

# The first videoconference tutorial

## Before the first tutorial

If you have been asked to teach by video link there are some issues which must be addressed before you find yourself on the other end of a link. You will need answers to the following questions to determine what support is necessary.

- ❑ Have you been offered appropriate training for teaching by video link?
- ❑ Has the campus contact for far end students been clearly established?
- ❑ Do you have access to appropriate far end support for your teaching?
- ❑ Will course materials be easily accessible to far end students?
- ❑ Has the library been informed and consulted regarding the identification, cataloging, storage and sending of course materials to students?

## The first tutorial

To benefit from successful video link teaching it is important that your first session deals with the key issues that stem from the medium you are using to teach this unit. It is considered that if students are aware of a teaching presence initially and are assisted to form a “learning group” they accept subsequent video links much better than students who have not had any face-to-face interaction. Basically, taking the mystery out of the medium is the best approach.

To assist you prepare your students, a student’s guide to videoconferencing at the University of Tasmania has been produced (titled 'Videoconferencing'). This guide is a resource for your first tutorial as it provides some useful information about participating in a video link class as well as space for students to fill in up to date contact information relative to your topic and discipline (inside cover “Important contacts”).

Engaging in some icebreaker activities in the initial tutorial will assist the individual students form a group. While many staff would already have their own preferred activities, sample activities are listed here for new tutors.

### *Icebreakers*

When students first attend a class they may not know any other students in the room. While this is not an issue for lectures it is something that needs addressing if successful tutorials are expected. The compounding factor for a class delivered by video is that generally there is no lecturer or tutor in the room with students. Therefore, it becomes essential for the tutorial group to learn how to function together to get the best out of the video link.

Knowing each other’s names is the most common way of introducing a group of individuals to each other. This can be done by going around the group, placing yourself

last. The first student says their own name, the next student repeats that name and adds their own and so on. While it may seem silly the benefits are that students do get to know a few names, they laugh, this breaks the ice and they are enabled to talk to each other when it matters later on.

A more structured activity is to ask students to pair up and to interview each other for about 3 to 4 minutes and then swap. Suggest that they take notes. Each student introduces their partner to the group. Students can find this less intimidating than introducing themselves.

A further activity, once names are exchanged, is to ask students to form groups of four and to discuss what they think the course will be about and to generate one question they want answered. Allow about five minutes for the discussion and then invite each group to offer questions. You can address these and at the same time get a sense of the degree to which students are tuned into the topic.

An added benefit of engaging students in these initial activities is that they develop a sense of expectation about what tutorials are like. If the first tutorial has to be by link it is also a good time to set up the rules of successful communicating via the link and encouraging the true interaction which video link is able to provide.

### **Contact with students**

In the first tutorial it will be important to establish a means of contact students have with you, the school office and each other. The *Student's Guide* suggests that students will need to have a student facilitator for each session to coordinate discussion from the far end and to enable queries about course content issues, assignments, assessments, fieldwork, placements or whatever to occur in an orderly way. The videoconference system only copes with one person speaking at a time and so the notion of an agenda for tutorial sessions is a useful one. This requires students to be in e-mail contact with each other and you.

A proactive approach by the tutor in establishing how students are to make contact saves time later on. Agendas can be sent among students. The idea is to have a plan beforehand so that if a link goes down students know what they are supposed to be doing and can get on with it rather than sit around or leave the room. While many students are primarily students and have no other commitments it is likely that there will be students who have had to take time off from work, drive long distances to attend class, and perhaps pay for child care. If a link crashes the consequences are less profound for students if they know what they should be getting on with. The ideal is to have someone available at the far end.

## **After the first tutorial**

After the first tutorial students will have questions and queries about the course. As the University is gradually introducing WebCT there will be built in methods of communication via on-line chat rooms, discussion (bulletin) boards and WebCT-based email. However, if your video teaching is not backed up by WebCT, you will need to think about being ahead of your students' needs by emailing them as an initial follow up. This e-mail should provide information about how students can get support and maybe provide useful information about what students should be doing at this point in the course. This is also an opportunity to reinforce the appropriate procedures you want to put in place around students' contacting you.

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