Using YouTube: Practical Applications for 21st Century Education

By Jeffery Gentry, PhD

Oral communication skills are always cited among the most important proficiencies for college graduates. Yet oral performance is often sacrificed entirely in online classes, even when the class should logically provide a major oral component. This article offers a technological answer to the problem of assessing oral performance in distance education.

In 2000, Rogers State University (RSU) in Oklahoma initiated several online degree programs. The university rightly required all students to complete a three-hour public speaking course with five assigned speeches. How could this component be completed by online students? For the first four years, the issue was sidestepped, as students were permitted to take online technical writing instead of speech. This shortcut obviously failed to serve the oral communication needs of students, so in 2004, RSU began teaching a hybrid speech class and later a purely online class in which students mailed in their speeches on video.

The mail system alleviated the problem of distance for RSU’s online speech students, but it added cost and inconvenience. Emailing speeches was out of the question for bandwidth reasons, so students had to package and mail their speeches at some cost, with no opportunity for classmates to learn from each other. Moreover, myriad video formats created compatibility problems for instructors, and the postal delay slowed the class considerably. Thus, technology made online public speaking possible, but added burdens not found in the traditional classroom, a setting in which student speeches are convenient and inexpensive, and permit immediate group feedback.

Enter the phenomenon of video-sharing websites. YouTube.com and the like are part of the Web 2.0 wave that promises to change Western civilization as we know it (Young, 2007). Unfortunately, YouTube also has been used to showcase binge drinking, fighting, and promiscuity among college students. On the upside, however, Trier (2007) notes that YouTube can be used as a substantial educational resource from elementary school to graduate school. He and his students “hunted for YouTube

Continued on page 2 >>

Tips from the Pros

Put Content before Grammar in Discussions

Online discussions are the Internet’s equivalent of conversations in the face-to-face classroom, which is why Stacey Curdie, director of online education at Plymouth State University, decided to emphasize content rather than grammar in online discussions.

“I didn’t correct their grammar every time they spoke, and I didn’t have the opportunity to edit their spoken words for spelling—why was I doing so in the discussion boards? I quickly realized that I needed to prioritize content over form in class discussion or there would be no real discussion,” Curdie wrote in a recent article in Distance Education Report.

Curdie uses the following preface to introduce online discussions:

“Discussions are the way we ‘participate’ in class, so it’s important that you post thoughtful messages that move the conversation forward in some way. ‘Yeah, I agree’ is not an acceptable posting and will not earn any points. Your participation in discussions can earn you up to ten points for each thread. After the due date for the discussion, you will be graded on your overall par-

Continued on page 3 >>
videos that articulated ideas found in
the required readings, especially
those found in the weekly chapter
readings “(Trier, 598). Trier also
provides tips for teachers and pro-
fessors to search for knowledge-
enhancing videos. The resource is
touted for providing availability,
immediacy, and student engage-
ment, and for generating compo-
sition response topics.

Clearly, video-sharing sites such
as YouTube offer practical applica-
tions in today’s classrooms. These
uses are invaluable considering the
wired nature of today’s young
people, who are prone to boredom
with traditional brick-and-mortar
education. However, all of Trier’s
examples come from watching other
people’s videos. What about the
poorly served arena of student per-
formance? Video-sharing websites
may be the key to connecting
today’s technological assets with
today’s educational challenges.

Using YouTube

Instead of mailing videos,
students can simply upload their
presentations to sites like YouTube
so their instructor and classmates
can view their presentations as they
would in a regular classroom. This
simple idea can close the potential
gap in quality between traditional
and online courses in oral perfor-
amance. Using YouTube for perfor-
amance-communication courses is a
simple three-step process: (1) create
video, (2) upload video, and (3)
discuss video. Camcorders with
FireWire connectors are available in
the $300 range (webcams are even
less), so the expense can be less
than that for two textbooks. Not all
students will need to purchase their
own equipment; they only need
access to it, and several family
members may already have what
they need.

Once the speech is saved on a
computer hard drive, it’s easy to
create a user account and upload it
to YouTube. The student can
stipulate whether the speech will be
made public or only viewable by up
to 25 people: the perfect number for
a public speaking class. I
recommend that students make
their videos public because that’s
easier than inputting 25 user
names. But for shy students, the
privacy option is ideal. I also
recommend disallowing comments
and disabling video responses,
ratings, and embedding. Uploads
take one to five minutes, and the
instructor and classmates can view
the video within an hour of the
upload.

