



# TESOL Connections

Keeping English language professionals connected

## Creating Your First ESL Video Lesson

by [Diana Lease](#) and [Davida Jordan](#)

As teachers, we often create new handouts or tests because the ones provided in the textbook or teacher's manual weren't exactly what we were looking for. We've also had the same experience with YouTube videos that we want to use in our classrooms. We find something on the topic we're searching for, but it's not quite how we would put it, or the examples don't really work for us. We know we could explain it so much better. If you have had these thoughts, this article will take you through the ins and outs of creating your first YouTube video, why you should give it a try, and why your students will appreciate it. Start off the new year by learning a new skill to enhance your teaching practice!

## When and Why Are Videos Useful for ESL Students?

One of the most popular uses of videos is to flip part or all of your class, which means that students watch the lecture material as homework before class, which frees up classroom time for more interactive, hands-on, and challenging activities. This is an excellent option for language classrooms because students do this more challenging work in class with the support of their instructor and classmates, instead of spending precious class time passively listening to a lecture.

Students can also use videos to review core concepts of the course in their free time. Students often need to hear the same point explained several times before they really get it, and videos allow them to get that much-needed repetition outside of class. This opportunity for repetition also builds learner autonomy because students have more tools at their disposal to problem-solve when they're struggling.

## The Value of Instructor-Created Videos

Your students (probably) like hearing your voice and/or seeing your face. It's comforting for them to have some familiarity with their lesson. They are used to you and your style.

You are an expert in your subject area, so why not share that expertise with the world?

Creating your own library of videos will save you time in the future. You have ready-to-go lessons at your fingertips. Share a few links with a student who is struggling with grammar so they can get some extra practice at home. Your YouTube channel can also serve as an online

portfolio to show to prospective employers when an in-person teaching demonstration is not an option.

## Creating Your Videos

### The Tools

You need a lot less technology than you think in order to create your own instructional videos. You might think you need a fancy camera or complicated editing software, but in reality, all you really need is an internet-connected smartphone and its built-in camera and microphone, and a quiet space to film. Check out (Figure 1), but in a pinch, you can get by with just the materials found in your classroom (Figure 2).



Figure 1. Filming with a smartphone on a tripod.



Figure 2. Filming with found materials.

### The Plan

Planning an instructional video is very similar to planning a lecture, but you'll have to be a little more careful in choosing your examples because you won't be able to check student comprehension during your explanation. Be sure to consider common student confusions and questions, as well as all of the aspects of the language point that you want to address. For example, when planning a video about the basics of adjective clauses, it's nice to include examples that have the adjective clause placed in different positions throughout the sentence, and to include a variety of relative pronouns.

We recommend choosing the examples you want to use in the video and using them as an outline. Practice explaining the content and examples out loud first. This will help you to find any problem areas before you start filming. We don't recommend writing a script because it will add stress to the process and likely result in a monotone video. Think about your students' presentations—they are typically much better when they are referring to a brief outline of notes instead of reading from a meticulously prepared script. If you're stressed about the plan for your video, please refer to the "Perfectionism" section below.

In the video, you should imagine your target audience. Imagine a student has just asked you to explain this point, and you're giving them your best explanation. Speak to them with appropriate speed and enunciation, based on their level. For example, you can speak much more quickly in an advanced grammar video than you can in a beginner vocabulary video.

We aim to keep each video under 5 minutes to keep students' attention. If your video is very long, it's a good idea to break it into several shorter videos. Students are often much more likely to watch a playlist of five 3-minute videos than they are to watch one 10-minute video.

### **The Filming (and Posting)**

The easiest way we've found to get videos to our students is to publish them on YouTube, and send them electronically. For more details and step-by-step instructions on this process, see the Appendix.

Here's a basic summary:

1. Make sure you have an active Gmail account.
2. Download the YouTube app to your smartphone, and log in using your Gmail account.
3. Use the camera app on your smartphone to film your video.
4. Use the YouTube app on your smartphone to trim, upload, and publish your video clip.
5. Log into YouTube on a computer to edit the settings of your video, and share it with your students.

## **Common Barriers for Instructors and How to Overcome Them**

What's holding you back? There are a number of reasons why ESL teachers don't make their own videos. Let's examine a few common barriers stopping teachers from creating their own videos and our suggestions for how to push past these obstacles.

