

Reviewing Your Teaching on Videotape

Reviewing a videotape of a teaching situation is one of several ways in which instructors can evaluate their own performance. In addition the videotape can be used as a method to assist peer review of your teaching.

However, watching a videotape of yourself in a teaching situation can be both a valuable and a discouraging experience.

It is valuable because it allows you to:

- view and listen to your class as your students do;
- observe your students' reactions to your teaching; and
- gather data about your teaching

It can be discouraging if you:

- expect to see something like a lively TV show on tape;
- only watch the video by yourself - comments from another person can help you to pay less attention to the distorted image created by the video medium, for example, a "flattened" voice, a blown-up figure, an exaggerated receding hairline or a button undone;
- don't have enough time to view the tape as a whole at least twice; or
- don't have some topics to focus on when watching the video replay.

What to look for in a video replay of your teaching

We suggest that you view the tape twice, first to get an overall picture of the lesson and then to ask some specific questions about what happened. In either case we include suggested lists of questions to ask yourself while viewing the tape. This should help you to focus your attention on what was happening in the class rather than feeling embarrassed about seeing yourself on tape. You will, no doubt modify this list and develop your own checklist so that the questions are tuned to your particular teaching situation.

First viewing - getting the overall picture

- What is your overall impression of the class? In terms of what you were trying to achieve, did it go very well, fairly well, or not so well?
- What were the best parts of the class? What were the worst parts?
- What did the students seem to be most interested in? What did students seem to be least interested in?
- If you gave the class over again, what three things would you change? How would you go about making these changes?

Second viewing - asking specific questions

The specific questions that we recommend you ask can be grouped under six general headings: (1) classroom climate (2) organization (3) clarity of presentation (4) asking questions and giving explanations (5) encouraging student interest and participation (6) classroom management.

1. Classroom Climate

What kind of relationship do you have with the students? For example, did you:

- Address students by name?
- Look at and talk to the class rather than to some inanimate object in the room?
- Refrain from addressing the same students most of the time?
- Appear to listen attentively to all students' comments and questions?
- Take time to respond seriously to students' comments and questions?
- Give feedback, encouragement, criticism and praise evenhandedly?
- Display interest and enthusiasm for the subject matter?

2. Organization

How well organized was the class in terms of telling students the aims, what content would be covered and ways in which this class was linked to previous and future classes. For example, did you:

- Explicitly state the purpose of this class session at the beginning?
- Explicitly state the relationship of this class to the previous class session?
- At the beginning present on the board, on OHP or in a handout, a brief outline of the topics to be discussed in this class?
- At the end of class tell students what would be covered in the next class?

How well organized was the class in terms of the flow of ideas and emphasis on the most important ideas? For example, did you:

- Keep focused and avoid digression from the main topic?
- Use some cues (verbal or non-verbal cues or pauses) to tell students when you finished discussing one topic and were moving on to the next?
- Emphasize the most important ideas by restating them or drawing attention to them in some way?
- Summarize the main points at the end of class or the end of a topic or ask students to do so?
- Restate, at the end of the class, what students are expected to gain from the session?

How well organized was the class in terms of your time management? For example, did you:

- Begin and end the class fairly promptly?
- Match your pace of presentation with class comprehension?
- Keep discussion focused?
- Include either too much or too little material in the class period? Did you find you were left with nothing to say before the end or had too much material left over at the end and hence had to rush to cover all the material?

3. Clarity of presentation

Reviewing a video can be a useful way to check whether you are presenting your ideas clearly enough for your audience to understand them. It is not always possible to find this out while you are in the act of giving a lecture or leading a discussion. For example, did you:

- Speak in a clear, strong voice that could be easily heard?
- Speak neither too fast nor too slow?
- Allow time for note taking by students?
- Write legibly and clearly on the board?
- Use clear visual aids such as OHPs or slides?

4. Asking questions and giving explanations

In addition to a clear presentation, you need to be aware when students are puzzled or “lost”, and to develop skills in asking questions and giving clear explanations of difficult concepts.