The instructor and classmates
can also post constructive criticism
via WebCT, etc. Threaded discus-
sions and instructor emails provide
the written feedback that leads to
superior learning on each assign-
ment. This format saves time and
money on postage. It also allows all
participants to view the presenta-
tion for peer review essays, which
better replicates the classroom envi-
ronment. In fall 2007, I utilized
video sharing for individual student
presentations in my online small-
group class. Students had very little
difficulty managing the technology
and were satisfied with its advan-
tages over mailing in DVDs or
tapes. I plan to continue using it in
future online classes.

It’s important to note that tradi-
tional classes can likewise use video
sharing to build student portfolios,
and thus reserve class time exclu-
sively for writing and preparation.
This would permit a far greater
density and totality of student
learning compared to traditional
instructional delivery.

Conclusion

Some instructors may not imme-
diately adopt video technology for
Continued on page 3 >>
presentations. Although cost and privacy are not significant barriers, some may worry that site providers would seek royalties. This issue is settled by YouTube’s terms of use policy. Although commercial use is prohibited without permission, educational purposes are allowed. This is because the only prohibited uses are selling YouTube’s player technology, generating subscription revenue, selling advertising, or competing with YouTube. YouTube account holders can even promote their businesses and artistic enterprises. Schools would not generate income, thus there would be no commercial use. Presentations are assigned regardless of the delivery medium. The service only provides convenience, cost savings, and enhanced learning for students.

YouTube has also been associated with copyright lawsuit concerns (Trier, 2007), and the channel has set aside millions of dollars to settle potential claims. But this is not a problem in the speech-performance arena because each presentation is original to the student. Theatrical monologues and oral interpretation performances may present a problem. But the Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998 protects YouTube, only requiring it to remove clips if the copyright holder requests removal (Trier, 2007). As students would not profit monetarily, most authors would likely have no problem with a 10-minute segment of their work being performed in this learning environment.

The number of applications of video-sharing websites for instructional purposes is myriad. This paper has emphasized public speaking as a ripe arena. Other performance classes with salient applications include oral interpretation, acting, business and professional speaking, voice and diction, argumentation and debate, persuasion, and radio and television announcing, as well as other courses outside the field of communication that feature student presentations. Rather than serve as merely a viewing resource with limited applications, video-sharing websites provide an entirely new educational laboratory.

References


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Reference

Surveys are often the tool of choice for evaluating online courses and instruction because they are relatively easy to develop and administer. But this ease is truly a double-edged sword because it’s very, very easy to write questions whose answers provide information of little value. For example, consider the following survey question.

Assigned readings were worthwhile.
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Disagree
   d. Strongly disagree

At first, the question seems fine. But let’s take this a step further and say that the question yielded the following data.

Assigned readings were worthwhile.
Selection Number
a. Strongly agree 3
b. Agree 14
c. Disagree 8
d. Strongly disagree 2
Not answered 2

More than half of the respondents thought the readings were worthwhile. Is that an acceptable number?

Table A. Please rate each of the assigned readings on the following attributes.

| Attributes (Rating scale: 1 is lowest score and 3 is highest score) |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| Readings | Helpful for understanding multiple points of view (1-3) | Worthwhile extension of textbook readings (1-3) |
| ... |

“Worthwhile” isn’t defined, and there are no clues as to what to do to make them more worthwhile. Here’s one example of a rewrite. (Table A)

This rewrite is likely to yield better information because it is more precise (the question defines “worthwhile” with two attributes) and allows respondents to rank each reading separately.

Next, I’ll discuss two important guidelines to follow for writing survey questions that yield information that can help you improve your online courses and instruction.

Ask the right question(s) to get the information you need.

As we saw earlier, it’s easy to write questions that provide little or no useful information—and waste everyone’s time. Consider the following question:

How often do you work on assignments or other coursework (such as reading discussion postings) for this course?
   1. Very often
   2. Often
   3. Sometimes
   4. Rarely
   5. Never

How often is “Very often”? Does it help you to know that 3 out of 35 students responded “Very often,” and 12 out of 35 students responded “Often”? Not so much. It’s better to offer more meaningful options, such as in the following rewrite.

How many days a week did you work on assignments or other coursework (such as reading discussion postings) for this course?
   1. Every day
   2. 4-6 days week
   3. 2-3 days a week
   4. Once a week or less

It’s important to determine what you want to know and write each question so that it will yield the information you want. The last example might be asked to determine if some assignment-completion problems were due to students not allotting enough time to do the work. If that turned out to be the case, you might want to make sure that students understand the workload and what will be needed to be successful in the first week of the course.

Be clear.

What’s wrong with this question?

