In the Classroom 78

Humanizing Your Online Courses With Video

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Stan Skrabut: Well, hello everyone. Thanks for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot to me. I know you can be doing other things. You're hanging out with me and I really do appreciate it. I've had a couple of people reach out and they want to know more about creating videos. I thought this was a great time to do it. We are in the midst of this COVID. We're deciding whether or not we're going back to the classroom or if we're going to stay in this remote learning.

One of the concerns of that is folks are talking. It's tough to humanize the course. It's tough to have that presence in there. I say poppycock. Video is a great way to humanize your online course. One of the things that I've seen as I've reviewed a lot of online courses is they're missing the human element. Video can certainly increase your instructor presence as related to the community of inquiry.

We've talked about the community of inquiry in different episodes of this podcast. When we're talking community of inquiry, we're talking about the social presence, the cognitive presence, and the instructor presence. Today, we're just going to focus on how you as the instructor can use videos that you create in your classroom because this is a way to increase that instructor presence as related to the community of inquiry.

Let's talk a little bit about why you would want to use video. Well, first of all, I can certainly cover more content using a video than I could just simply typing out words. I can type out a lot of words to talk about my content and stuff, but it just is not as engaging. What I discovered is the other day I gave a presentation online to faculty. It was 48 minutes. I basically captured the whole presentation while we were doing it and then I threw it up on to YouTube, but I went out and did some closed captioning.

In order to do that, I needed the transcript so I sent out for a transcript. That 48-minute video resulted in 11-page transcript. It would take me quite a long time to crank out 11 pages, but in 48 minutes, I can cover that topic. In some ways, it's more efficient that you can use a video to talk about specific topics and make them more engaging because you can introduce images, you can introduce other videos, some of that B-roll, and just simply make it more engaging. That's one of the reasons.

On the flip side, you can reuse content. Video is a great place to start that you can start out with a video, and as I mentioned, with a 48-minute video, I got 11 pages of transcript that I can then rapidly reshape into a blog post, into an informative textual piece that I want to share with students. I can break it up, build the slide presentation. I can do a lot of different things.

I can also strip the audio from the video and turn that into a podcast episode. Do a little editing to condense it so I can take a long video where there's some natural pauses. I'm showing things and just crunch it into a podcast episode. Lots of different ways that you can reuse it. You can slice and dice the content as you see fit simply by starting with a video.

Everybody has a smartphone. Greatest number of people that have smartphones has increasingly risen over the years. A smartphone is pretty much ubiquitous. That is one of those elements that has added equity in terms of education. When we talked about the digital divide before, we really focused on computers, but the smartphone has reduced that.

Video is one popular means that individuals consume information on their phone. It only makes sense that you go ahead and create videos that can be consumed by your students using that particular device. Also, videos are more engaging than if I was just to write a textual piece. Now, I'm not saying that having articles and book chapters and books and magazines are not important. They definitely should be part of the class, but there also should be a balance with other multimedia such as podcasts or audio files and video is certainly there. Videos are a great way of grabbing attention, great way for creating enthusiasm around a topic. If you can see that and really tap into the why of a topic, videos are great for doing that.

Let's talk a little bit about creating video. There are some fears about creating videos that I want to talk about. One is the amount of time that it takes to create a video. Videos can be tremendously time-intensive if you allow it to be that way. Our expectations of a video have been changed because of YouTube. Prior to YouTube, we really were looking for production quality videos. They had to meet a very high standard.

Well, YouTube has made it so we are tolerant of all kinds of things. We'll watch a shaky video of somebody recording a protest in the making. We'll watch that and be totally glued to it. Now, I'm not saying that's the kind of videos that you need to create. You certainly don't want to go out and create slop, but you don't also have to go for the highly-produced videos. You can be very authentic and you can create a video pretty quickly depending on what type of video you're going to create.

There is a huge spectrum that you can work in and you have to determine what the return on investment is going to be. In some cases, you want to make it a little more produced and polished. In other cases, you just want to be very authentic and just knock the video out. Therefore, we just have to get away from that idea of perfection because perfection will kill a lot of great products if we're trying to overproduce it. I'm just telling you, you don't need to be that perfect.

