

Transcript for Teaching Talk #8: Digital Assessments: PowToon Videos

Aron Fazekas: Good afternoon, my name is Aron Fazekas and I am an education developer with the Office of Teaching and Learning. Welcome to our Teaching Talks that we are hosting. Before we get started, I first wanted to acknowledge that we are all in various places that are governed by different treaties and relationships to the land and in particular with the current social issues that we are experiencing right now, I think it's important to remember our collective responsibilities to each other as we consider how we can enact inclusion and respect in our daily lives and actions. So, just some housekeeping things before I pass it over to our panelists today; the session is going to be recorded and we'll have a link available posted on our website later on. The session is usually structured over the 50 minutes or so that we have with 20 minutes roughly for the panelists and then we follow that up with a question and answer period where you can pose your questions to the panelists.

Shehroze Saharan: Shehroze, I'll pass it to you, and you can just walk us through the rest of the technical logistics. Hello everyone, my name is Shehroze and just a few things to remember for everyone is that as you're coming in you will notice that your audio and video is turned off and it will remain off for the duration of the session. So a couple of things to remember in terms of how to actually ask the Q&A during the Q&A session is: at the bottom of your screen you will notice a Q&A tab, so you can click that and have it open and that's where you can write your comments your questions and then we will be taking a look at those questions and addressing them to the panelist at the end of the session. As always, please remain respectful for the duration of the Q&A session and with that I will pass it over to Lindsey.

Lindsey Robinson: Hi, thank you so much for joining us today. I am just going to share my screen with you. Thank you very much for joining us today. I'm Lindsey Robinson, I'm the Digital Learning Specialist in the McLaughlin Library. I help instructors integrate digital assessments into their courses, as well as oversee the operations of the media studio and the student staff who work there, who support students in creating this type of digital media. I'm also joined today by Dr. Clive Thompson: professor from the School of Languages and Literatures. So, today I'll be starting off talking, before he can share a little bit of his experience with this type of assessment.

So, first off, I'm going to talk a bit about what PowToon actually is. We're going to talk about best applications for PowToons, part of a PowToon project, and then criteria for you for evaluating good video and audio and how that might look within a rubric. We're also going to talk a little bit about the limitations that the fall might present as well as some supports offered within the library.



Lindsey Robinson: So, what is PowToon? PowToon is a web-based video creator. You can add text animated characters and objects, add stock video, images, and music as well as upload your own media to personalize it. We use PowToon actually at the library all the time to create instructional and how-to videos. We have an educational subscription with classroom seats. You can create free accounts with PowToon as well, but the educational subscription provides access to more features, there's less PowToon branding on it, and you can download it as an mp4. So how it works is that there's basically a timeline layout and that allows you to drag-and-drop different items into it, to resize and adjust timings, but it's important to note that PowToon is not a video or an audio editor. If you think of it as a more dynamic and modern version of basically a PowerPoint video, so it's basically like creating slides and setting the timings to it. PowToon is best for explainer videos, for introducing a topic, or exploring a topic, for reflection videos. So maybe you want your students to reflect on their course and their experience, or how-to videos, so explaining or outlining a process. So, it's best for creating short videos; we usually suggest under five minutes, but it's best for somewhere between two to three minutes.

So, parts of the project that students would have to go through in order to create a video like this. So, planning and brainstorming, research and narrowing a topic, like so many assessments. So then after that portion, would be scripting and storyboarding. So, scripting what would be said in the video, and storyboarding kind of plans out an idea of what would happen on screen at the same time that the script is happening. We generally recommend after this stage that there's some kind of peer review process put in place. This usually helps students create better videos to get some kind of outside feedback. Then there's creating and gathering media, so because there's so much media already in PowToon, it really depends on the assignment and what they might have to create or find elsewhere in order to import into PowToon. So, they would be looking for images, video, and sound and then they would have to record their audio. So, for a voiceover, that script is part of the video. They would have to record their audio first and then upload it into PowToon and then they would put all of the media together in PowToon; then they could publish and download on their final product. So, in the last webinar I did, there was a lot of questions about how to assess this type of work and people didn't necessarily know what makes a good video. So, these are kind of some guiding questions that we often provide people to think about what makes a good video:

Does it have a consistent look and feel?

Do visuals enhance the script without becoming too cluttered and overwhelming?

Is it engaging?

If text is used, is it large enough?

Is there enough contrast so that everyone can read it?

Does the video create movement?

Are there smooth transitions between scenes?

And similarly, what does good audio sound like?

Lindsey Robinson: So, audio: even if you don't think you know anything about audio, you can usually tell if it's bad or if it's good. We were just having a conversation that poor audio can really distract from a video. Even if they spend so much time on the look, the poor audio quality can really distract a viewer from being able to enjoy the video as a whole. So,

can you hear the voice, is it clear?

Is the volume consistent throughout, or is it very pitchy between different parts?

Was it recorded in a quiet space or is there a lot of background noise?

Is the voice expressive?

