

Videotaping Online Classes, or
How to Effectively Communicate to a Camera

Some Notes from James Babanikos

- I teach... scriptwriting... directing... in the Dept. of Telecommunication in the College of Journalism and Communications. In the Directing class, I teach students how to work with actors, and get the best performances from them.
- And what I tell my students to tell their actors, is that the secret for acting in films, is knowing how to react effectively... and you can only react effectively is if you're listening.
- So the most important skill for an actor to have is... the ability to listen, really listen to what the other character or characters are saying, and then react naturally. That will help them give a much better performance.
- But that doesn't help you.
- Because it's just you and the camera. There's no one to listen to... and react. So scratch that.
- There are some other tips, though, that I give my actors, and these will be helpful for you as well:
 - Don't rush it. Take your time. Don't be afraid of pauses. How long is a pause? That depends. Long enough for what you said to have time to sink in. So if you say something that's really important... pause. Wait until the concept has sunk in. Then go on.
 - Relax. The more nervous or uneasy you feel, the more uneasy your audience will feel as well.
 - Focus. Concentrate on making your points . Don't ramble.
 - Look into the camera. Make direct eye contact with it, like you do with students. You can look away from time to time, but there needs to be a reason for it. If you're wondering, contemplating about something, then it's OK to look away. But you shouldn't break visual contact for no reason.
 - In general, if you're really focused and involved in the moment, your visual focus will take care of itself.
 - Don't be monotonous.
 - Change the pace of your lecture.
 - The length of your sentences.
 - The inflection.
 - The volume.
 - ... As you do in live lectures.

How should I prepare my online lecture?

- It seems that you have three options:
 - you wing it, not using a teleprompter. After all, you've taught this same class for 10 or 20 years.
 - You use your teleprompter, but you only use it to give you the main points of the lecture, and you extemporize on those main points.
 - You write down the entire lecture, word for word, and you read it off the teleprompter.

- Let's examine each one:
 - You wing it.
 - It's something you're more used to because you've been doing it like that.
 - But teaching a live class and talking into a camera are very different things. If you tell a joke, you get a reaction... most of the time. Not so with the camera! If you introduce an important point, you look around and see the faces of your students and you can decipher whether they understood it or not. Not so with the camera.
 - This lack of any reaction to what you're saying can be unnerving.
 - When we wing a class in front of a camera, it's been my experience that we tend to ramble... and so it takes us twice as long or even longer to make the points we want or need to make.
 - Also, we may forget completely to cover important material.
 - That's why some people like to use a teleprompter to include just some notes or headings of what they will cover... to have a kind of outline, in other words.
 - This way, they can be sure that the lecture will have a certain order, and that they'll cover everything that needs to be covered. They won't forget anything because everything they need to talk about is in the outline.
 - This works really well for some people.
 - In fact, I've used it a few times myself in my online lectures.
 - But I found that the tendency to ramble is still there.
 - And then I did something I never thought I would do.
 - I wrote my entire lecture and read it from the teleprompter. Every last word. And for me that worked.

- **Having the entire lecture there for me to look at made me feel more confident, more stress-free.**
- **I was able to do three lectures every taping session and I didn't feel tired.**
- **I also was able to cover everything that I needed to cover in a succinct and effective fashion.**
- **But you really need to be careful if you decide to script and read your entire lecture.**
- **It's really important that it doesn't appear that you're reading the lecture to them.**
- **It needs to appear as if you're talking to them.**
- **And the way you write a script in which it seems that you're simply talking, that you'd adlibbing, that you're extemporizing... is to write it in a conversational style.**
- **And here's how you do that:**
 - **Assume that you're talking to one person.**
 - **Write as you talk.**
 - **Use informal, simple words.**
 - **Use contractions.**
 - **Use simple sentences... limit yourself to one thought per sentence.**
 - **Avoid using subordinate clauses... break one sentence into two if you have to.**
 - **Use personal pronouns. Make the viewer feel you're talking specifically to them.**
 - **Avoid negative constructions.**
 - **Translate complex facts and information into language that's easier to understand.**
 - **Avoid clichés.**
- **Good luck!!!**