Even my podcast. I realized I could script everything out and really highly produce it, but that's not going to be valuable for me. I use this as a learning tool for myself and I'm taking you on a learning journey. Because of this podcast, I've gone out and explored topics that I probably just wouldn't explore in-depth as I am doing because I want to create a podcast episode. I'm doing it for my personal learning and I'm taking you on the ride with me. Naturally, I'm also using it as a teaching tool, but as you can

tell through the language that I use and how I use it, it's not scripted. I'll talk a little bit more about that as we go on.

Let's talk a little bit about the type of videos to create. You have all kinds of options. When you're creating a video, there's lots of elements that can be in place. Talking head. Now, your video can be solely a talking head, or it can have a picture-in-picture of a talking head, or you can remove the talking head entirely. That is an option.

You can screencast. You can basically show what's on your screen. You can have a slide presentation, you're narrating that slide presentation. That is certainly an element that you can have in there. You can do the Ken Burns Effect where you have an image come up on the screen and you can zoom in or zoom out or move that image around. You can include video. What's called B-roll. Have background video. If you're talking about protest, you can have video of a protest in the background.

You can also do annotations. You can have a whiteboard. Now, this whiteboard can be a physical whiteboard that's behind you and you're writing on it, or it can be a virtual whiteboard. The nice thing about video is you can combine these elements. You can have, as you're thinking about it, different sections where you're doing different things. This is all possible with video.

Now, these videos can be live videos, one take then you're done with the video, or it can be a video that is more produced where you are building upon elements and you have different segments. It's really up to you how you're doing it, what the purpose of the video is. Different ways that you can use video. Introduction videos. Introduction videos are a great place to start. Simply introduce yourself. You have an opportunity to share your personal and academic interest. Why are you teaching this course? Why are you in this discipline? Why are you an instructor? Lots of things that you can talk about.

After reviewing countless online courses, a lot of instructors, do not take advantage of this. You can make those introduction videos a little more exciting by including images. If you're talking about your cats and your dogs, you can show pictures of those. If you are fond of a specific country that you go to all the time, you can show pictures of that. You can have little video clips that you show different parts. It is a great way to become human in your online course, doing these types of things.

Another video that you should have in your course is a course orientation. With the course orientation, you could have a screencast. You can walk your students through your course highlighting different areas of focus. Wonderful way of pointing out the important things that you want students to focus on throughout your course. Another way to use video is provide feedback to students. This is a great tool that you can use. You can bring a document on the screen and you can walk through the document, highlighting the good points in areas where they can improve.

Sometimes just providing the written word can be a little cool and that may not be how you intended it, so with a video they get to see you. They get to see your

expressions and those non-verbal cues that lets them know if they're on track or not. Virtual field trips are another great way to use videos. Are you an art instructor? Why not conduct a virtual gallery walk? Do you teach history? Conduct a virtual tour of a battlefield or another historical site.

Do you teach Botany? Conduct a virtual plant walk. Teach Chemistry? You can introduce students to the chem lab and highlight safety concerns. Lots of different ways that you can do a virtual field trip. Another common way that you can use videos is to summarize a start-up module. You can use a video to talk about an upcoming module in areas that you want students to focus on. Or you can use a video to summarize what's just transpired. Naturally with videos, it's more engaging than if you just had throw out some texts and put it in the email. If you're doing labs regularly, you can use videos to show the students the processes that you want them to follow during the lab activity.

You can use the video as a supplement to the written instructions. You can highlight specific tricky points that trip up students. Clarifying pinch points is another great way to use videos. When you have a lot of students asking the same questions, that is an area that you need to clarify in your course. Videos can be used to clarify these areas with just-in-time learning. I use these types of videos all the time when I work with faculty. They'll ask the question and I will create a quick video to help them walk through a process or a concept. They really appreciate it when they get these emails with those videos. They're immediately able to get back to what they were doing, the important work they have.

