

Using Screencasting as a Teaching and Support Tool

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I have recently discovered that screencasting can be used as an efficient and motivating teaching tool.

A Newer Instructional Tool

A growing and efficient trend in computer based training (CBT) is for the instructor to record lessons as screencasts. A screencast is a recording of a computer screen, usually containing audio narration, which is then published as a video file. Even though screencasting is perfect for computer instruction, any other subject area can also benefit from it.

Video Samples Available

In the high school computer courses I teach, instead of textbooks I use many of these ready-made recordings from a popular site called *lynda.com*. They use screencasting as a base for their CBT instruction. They have many free samples available for you to check out. If you would like to see some samples of instructional unit screencast videos, follow the link and select a topic of your choice: <http://movielibrary.lynda.com>.

Benefits and Limitations of Screencasting

I build my own videos tailored to the exact content areas I am teaching while keeping in mind the interests and learning styles of my students. Students can review a video lesson as many times as they wish. I do not need to spend time re-teaching a student who was absent on the day a screencast instructional activity was used. These videos can be placed where students can easily access them at school or at home when saved to an internet location, a CD, or a USB drive. I can also build a library of personal screencast videos for later use. Teachers can share those video resources with each other. Screencasts should not replace direct teacher contact and instruction. I still provide students with direct interaction, guidance, answers to their questions and evaluation of their learning experience.

Student Use

I plan to install the free recording software on our computer lab workstations. This way each student can create his own screencast movies. They could, for example, create an activity demonstrating evidence of learning. I find that this type of hands-on activity is highly motivational for most students.

What You Need is FREE

The only hardware needed is a basic XP computer with a microphone. To create a movie I use “Windows Media Encoder”. It is free and I found it very easy to use. It saves the screencast video in *.wmv* format. I easily found the download internet location by searching (googling) the words *windows media encoder*. There are other software solutions that can be used to create screencasting movies but the free one has served me well. To view my created *wmv* videos my students and I use the free/built in and popular Windows software named *Windows Media Player*. This works well since we all use Windows computers.

Note that if you or your group uses a variety of platforms such as *MAC* or *Unix* you would need to convert your original file format (*.wmv*) to something more universal such as *.avi*. There is free *avi conversion* software available for that purpose at <http://www.tucows.com> .

Special Teaching Strategy

Adventist schools are often looking for strategies to help cope with the extra challenge of multi-grade classrooms and special needs situations. They are also looking to add effective teaching methods to their repertoire as they serve students possessing visual and auditory learning styles. I believe that commercial, teacher, and student built instructional screencast options should be considered as a teaching tool to help facilitate these situations.

Other Uses for Screencasting

A screencast video can also be used to help teachers in need of additional computer training. It is a great way to demonstrate to teachers how to interact with new software. It is also useful for providing informal instruction given to students, teachers or any staff by educational leaders. Video memos are a good example of something you can email to all your staff. It is like a voice mail through your email but with a visual component. All computers now have sound cards and speakers or they are able to accommodate earphones.

Screencasting is not only a useful option for distributed learning and computer support of the staff, but it is also useful to me as a classroom teacher. To me the most exciting part is that, in addition to the commercially produced screencasts, anyone can produce their own videos for free.