

## ENHANCING

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- Video allows us to observe activity on more levels than text
- Video as a means to introduce ideas or issues for discussion
- Lessons learned by making 3 different types of videos
- Participants' feedback

## INSIDE THIS ARTICLE

CONTEXT

RATIONALE

EXPERIENCE

LUVLE &amp; SERVER

EVALUATION

WHAT WE LEARNT

## The good, the bad and the ugly: making video for online learning

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This case study tracks the development of video materials for an online course for distance learners.

It considers the rationale for video development within such a course, its integration into course design and the practical issues that need to be addressed in production and post production.



### CONTEXT

Within the Department of Continuing Education there is a programme of courses that leads to the award of the Certificate in Creative Writing.

If wished, these courses can be taken wholly at a distance, in which case the Lancaster University Virtual Learning Environment (LUVLE) is used as the course vehicle. The videos that were developed in this case study were prepared for the course, '*Working Towards Publication*', intended for more experienced writers within that programme.

No special funding was made available for the purpose of this video production and at the outset it was anticipated that the

main production cost would be in terms of existing staff time.

This was indeed the case, but from September 2005, changes to the faculty structure within the university resulted in changes to the charging policy of LUTV for those departments outside the new faculty of Arts and Social Sciences.

While this project was completed on the same basis on which it started, future development plans would need to consider the additional charges that are now in place.

(Contact LUTV for more information)



The rationale for this video development was on two fronts. The first related to enhancement of the learning experience, the second related to a wish to experiment with the medium and the technology and see what was possible for potential development in other areas.

## 1. Enhancing the learning

- ***Creating an environment that supports learning***

A distance learning context does not easily allow students to be together and experience each others' and the tutor's company unless focused on a task. Course tasks are readily reduced to 'minimum requirements' for the busy learner and the development of working relationships can suffer.

Although the primarily text-based environment supported by LUVLE is ideally suited to a course in creative writing, it is important in any course to consider ways in which students can be 'socially connected' to each other. Connecting students with each other, and students with the tutor, is important to engender a sense of belonging and motivation – both of which are conducive to establishing an environment in which students feel confident to take risks and think creatively.

While such 'connection' can take place via text-based activity within LUVLE, it is worth considering the role that video can play to support it. It is stating the obvious to note that video allows us to observe activity on more levels than text. But it follows that in the process of using video we allow greater sight of those participating in it. This can serve to affect the relationship that observers have with these participants.

- ***As a means to introduce ideas or issues for discussion***

For this course in '*Working towards Publication*', there is an element concerned with introducing students to the publishing world.

For variety we chose to address this element by inviting published writers to share their experiences on video and to use this as stimulus for online discussion between students.

In addition to the video, each of the published writers subsequently joined in the student discussion forum as guests for a period of two / three weeks.

## 2. Experimenting with video production

Three videos were made:

**1. Recording of a conversation** between the course tutor and a published novelist (first guest) in the studio at LUTV around issues of writing and of getting published as a novelist.

**2. Live 15 minute webcast** from LUTV studio: an interview of a published novelist (second guest) and the course tutor (a poet) on the subject of '*What is poetry? What is prose?*' (and the implications of each genre for publication) This live webcast was recorded for further use as a course resource.

**3. A 15 minute interview recording** of two published poets - one the course tutor, the other a published poet in Edinburgh linked via video conference. Recording made in the Library video conference room. Finished recording and edit carried out by LUTV.

*All recordings were subsequently coded up for digital use and deposited on the LU streaming media server, supported by ISS (Information System Services); then streamed via the LUVLE course site.*



## EXPERIENCE



Apart from the broad topic outlines that were to be addressed, this first recording was broadly unstructured. The tutor was to engage the guest novelist in conversation for a maximum period of 15 minutes.

*(We considered that 15 minutes was the time that students online would be able to sustain attention, based on widely held opinion about student attention span within lectures.)*

Unfortunately, the tutor got wrapped up in the conversation, lost track of the time and the final recording amounted to 22 minutes. The task then became one of editing up the finished version to fit to 15 minutes. In the event, the content was all seen to be relevant and with minimal edits the conversation was chunked up into three short clips, each of which addressed different themes and each of which could be viewed separately.



