Humanizing Your Online Course: Using Brief "Imperfect" Videos

" I don't believe videos need to be perfect. Instead, they need to be meaningful and make relevant connections for learners. Video is also an exceptional medium for easing anxieties, building trust, and supporting your students' learner variabiity."
(**Pacansky-Brock***)*

In this third issue of our summer newsletter series, we'll continue to explore practical tips to create a welcoming and inclusive learning environment in your online course. When you *humanize* your online course, you build your teaching intentionally on framework of the four interwoven humanizing principles of *trust, presence, awareness,* and *empathy.* To learn effectively in online courses, students need to focus on important course concepts and content, and build their knowledge as they progress through the course.

Here we share two examples of best practices for using brief videos (from Pacansky-Brock's list of eight humanizing elements): (1) **Bumper Videos;** and (2) **Micro lectures.** The key characteristics of these videos are that they are *brief, focused,* and *"imperfect".* By being brief and focused, you provide students with learning "chunks" to build upon each other throughout the course. By being "imperfect", these videos are authentic and intentionally created by the instructor (you). These brief videos build trust, by sending the message to your students that *"I am here to help you learn."*

HUMANIZING YOUR ONLINE COURSE
STRATEGIES FOR USING BRIEF "IMPERFECT" VIDEOS

BUMPER VIDEOS

- *What is it?* A bumper video is a 2-3 minute, visually-oriented clip which you can use to introduce a new module, clarify a sticky concept, or to summarize results of a course assignment or activity.
- *Why include bumper videos?* These serve to grab the attention of learners, particularly with visual elements, and also may include your brief narration.
- *Where to place these in your course?* Place these where students will need this focused information. For example, you can include at the start of a learning module, or in the announcements to start off a week.
- *How?* Bumper videos should be "imperfect" and authentic; they don't need high production value. Use apps & tools such as Kaltura, Screencast-o-matic, Animoto.

MICROLECTURES

- *What is it?* Microlectures are brief (usually 5-7 minute-long) narrated instructional videos that are designed for specific objectives. Being brief and focused are critical!
- *Why include microlectures?* These serve to focus, chunk, and build learning throughout the course.
- *Where to place these in your course?* Include these in modules or lessons of your course, presenting as a series, instead of one long lecture video. Give students an opportuniity to check their understanding as they move through the series of microlectures, with low-stakes quizzing, reflection, etc.
- *How?* Microlectures should be authentic and don't need high production value. Use tools and apps, such as Kaltura. Microlectures are brief, you can easily edit them to refresh and use again..

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View the "Humanizing Your Online Course: Strategies for Using Brief "Imperfect" Videos" Infographic Online

Tips for Using Brief Videos in Your "Humanized" Online Course

Here we share two practical ways to use videos to support learning and connect with students in your online course: (1) Bumper Videos; and (2) Micro lectures. Note that the practical tips and best research-based practices shared here are suggested "starting points" for humanizing your online course. We encourage you to try, adapt, and apply these tips and practices to your own online courses and online teaching, finding out what works best for you and your students.

Start with these practices for creating brief, authentic, focused videos for your online course. Since these are **brief "imperfect" videos**, you can easily refresh, edit, and revise them to use again, customizing for your students as needed each semester.

1. **Create Bumper Videos**

What are Bumper Videos and Why? Bumper Videos serve to get students' attention and engage them! "Bumpers" are a concept used in advertising to enhance customers' brand awareness by using a short, memorable message. **Pacansky-Brock** has adapted this concept to education, particularly to humanize online courses with brief, focused messages. A Bumper Video is brief, usually 1-3 minutes (or even less), and includes images, text, and music to grab student attention.

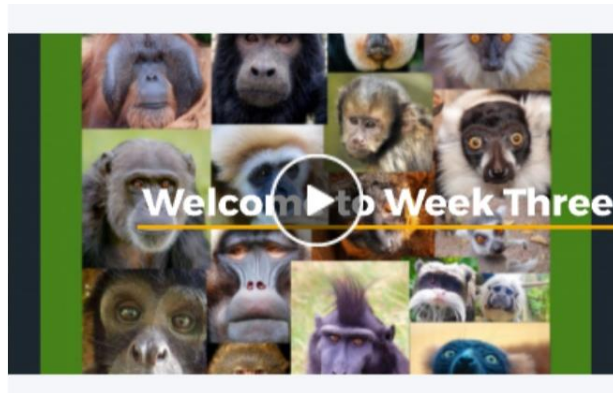### *Where to Place Them in Your Course?*

Bumper Videos can be used to introduce a module, an important, critical or sticky topic, an assignment, anywhere in your course where focus is needed. To introduce a module, you can think of a Bumper Video as a "Coming Attractions" movie trailer, in which students get highlights of the general content, assignments, and deadlines for that module or week. You also may create a Bumper Video to briefly summarize or comment on the completion/end of a module or week, *e.g.*, summarizing discussion postings of the class, or class results for an assignment or exam. Bumper Videos may be placed wherever you find that student attention is needed most --to kick off a module, clarify a critical concept, or to review class results a completed task or assignment.

How to Create Bumper Videos?