I also do a lot of "how-to" videos. These are great ways of doing virtually anything. How many times do you go to YouTube to learn how to do something? I'm on YouTube all the time learning something new. Actually, I would be remised if I did not mention that you can use video to capture your lectures or presentations. This is an opportunity for you to talk about those different needs.

All right, let's talk about really quickly equipment needs that you would need to pull together in order to create videos to support your classroom. Depending on the video that you're creating, will dictate what equipment that you should have on hand. There're some really basic requirements that you would need such as, you need something to capture a video. Part of that has to capture the audio and lighting. Those are really the core elements. If you get those right, you're on track. You can create videos. One way for capturing videos is a webcam.

As a minimum, you should have a web-camera. Although, you could create a video with a camera, a regular camera that captures video or something like an iPad or smartphone. Those are other ways that you can capture video. Once again, it really depends on what you're trying to do. If you're trying to do a screencast, then probably you're going to need a computer to do the screencast and a webcam. Once again, it depends on the type of video that you're creating.

You may do it in segments, so you may use different cameras to capture different parts and then build the video on your computer. I would say a microphone of sorts is important. Now, the microphone can be part of your webcam and that's mostly

adequate for a lot of things I certainly do. If I'm outdoors, if I'm in an area that has environmental noise and has wind or crowds or vehicles going back by, then I recommend using a repel mic or another condenser mic that allows you to capture that audio correctly.

A viewer will forgive you for bad video but they will not tolerate bad audio. If your audio's horrible, they will stop listening to your or watching your video. They will just stop it. The audio is some ways more important than the video. Lighting. Natural light is your friend. This is the best light that you can use. I would encourage you to sit near a window or go outside when it's possible. If it's not possible, then you need some supplementary lighting. You can use normal lamps, right? They have certain colors to them. They may give you that yellow color to them, unless you use maybe LED lights that will give you that white light.

Shop lamps or photo-studio lamps. That's what I use. I have a photo-studio lamp in my office that I turn on, on occasion. I also have a set of windows that usually takes care of my lighting needs as much as possible. Another piece of equipment that you need is a computer. You would use a computer to process your videos and be able to upload those videos to YouTube. If you're going to do screen-casting, then probably the best thing to is use a video. If you have a need to do annotation, then I would recommend that you have either a physical whiteboard, so you can basically capture what you're writing on the whiteboard or a digital whiteboard.

What I found a great way of packaging these all together is I use an iPad and I connect to a Zoom session and I use the iPad, then I turn off the sound and all those things. I mute the microphones, so I'm not getting that bleed over. Then I use the annotation I can write on my iPad and I use that if I need to do any type of annotating. Then it works out tremendously well. I'm a fan of a second monitor. If I'm doing work, I like to have two monitors so I can have-- It just allows me to control the recording session a lot better when I have these two monitors going at the same time.

Lots of different software that you can use. I'm just going to tell you some of the software that I use that I'm a fan of. Camtasia, that is a tool that I use for more complex videos. If I have multiple parts or I need to clean up some things. If I'm basically piecing the videos together, then I use Camtasia in order to do that. Lately, I've been doing a lot of Zoom work. I record my Zoom session to my computer and as I mentioned, with Zoom if I wanted to do some annotations then I can have my iPad available. I can connect to a Zoom session with my iPad and be able to capture that.

If I have Google slide deck or a PowerPoint slide deck, I can use Zoom to capture that, works out tremendously well. Another tool that I use for quick capture is Screencast-O-Matic. It is a great tool for doing simple talking head videos or screencast. It's a one in done type thing and then I will upload that to YouTube. GoVideo is my go-to tool for creating short videos to explain something to individuals. That I will fire up GoVideo, it's a little extension on my Chrome toolbar and I will fire that up, capture my screen. Walk typically faculty through a process

and then I will send it off in an email. It's just slick. I just love GoVideo. I'm a huge fan.

