into basic elements.<sup>11</sup> She elaborates that it's helpful to announce the goals at the start and to reaffirm them at the end, measures that help ensure fulfilment of Mayer and Moreno's ambition of 'deep understanding of the material, which includes attending to important aspects of the presented material, mentally organizing it into a coherent cognitive structure, and integrating it with relevant existing knowledge'.<sup>12</sup>

Screencasting needn't be an overcomplicated task. The obvious danger is uploading a bewildering amount of clips when judicious selection is the best approach. It is not about becoming virtual librarians, disappearing into the web, but about catering for modern needs in a flexible environment where accessibility to resources is paramount in the changing culture of libraries. Video tutorials should be used as part of a wider portfolio of teaching methods, not as a disassociation from the classroom but extending resource awareness beyond the limitations of traditional classrooms and lecture theatres – broadening the scope of librarianship by democratising information in the digital age in the continuing shift from traditional pedagogy.

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- 7 Ibid. Reece argues that a single information literacy tutorial is inadequate to cater for today's student needs
- 8 Penny M. Beile and David N. Boote, 'Does the medium matter? A comparison of a web-based tutorial with face-to-face library instruction on education students' self-efficacy levels and learning outcomes', *Research strategies*, 20, 2005, pp57-68
- 9 Marta Somoza-Fernandez and Ernest Abadal, 'Analysis of web-based tutorials created by academic libraries', *The journal of academic librarianship*, 35 (2), 2009, p130
- 10 Ibid. However, sometimes such a pedagogical dogmatism misses the point of providing a responsive video tutorial service to 'develop elements that favour usability and accessibility'
- 11 'Learning to teach through video'
- 12 Quoted in Leeder, *ibid.*