Where do you do your schoolwork?
   a. Home
   b. Work
   c. Both home and work

Hmmmm. What should a respondent answer if he does his schoolwork at the library or at school? Or what if he does his schoolwork at home, school, and the library? One option is to add more options. Another is to add an “Other” option with space to input another answer.

Continued on page 7 >>
Astonishing Instruction: Anticipating Online Learners’ Needs

By Shannon Corona

In 2002, the World Bank determined that educational access is vital for developing countries, and this was noted by Steven Van Hook (2006), author of Access to Global Learning: A Matter of Will. Statistics show that “with only 17 percent of the world’s population able to advance beyond secondary education levels, new technologies and learning models are called upon to fulfill the need” (Van Hook, 1). By 2025, Van Hook predicts that 160 million students worldwide will be enrolling in higher education (Van Hook, 1). Online educational access will be a possible option to meet this growing need.

There are several examples of Internet access and network infrastructures that currently work in remote countries and locations. “Bernard Krisher brought online learning access to one of the poorest villages in Cambodia devoid of electricity and phone lines,” Van Hook notes (Van Hook, 3). The Global University System (GUS) is implementing a similar plan to bring broadband wireless Internet to several growing countries. According to Utsumi, GUS projects are now starting in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Malawi, and Ghana (Utsumi, 3). The availability to the Web and online college courses, along with proposed numbers of students entering higher education, bring about a new challenge: facilitating learning for online students around the world.

Van Hook argues, “Curricula and pedagogies need to be adapted to a wider array of cultural and linguistic differences as institutions seek to expand their enrollments beyond national borders” (Van Hook, 6). The challenge does not end there, however, because there will be a demand for trained instructors to facilitate learning for not only all types of learners, but also for learners from all types of cultures. “Researchers are devoting studies to identify teaching methods for better cross-cultural effectiveness” (Van Hook, 7).

Current findings relating best practices to bridge cultures suggests that active learning culminates “when the curriculum design intersects a multicultural perspective and the course objectives focus on the process rather than the material itself” (Blunt, 12). Creating courses that relate cultural perspectives and influences in the field of study brings an institution and instructor one step closer to reaching this outcome. The instructor can help students focus on the processes while they learn the course content. Blunt favors course design that adapts to a flexible teaching and learning experience “in which both instructor and student benefit” (Blunt, 3). Active learning that involves the student in learning can achieve this goal. In an online format, this would incorporate discussions that welcome cultural perspectives. Instructors will need to be aware of these perspectives and be open to learning about different cultures, similar to how students are open to learning about the content.

Implications for online instruction and “astonishment” training

As Internet access becomes more available around the globe, there will be an increasing demand for online courses and for instructors prepared to facilitate international student learning. Educators who are trained in best practices for online facilitation will be able to bridge cultures while continuing to improve instruction for all online students. The key to creating this bridge is “astonishing” instruction, which involves anticipating the needs of the learner.

“Astonishment” training teaches instructors to provide insightful and meaningful feedback, facilitate content by explaining lesson objectives, and focus on the processes of learning rather than the outcomes.

Joan Sieber (2005), author of Misconceptions and Realities about Teaching Online, describes key principles of online instruction. Some keys to her findings are:

1. Elicit active and critical reflection by learners on their growing experience.
2. Use deliberate practice and provide prompt constructive feedback.
3. Clarify learning goals and one or more paths to them. (Sieber, 332)

Astonishment training outlines and details these practices. Instructors focus on feedback and critical reflection by the learner, and provide the goals clearly outlined in their weekly posts. An important finding by Sieber is the focus by faculty on processes of learning rather than on the outcome. This is a key consideration for teaching online students and one that an astonishing online instructor implements.

Beth Perry and Margaret Edwards (2004), authors of Exemplary Online Educators: Creating a Community of Inquiry, completed a study that consulted online graduate students in order to define exemplary educators. Their findings provide further support of the principles and best practices of
Teaching Online With Errol

What to Never, Ever Do in Online Teaching!

By Errol Craig Sull

We have been taught that when giving others advice, it is best to do so in a positive manner rather than implore folks “not” to do this or “don’t do that.” It is far better to advise others to “do” this or to “take a positive approach.” But sometimes there are approaches, strategies, or other “things” in teaching online that are so heinous, so evil, so plain wrong, that for their seriousness to be driven home, only a “Don’t do it!” approach is warranted. This is the focus of this month’s column.