There's another tool called Lumen5. Lumen5 and Adobe Spark. They're actually two different tools. Lumen5 and Adobe Spark are really powerful tools for creating short, impactful videos to grab attention. There you can drop a set of photos in and add some maybe music behind it and some little text snippets that are moving around on the screen. It just makes attractive videos, that you can highlight something. Not necessarily something that you would do talk overs but sometimes you have different videos for different purposes. I would definitely check those out.

Now, everything that I create, I share on YouTube, except maybe some of my go-to videos. Which I just send through email. YouTube I share all the videos that I really produce to YouTube because that's what they do. They stream video. It is something that everybody knows how to use. It's my tool of choice for sharing videos. Let's real quickly talk about some success strategies for creating a video.

First of all, stop worrying about how you look and sound. You need to focus on why you're creating the video. It's sole purpose is to help your students learn. Your students already know what you look like and what you sound like. That is natural to them. It's unnatural to you. You're not creating the video for you. You're creating the video for them. Your students want you to show up in their classes, so stop thinking about what you look and sound like. I hear it all the time. "I don't like what I look like on video," get over yourself just go create the video because it's not for you. It's for them. All right, sorry, quick rant.

Video is not for everything, you should have a balanced approach in your class, you should have those textual pieces, those articles, books that they need to read, the chapters they need to read but you also can have a video equivalent for those things. This is really in line for universal design for learning and the idea of providing choice. Really think about it, is video the appropriate tool to use to do what you're doing? Think about, is it the appropriate tool?

Now, if you've decided it is the appropriate tool and you're getting ready to put a video, I strongly recommend that you put together a plan, a storyboard, something that really walks and talks you through what you're going to do, what you're going to show them, what you're going to do, what you're going to say, and just plan it out segment by segment and this will help create a better video. With that, you have an option to create a script or an outline. There's times when scripts are appropriate, if you're using a highly produced video, then you would definitely use a script. If you're doing a more authentic video and you're trying to come off more natural, then I would go with the outline approach.

Scripts make creating a transcript or a closed caption extremely easy because it's already written. On the other hand, if you use an outline, you have to go through some hoops in order to get it a closed caption for your video. It's a give and take what the advantages are. When I create this podcast, I have an outline that I'm following. It keeps me on task. It's quasi script, there are some things that I read word for word, but there's other things where it prompts me and I start going on a roll

and I ad-lib a lot but it just keeps me making sure that I move through the content pretty steadily.

I think it's essential even for a video that you can have it clipped there next to your camera so you can make sure that you're on task as you're going through things. When you create a video, regularly change what's being shown in order to keep it interesting. If you see a talking head for 10 minutes, you're going to bore your viewers to death, right? If you are a talking head, you're going to bore them to death, you got to change it up.

Now, historically, even watching movies that they change what is being shown on the screen quite often, and the amount of time has changed over time. You are seeing something new, a new angle, a new representation, basically about every eight seconds. Now, I'm not saying that you need to change on that regular interval but when I build a slide deck, I'm changing my slides at least every 45 seconds to a new slide and I'm talking about that slide. It's a strategy that I picked up but I do not stay on the same slide for 10 minutes, don't do that. Keep it visually interesting by keep changing what you're doing and what you're talking about should be reflected on the screen.

In creating videos, I recommend a strategy called thin-slicing. Do not try to cover everything in one video. Instead, thin slice the video. This means you're going to focus on one small objective at a time, there's a lot of benefits to this. When I was at a 2014 Association for Talent Development Presentation, that's where I learned about thin-slicing. A guy named Steven Meyer from Rapid Learning Institute, he gave a presentation. He focused on the fact that most E-learning courses are too long. Folks who just will not sit for a 90, a 60, a 30-minute video presentation. They are not conducive also for just-in-time learning.

He talked about this idea of thin-slicing, making a video or instructional content small enough to address a single topic. The material should be bite-sized to facilitate just-in-time learning. If you look at LinkedIn learning or Khan Academy, those are thin-sliced videos, they're focusing on one topic. Now, LinkedIn learning may be focusing on an entire course but each video is a small segment of only a couple minutes. That's the idea of thin-slicing. Thin-slicing is intentionally incomplete. It focuses on a single concept. It's just like you do a Google search on a topic, it's one concept to change one behavior to achieve one outcome.

