

Adapting PowerPoint Lectures for Online Delivery: Best Practices

By Emily A. Moore, **January 7, 2013.**

If you use PowerPoint lectures in your face-to-face classes, you can use those same lectures as jumping-off points for creating narrated animations for your online students to watch. That's the good news.

However, chances are you'll need to make extensive changes—both to your existing PowerPoint slides, and to how you deliver them. Typically, this means scripting the lecture before narrating and recording it so that all information presented online is:

- As concise as possible
- Organized logically (no skipping around)
- Relevant to the important concepts you're trying to convey (as opposed to spending equal time on minor points or details)
- Rich with stories, personal examples, and/or examples that clarify and amplify the important concepts
- Primarily visual (very little text presented on any screen)
- Broken down into separate 2-7 minute recordings, each based around a single concept

Unfortunately, there's no quick and easy way to adapt face-to-face lectures for effective online presentation. Simply recording yourself narrating your PowerPoints as you would in a face-to-face classroom is ineffective because the online environment differs from the classroom in several ways:

- The time and attention students are willing to spend watching a screen is much less than the time and attention they're willing to spend watching a live human being lecturing.
- The online environment is poor at conveying information in text form (but excels at conveying information visually).
- Online students can't ask questions in real-time—and you won't be able to see when they're "getting it" so that you can diverge from your standard lecture and supplement their understanding. Therefore, your presentation has to be extremely clear and explicit.
- Online students are typically much less tolerant of extraneous or confusing information presented in a recorded lecture than they are of an in-person lecture.
- Students will be accessing lecture recordings differently—and for different reasons—than they "access" face-to-face lectures. Face-to-face students come to class, listen to lecture, and leave. Online students may use lecture recordings for previewing material, as their main source of course content, or for review. They may access recordings never, once, or multiple times for any of all of these reasons.

All of this means that you'll need to rethink the way your existing lectures are organized, what information they contain, and how that information is conveyed.

Below are best practices for converting a PowerPoint presentation for online delivery:

- **Break long lectures into five minute (or so) chunks.** Studies show that online students won't sit through hour-long lectures—so don't create them. Instead, create a handful of smaller lecture "chunks," each of which defines and elaborates a main concept. Chunking lectures in this way also makes it possible for online students to customize their learning by reviewing—and re-reviewing—only those concepts they're having trouble grasping.
- **Write a script for each concept.** Speaking off-the-cuff may work in a classroom, but it doesn't online. Scripting forces you to organize the presentation of your material—to make sure you don't leave anything out or throw in anything extra. It also gives you time to think about the most effective approach to convey

material in the highly visual online environment. If you decide not to write a script beforehand, be prepared to spend the same amount of time you would have spent on the script in the recording studio instead, recording and re-recording your lecture chunks (in effect, scripting your recordings during the recording process instead of beforehand). There really is no way around the scripting step in the production of effective content optimized for online delivery; it's "pay me now or pay me later."

- **Rework your PowerPoint slides to act as a storyboard for your script.** Your PowerPoint slides should contain mostly visuals; you'll need to reduce text to a few words per screen at most. Animations (recorded PowerPoints) are good at conveying visual information; they *aren't* good at conveying text information. Any text that appears on the screen should be the "take aways" or critical notes you would expect students to take, not simply explanations or nice-to-have details.
- **Time any text or images that appear on your PowerPoint slides** to display at the same time that you, the narrator, speak the text or discuss the image. Studies show that presenting text causes students to try to read it—which means they're missing whatever the narrator happens to be saying at the same time. Learning theory also suggests that displaying images and talking about them later isn't as effective as introducing the images at the very time you begin speaking about them.

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