Bumper Videos should be brief, focused, and "imperfect" (low-stakes & production value). You can put them together quickly using tools such as Adobe Spark, Animoto, Screencast-o-matic, Powtoon, Canva. You even can use your smart phone to create a video (**see phone tips here**). Bumper Videos should emphasize visual elements to attract attention, *e.g.*, images, music, color. You can include voice-over narration and even feature yourself in cameo appearance! However, it's recommended to keep "talking heads" to a minimum.

As you plan Bumper Videos, always keep in mind the humanizing message that you are sending to your students, *"I am here to help you learn"*. The content provided in these focused 1-3-minute-long Bumper Videos should be useful to students.

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Examples of Bumper Videos

See course media link:
https://coursemedia.gmu.edu/media/Example+of+Bumper+Video+for+Anthropology+Course/1_hbj7idp4

If you click on the video screenshot or link (above), you will find an example of a Bumper Video created to introduce a weekly module for a fictional Anthropology online course. The Bumper Video uses images, text, music, and color to attract attention to Week Three course content about Non-Human Primates. This video was created using Animoto; Animoto has ready-to-use templates, stock images, and free music tracks. This Bumper Video was created in about 90 minutes!

In the video, students experience various images of prosimians, monkeys, and apes; they get general information about what will be covered in Week Three, the discussion topics, and about upcoming assignments. Note that the language in the text is inclusive, using "we" and "our". Overall, this example of a Bumper Video is brief and less than 2 minutes long. This video could be placed at the start of Week Three module, and/or in the Announcements. After viewing this video, students can feel the instructor's enthusiasm for the subject material, so that they look forward to Week Three of the online course!

Here are additional examples of Bumper Videos (also presented on **Pacansky-Brock's website**)**;** one is a course intro, and the other examples focus on clarifying important course concepts. These videos are all found on YouTube at the links listed.

- **Abnormal Psychology Intro, by Katie Conklin, West Hills College Lamoore** (2:23)
- **The Writing Process: Brainstorming, by Colleen Harmon, Cuesta College** (2:52)
- **What's a Bit? by Brent Wedge, Modesto College** (2:48)

Tips for Using Brief Videos in Your "Humanized" Online Course (continued)

(2) Create Microlectures

What are Microlectures and Why?

Microlectures are brief narrated instructional videos that are designed for specific objectives. Microlectures are usually 5-7 minute-long, but should not be longer than 15 minutes. *Being brief and focused are critical!* Because Microlectures are brief and focused, they serve to chunk and build learning in your online course. Research shows that online students learn best when videos are kept to **15 minutes or less** in length (*e.g.,* Berg *et al.,* 2014). Students simply lose attention when viewing a long lecture video online! If you think about TED Talks as a model, video lectures shouldn't run longer than 15 minutes in length.

Where to Place These in Your Online Course?

Include Microlectures in modules or lessons of your course, presenting as them as a series or playlist, instead of one long lecture video. Give students an opportunity to check their understanding as they move through the series of Microlectures, with low-stakes quizzing, reflection activities, etc.

How to Create Microlectures?

Microlectures should be authentic and like Bumper Videos don't need high production value. Use tools and apps, such as PowerPoint, Canva, Kaltura. You even can create **Mini-Lectures with VoiceThread**! Because Microlectures are brief, you then can easily edit and revise to use again.

Four Steps for Creating a Microlecture (from Pacansky-Brock)

4 Steps to Creating a Microlecture

Record
1. Select a video tool appropriate for your content.
2. Record your microlecture
3. Export your recording to a video file (usually an .mp4) and save it on your computer

Host
1. Select a hosting method
2. Upload your video from your computer to the hosting provider

Caption
1. Add accurate captions to your video
2. If mechanical/automatic captions are provided, these may need to be edited to ensure they include punctuation and capital letters.

Embed
1. Copy the Embed Code from the hosted video
2. Embed the video on a Page or Assignment in your Canvas course

Tips for Using Brief Videos in Your "Humanized" Online Course (continued)

If you already have created long lecture videos for your online course, it's possible that you could use video editing tools to break up long lectures into multiple Microlectures. However, it's best to intentionally plan Microlectures, so that these build upon each other. For additional guidance and tips for creating Microlecture videos, please see the *Pocket PD Guide for Making Videos* (Google Slide Show) posted at **https://brocansky.com/humanizing/bumper-microlectures.**

Humanizing Your Online Course: Next Steps!

In this newsletter issue, you've learned how brief and "imperfect" videos can engage your online students, and enhance their learning. As you prepare your upcoming online courses, include some Bumper Videos and/or Microlectures. Keep your videos brief, focused, and simple – it's OK if they are not "perfect", since that shows your students that you're human! You want to send your students the message, *"I am here to help you learn"*.

As you create videos, always keep in mind the four interwoven humanizing principles of *trust, presence, awareness,* and *empathy!*

Need Additional Guidance? Please contact Dr. Darlene Smucny, Assistant Director, Digital Learning, Stearns Center, for guidance and assistance for humanizing your online course. Her email is: **dsmucny@gmu.edu.**

Cited Resources

- Berg, R., Brand A., Grant, J., Kirk, J., and Zimmerman, T. (2014). **Leveraging Recorded Mini-Lectures to Increase Student Learning**. *Online Classroom* (2014):5-6.

- Pacansky-Brock, M. (n.d.). **Bumper Videos & Micro lectures. https://brocansky.com/humanizing/bumper-microlectures** (brocansky.com by Michelle Pacansky-Brock is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License).

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