Having learnt from the first session, an interviewer (me) was included in this second recording – to take responsibility for holding and structuring the conversation.

This session had all the features of a live television broadcast in terms of preparation, rehearsal, timing and nerves! At this point we were particularly grateful to Mike O'Donoghue, CSALT Educational Research, for his help, built upon his experience in live broadcasting.

Preparation in advance (knowing the number of seconds needed for introduction and closure and the way in which the interview would be concluded) paid off. Though we carried out a full rehearsal just before we went live in order to get timings right, we did not script content as we preferred that the session should be as spontaneous as possible. While some time was spent in planning, in all we spent only an hour and a quarter together. The result of our preparation was that the session had greater coherence without any need for post-production activity.

Subsequent to this session we considered the potential for viewers to interact with the speakers in the studio (via the synchronous chat facility in LUVLE or via email). Such interaction would enable students to be actively involved in what was taking place as well as to allow the speakers to tailor what they were talking about to meet what was needed.



The final recording was originally intended to be not only a video conference but also a live webcast. *(The intention being to use technology to address the wider range of limitations that arise in face-to-face engagement)* However, the logistics of this proved difficult as LUTV does not have video conference facilities and with the time available it wasn't possible to set up the necessary networking to arrange live streaming from the Library, so recordings were made instead. It proved straightforward to arrange video conference facilities with Edinburgh via MALTS (Media & Learning Technology Service, University of Edinburgh) and fortunately this side of things went without a hitch. LUTV made recordings of the video input from Edinburgh as well as what took place at Lancaster and subsequently edited up both to produce a finished video clip.

The process of this session was similar to that of the second session both to give the session spontaneity and to limit the extent of editing required. The difference with this session was that the rehearsal was also recorded as 'a safety net' in case of subsequent 'hiccups'.

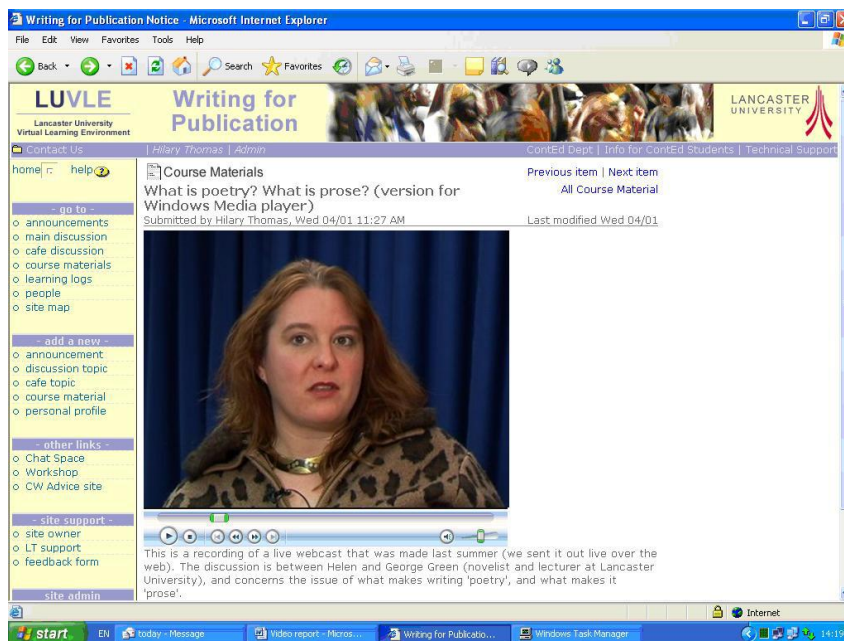
**LUVLE & SERVER**

**Video files and using the media streaming server**

Each of the sessions once recorded was placed on the LU streaming media server. Since the videos were part of the course, we placed the link to them within the 'Course Materials' section of the LUVLE site, where there is facility for this. This enabled us to place explanatory text beside the video and for discussion to be located nearby. It is worth noting that although there is some scope to vary the size of the video window that shows when played this way in the site, there are limitations – great if you don't want to draw attention to that spot on your chin, but not so good if you're attempting to show detailed illustrations!

