Screencasts: Zero-budget Lessons for Everyone
Brendan DeCoster

Screencasting offers a zero-budget opportunity to create videos with narration which can be published to the internet on YouTube or other platforms, thus allowing students easy access to class content on their own time. A screencast is a video recording of what is shown on a computer monitor. Thus, a screencast shows exactly what the mouse is doing, what is being typed, what links are being clicked, and anything else that the computer user is doing. Because of this, it is possible to show, step-by-step, various grammar exercises, formatting exercises, explanations of readings, and many other topics as well, provided that they lend themselves to a visual representation. Essentially, a screencast can be thought of as the computer projection behind the teacher as he or she is teaching (though there is definitely the possibility to explore other avenues of instruction).

In recent times, Khan Academy, an online learning/tutoring tool, has notably created entire courses out of screencasts (Young, 2010), which several school districts have started to use to complement their in-person teaching. The best part of these videos is that they can be adapted to any class, any level, any situation, any budget, and require very little prep. There have been very positive initial reactions and results to the incorporation of screencasts in teaching (Jordan, Loch, Lowe, Mestel, Willkins, 2012). Although there has been little research into the effectiveness of language learning using screencasts, there has been a great deal of research suggesting that screencasts aid in the learning of many other subjects (2012). See Figure 1.

Every screencast begins with a script of the content to be covered and the exercises which will be included in the practice of the content. It is best to create this script in MS Word or an equivalent so that the content can be easily copied into other programs. Once this script has been written, it remains for the teacher to decide whether to continue to use MS Word or to copy the content into another program such as Power Point. At this point, it is very important to create each step of how the content will be taught, since it is best to separate lesson content into sections of the document or presentation.

When creating a screencast, it is important to consider the following questions:
1. *What are the details of the content I wish to teach?*
2. *How can I explain this content both verbally and visually?*
3. *How can I allow students to practice and interact with this content?*
4. *How can I allow students to check, on their own, how accurately they have performed and mastered this content?*
5. *What programs can I use to create the lesson?*

(see Sugar, Brown, & Luterbach 2010)

Figure 1

Next, it is time to record the screen-cast. This requires a microphone connection and a program to record the screen. Most easily, QuickTime can be used, as shown in Figure 2. However, another commonly used program is Jing, which you can download at http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html. Both are available free of charge. Simply press the record button and begin recording according to the script.

Once this is complete, review the re-cording and decide whether it is acceptable. If it is, publish the recording to YouTube or the Jing server (Small, 2010), using your login credentials. Once this has been done, provide students the URL for the pertinent link.

This is all that needs to be done. With most devices, your content will be readily accessible and reviewable. This provides students the opportunity to view and review your content as many times as they wish, enhancing instruction and allowing more effective learning.

Example

Please feel free to observe the following example of an ESL screencast: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AKFc57KGN9M

References

Jordan, J., Loch, L., Lowe, L., Mestel, M., Wilkins, W. (2012). Do short screencasts improve student learning of mathematics? *MSOR Connections, 11*(4).

Small, J. (2010). Delivering library instruction with screencast software: a Jing is worth a thousand words! Paper presented to *Discovery! Future tools, trends and options: 7th Health Libraries Inc. Conference*, Melbourne, Vic. 22 October 2010.

Sugar, Brown, & Luterbach (2010). Examining the anatomy of a screencast: Uncovering common elements and instructional strategies. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 11* (3), pp. 2-20.
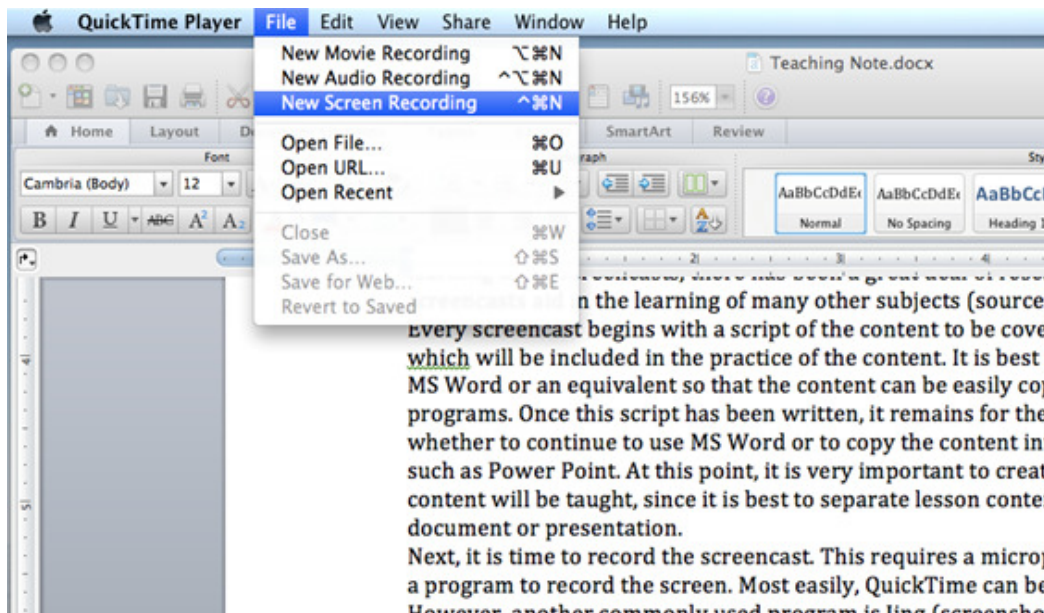
Figure 2

Young, J. (2010, June 6). College 2.0: A self-appointed teacher runs a one-man 'academy' on YouTube. *Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/A-Self-Appointed-Teacher-Runs/65793/

Brendan DeCoster is an instructor at the University of Oregon. He has taught at all levels of the IEP and AEIS courses, most recently focusing on AEIS courses for matriculated students. He has taught in Korea, Canada, Mexico, and the USA.

Software Review: *Sharendipity*
Ibtesam Hussein & Maysoun Ali, Washington State University

Sharendipity.com is a website that can be used by teachers and students alike helping users to create interactive games and web applications that they can share with others through social networking sites. The site provides users with free creation tools found inside the browser. In addition, this website provides the user with the chance to create learning materials in the section that is concerned with education, which, in turn, develops and strengthens different types of literacies for users. According to Lankshear and Knobel (2006) new literacies could be defined and related to three types: cultural, critical and technological literacies Therefore, they argue that individuals need to be socialized into new literacy practices in order to be able to participate effectively and productively. In addition, Coiro (2003) asserts that new literacies should be highly engaging for learners to motivate them to learn and foster their learning. Thus, the website could be a useful source for teachers who want to engage students in the technological literacy learning process.

Evaluation of the Main Features

Sharendipity.com provides the user with many opportunities to apply critical thinking skills. In fact, the website allows users to create their own applications (including games, widgets, and education tools) from scratch. When users design their own games and widgets, they have to think critically before selecting among different game creation tools offered by the website. This requires users to question, compare, and evaluate the effectiveness of tools as they create. For games, users might create a Scramble Puzzle Game in which they can add their own images and choose how many rows and columns they want to include in a scrambled version. Again, students or teachers can use this to enhance and develop technological literacies.

Additionally, Sharendipity.com provides users with ample opportunities to interact, cooperate and collaborate with each other in order to create and develop. In fact, the website is connected to social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs, in which users can argue, discuss, and comment on products that they or other users create. It also helps students create games that are tailored to their learning needs that they might then share with other learners.

There are several features that make Sharendipity.com engaging and contribute