



Using Audio and Video in your Online Courses

The integrating of audio and video files into an online course has an enormous impact on the user. The key to a successful, meaningful implementation is advanced planning, not spontaneous action. To get started, it is recommended that you teach the class, at least once, before you add any multimedia. This gives you the opportunity to discover weak points in the delivery of instructional material and to see how students deal with your current delivery method. Remember, compared to students in the traditional classroom, your students in the virtual environment must possess and employ a very different set of skills and abilities to master learning. Moreover, what you successfully conveyed to students from the front of a classroom may not transfer easily into the virtual classroom.

Never use multimedia for the sake of using it. This sounds like common sense, but there is a movement in some institutions for mandated usage and some faculty believe more is better. Most instructional designers encourage media to supplement text based instruction, due to different learning styles and other pedagogical issues. However, they also encourage a focused approach. Media should cover course or project expectations, key concepts and principles, hard to understand material, provide course-related enriching experiences, expose students to field activity, and contribute to student learning outcomes.

Being focused, your media presentations should be short and concise. Short equates to your user's ability to download and play the files. Your institution should have a feel for this, and as a result, should have a time or MB standard. However, a good guideline is around five minutes. If it takes longer to present the information, chunk the material in several short segments as opposed to one long lecture. Remember, the students operating on dialup have to set and wait for your information to download. Designers also encourage faculty to type out what they are going to say. This further enforces the short and concise guideline; no one wants to type out a 30 minute lecture. But more importantly, it provides a text alternative for students who have a hearing impairment or can't get the file to open and play on their computer.

Lastly, there are several things you need to do to make the media experience run smooth. First and foremost, create multiple formats of the media. At a minimum, a 56k version should be created for your dialup students and a 100k (and up, but keep it reasonable) for your DSL, cable, T1 students. You may want to consider an audio only option as well.

Don't forget to provide students a link to the necessary plug-ins (Windows Media Player, QuickTime, etc.). It is a mistake to think all of your students are computer savvy. Provide them the player or a link to it, preferably a free link. Lastly, provide telephone numbers or an email address to the technology support services office, so when things go wrong (and they will) help is at hand.