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Cooking Up Cauldrons of Content: Recipes for Video Tutorials

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Recipes for Video Tutorials

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BY RACHEL EVANS

Video tutorials can be a quick and affordable solution for presenting knowledge, skills, or resource awareness to your library patrons. This practical guide will equip you with all of the essential ingredients needed to begin cooking up video tutorials right away.

Librarians and library staff are often tasked with creating or presenting library instruction. Libraries are also notorious for being short staffed and having small budgets. As a result, it can be difficult to get in front of an intended audience face to face. Video tutorials can educate people remotely and at their own pace, providing the option for viewers to pause, practice the new skill as they view the video, and even to return to the material over and over again as needed until the skill is learned or knowledge is attained. Creating video tutorials can be easier and more feasible than you might think. You only need a few basic ingredients to get started.

Basic Ingredients List

• **1 computer**—Think of your computer as a cauldron; this is where all of the "cooking" will happen.

- **1 microphone**—The mic you use can be built into your computer's hardware, or it can be a separate microphone or headset-style (attached to your headphones).

- **1 set of headphones**—Headphones are necessary to hear yourself while recording audio, to prevent audio feedback while recording, and to listen to your tutorial's audio during postproduction editing.

- **1 screen recording program**—A screen recorder will capture your actions on the computer and the voice of the tutorial narrator, as well as save your visual and audio captures in the form of a video file.

- **1 media editing program**—Media editors allow you to trim your video and audio files, add captions or titles if needed, and export your finished file in a proper format.

Selecting the Right Ingredients

Now that you know what you will need to get started, there are many options to consider when selecting which types of hardware and software to use, each having its own pros and cons. Determining what is right for your tutorial will depend largely on what hardware or software you already have at your disposal, what type of content you will be presenting in your tutorial, the quality expectation of your final product, and (if it is necessary to purchase hardware or software to complete the project) your budgetary limitations.

Microphones and headphones are essential to both capturing and editing quality audio for your tutorial. We have all experienced low-quality web videos at some moment in time. Even when the content is useful, subpar audio can make otherwise helpful information very difficult to understand. Many computers, laptops, and tablets today have microphones built in to the device. Always test the quality of the audio a microphone will capture before deciding to use it for a project such as a video tutorial. Depending on your in-

tended audience, the audio quality may not represent your institution well, and you may need to purchase an external microphone or headset. That being said, some onboard computer microphones can produce high-quality audio. For example, most Mac computers and other Apple devices have decent microphones built into the monitor. I have personally used the onboard microphone on both Mac desktop and laptop computers over the years, and it is my current preferred setup when creating video tutorials. Why use extra devices if they are not necessary? In general, the simplest setup is best and will allow less room for technological issues. Headphones are another essential tool for editing any digital media that contains audio. Although it is important to review your finished media using a desktop, laptop, and other device's built-in speakers (you always want to test your finished tutorial on the devices your audience is most likely to view it on, so that you can best predict how they will experience it and what quality it is likely to have), it is just as important to create and edit your audio using appropriate headphones. There are many types of headphones on the market, and while you may not need the top-of-the-line, studio-grade headphones, you will need something better than iPod earbuds. The goal is to eliminate unnecessary room noise while editing, so that you don't miss potentially distracting bits of audio in your recording. Combination microphone/headphone headsets are very popular with people who create video tutorials. If you foresee yourself creating or editing video tutorials on a regular basis, this option is an excellent and affordable investment. If you have issues with audio feedback or excessive noise in the area you record in, combo headsets can help to reduce and, in some cases, eliminate those issues.

