



Using Online Tutorials To Teach Podcasting

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Students enter the classroom with different levels of experience. Some have never used a particular software application and others are already certified. This makes it challenging to do technical training during class time and keep everyone engaged. Inevitably, those with the least experience require the most attention. And those with the most experience can come away feeling like they didn't learn anything. Technical training also takes up valuable class time that could otherwise be spent on activities that encourage deep thinking and critical analysis.

This challenge is ubiquitous in media programs where students practice what they learn through hands-on production. How do you keep students with a wide range of experience engaged during the class sessions that cover the production side of these media practices? And is it possible to accomplish that training outside of class to create more room during class for critical thinking? Yet another problem is finding the time to design and produce new teaching materials.

For this project, a grant for teaching innovation and curriculum development awarded by the university resulted in a course load reduction to develop new teaching materials. The goal was to design a series of tutorials to be offered within the university's Learning Management System that improved the learning experience for students with a wide variety of proficiency and also to reduce technical training time in the classroom.

The specific coursework for this project was to create a podcast from start to finish. The audience for the modules were freshmen and sophomores in a

broadcast announcing class. It's been my experience that "making a podcast" is a more engaging hook for students than "learning how to set mic levels" or "editing in Audition."

The tutorials used two methods: screenshots and screencasts. The first third of the sequence used step-by-step screenshots and written instructions to help students get everything set up on the computer, open Adobe Audition, select audio inputs, and set recording levels. Screenshots were selected for two reasons: 1) it illustrated each click to make sure students didn't miss anything, and 2) it should be easier to maintain as operating systems and software updates inevitably make some steps obsolete. The other two-thirds of the sequence used screencasts with narrated on-screen actions. This gave direct visual examples of how to move around the interface, how volume levels can be changed, and when and where to mix music under voices. Each tutorial was segmented into small pieces to allow students with no experience to re-watch videos on specific tasks and take as much time as they needed to accomplish the assignment. Students with more experience could skip portions of the training sequence that were already familiar.

Each of the tutorials included three sections: training resources, an assignment and a quiz.

The first module, "Recording Audio In Studio," gave students an orientation to university resources which include a room in the library where audio can be recorded. It also included photos for each step of configuring physical equipment and screenshots for software steps to get the best quality recording. The assignment was to record their voice, export it and

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submit it to Canvas, the university's Learning Management System. To reinforce what they'd learned, a quiz recapped what they'd done in the module. Each quiz was designed more as a learning tool than an assessment; it could be taken multiple times and the following module remained locked until all answers were correct. A study in *TJMC* by Gil and Williams (2018) found that using follow-up quizzes increased viewership of videos in a flipped classroom context.

The second module, "Mixing Music and Voices in Adobe Audition," provided students with video screencasts that included the instructor's voice showing them how to use Audition. Seven videos averaging three and a half minutes each introduced them to the software interface, multitrack editing, adjusting volume, nondestructive editing, podcast template, Essential Sound Panel and mixing music under voices. The screencasts were produced using a Blue Yeti USB microphone and Quicktime's Movie Recording feature. The assignment was to record their first episode, including music, and submit it to Canvas.

The third module, "Publishing a Podcast Online," introduced students to RSS feeds, Wordpress plugins and podcast aggregators such as Apple Podcasts. All students on campus are provided with an individual Wordpress site hosted by the university. This allowed the tutorial to bypass much of the manual labor dealing with domain names, hosting services and installing Wordpress. Three videos screencasts averaging three minutes each walked them through the steps. Their assignment was to configure their podcast and submit a link to their feed.

After each of these stages, time was spent in class reviewing the results of the work they'd done outside of class. Verbal feedback was provided in class on each project and classmates were allowed to add comments, ask questions or give suggestions. Group feedback sessions tend to be helpful not only for the individual receiving feedback, but also for their peers to gain a broader understanding of issues they might not have encountered themselves. I find in-person verbal critique sessions to be a highly valuable way to spend class time.

After implementing the tutorials, students were prompted for feedback during class. They were asked which of the methods within the tutorials they preferred, screenshots or screencast videos. By a show of hands, half preferred screenshots and half preferred videos. Those who preferred screenshots noted the ease of having a screenshot associated with each click.

Those who preferred videos noted the ability to pause and rewind to watch on-screen actions repeatedly. In this study, only one third of the tutorials used screenshots. The fact that half of the class preferred screenshots suggests favorability toward written step-by-step instructions with screenshots over video instructions. When asked about doing the learning outside of class rather than during class, most preferred to learn at their own pace. They also liked bringing their work in to show their classmates and receive feedback. Overall, students responded positively to the tutorials, commenting, "I liked it," and "step-by-step instructions were simple."

A study in *TJMC* by Strong (2018) found similar favorability toward written instructions over video. In the study, students were given the option of accessing online course material in either written or video form. Students accessed the text version more than videos, noting it was quicker and more versatile on mobile devices. But rather than favor only one option in online curriculum design, Strong suggests digital media courses should provide both forms "to satisfy the spectrum of learning styles of the students." (Strong, 2018).

The quality of students' final submissions was pleasantly high for a first-run using newly created tutorials. It was noteworthy how well they were able to record and edit audio by following the provided resources without interacting with an instructor in person. Students did raise a few issues that needed to be addressed such as an echo in their headphones or other technical problems stemming from public resources that weren't always left the way the instructions expected. Updates were made to the instructions to avoid issues for future classes. The first two modules were resounding successes, as nearly all were able to meet expectations. Results from the third module were mixed. Only about half were able to identify their podcast feed and submit it correctly. Nearly all were able to correctly publish their audio in Wordpress, but many were still unclear on what the feed is and how it works.

To assess how the out-of-class tutorial method compared to the in-class method, a standardized rubric was used to evaluate the results. Submissions delivered after following the out-of-class tutorials were compared to the results of audio and video submissions to other courses taught by the same instructor using the in-class training method. The results did show a small reduction in performance using the out-of-class

method, but none of the elements dropped more than 9% compared to in-class methods. Two of the seven elements in the rubric were within 1% of the average results. Two of the elements were 4-5% lower. Three elements were 6-9% lower. While the tutorials did not perform equally or better than in-class instruction, it is encouraging how close the results were.

The positive results of this project inspired the journalism department to reflect on ways to improve the learning experience for students in other classes. Based on the initial work, the university awarded the department a grant for curriculum revision that resulted in the transformation of two courses in the department core to use this model of assigning work outside of class followed by in-class critiques of their work. Changing these two courses resulted in program changes to five bachelor's degrees.

The tutorials referenced in this project have been made publicly available: <https://acu.instructure.com/courses/2638919>

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