



Making Movies

Teachers and students have been using movies for language learning for years. With the rise in availability of camcorders, many also began creating and sharing their own movies. Personalized video can allow lessons to become dynamic and vibrant experiences for both student and teachers. Being involved in the creation of video can empower students and provide them with a framework in which they can further explore realms of language use they might otherwise not notice. Collaborative group video projects can help to establish a constructivist learning environment that is meaningful and engaging. In short, video has much to offer us. But what do we need to know in order to use video effectively?

Rise of Digital Video

Digital video has made all of this even more accessible and varied. We can create high quality video with rather inexpensive equipment. A digital video camera can be shared by many users in a single department, thus minimizing investment. A single digital video-capable computer can be used to edit these videos and they can then be distributed among students and teachers through a variety of means, including web servers, CDs and DVDs.

Basic Video Skills

It is helpful to have a bit of visual and production guidance. While it is extremely easy to point and click a camera, making videos that match the quality of commercial videos is not yet 100% accessible to most of us. Video can certainly be a time consuming endeavor, but with practice you can get better and better results each time you work with it. However, when just getting started it is important to know where to turn for advice. There are people who spend their lives working only with video as a profession who are never satisfied with their results so we have to keep things in perspective. There are a lot of fairly simple things we can take into consideration when working with video. I have been making instructional videos for years and just recently took a course on video production that taught me many things that I never would have considered previously. Here is a list of some of the highlights:

- You can't make up for bad shooting with good editing. This is by far the most important point. If your camera is not steady or focused you will never be able to make it steady and focused no matter how much you edit.
 - Use a tripod
 - Focus
 - Set white balance (most cameras allow you to set the degree of what "is" white by pushing a button named "white balance" and focusing in on something you deem to be white. If you do not do this, you are likely to end up with yellowish tinting).
- Prepare for movement
 - If there will be motion, begin the shot with extra space in the direction the subject will be moving.
- Check your lighting
 - If you film in inadequate (or too much) light you will have disappointing results.

- High noon is a good time to avoid too many shadows.

Basically, what we do when editing is to put the pieces together in whatever way we choose, but without good quality pieces there is little we can do to improve things. Here are a few very helpful resources to consider when shooting video:

- www.betterphoto.com/exploring/videoTips.asp
- www.marcpeters.co.uk/video-editing-tips.html
- www.marcpeters.co.uk/shooting-tips.html

Once you get a feel for general concepts of video creation and production, you need to learn to use the software.

Video Editing Software

There are a number of software packages that you can use for capturing and editing your video. Free programs such as Apple's iMovie and Microsoft's Movie Maker are quite easy to use. They allow you to capture (or import) video, add titles, transitions, additional audio and a number of other typical adjustments. Other software, such as Adobe Premiere and Apple's Final Cut provide you with a wider breadth of professional opportunities. In order to get more information about using each of these packages, the following links may be useful:

- Connecting a digital video camera to your computer (for Movie Maker)
www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/moviemaker/getstarted/cameratopc.mspx
- Download video to computer using Movie Maker
www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/moviemaker/getstarted/downloadvideo.mspx
- Easy steps for creating movies
www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/moviemaker/videos/create.mspx
- Saving and Sharing movies with Movie Maker
www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/moviemaker/getstarted/savingsharing.mspx
- Online tutorials for iMovie:
www.apple.com/support/imovie/

Equipment

Good quality cameras can be purchased for a few hundred dollars. Most consumer digital video cameras are quite a value these days. Such cameras can be connected directly to a compatible computer (typically this involves a computer port commonly known as firewire). The most important aspect of a digital video camera is the lens. For resources related to the selection of digital video cameras, see this column, issue 37 (Jan/Feb, 2004) and this link: <http://gregling.net/dvc/>

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