Screen recording software is also essential, and there are many options available to choose from. The first thing to consider when deciding which software will best suit your needs is the type of computer you will be using to record on. Although it is possible to create video tuto-

rials using tablets and even smartphones, unless you are extremely familiar with those devices they will be more difficult to use than a desktop or laptop computer. If you are creating tutorials as part of your job duties, you are likely limited to using the computer your employer provides. Regardless of your computer type, there are many free and paid programs to choose from. If you are using a Mac OS X desktop or laptop, QuickTime is an excellent choice since the application and screen recording feature come preinstalled. For Mac and PC, Jing and Camtasia Studio are both good choices. You can download Jing for free; however, it has certain limitations, including a maximum 5-minute recording time and a limited number of options for sharing your finished videos. With Camtasia, there are free trials available, but you must purchase the software to get the full benefits. As an added bonus, Camtasia also has a video editing component, allowing you to capture and edit using a single program. Lastly, if it is important to you that your videos are more personable, Camtasia makes this easy by allowing your computer's built-in camera or attached webcam to record the narrator alongside the screen recording. This feature may be more useful to educators or librarians who have a smaller or specific audience such as a class than it would be to those of us creating tutorials for larger, more general audiences. And for those who are looking for a primarily PC software, Fraps is one of the best solutions available. Primarily used to capture computer and video games, this software requires a lot of computer space to run efficiently, but if you have the space you can get high-quality, uncompressed screen recordings. This software is especially useful if you are capturing screen recordings of something that moves or changes very quickly on the screen, allowing you to choose and set your frames per second (fps) to your exact needs so that your final recording does not appear slow or miss important screen or mouse movements. There are many more paid and free programs on the market; be sure to consider your needs and budget when deciding which software is right for you and your project's goals.

Screen Recording Software: Pros, Cons, and Cost

Screen Recording Software	Jing	Fraps	QuickTime	Camtasia Studio
Pros	Very simple to use. Available for both Mac and PC.	Best for animation, gaming, or other quick screen movements. Can download free editors (Windows' Movie Maker and Freemake video editor, etc.).	Simple to use, especially if you are familiar with Mac computers. Cheapest solution for Mac screen recordings. Option to create new audio recordings too.	Will capture your screen and video from webcam simultaneously. No separate editing software needed; an editor is a part of this software. Available for both Mac and PC.
Cons	Limited to 5 minutes or less. Can only upload to certain places. No editing options.	Available only for PCs. Limitations with free version. Requires separate editor.	Requires separate editing software (iMovie or Final Cut Pro recommended).	No free version available (but a free trial is available—if you are considering this option, try it).
Estimated Cost	Free	Free to $37	Free; for iMovie, $14.99 and $299.99 for Final Cut Pro	Free to $99/$299

Editing software is another essential part of creating a successful video tutorial. Although tutorials can be successful without postproduction editing, it is unlikely that you or your stakeholders will be satisfied with a single, first-take, unedited tutorial. Refinement is one of the keys to making a finished product that people will continue to be happy with and find useful down the road. You will more likely than not have multiple video and audio recordings to work with, and you will want to review all recordings to use only the best and most essential parts of each in your finished tutorial. Again, depending on your goals, the type of audience your tutorial is aimed at, the type of computer you are using, and the budget at your disposal, there are many options to choose from when selecting an editing program. For Mac users, iMovie and Final Cut Pro are excellent choices. iMovie comes preinstalled with many Apple devices, and if your device does

not have it preinstalled, the price tag is very reasonable when compared to other editing software. It is a capable video and audio editing program that allows for trimming, basic video effects, and creating text titles (which can be helpful in highlighting key points in your tutorial). Final Cut is similar to iMovie and comes with many extra features, but it may take longer to learn how to get the most out of the program and will cost you more money to purchase. However, it is well worth the investment if your institution plans to create tutorials and other digital video on a regular basis. For both Mac and PC, Adobe Premiere is a popular choice, although it may not be the most affordable program if your budget is small or nonexistent. For PCs, a very basic but free solution is Windows' Movie Maker. It is incredibly easy to use, and although its capabilities are limited, it will do the job for trimming your recordings and exporting them. Paid options for PCs include

Sony's Movie Studio (a lower price tag), Sony's Vegas Pro (a higher price tag), and Avid's Media Composer. There are, of course, many more free and paid options out there to choose from. Select the one that best suits your needs and budget. When you are finished with your video, you will need to export or save the final tutorial in an appropriate video file format for uploading online. Most video editing software will give you multiple options for exporting. You may want to consult the video hosting site you choose to use for the file types that are acceptable. Exporting videos as M4V and MPEG-4 files works very well, saving your final product at a small file size as well as retaining high quality for streaming on the web. This will allow for a quicker upload time as well.

