

## Less is More: Getting the most out of short videos

### **Why I chose this topic**

In the ever-expanding world of the tools and tricks for language teaching, any motivated teacher does their best to keep up-to-date, and draw on all possible resources to engage students. Videos are perhaps especially accessible, but effective classroom use of these can come at the cost of lengthy preparation. Although there are specific EFL video sites (three excellent ones were acknowledged in the session), a Youtube video or film extract where the topic may be perfect for your students is still liable to be very challenging.

There is now a wealth of published video material – for example, interviews and mini documentaries – which closely caters to business students' needs and interests. My session at BESIG demonstrated how we can use these videos not only to focus on language and skills, but also to inspire students, relate to real-world issues, and serve as an invaluable stepping stone to real-world communication.

### **Introduction to the session**

After a short open-group poll on videos participants currently use, we discussed briefly the pros and cons of using authentic video. We then moved towards the session's main aims: how we can use short (mostly 3-4') videos from published sources to motivate students, make classroom language and topics more accessible, and help bridge the gap towards more authentic extracts.

The session was attended by many who had not previously seen the videos I showed. This enabled me to demonstrate how I set up a video lesson: first, I lead in to the video topic in a way which suits my particular group; I usually then focus on a few lexical items so that they don't later create a hurdle which can dampen enthusiasm. And, while I like to link the video to course book materials, I do think it's important that a video lesson can stand alone: I try to use it as a self-contained lesson, but one which also lifts the corresponding unit's materials off the page.

### **The session**

I focused on three sources for videos: *International Express* (third edition) Pre Intermediate and Upper Intermediate, *Business Result Advanced* and Pre Intermediate, and *Successful Presentations*. While each video comes with an accompanying worksheet and audioscript, I demonstrated how just a little extra work can tailor the materials to make the topic specifically relevant and potentially exciting to participants' own students. This can be in the form of a lead-in asking about students' preferences on a topic (e.g. favourite building / place, for a video about the High Line in New York), what apps they use (for a video about Zipcar, a US start-up), or their opinions on how to involve an audience in a talk. (This latter example was in preparation for a corporate presentation we used to focus on one aspect of presentation skills). We then used an extract from a TED video to test the strategies for bringing a presentation alive.

Similarly, besides a personalized lead-in, I think it's important to exploit the topic of a video, and include an appropriate follow-up activity. This shouldn't necessarily become a serious writing task, which takes the edge off enjoyment, but could be internet research into a similar (e.g. start-up) company with brief report-back to the class, or even writing a short postcard highlighting 'the best of' when visiting a particular place / city. When such tasks are done in

pairs or small groups, students enjoy them more, tend to be more creative, and often a competitive element can be included, stretching language use or ideas. It's a win-win situation!

In the session, I also used one video (*Business Result*, Advanced U9 Corporate Social Responsibility) to demonstrate how we can focus on business content which we ourselves may be unfamiliar with. My example related to EON, a UK energy firm, and their project Challenge 100 about eradicating fuel poverty. I also feel this example enables students to relate to everyday matters from a business perspective, and is also an issue which, to some extent, relates to everyone: sometimes it's refreshing to 'get real' and not always discuss dream holidays, or exotic topics we have little connection with.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, I wanted to demonstrate a three-stage approach to using short video, with exercises at each stage: before-, while-, and after-watching tasks. It's also important to take your own group's interests and needs into consideration: sometimes making a linguistic link and focusing specifically on past tenses within a 'good topic' may work; at other times I think it's enough to use the video largely for inspiration, and to serve as a springboard for more detailed follow-up activities. And the beauty of all these particular videos is that not only are audioscripts included in the worksheets, but students can listen and watch again and again, with or without subtitles: for me as a language learner, that really appeals!

### **Testing the formula**

After showing how I would exploit four videos, I played the fifth and final video without any exercises, for participants, in three groups, to come up with their own thoughts on how to lead-in to the video, what activities to do while watching, and suitable follow-up tasks. Their ideas were wonderfully creative and inspiring, and included ordering and guessing games, and sound-off or picture-off activity variants, demonstrating that bouncing ideas off others over a very short space of time (2-3' only) can result in making videos not only fun in the classroom but very worthwhile linguistically. I was truly impressed, and it further demonstrated that a little investment goes a long way! Participants were then given the accompanying worksheet, a rather more down-to-earth document, but one which nevertheless exemplifies the very comprehensive nature of this source for learning, and which can be selected from or added to.

### **Response and Feedback**

By and large, I felt the audience were engaged in the session, and interested to learn more about the videos and their availability. This should undoubtedly have beneficial consequences for using published video materials effectively in the classroom.

### **References**

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- Baade, K., Holloway, C. Scrivener, J. & Turner, R. (2012) *Business Result Advanced*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
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[rachelappleby@mail.datanet.hu](mailto:rachelappleby@mail.datanet.hu)  
@rapple18