

## Lecture Pods Unlimited

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The Blended Learning Team from the School of Humanities and Communication Arts will demonstrate how we assist with the creation of 'lecture pods'. The presentation will be delivered in video format, showing the actual processes we go through. We'll detail how we work with academics to assist them to convert their teaching from live lectures to presenting to camera. The presentation will also showcase several tools created by Peter Steele, that have made a great contribution to sustainable processes in the school for producing large volumes of lecture pod videos.

Keywords: video, lecture-pods, sustainable, processes, team, syncprompter, design, benchmark

### Video poster link

<https://youtu.be/wT5zsqw-qN0>

### Video Poster Transcript

The following video is presented by the four Blended Learning Team members from the School of Humanities and Communication Arts from Western Sydney University. It is divided into four short sections: an overview or description of our technology enhances Learning or TEL project; the aims and objectives of this project; the tools and workflows developed for this project - most notably the SyncPrompter app; and the outcomes to date of this project

The TEL innovation developed by the HCA Blended Learning team, is an efficient, sustainable workflow and tools for the development of online lecture pods. Lecture pods are short form video materials that replace face-to-face lectures in fully online delivery, and are embedded in the university's learning management system, or LMS, which is called vUWS.

The School's Bachelor of Communications degree was offered on campus, online, and in a hybrid online form in 2015. The flipped classroom required lecture content to be available exclusively online. Rather than simply video live lectures, a practice that had generated low viewing numbers when trialled some years prior, the four person blended learning team developed and supported the production of lecture pods.

A pod is a small chunk of lecture content, usually around 6-12 minutes long, containing a few key messages or insights. Our campus based students welcomed the opportunity for accessing lecture content asynchronously. These are not simply a long lecture divided up, the academic staff have reworked their material for each pod to contain a few key pieces of information, examples and calls to action. The call to action may appear in the pod itself, or on the vUWS site where the pod is situated. The pods only work when the content is adapted to this shorter style in this asynchronous space. The academics had to see the lecture content from a different perspective.

The team's aims and objectives included: increase production capacity and efficiency of online lecture pod materials, making high volume, and high quality both sustainable and cost-effective for a small team; increase reusability of content through improved scripting and lecture content structure; invigorate the look and feel of vUWS sites within the said LMS, with a view to match and increase "student attendance", both of lecture content and time spent using the LMS for face-to-face students as well as the online cohort.

We have offered a range of support to staff to bring them up to speed with their lecture pods and other blended learning developments. The team developed a style guide for a standard lecture pod video. This guide considered playback on multiple devices of varying sizes, factoring in text legibility, contrast with other learning materials, viewer screen use fatigue and even portable device power drain. The team consolidated the guidelines, templates and instructional videos on one web page. Academic staff were referred to this page as part of initial discussions regarding their individual lecture pod production timeline.

Here the academics can find: a video outlining the rules and processes to help them create a properly formatted script and slideshow for their lecture pods; a link to download the four approved PowerPoint templates; a second video – which we'll play soon – of pod tips, some dos and don'ts. Links to our pod facilities calendars; and finally, email links to request a booking. This email goes to a shared team mailbox.

A number of instructional videos were produced using the same technology and workflows that academics use for their pods. These videos, often including the team's own brand of humour, have also been screened at meetings and conferences, and the staff from other schools within the university as examples of emerging best practice. When the academics are presenting these pods, and indeed when we're presenting, we're doing so with the aid of a teleprompter.

Teleprompters are wonderful things and basic prompter generators for your web browser can be sourced for free. Very basic tablet prompter apps are under \$10. But all these do is scroll your text. Back in the day this meant that a presenter would have to look at the prompter with a prompter remote in one hand, and with the second hand – and their peripheral vision – drive their PowerPoint slideshow. Few people could look cool and professional with this multitasking.

We then experimented with a blended learning staff member operating the slideshow remote 'live', but this was also problematic. It was difficult to anticipate the speed of the presenter's delivery, and hard to note mistake points simultaneously. We needed code. Team member Peter Steele developed, from scratch, SyncPrompter. A staff member writes their script and PowerPoint Slide cue points and presenter checkpoints in this document. This is then saved as a text file to the Blended Learning Team's Dropbox account. Using SyncPrompter, one opens this file from Dropbox on an iPad in an autocue mount. Once the recording has commenced, the SyncPrompter script can be started, at which point the app produces a tone for synch in post-production. The presenter can control the speed of the autocue on-the-fly using a bluetooth remote control. If the presenter makes a mistake, they can stop the autocue and return to the previous checkpoint or slide. Once the pod recording is complete, the app saves a zip file back into the Dropbox. This contains files including the original script, subtitle files, logs, xml files for editing, as well as a folder structure to populate with the source footage, any additional media, the PowerPoint slides, and eventually the completed exported lecture pod. When the XML is imported to FinalCut Pro, AutoDesk Smoke or Premiere Pro for editing, the presenter mistakes have already been removed from the recording automatically, with slide placeholders also positioned in the sequence all ready to be linked to the pod recording file and PowerPoint slides. The editor's role becomes one of quickly finessing points rather than wading through and assessing takes.

The Peter Steele titlemaker allows all staff to generate identical video title slides, which then double as the custom thumbnail frame, sometimes call a poster frame, when the video is embedded into vUWS. The School's vUWS sites' look and feel, the result (once again) of Peter's custom code, provides buttons for the pods underneath the embedded videos. Students can select all sections of a particular module or a single section on which to concentrate, such as the lecture pods.

The lecture pods with online Zoom tutorials were at the centre of the student learning experience.

Outcomes of this TEL project include: an increase of production capacity up 300%; an increase in the quality and consistency of lecture pods produced, due to staff training and the aforementioned post production tools; reusability of content is increasingly part of normal teaching practice with a steep decline in pods requiring reedits or reshoots; in seven of the course units the lecture pods in the HCA pod rooms have provided better than the equivalent of 100% attendance at face-to-face lectures. When compared to the overall school vUWS site averages, data shows that the enhanced vUWS sites making use of lecture pods, boast impressive improvements across student access to the unit sites, student interactions once in the unit sites, and the minutes spent in the unit sites overall.

And finally, in December 2015 the Blended Learning Team, along with the academics who delivered the program, won the Western Sydney University Learning and Teaching Award for Excellence in Teaching, for the first four fully online units making use of this technology enhanced learning.

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