OPEN Video Production Tips

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Preparation and Context

AUDIENCE

Our audience is very broad and diverse. Many have limited resources and/or formal teacher training. It’s important to keep these factors in mind when planning. Consider your attire and images that are shared. Be sure to consider the complexity of your vocabulary, provide examples, and illustrate concepts fully. Please also refer to the Department of State Materials and Content Best Practices document, which provides guidance on making content appropriate for a global audience.

BRANDING

Use provided OPEN templates whenever possible. When you are not using a template, make sure Department of State and OPEN Program logos are at the beginning or top of each video or document. Refer to the U.S. Department of State Marking and Branding Guidelines that flow down in your sub-award, and OPEN Program template guidelines for assistance with logo sizing and placement.

SCRIPT WRITING CONSIDERATIONS

Establish expertise: whenever a new subject / speaker / lecturer is presenting, include an introduction including their name, title, and relevant experience (1-2 lines).

Share the roadmap: presenting a short agenda at the beginning of the video will help participants anticipate and follow the main points of the video more easily. Include a few short lines about the main topics that will be covered in the video.

Word count: OPEN videos are limited to 5 minutes to ensure accessibility for low-bandwidth contexts. Considering an average speaking rate of 130 words per minute, scripts should be no longer than 700 words.

Best Practices for Slides and Screencast Videos

FORMAT AND STYLE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Create slides using the OPEN template provided by your Technical Officer.
- Slides with large, interesting photos, creative infographics, maps, minimal text, and a modern layout give your content a new and fresh look.
- Use a white background for your slides. Use the same font as is on the template provided throughout.
- Font should be a minimum of 24-point for main slide text.
- Images should be used throughout to support the content.
  - Images should be CC0 or CC BY licensed, Refer to the CC BY Guidelines and Manual on the OPEN website.
  - Follow CC BY guidelines throughout the creation of all videos.
- In videos and throughout your course, highlight resources from the American English website and/or English Teaching Forum as resources when possible.
- When screencasting, capture only the content that is relevant to the video. Hide menu bars and bookmarks, turn off notifications, etc.
Using the mouse as a pointer can be a visual distraction and difficult for viewers to follow. Instead, color, highlight, enlarge, or cut to a close-up to call attention to key points.

- Insert an instructor’s talking head with slides, as is more engaging than slides alone (Guo et al., 2014).
- Avoid lingering on a single slide longer than necessary. A single slide accompanied by 60 seconds of narration can create a high-context, cognitively demanding scenario and reduce engagement and comprehension.

**Best Practices for In-Person and Animated Videos**

**WORKING WITH EXPERTS AND/OR PROFESSIONAL SOFTWARE**

When creating any videos that do not contain slides or a screencast as the main visual, please consult and/or collaborate with video production experts whenever possible. For example, work with an expert who has the audio-video equipment necessary to create high-quality and professional-looking videos.

Check out this video created by George Mason University (GMU) as an example of the type of quality the OPEN Program looks for in regards to videos that feature instructors or course developers. Course developers at GMU worked with their university’s multimedia office.

You may also choose to create animated videos for your course, though live action videos, like the one above, are preferred. You may be able to budget for the use of online tools or software in your subaward. You may also investigate resources within your broader network at your institution or university. Keep in mind that animated elements must be able to be openly licensed. Check the terms of use of the tool of your choice before you start.

**BACKGROUND MUSIC**

When choosing to use background music, only use background music that is openly sourced and that creates an upbeat, engaging tone to punctuate specific scenes in the video. We recommend using music only at the beginning and end of the video to avoid distracting from the content. Take a look here to find options for creative-commons licensed music: Legal Music For Videos - Creative Commons.
Other tips

LIGHTING
If possible, turn on more lights or rotate yourself so the best lighting is hitting your face instead of the back, side, or top of your head. If it is bright outside, make sure that light is not coming from behind you (i.e. Close your blinds or reposition your camera so that light is not in your background but in front of you.).

POSITION AND POSTURE
Unless an “action shot” is necessary, film from the waist up. Those featured in the video may even choose to stand.

DELIVERY
Write your script to reflect how you would naturally speak. Prior to recording, rehearse delivering it in a way that sounds natural and authentic.

Many TESOL instructors have been taught to slow their speech in the classroom. However, with video format, learners are able to pause and replay or control the playback speed. Speaking at a natural pace, rather than slowing down affords the learner an authentic language sample (Hayati, 2010; Bacon, 1989; Derwin, 2001).

Drinking water or tea before shooting and in between takes can keep your lecture sounding crisp and lively.

AUDIO
If you are not working with a production office or professional, consider using ear buds and a microphone through your personal computer to record audio. This will prevent audio feedback during recording.

Whenever possible, use a microphone external from the camera to get the best possible sound quality.

BACKGROUND AESTHETICS
Where possible, seek out an aesthetically pleasing backdrop for the video. Simple things can make a background more appealing - a bookcase, artwork, posters, or items related to your career field. Remove clutter in the background. Feel free to use virtual backgrounds.

POSITION
Make note of the angle of your camera. If using a laptop, lower your chair or raise your laptop so that you’re looking at your audience instead of down to your audience.

When framing your shot, consider using the rule of thirds. If you place the subject in the upper, lower, left, or right third of the frame, it will be more pleasing to the eye than if centered in the frame (CSU 2020).

Consider how the image will look on a mobile phone. Roughly 50% of OPEN participants access all or part of the course on mobile devices. Mobile viewers should be able to see the whites of the subject’s eyes (Stockman 2011).

ASK OTHERS TO REVIEW
Before submitting your video to a Technical Officer, ask a colleague to review it, and revise it accordingly.