

# Currents

In Teaching and Learning

ACADEMIC  
JOURNAL



VOLUME 13 NUMBER 1 SEPTEMBER 2021



WORCESTER  
STATE  
UNIVERSITY

## BOOK REVIEW

### *99 Tips for Creating Simple and Sustainable Educational Videos: A Guide for Online Teachers and Flipped Classes*, by Karen Costa. Stylus Publishing, 2020.

—Elizabeth Siler

Elizabeth Siler, Professor, Business Administration and Economics Department, Worcester State University. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to: [esiler@worchester.edu](mailto:esiler@worchester.edu)

Karen Costa's book arrived at just the right time for many of us who never expected to teach remotely, or at least to teach so much remotely! I had never planned to make my own teaching videos, even though most of my classes are heavily discussion-based and moving toward the "flipped classroom" model. Then, of course, the pandemic happened, stay-at-home orders were issued, and all of my classes suddenly had no face-to-face time at all. When I attempted to write up supplementary instructions for accessing library resources for a complex project, a task that normally takes place during class time in front of laptops with students helping each other, that's when I learned (1) just how much information I convey in person through speaking, and (2) how inadequate written instruction are as a substitute. At about that time I learned about Costa's book, and it took reading just a few pages to convince me that making videos could vastly improve the quality of my working life and the quality of my students' experiences.

This book is written, as the title suggests, as separate tips of one to two pages each, grouped into sections by theme. The book includes QR codes (links you scan with a smartphone) to supplementary videos. As Costa says in her introduction, you can use the book in whatever way works best for you—you can read straight through from start to finish, beginning with the underlying reasons and theory, including the requisite connections to aligning your video creation and use to your instructional goals, or, you can jump straight to Tip 91: Make a Welcome Video. The book begins with two sections about why videos are good for both students and instructors, and the ways in which videos can align with your instructional goals. The third section connects video use to several educational theories. Sections 4–10 address different aspects of videos: what types, when to use them,

and a comprehensive set of "how-to" topics including sound, lighting, being on camera, and technology. The book ends with a beginning: an invitation and plan to build your teaching video practice, followed by a set of suggestions for practice videos (Sections 11 and 12).

Throughout the book, Costa consistently addresses issues of accessibility (descriptions of images, captioning), of good teaching practices in general, and of striving for humanity rather than perfection. Costa's writing models one of her goals for videos: humanizing online classes. She tells stories of her own experiences, including her mistakes and failures, and of other parts of her life. The result is engaging, instructive, and balanced, and allows us to experience what it might be like to take an online course that uses Costa's approach. An important contribution of this book is her commitment to sustainability: teaching and developing course materials can expand to fill up all of the time that we give it. There is always something to improve, to update, to revise (to grade!). Costa demonstrates two ways that videos can be part of a sustainable approach to teaching: by making imperfect but "good enough" videos, and by building a library of videos you can use for many semesters and courses.

Although it is not directly addressed in the book, Costa's approach to making educational videos also supports trauma-informed pedagogy, a way of teaching that acknowledges the effects of extreme stress or trauma on learning, and designs in ways to help compensate for those effects. One of the most important and effective ways to help students cope is to help them make connections and develop relationships with each other and with us, their teachers. While this might seem like a daunting task in a fully remote, asynchronous class,

99 Tips *continued*

Costa's book overflows with evidence that being present and being yourself, through video, helps students feel connected. My experience bears this out; midway through the fall 2020 semester, I made a video talking about how difficult the semester had been for everyone, myself included, and informing my students that they are not alone in how they feel and how well (or badly) they had been doing in school. To my surprise, students whom I had never met or seen wrote to thank me, and to tell me that they were sure they were alone in "doing so badly" this year. Costa's book is the reason I made that video.

Sections 1 and 2 describe reasons for using videos and ways to align them with instructional goals. The Tips in Section 1, make arguments for using videos, from "be part of a movement" toward more online education to "have fun" and feel connected to students, even if you never see or speak with them. In Section 2, Costa explains her goals for videos, at first "to overcome frustration," (p. 26) and now, to "humanize, instruct, and clarify." She invites us to stop and reflect on our own goals for using videos, instead of just jumping in and beginning.

Each tip in Section 3 makes a research- or theory-based argument for using videos in remote learning. They are: community of inquiry (being present); validation theory; brain-based teaching; bridging the spatial and temporal "transactional distance" between learners and teachers; symbiotic relationships; aesthetic-usability effect; student fear; emotion; commonalities between learners and teacher; and immediacy cues. It wasn't until I had finished this section and was well into the next that I realized I had just read (and enjoyed) a literature review without even realizing that's what I was doing. Sneaky? Perhaps. A model for online learning? Absolutely.

Sections 4–10 address the practical details and guidance for making decisions about what, why, and how to include videos in your courses. Costa's goal of sustainability comes through clearly in these tips, especially in places where she describes her own experiences of "I tried it the elaborate way, and the cost in time and energy was too high; the easy way is more than adequate for meeting my goals." Her approach is particularly applicable to this time, especially for those of us who are overwhelmed by the technological choices and social media photos of multi-monitor Zoom

teaching setups. These sections of the book have a lot of information in them, especially for a beginner; at the same time, each tip on its own is completely manageable. This enabled me, for example, to pay more attention to the tips that I needed the most, and come back to the others at more leisure.