Optional Ingredients List

There are some optional things you may want to consider including in your video tutorial depending on the type

of tutorial you are creating. They are as follows:

• **Special mouse arrows or cursors**—Change your computer's settings to increase your mouse arrow and cursor size and even to select a different style of arrow. Be careful not to choose

• **Outlines and scripts**—Whether you are in charge of deciding what the narrator says during the tutorial or not, be sure that an outline of the content and a script of the dialogue exists before you begin recording. If you are narrating yourself, you will quickly find out how essential a script can be.

some cases, they may want to provide the outline or script for you to work from. Each organization treats tasks such as this differently, and you may be assigned anywhere from a large team of people to work with to doing it all solo. Either way, be sure to show your enthusiasm about the potential benefits of your tutorial from the start to generate the most buy-in from your library.

As with fine cuisine, knowledge is most appreciated when it is well presented.

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a style, size, color, or effect that will be too distracting (such as a flashing arrow); the goal is to make sure the viewer doesn't lose sight of the cursor during the tutorial. If it is important to your tutorial for viewers to clearly see the cursor and for you to circle items on the screen, programs such as Follow Mouse can be very useful. This free software shows a colored tail on the mouse cursor, drawing even more attention to your movements on screen when recording. Other similar options are available for drawing or making highlights on your computer screen.

• **Titles or captions**—Depending on how complicated your content is to understand, text titles or captions can assist your audience in better understanding your tutorial's most important information. If you are navigating to various resources on the web, use titles to present each URL you visit so that your audience can more easily follow along.

• **Zooming**—If details on the screen are important to understanding the content, use zooming effects to increase the size of items in your video during the tutorial. This can be especially helpful if you think your audience will view the video at a smaller size (such as an embedded video). Be careful not to zoom in and out too often or unnecessarily as this could distract the viewer and defeat the purpose of using the effect in the first place.

Tips When Cooking for Groups

If you are planning a video tutorial project, you likely already have a target audience in mind. Regardless of the type and size of your audience, there are some key things to consider when creating video tutorials.

Liaising with stakeholders before, during, and after your tutorial production will help ensure that the final product is in line with your patrons' needs and library's goals. Of course, stakeholders is a very broad term. This could include your supervisors, colleagues, or other superiors. It may also include parties who con-

Smaller portions are easier to digest and the key to successful tutorials can often be the duration and simplicity of the video. Consider that when people take the time to watch your tutorial, you want them to know what they can expect to learn from it within the first 30 seconds. A short introduction and sentence or two summarizing the goal of the video tutorial can help viewers to see how valuable the information they are about to take in will be to them. It is also good practice to keep videos you plan to host online short and to the point. Although some subject matter may require longer durations, in general, the type of library instruction you would likely want to include in video tutorials is best served in portions of 1 to 3 minutes. Include only the necessary information. A script can help you stay on track, and even after that, postproduction editing can help

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tribute financially to your organization and the target audience themselves. Your target audience may be a wide variety of patron types who have different tastes and preferences. Your wide range of stakeholders may have valuable input and advice for your tutorial's content. They are often the best place to begin when creating an outline or script, and in

you to cut out unnecessary silences and to make your final video tighter. If the content of your instruction needs more time than 1 to 3 minutes, consider breaking it up into multiple videos. A series of short videos is much easier to digest than one long 15- to 30-minute video.