Some of the benefits of this is, it allows viewers to dive into the topic where they need to be. If you were to give a 30-minute video on a topic, but your students could only watch 10 minutes, then they have to go find their place but if you have a thin slice video that's only a couple minutes, they're going to walk through those different short videos and when they need to come back, they'll pick it up where they left off.

Thin-slicing a video is also a lot easier to create. It's very modular, you can use it plug and play in different courses, takes less time to create those different videos, you can experiment more and if something changes, it's a lot easier to go back and change it. You can also measure things; that you can see how often students are

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looking at your particular videos. You can use this for better assessments. What else?

When you create these videos, use appropriate titles. When you're uploading a video to YouTube, don't say that this is module five video, that's not a good title. Talk about using appropriate titles so you can use this in other places. In this case, this podcast is about humanizing your courses using videos. Now I can use that podcast episode in a lot of different places. Also, when creating a video stay as generic as possible. What I mean by this is, in my podcasts I'm like, "Hey, it's sunny here. We're in summer and we're doing those things." That's probably not appropriate for your video.

That if you're saying, "Hey, good morning, everybody," but they're checking out the video in the evening it throws them off, so probably not the best way to do that. When you're referencing a season, a time of day, a location, you're locking these videos down and you're reducing the evergreen capability of this video. The evergreen is being able to use a video over and over and over because you have not put it out of date because of location or those seasonal things that you've made it so it can be used anytime and anyplace.

This is really critical if you're rolling courses over. If you're rolling a course over and you reference certain individuals in your course or a specific day when something is going to launch, then you have to redo those videos when you have the next course because students will know it doesn't necessarily make your course look better. Also the same thing with web links. If you reference a web link, you better make sure it's available forever. If not, don't put them in the video, you can talk about in more generic terms, how to locate that specific link but don't talk about it at a specific URL.

I found this really important. I've been doing a lot of work and I have reference videos from Sunni and so now I've locked this down. I reference videos that Sunni has created but they have since changed the URLs and I've had to redo courses because the links are broken. Something to think about. Also, when you're creating your videos, control your background, know what's around you, take a moment to look at your background and make sure everything's going to be appropriate before you start capturing that video. If necessary stage your background, make it what you want it to look like.

With the camera, you certainly should be looking at the camera and the camera should be slightly above your eye level so you're actually looking up into the camera because you don't want somebody to be looking up your nose. You don't want the camera to be below you and taking that profile. Instead, you want to be looking up at the camera and smile both inside and outside because this really pulls up your enthusiasm, makes you more engaging as a speaker. This is appropriate even if it's a screencast and you are not visually on the screen, smile anyways inside and outside to show that that enthusiasm.

A part of this is also, be yourself. Once again, depending on the type of video that you have, you have some that are highly produced but in most cases, you want to come off more authentic so don't edit out the imperfection that if you realize that you

have some audible pausing like ums and different words, it will drive you nuts to try to edit all those out or have to redo the video over and over and over again to control for those things. Or when your cat walks across your keyboard when you are creating a video to talk to a student, those things make you human and that is how you talk already. Don't let it drive you crazy.

Now, naturally, if you are creating a more highly produced video, then certainly you're going to control more for that but not everything has to be high produce. When you create your final video and you're exporting it to a format, I recommend that you use an mp4 form file format. It is a universal video type that everybody should be able to get. We talked a lot of different things, why you want to go ahead and create these videos, the different types of videos that you can create, certainly not are all-inclusive. I shared a lot of show notes or a lot of resources in the show notes that you can go tap into, please go check those out. That will help you create better videos, but I encourage you to go do it.

I think go out and create that introduction for your course or the next time somebody is asking how to do something, go knock out a quick go-video and show them how to do it and you'll find out that pretty soon this is a great way of being more human in your class. Please go out and do that. Before I let you go, here's a quick plug for my book.