Does the speaker pause, vary the speed and pitch, to enhance engagement?

Did the music and sound effects overpower the voice, or is there a good balance?

So, you could take those kinds of questions to focus in on what you think is most important. These are kind of examples of what you might find in a rubric. Audio recorded in a quiet space, the voice is clear and understandable, video has a consistent look and feel, smooth transitions that work with the audio voice-over. Media: images, voice, and music create a distinct atmosphere or tone that matches the story. Creativity: approach to the video was original in its composition and delivery. So, you may find that you could add them in each category like that. Some people have been in a much broader category in terms of the delivery and production or execution or something like that. So, limitations, moving into the Fall, one of the main limitations that I think about for the Fall, especially when we're talking about mostly people doing this online, is audio recording. So, it means that they're going to be recording audio with whatever equipment they have, so that might be their computer, it could be a cell phone, they could be using headphones that have a microphone in them. But basically, it's limited to whatever they have access to. The other part is that you need to do all of your audio recording and editing outside of PowToon; you would need a second tool in order to do that. Generally, we recommend that people use Audacity and we have a lot of supports for Audacity at the library. It's a free open-source tool that works on both Macs and PCs. We have a question you can ask yourself though; does it even need audio? Depending on the assignment and the way that it's put together, maybe text on the screen would work fine, but that all depends on what your expectations are, So, collaborations could potentially be another limitation. There's no simultaneous editing, so if you think about something, like Google Docs, where lots of people can be in Google Docs at the same time editing. PowToon doesn't really work that way, so you'd have to make sure that if it was done in groups, that people had designated times where they were working on it, or they could look at collaborating over something like Teams or Zoom, where somebody would share their screen as they edit and people can help and give input that way. So again, it's not a video editor, so that's another limitation. It has a small upload capacity per file, but you could upload multiple files; you just need to edit and split clips in another tool like iMovie before they input their own clips. So that's just another thought, but it's possible that they won't need to have additional video footage that they need to upload. Again, it all depends on the parameters of the assessment.

Lindsey Robinson: Supporting you and your students: I put together a guide as a starting point. It can be found at [guides.lib.uoguelph.ca/Digital Assignments](https://guides.lib.uoguelph.ca/Digital%20Assignments). On this guide, I kind of break down different digital assessments and what they're best for. Basically, what I've just covered in this presentation. And then there are the supports available online, that are self-directed for students to use, that are available online for those students to use, that we can integrate into your course. So, there are things like help guides, there also are some online tutorials as well that students can work their way through. For example, we have an audacity tutorial that actually takes people through audio editing, step by step, and you can actually have that open as well while you're working through and editing your audio. So, you just do it step by step, and it works with you. So, we will also be offering online consultations, so whether you need help with assignment design, or have questions about rubrics, you're welcome to book an appointment with me and get in touch with me. Also, students will be able to book appointments as well for help with troubleshooting. So, if they don't understand how to do something with a tool, we have a student staff who can support them through that. If they want help choosing a tool, we can do that as well, and also copyright questions or finding media. As I mentioned, we do have self-directed online tutorials, help guides, and videos, and we also have access to PowToon. So, if you are interested in getting access to PowToon for those upgraded accounts, you can get in contact with me. We have a limited number per semester that we can give access to. Also, it's not on the slide, because I haven't really worked out how it will work, but I am planning to offer workshops through the library online, through the fall, which will probably be tool-based. So, I'll probably be developing workshops around PowToon specifically, where we get together, kind of, in small groups and figure out how to use that tool. If you were interested in that, I will let you know when those workshops are scheduled and posted. So now kind of moving into some example: we thought it would be a great idea if you could see what these videos would look like. So, Clive will be sharing his experience in a moment, but this is actually one video that some of his students created, and we thought we'd give you an opportunity to see it. Okay, just one moment.

(French narrator voiceover of PowToon example). Lasts for three (3) minutes

So actually, the students managed to bring together a bunch of different things. They had to find their own media, and they added text and some stock video behind things, as well as a map, some music, and they did their voice-over. So, they had to combine all of these different elements. So, I'm going to pass things over to Clive now.