Setting realistic goals for cooking time will help to ensure your video

is accomplished ahead of your deadlines and will allow you to better stay on track with the goals and deadlines of your stakeholders. Although video tutorials can be done very quickly, allowing yourself time to revisit the tutorial prior to your final deadline will make your tutorial that much stronger and more successful. Set aside portions of your production process for periodic reviews by your colleagues and stakeholders to gather opinions. A fresh set of eyes and ears will often notice things that the creator of the video may not have noticed. Always save multiple copies of your original and working files so that, as you make edits based on others feedback, you do not lose work in the event that you need to revert to a previous version or working file. Always be open to making edits, even if you don't initially agree with someone else's opinion. It may surprise you how often you will try an edit based on someone's recommendation that you are hesitant about and end up really liking it.

Presentation Is Everything

As with fine cuisine, knowledge is most appreciated when it is well presented. Take the time to choose appropriate arenas for presenting your finished tutorials to your audience.

Video hosting platforms are essential in delivering your video tutorial online. Although some video tutorials may be intended for face-to-face scenarios, most video tutorials exist because they can be viewed on the web. There are many video hosting sites to choose from, but the two most popular are likely to be your best bet: Vimeo and YouTube. For most institutions and organizations, free accounts will offer more than enough space for you to upload and share video tutorials with your patrons. The choice between which of these two services you use may come down to privacy and copyright issues, the length of your videos, and the cost to upgrade accounts. Vimeo PRO offers excellent features for limiting video visibility and streaming to specific URLs. Both YouTube and Vimeo offer a variety of copyright choices for

the media you upload, ranging from public domain and creative commons to standard copyright. The players for each service look slightly different, and if you are planning to embed videos on your own website or library blog, the interface look and options available for customizing the player may also be an important factor.

Blogs, libguides, and websites are among the most common locations for embedding your finished library video tutorials. When deciding where to embed your finished tutorials, choose the location your patrons are already visiting frequently. Other ideas include within your library catalog's interface or linked to from within your library app. You could also place video files on your library computers in a folder called Video Tutorials. In any of these cases, try to give some context to your videos rather than just embedding a tutorial with no explanation as to what it is. If you choose to link to your video tutorial rather than embedding it, use link text that is descriptive rather than generic URLs that may not be accessible to all of your patrons.

Promotion can be difficult. Use all of the resources available to you, both online and in physical form. Just because a video is hosted online doesn't mean you can only promote it on the web. Create flyers or signs that advertise video tutorials. If you see patrons in the library using smartphones, you might try incorporating QR codes on signs, bookmarks, or elsewhere in the library that would take patrons directly to a video tutorial when scanned. Position your QR codes in locations that make sense for that video. For example, place a QR code on a sign next to a dedicated library catalog computer that takes patrons to a video tutorial specifically about searching the catalog. If there is a dedicated station in the library for placing items on hold, advertise your video tutorial about how patrons can place items on hold online at that location. When you have a captive audience in the library for any library event, use a minute at the beginning

or end of the meeting to mention your video tutorials. If your library is using social media, share links to your video tutorials through those outlets.

Measuring the success of video tutorials can be easier than you might think. Video hosting sites such as Vimeo and YouTube will automatically generate simple statistics for each video you upload. You can use these to keep track of how many views a video has. If your library website or blog is using Google Analytics, you can drill down and track how many page views the page you have embedded your video on has received. With social media, if you are sharing your videos on your library's Facebook page, use Facebook's Page Insights to track the user engagement for a video post. When your library does annual or other periodic patron surveys, be sure to include questions that relate to your video tutorials. Survey results may reveal that patrons are not aware of your video tutorials at all, which would let you know that more attention should be given to promotion. Survey results may also indicate new ideas for future video tutorials, patron complaints about video quality or slow load times, preferences about video duration, or annoyances with a narrator's voice. Statistics and user feedback can assist you in tracking the usefulness and success rate of your video tutorial campaign and help you to adjust and improve future tutorials. ⚱

About the Author and Illustrator

Rachel Evans is a web coordinator and digital media specialist at Alexander Campbell King Law Library at the University of Georgia School of Law. She received her M.L.I.S. from Florida State University and holds a B.A. in art and music. She has worked in both academic and public libraries since 2008 and is interested in the intersecting relationships of librarianship, digital media, technology, and web design.

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