Online teaching, of course, is relatively new. I have been teaching online for 14 years and am considered somewhat of a pioneer in the field—yet 14 years is a blink of an eye. What this means is that I and thousands of others who teach online are still trying to figure out how to really get it just right—how to take all that experience from teaching in a traditional school and all the inexperience from teaching online, and use both to become online instructors who are boffo and to teach online classes that elicit huzzahs! What follows are items that should never see a hint of daylight in any of your courses.

Never copy and paste old coursework without proofreading it. Copying previous information, emails, syllabi, and other postings from previous classes can save much time. However, each time you do, it’s important that you take the time to proofread for old dates, no longer applicable assignments and textbooks, and other dated information that can immediately tell a class that you are not involved or interested in them, that you are not a careful or concerned instructor—never a good way to start off a course.

Never share personal information beyond the superficial and what the course calls for. Depending on the school, you might be asked to share a bit of your life—but the operative word here is “bit.” The course is not a pulpit for you to expound on your interpersonal relationships, your latest attempts to get published, a vacation in the Canadian Rockies, your recent dinner party, or the like. This is not why students are taking your course. Use personal information only when necessary for a course, and then make it only of a superficial nature. Sure, you want students to know you’re human, and that’s fine—but your autobiography is something they don’t need.

Never have inappropriate relationships with students. Whether during a course or after a course has ended, your relationship with a student should always be professional. During the course, there are obviously numerous reasons to be in contact with your students, but only as they relate to the course or its subject matter. Once the course has ended, there are legitimate, professional reasons to stay in contact with a student: because that student has an incomplete, is challenging a grade, has a question related to the course, or seeks your professional guidance, for example. Anything less than a professional relationship with a student may be very innocent, but too often the perception is anything but. And if the school gets wind of this post-course, nonprofessional relationship and is uncomfortable with it, don’t think for a moment that your teaching job won’t be in jeopardy.

Never use your postings as a substitute for your frustration as a writer, philosopher, or advice columnist. When you post to the class or even to individual students, stick to the point you need to make. Do not ramble or wax poetic about this or that because it appears that this is the only forum where you can share your ideas, thoughts, and musings related to items not associated with class. If you need to let the world know about your frustrations, triumphs, disappointments, and concerns, set up a blog.

Never be less than a role model that students can emulate. You tell students they must give substantive postings in a discussion thread X days a week, that their assignments must be in on time, or that you’d like them to respond to your email within 48 hours. Whatever requirements you make of your students, you must be the role model that shows students you not only talk the talk, but also walk the walk. Thus, you should be very visible in the course, respond to all email within 48 hours, be sure your discussion postings are substantive and in great supply, and follow through on all promises you make to your class. Not doing so diminishes your credibility and makes for a rough relationship between you and your students.

Never use foul, sexual, or sexist language. There are online instructors who think it’s cool to curse and who don’t really think about the public nature of their sexual or sexist postings—but then it’s too late. Unless you are discussing Huck Finn’s “All right, then. I’ll go to Hell” comment or the like, there is no reason for you to curse. As for sexual comments or innuendos, if they live in your mind, keep them there. They should never find a spot in your course. And sexist comments—as well as racist or Continued on page 7 >>
similar comments—are offensive, insensitive, and boorish.

**Never show favoritism.** It’s easy to settle in on a student or two who really put forth extra effort, are witty, and ask insightful questions; likewise, we can be quick to write off students who seem not to care a whit about the course, don’t follow directions, and never seem to “get it right.” But if you let this enter into your grading, comments to the class or individuals, or enforcement of class rules, your objectivity and integrity have just been trashed—and the class will quickly know it.

Always be neutral and base your grading and other student decisions on the guidelines you established for the class at the beginning of the course.

**Never criticize a student in front of other students.** We don’t like it when anyone criticizes us in front of others—do you think students are any different? It is very unprofessional, unethical, and simply unkind to criticize any student to any degree in front of that student’s peers—no matter if it’s in a discussion posting, a class email, or a live chat. Sure, it takes more time to send an individual email or call that student, but it is also the right thing to do—and that student will be more receptive to your comments and certainly appreciate that you kept it private.

**Never be a braggart.** The course isn’t about you—it’s about the students. Most schools require that an instructor introduce himself or herself, and this sometimes includes posting a biography—but no more. If students want to know more about you—and they will—all they need do is explore the Internet for more facts and foibles about you. Yes, something in your professional life may be perfect to underscore a point a student has made or one that you want to make about an item in class; that’s fine. But don’t go on about how wonderful you are.