Section 4 is about types of videos: "talking head" videos, screencasts (voiceovers of on-screen images), and a combination. Section 5 is where I confess to getting lost in my imagination. This section is filled with possibilities for ways to use video far beyond recording a lecture. For example, Tip 42 makes suggestions for videos as weekly course announcements, and Tip 45 gives several ways to integrate videos into course content, such as an introduction to the week, or walking through assignment instructions. I followed Tip 48 and made screencasts to give each student personalized feedback on a draft of a major project. While it was time-consuming, as Costa points out, it was faster than I expected, and more effective than written feedback has been in past years—most students appreciated and implemented my suggestions.

Section 6 is about lighting, location, sound, and recording devices, very simply and with a minimal budget. A smartphone is more than sufficient for most talking-head videos. Section 7 is the skill-building section; each tip is one specific way that a video is different from an in-person lecture. Tip 60 addresses eye contact when you are talking to a camera, and Tip 64 walks through why and how to keep your videos brief, under 10 minutes, even if the total video-based content for a topic is longer.

The entirety of Section 8 is dedicated to using PowerPoint effectively, linking back to and applying concepts from the literature, as described in Section 3. Section 10 is the section that I didn't know I needed: all about how to get your videos from your device to your students. This section includes information on privacy and limiting access to videos when they are hosted on public platforms, such as YouTube.

I particularly want to point out Section 9, titled "Is Being on Camera for Everyone?" If your answer is an emphatic "No! It's not for me!", fear not. You can still make videos to meet your teaching goals, including introducing yourself, without using your camera. Other

## 99 Tips *continued*

tips in this section help you explore and legitimize an aversion to being on camera, and, if you choose, to try it out anyway.

Section 11, “Building Your Video Creation Practice,” was written before the pandemic pushed so much online so quickly. It was—and is—intended to help you pause, think, prioritize, and plan as you work, over semesters and years, to integrate more videos into your teaching. That seemed like an impossible luxury to me, trying to move three discussion-heavy courses to fully remote in three months. And yet, the idea of sustainability permeates this section. Find what works for you; make a welcome video if you are overwhelmed and don’t know where to start. Reading this section helped me think beyond the immediate need for remote learning and remember that all pandemics end. Section 12 is full of practice exercises. Each short and non-threatening

exercise addresses an aspect of making successful videos. Make, review, and delete.

Costa’s 99 Tips for Creating Simple and Sustainable Educational Videos delivers just what its title suggests, and more. Videos can be an extremely powerful tool to humanize online learning, to connect with students, and to make the work of teaching more sustainable. Costa is expert at showing the multitude of ways to use this tool, and reminds us over and over to “find what works for you.” This book is appropriate for instructors with any level of experience making instructional videos, and for both new and experienced teachers. It is a thoughtful guide to incorporating video into your teaching, whether your classes are online, in person, or somewhere in between.

## Information

### Editor

Benjamin Jee, Worcester State University, MA

### Reviewers and Copy Editors

Elisabeth Buck, University of Massachusetts Dartmouth, MA

Mariana Calle, Worcester State University, MA

Jennifer Daniel, Queens University, NC

Melissa Duprey, Worcester State University, MA

Emily Holland, Brandon University, Canada

Vivian Kao, Lawrence Technological University, MI

Mark L. Johnson, Pittsburg State University, KS

Linda Larrivee, Worcester State University, MA

Melissa Mills, Oklahoma State University, OK

Susanna Meyer, Worcester State University, MA

Dirk Morrison, University of Saskatchewan, Canada

Karyn Olsen, University of Western Ontario, Canada

Matthew Ortoleva, Worcester State University, MA

Ruby Owiny, Trinity International University, IL

Drew Polly, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, NC

Amber Racchini, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, PA

Ray Sanchez, Madera Community College, CA

Emily Scribner, Clemson University, SC

Colleen Sullivan, Worcester State University, MA

Seth Surgan, Worcester State University, MA

Scott Wible, University of Maryland, MD

### Journal Advisory Board

Mariana Calle, Worcester State University, MA

Melissa Duprey, Worcester State University, MA

Linda Larrivee, Worcester State University, MA

Susanna Meyer, Worcester State University, MA

Emily Soltano, Worcester State University, MA

Seth Surgan, Worcester State University, MA

Don Vescio, Worcester State University, MA

### About Us

*Currents in Teaching and Learning* is a peer-reviewed electronic journal that fosters exchanges among teacher-scholars across the disciplines. Published twice a year (typically one issue in fall, one in spring), *Currents* seeks to improve teaching and learning in higher education with short reports on classroom practices as well as longer research, or theoretical articles related to teaching and learning.

### Subscriptions

If you wish to be notified when each new issue of *Currents* becomes available online and to receive our Calls for Submissions and other announcements, please join our *Currents* Subscribers' Listserv: [Subscribe Here](#).

### Call for Submissions

*Currents* invites general submissions on issues of teaching and learning, including:

- Brief reports that provide a concise but complete account of new teaching methods or materials that will be of broad interest to college and university instructors (750-1250 words).
- Medium-length teaching and program reports on classroom/curricular practices (2500-5500 words)
- Longer research or theoretical articles related to current issues in teaching and learning in higher education (5500 - 7000 words)
- Book reviews, pending editor approval of proposed text.

All submissions must be original, previously unpublished work and, if based in a particular academic discipline, must explicitly consider their relevance and applicability to other disciplines and classroom settings.

### Submissions and Contact Information

Please address all submissions and inquiries to Benjamin Jee via e-mail: [currents@worcester.edu](mailto:currents@worcester.edu)

For further information and submissions guidelines see our website: [www.worcester.edu/currents](http://www.worcester.edu/currents)

*Currents in Teaching and Learning* is a publication of Worcester State University, Worcester, Massachusetts, U.S.A. ISSN: 1945-3043 © 2011, Worcester State University