9.6 Screencasting for Educators: Possibilities

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Screencasting is the recording of material presented on your computer screen—plus your narration—and then sharing it with others. A screencast is essentially “show and tell.” To help you conceptualize screencasting, imagine that a student is in the room with you, and you are both looking at your computer screen. The student can see what you have displayed on your computer screen, and hear what you wish to share about it. In addition, you can use your mouse as a pointer on your screen to focus the student’s attention. The screencast that you create is essentially a video recording of what you presented on your computer screen plus your narration.

Screencasting is quick, effortless, and effective. With a screencasting application (e.g., Jing¹ or Screenr²) you can create, post, and share a screencast within minutes. Importantly, screencasting is a great way to increase your teaching options, enhance your online social presence, utilize a richer communication medium (both visual and auditory), and encourage new forms of student participation. Once posted, students can refer to your screencasts 24/7, as often as needed.

Students often share that while watching a screencast they feel as if they are actually “in the classroom with the instructor.” That is high praise indeed—indicating that screencasting is both a rich medium for instruction and that it conveys to the students the instructor’s presence. In some courses, students are asked to create their own screencasts—which can result in a wealth of instructional tutorials and presentations. Think about how you might use screencasting in your class.

Instructional Uses for Screencasting

A lecturette is a short presentation of 4 - 7 minutes. Typically a lecturette is focused on a single topic. To create a screencasting of your lecturette, first open the computer or web application that you wish to show your students. The application could be a slide show presentation, a drawing application (that you would treat as a whiteboard), an online resource (e.g., a website or online demonstration), or video that you wish to discuss (e.g., a YouTube³ video). If your lecturette is a slide show presentation, you’ll need to create the slide show ahead of time. Then you start the screencasting program, add your narration, use your pointer to focus attention, and interact with the applications (e.g., drawing, advancing to the next slide, starting an online demonstration, etc.).

Lecturette Possibilities:

- Slide presentation (e.g., MS PowerPoint, SlideShare⁴)
- White board (e.g., a Web 2.0 whiteboard, MS Paint)
- Video (e.g., as you record a YouTube video, discuss the action as it occurs)
- Electronic/Internet resource (e.g., Art Images, Websites, Demonstration Applet)

A tutorial teaches students a process, such as using an application, how to solve a problem (e.g., math), navigating a particular resource, etc. When covering a complex topic, consider breaking it down into several short, focused tutorials. Students can refer to the tutorials as needed, watching it as many times as needed, when they need it.
Tutorial Possibilities

- How to use an application (e.g., statistical package, drafting program, web 2.0 app, etc.)
- How to navigate the course online (CMS/LMS/Website)
- How to use a web resource (e.g., how to do a library search, use Google Docs, etc.)

Primarily because screencasting is quick and easy, it can be used to enhance “regular” online communication. Screencasting adds both a visual and auditory component, thereby greatly increasing the richness of the communication.

Discussing a document? Bring up the document, and then use your mouse arrow to focus attention while you provide your verbal feedback. Wish to use a whiteboard to walk a student through a process (e.g., solving a math problem)? Open a drawing program, then use your mouse (or drawing tablet) to draw on the “whiteboard” as you verbally describe the needed steps. Student having trouble navigating a site or using an application? Bring up the website or application, and while recording it with the screencast program, walk the student through navigating and using the site. Wish the student to “hear” the message (e.g., helpful with foreign languages, music, etc.)? Use screencasting primarily for recording the auditory component.

Personal Communication (e.g., Responding to a Student Question) Possibilities:

- Create a personalized lecturette to answer a question
- Discuss an image or document
- Open a drawing program and use it as a whiteboard
- Walk a student through using an application (e.g., drafting software)
- Describe relevant material (e.g., website, student work, electronic resource)
- When the emphasis is on “hearing” the communication (e.g., foreign language, music, ESL)

Note: Personalize the response by including the student’s name, or perhaps instead save your response (without student identifying information) to later add to your FAQ section, teaching materials, or when responding in the future to similar questions.

Similar to personal communication, screencasting can be used to provide feedback on student work. In this case, you would open the electronic version of the student’s work (e.g., document, slide show presentation, posting, etc.), and then use the mouse arrow to focus the student’s attention while you provide verbal feedback on the assignment. A screencast can also be used to provide general feedback on an assignment, such as a solution guide or discussing commonly missed problems or difficulties experienced.

Feedback on Student Work Possibilities:

- Papers submitted electronically. Consider bringing up the document on your screen and going over it with the student (perhaps reviewing the written annotations you’ve already provided using Word, Crocodoc, or Adobe Acrobat Pro)
- Exams (visually bring up the exam to show the student as you discuss it, or highlight a small unchanging part of your screen, and basically just provide auditory feedback)
- A solution guide to an exam or assignment
- Individual or Group Slide Presentations submitted electronically to the instructor (e.g., MS PowerPoint, Google Presentation, SlideShare, VoiceThread)
- Art work submitted electronically to the instructor (e.g., photo, video)

Creating a Social Presence In an Online Course

For online courses especially, screencasting can help to project an instructor’s presence—to
motivate, encourage, connect, share, and excite students about what they are learning. Some screencasting programs also enable you to use your webcam (e.g., Jing Pro\textsuperscript{10}). When you switch to a webcam, students can both hear and see you. If your weekly online announcements include using the webcam, your online students will experience a much greater connection with you. If you stick with just screencasting, they will know your voice, and appreciate the greater use of intonation available with “hearing” versus reading. Consider exploring the possibilities of screencasting for connecting more closely with your students. You may find your online students later approaching you on campus and thanking you for being their online instructor.

Enhancing Your Online Presence Possibilities:
- Provide a “Welcome to the Course” announcement/email/text messages
- Introduce yourself to your students
- Share weekly announcements or updates with the students (personalized to the class activities and students)
- Comment on student posts, blogs, work (in the screencast, you can directly point out what you liked about the students’ contributions)

Conclusion
Screencasting is an excellent pedagogical tool. With screencasting applications like Jing, instructors can quickly, easily, and effectively provide students with instruction and feedback. The screencasts are then available 24/7 to the students, and can be reviewed as often as needed. Additionally, students often report that in watching the screencast, they feel as if “they are right there with the instructor in the classroom.”

Notes
1. See http://www.jingproject.com
2. See http://screenr.com
3. See http://youtube.com
4. See http://www.slideshare.net
6. See http://docs.google.com
7. See http://crocodoc.com
8. See http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobatpro
9. See http://voicethread.com
10. See http://www.jingproject.com/pro