The list below includes some suggestions for explaining difficult or unfamiliar material more clearly. For example, did you:

- Seem to know whether or not the class was understanding you during the lecture or whether they were puzzled or confused?
- Define new terms and concepts before discussing them?
- Give examples, illustrations, or applications to clarify abstract concepts?
- Explicitly relate new ideas to familiar ones?
- Use alternate explanations when students did not understand?
- Slow down your presentation when discussing complex ideas?
- Use handouts and audiovisual aids to assist explanation?

Questioning is another important technique to gauge students' learning and ensure understanding of the content. For example, did you:

- Ask questions to determine what students know about the topic?
- Encourage or discourage questions from students?
- Ask different kinds of questions (knowledge, interpretation, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) to challenge students?
- Ask questions that promote original thinking and evaluative analysis?
- Periodically ask questions to gauge whether students need more or less information on a topic?
- Pause to allow students time to respond?
- Encourage students to answer difficult questions by providing cues or rephrasing?
- Handle difficult or value-laden questions effectively?

5. Encouraging student interest and participation

Students will learn better from a class in which they have actively participated and in which they are interested rather than from one in which they are just passively receiving information. Some ways to encourage participation are implicit in this list of questions to ask about the video. Naturally the size of the class and the aims of the class will determine how much discussion is appropriate so you will need to take this into account when using these questions to review your video teaching episode. For example, did you:

- Incorporate students' ideas into presentations?
- Encourage as many students as possible to participate in discussion where it occurred?
- Attempt to draw out quiet students and prevent dominating students from monopolizing the discussion?
- Refrain from monopolizing the discussion yourself?
- Close the discussion by explicitly summarizing the different viewpoints and ideas presented by students?
- Accept points of view different from your own?
- Vary activities over the class period?
- Encourage students to challenge ideas?
- Make all students feel comfortable in class?

6. Classroom management

Two common concerns are order in the classroom and the issue of inattention, particularly in a large class. However, what is considered good discipline will vary from instructor to instructor and from situation to another. Disciplinary problems sometimes are a reflection of student dissatisfaction with your teaching. Certain forms of misconduct have to be stopped immediately and positively. But to solve the problems, some effort is needed to reflect on your past practice to discover the root of the problems. The following questions may give you some hints.

In case of inattention, reflect if :

- You have made your presentation interesting enough to command the attention of your students?
- You have encouraged students' participation in various learning activities?
- You have held your students accountable for their own learning, e.g. ask for a reaction paper following the lecture, a student-led discussion, etc.?
- You have linked the topic with the assignment or examination syllabus?
- You were aware of the physical and psychological distractions like noise, poor lighting, physical fatigue, hunger, an important test following the class, an important event at the Student Union, etc.?

In case of order in class, recall if:

- You have set up some mutually agreed ground rules about behavior with the class and explained to your students that they have certain responsibilities and certain rights?
- You have conveyed to students the notion that the accomplishment of course objectives is partly their problem?
- You have shown that you are willing to entertain reasonable suggestions, objections and questions and are attentive to your students' needs?
- You have created a positive and supportive climate in class?

Several of the above questions are adapted from:

Davis, B. G. "Watching Yourself on Videotape" in *Tools for Teaching*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1993, pp. 355-361.
Davis, B. G. "Sample Observation Form" in *Sourcebook for Evaluating Teaching*, Office of Educational Development, University of California at Berkeley, 1988, pp. 25-26.

It is possible to go further in analyzing videotapes using a selection of observation techniques where what is said in class and non-verbal events can be recorded and analyzed in terms of frequency of occurrence of events. Such analysis can then be considered in terms of possible reasons for their outcomes. These techniques will be discussed in detail in a later *Teaching-Learning Tips* on Classroom Observation Techniques.

Summary

This Teaching-Learning Tips provides some suggestions about what to look for in a videotape in order to evaluate your own classroom performance. If you want more advice or assistance in viewing the tape and deciding on methods to improve your classroom performance you are welcome to contact staff of the Instructional Development Unit (Mavis Kelly at ext. 6811 or Winnie Wong at ext. 6809).

References

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Teaching-Learning Tips is an ETC publication which aims to provide quick and practical ideas for lecturers and teaching assistants to enhance teaching effectiveness. It will be published four times annually. Contributions of ideas and suggestions of topics are heartily welcomed. Please contact Winnie Wong, editor at ext. 6809 or email "etwinnie".