**Never solicit positive evaluations.** Students will give you evaluations based on what they believe you deserve (yes, there will be the occasional “revenge evaluation”—it goes with the territory). But asking students to rate you highly tells them that you don’t care about them or about the course, but rather your paycheck, so that those who issue it can think highly of you and rehire you because of glowing evaluations.

**REMEMBER:** “Never” means not at all, no possibility, is not an option, would not consider, no way, ain’t gonna happen, does not equate, ixnay, and not in this lifetime. Period.

Please let me hear from you, including sending along suggestions and information for future columns. You can always reach me at errol-craigssull@aol.com. And I’d be very interested in hearing about other “Never, Evers” you think I should add to my list—I’ll run them in a future column.

Errol Craig Sull has been teaching online courses for more than 14 years, and has a national reputation in the subject, both writing and conducting workshops about it. He is currently putting the finishing touches on his next book, The Student’s Complete Guide to Online Learning.

Yet another is to provide a checklist, such as the one shown below.

I do my schoolwork at (check all that apply):

- Home
- Work
- School
- Library
- Other: _____

Make sure that each question asks one thing at a time. Yes or no answers to “Were the checklists and example assignments useful tools for completing the course assignments?” won’t tell you if the checklists and examples were both useful, or if one was useful but not the other.

Also, make sure your language is as precise and clear as possible. I discussed earlier how the word “worthwhile” might mean very different things to different people. One student might reply no to “Was [resource name] worthwhile?” because he didn’t make time to utilize it, while another might answer similarly because he found the resource hard to use.

Also, be careful about coming to conclusions from unclear questions. For example, say that many students did poorly on the last assignment and then you asked, “Was the final assignment too hard?” Seventy-four percent said no, so you might conclude that the assignment didn’t need fixing. But what if it wasn’t too hard, but it was too much to accomplish in the allotted time? The answers provided would not yield data to help improve the course the next time around. An open-ended question such as “How can the [assignment name] be improved?” would likely yield better improvement insights.

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astonishing instruction. Perry and Edwards summarize by saying, “The major themes that emerged from the study were exemplary online educators as challengers, affirmers and influencers” (Perry and Edwards, 3). The themes of critical thinking and affirming student potential are echoed in this paper, as well. These are two key areas that astonishing instruction focuses on. One graduate student stated, “Her feedback was so encouraging and you never wanted to let her down” (Perry and Edwards, 4). This comment supports the need for instructor feedback to be both meaningful and personable.

Another emerging theme that relates to online students is the idea of “learning with.” Perry and Edwards comment on learner feedback, saying, “Some narratives convey that students are motivated when the teacher-learner relationship involves a mutual learning experience” (Perry and Edwards, 7). This relates well to learning about online students’ cultures and perspectives, and being open to the interactive experience.

Rationale

Online education is a growing field, and with this growth comes new challenges: meeting and exceeding learner needs. To prepare for these challenges, astonishing instruction anticipates all learners’ needs and bridges the gap in online instruction. Astonishment training achieves this goal by teaching instructors how to provide insightful and meaningful feedback, facilitate content by explaining lesson objectives, and focus on processes of learning rather than on outcomes.

Instructors have an outline to follow and provide feedback, one that creates personable comments, focuses on process, and increases students’ learning. As instructors provide feedback, they look both to affirm learning and to focus on understanding. Those areas of difficulty or misunderstandings provide an opportunity for process focus. Instructors provide corrective and relate the material to the content in the course. This moves feedback from right and wrong, and focuses instruction on process learning. This can be effective for the traditional learner, as well as for the online learner who may need additional instruction in key terminology or a specific process. Along with process learning, instructors will clarify lesson objectives and create relevant examples.

Instructors have an opportunity to create a learning environment and provide students with an overview of each lesson with weekly posts. The expectation is that weekly posts are a teaching opportunity. The posts should reiterate the lesson objectives and provide relevance to the example. This is a great opportunity to identify difficult areas and simplify instructions. The post should be clear, logical, and user friendly for all students. Astonishment training provides an opportunity for instructors to create these posts, gather feedback from peers, and provide learner encouragement. This is not only a best practice, but also a link for online learners to clarify objectives and instructor expectations.

Conclusion

Astonishment training allows instructors to anticipate a learner’s needs. By implementing training, instructors will be able to go beyond learner satisfaction and reach astonishment. The training is designed to allow peer interactions and feedback so that the instructor has both the experience of facilitating online instruction and being an online learner. The objectives and assessments are aligned so that the instructors will be able to reach the expected outcomes. This training will increase the overall satisfaction and knowledge of both the online learner and the instructor, as well as meet the needs for all involved.

References


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