However, this aspect is currently being addressed by the Learning Technology Group within CELT and in the near future it will be possible to adjust the video window size according to need.

It was also necessary to anticipate the different media players the students used. We saved the video files in *Real Media* and *Windows Media* format as well as in formats suitable for viewing either over broadband or via a modem, (that said, viewing via a modem proved to be not entirely satisfactory in terms of allowing consistent visual quality).

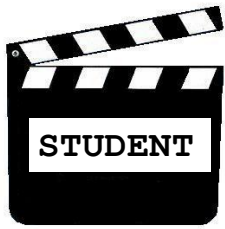


The video as viewed through the course LUVLE site

**EVALUATION**

**1. Enhancing the learning**

Initial feedback suggests a mixed response to the videos. Some found them helpful, some did not. Comments were made in response both to the content of the videos and to the use of this medium. We might hypothesise that where there is a difference in response it relates in part to the orientation of the student, including their preferred learning approach.



One student who found the videos helpful responded,

***'...once I'd seen them a bit I carried on doing stuff and listened as I was doing other things. It'd be easier for you to get more stuff if you just used audio, so perhaps you should do both?'***

Her suggestion links with further thoughts we've had in this area, including the possibility of students uploading their own audio files by way of submitting their work (e.g. within a poetry course).

From the tutor's perspective the format of the sessions made a difference. Commenting on the third recording she said,

***'...I think being freed up to be part of the discussion rather than facilitating it was very liberating and the conversation unearthed some new perspectives on writing for me.'***

This confirms the impression of the first session where the tutor had been the facilitator of the discussion and not been able to fully engage. In my opinion this last session came to life in a way that none of the others had – though it is important to acknowledge that the discussion related to the tutor's preferred genre.



It is more difficult to evaluate the quality of the working relationships within the course and the effect of using an additional medium. This group of eight students was an active and experienced group. Although they had not all worked together before, they were familiar with working via the Internet. In part this was our reason for using them to experiment with the media as we knew they would 'ride' whatever occurred, but for this reason also we cannot see so easily the impact of our experiment. One of the students, however, did comment,

***'...it was nice to see what they look like and hear their voices, and I felt more able to chat during the online sessions, having seen and heard them.'***

## 2. Experimenting with video production

In terms of efficiency of production and quality of output there are a number of factors to be taken into consideration.

Although for the performers the input time was broadly similar for each session, for the TV crew and myself there was time spent on the first and third recordings in editing. From this point of view the second video session was the most cost effective. Although there was preparation time needed by the TV crew to set up – this was the first time they had streamed live to a time-scheduled **webcast** – this preparation time is likely to be less for subsequent events.

In terms of quality of the output, this second session was on a par with the other two where editing was carried out, the focus of performing live giving an added frisson to events and serving to pull it all together.



## Things to think about when producing video for your course:

- **Establish the key elements you wish for your video.** Return to these periodically to check you've not lost sight of them, (we wanted spontaneity regarding content and an opportunity for students to feel connected with the speakers)
- **Anticipate human foibles** – not everyone is at ease in front of a camera, so allow time and flexibility to accommodate this
- **Even if you don't use scripts, plan the stages of your session from start to finish; rehearsal can help you identify potential hitches**
- **How much will it cost?** (don't forget your workload) How long will it take? (don't forget others' workloads)
- **Consider the viewpoint of the students and their needs** – regarding video content, access and usefulness  
Bear in mind that not everyone has the same approach to learning as you – some may not find your video useful.

## For the future?

From this small project we will consider experimenting some more with synchronous activities (like webcasting), as well as the use of audio. Particularly of interest is the relative ease with which two-way communication can be achieved using audio over the web.

Thanks and acknowledgement are given to the staff of the Television Unit (LUTV) for all their help, to Mike O'Donoghue of CSALT, Ed Research for his help and advice and to the course tutor and all the guests who took part.

### Useful websites for using and making video:

Video Streaming: a guide for educational development:

<http://www.clickandgovideo.ac.uk/>

W3C Journal - Guidelines for Multimedia on the Web -

<http://www.w3j.com/5/s3.nielsen.html>