Clive Thompson: Okay, thank you very much Lindsey. I'm quite happy to talk about my experience with PowToon, because it went very well, and the students enjoyed using PowToon as well. The video that you just saw was made in a course that I taught in the winter of 2019. It's a course, a third-year/fourth-year undergraduate course, for specialists in French Studies. It's a course on women in French literature, culture, and cinema. So, the first step in my way of doing things was to invite Lindsey to come to my class and do a workshop. That was a big help because it has gauged students' confidence that they could start off on the right foot, and it gave the students a sense of confidence that they could go ahead with the project. As Lindsey just said, she is not able to come into classes in the next year, but she will have lots of other materials available to help us use PowToon in our courses. So, I'd just like to go through some of the specific instructions that I gave students. The video itself is worth 25% of the final grade, in other words it's more or less the equivalent of a major essay. I told the students that the final deadline for at least completing the video was the first of April. So that gave the students three months: January, February, March to make their videos. The video, I said, should be two to three minutes. Students could work in groups of two, three, or four, and students could work alone if they wanted to. I've been using PowToon for about the last three or four years now, and every time that I've asked students to make content in a course, at least one student has decided to work alone. Some students just prefer that and that's fine with me. So, I told the students that the video had to give biographical information about the woman writer, artist, filmmaker or musician. I gave the students lots of flexibility and latitude in what they could choose: the topic they could choose, the writer they could choose, and I think that seemed to work well. The students said they appreciated having that flexibility. I said the video should contain some biographical information. An important guideline for the students was to say that they had to pitch the level of their video, so they were making it for a grade 12 high school class and that seemed to help students get a sense of what level of information, how much detail they should give in the videos. And, as I think you saw with the video that you just looked at, it would work extremely well for high school students as an introduction to this woman filmmaker, Julie Gautier.

I said that the video had to include some very specific things: a title page with the students names, a text, a script which the students wrote in French and read in voiceover, and I said they could use any photographic material, video material that they liked. I said that the video, the content of the video had to answer several questions like who is this writer, artist, or filmmaker? What were the challenges she faced when she was going through her career? Say something about the originality of her work, and the final exercise that the students did was they had to present their video to the other students in the class. So, in this particular course, we organized what I called a video festival and that took place in the last week of classes. So, each group of students would stand up in front of the others and show their video, describe the challenges they faced, what they learned, and also answer questions, so students got feedback that way and that worked very well.

Clive Thompson: My evaluation criteria for the video were as follows: I would allow 40% of the total mark of the video to be for the accuracy, the precision of the language, the French language, used in the script and that is rated for voiceover and for the quality of the spoken French. Then that left 60% of the final grade for the video for technical, aesthetic, and originality of the video. I basically followed the criteria that Lindsey just showed in her PowerPoint. So, some of the challenges that students run into with this project are things like helping students find a topic when they choose a blank, and it turned out that the vast majority of the students had no trouble. In this case, in this course they came up quite quickly with a writer or filmmaker that they wanted to work on. However, there were a couple of groups of students who spent quite a bit of time with me actually, deciding how to treat their topic, how to write their script, and in other words how to approach the video. But I think that the students who have those kinds of challenges are an exception in my experience.

There's another challenge and that is to help students sort out personal tensions that arise within a group. Each time I've had students do videos there's always at least one group in the course where the students get into personal kinds of conflicts or difficulties. A student, for example, isn't pulling their weight and the other students come to me, and I found that students are pretty good at sorting those things out themselves, if I sit down with them a for a bit and explain to them ways of helping decrease tensions. Over the last four or five years, this will be in one case where I actually intervened and spoke directly to the student who seemed to be creating some difficulties. Helping students with the technical problems is another challenge, but because we have such great support from Lindsey and her colleagues at the library, we were never in a position where the students just got stuck and ended up being totally frustrated, so I'm going to continue doing this. My plan is to do videos in my courses this fall, and I will make some changes, I think. I haven't done pure feedback which is something Lindsey mentioned in her PowerPoint. I think pure feedback would be really great and helpful to the students in other words, get students, before they finish their videos, to show a first version to another group of students, get feedback and be in a position to make some changes in their video, in light of that feedback. I'd also like to try peer-assessment, peer-evaluation: get students involved in assigning a grade to the videos, and I haven't done that yet, but I'd like to try that. I'm thinking of ways that could work and having conversations with various colleagues who have done that in the past, and that I'll see about that in the fall courses.

Just a final couple of points: the benefits of this pre-decided project is that students improve their writing skills in French, because they do have to write a script, it's a very particular genre, the video script, but writing is a skill that the students develop. They definitely have to work on speaking skills in French, because of reading the voiceover during the presentation of the video, and they practice public speaking in that final presentation of the videos to their peers. So that's another occasion when they get some oral practice using their French.

Clive Thompson: Students really learn practical, transferable, technical and communication skills, I think Lindsey might show you in a minute, some of the reflection statements that my students produced at the end of this particular course. And I'd just like to underline it again, that these reflection statements that I asked students to do, where they have to write 200-300 words about the skills they developed while making the video. That's a very key part of the process for me. So, I'll stop there, and I'll be happy to answer any questions about my experience that I've just described.

Lindsey Robinson: I'll just quickly share those statements that you mentioned. So, one student said:

"This task was multi-layered and required a lot of different skills to be put together. I enjoyed that it was not restrictive, and the students could pick a topic that fell under the theme of the course. Keeping in line with the video creation projects, I learned how important planning is. It is great to have ideas and a vision, but it is equally important to figure out how to make those come to fruition."

Another one was:

"Making the video was my favourite assignment. Normally, I do not have the opportunity to be creative and explore a topic that interests me. It gave me the opportunity to interpret what good and evil means to me and taught me how to work with different programs such as PowToon and Audacity. Additionally, I learned how to better time manage."