### **Lack of Confidence**

You may think that you wouldn't know what to do in a video, but think again. If you're a classroom teacher or tutor, you can make a video! Do whatever you do in your classroom. As far as feeling self-conscious, it's normal. However, (most of) your students like to see your face and hear your voice. And now they can take you with them wherever they go. The biggest hurdle to overcome here might be imagining the students sitting in front of you when you're actually filming in your house or classroom alone. This gets much easier with practice. Think about grammar points that you have explained many times, points that trip students up, that they need extra help with. For example, how many times have you explained final -s with regular simple present tense verbs? You probably have a lot of good examples that you use as well as your own personal way of explaining this small but important grammar point.

Some of you might be thinking that you feel comfortable in the classroom but you feel strange about having your face and voice out there, exposed to the whole world. If you're not trying to

be the next YouTube sensation, you can use the YouTube privacy settings to set your video to “Unlisted,” so only people with the link can access it.

### **Lack of Experience or Technological Expertise**

This is a hard one to get over. You may be intimidated by technology. You may say, “But I’m just not a computer person.” Actually, if you use a smartphone to take pictures and access the internet, you already have all the technology skills you need! And you know that many of your students are very comfortable with technology *and* watch a lot of YouTube...so why not join them? When you set aside the time to make your first video, you may be surprised at how easy it actually is.

### **Lack of Time**

This is one we all struggle with, whether or not we are making videos. Teachers are almost always pressed for time, trying to squeeze in all the content we can while completing administrative tasks, attending to students’ needs, and staying up to date on the multiple institutions where we teach. For making videos to be a practical part of your teaching practice, we recommend filming each video in one take, and being okay with small mistakes. We also recommend filming several videos in one sitting. That way, you don’t need to set up your filming tools for each video.

### **Perfectionism**

Think back to when you first started teaching: detailed lesson plans, hours spent imagining possible scenarios, hours spent getting ready for every class. Think about what you do now. You probably wing it a bit more, don’t you? Be honest. Well, it’s the same with videos. You might want to plan for everything, but if you don’t make a video until everything is planned, you might never do it! Our advice is to just get in there and do it. Accept that it won’t be perfect, and actually, it shouldn’t be perfect. You don’t expect your students to be perfect, and you’re certainly not perfect when you’re teaching in the classroom. Why should your videos be any different? And furthermore, a perfect video can seem artificial and even boring. Seeing a real live teacher fumbling around is much more interesting. I appreciate when my kickboxing teacher on YouTube loses her balance or my YouTube aerobics instructor’s shoe falls off. It reminds me that they are human, just like me. People aren’t looking for polished videos on YouTube; they’re just looking for useful or informative content, so don’t sweat it.

### **Sample Videos**

Our videos are far from perfect, but they allow our students to see and hear from their teacher any time they need help. Here is an example video from each of our YouTube channels.

- [RockStar English - Comma splices](#)
- [TeacherWhatIDo - Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Adjective Clauses](#)

Do you have a new year's resolution for 2020? Why not make it to create your first YouTube video? Go for it! (And if you do and want to share, please do! We love to see your creations. You can email it to [dmlease@gmail.com](mailto:dmlease@gmail.com))

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***David Jordan*** has taught ESL for more than 18 years. She teaches at Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon, USA and is the incoming president of ORTESOL, the Oregon affiliate of TESOL. She is also the co-chair of the TESOL Environmental Responsibility Professional Learning Network, which seeks to bring sustainability to the forefront of TESOL. David loves getting to know her colleagues and her students. Her goal is to learn all of her students' languages, a list which keeps growing!

## **Appendix: Creating Your First ESL Video Lesson**

### *Instructions for Creating Your First Video*

Plan what content you want to teach, and keep it simple! Choose your examples, and write them on your whiteboard, paper, or so on, if necessary. Think about what aspects of the target language you want to explain, and make sure the examples include those points.

Then, follow these instructions for filming and uploading your video:

#### **Step 1: Make sure you have an active Gmail account.**

Most institutions that use Google products will allow you to have a YouTube channel associated with your school email, or you can create a new Gmail account for free. We've both chosen to create new Gmail accounts so that our full names aren't associated with the accounts, and so that we'll retain access to our content even if we leave our current teaching institutions.

#### **Step 2: Download the YouTube app to your smartphone.**


Then, log in using your Gmail account. This will prompt you to create your YouTube channel, which means you'll need to choose a channel name. Note: Whatever you choose as your channel name will also become your display name in Gmail, so that's what people will see when you email them from that account.

#### **Step 3: Use the camera app on your smartphone to film.**

Open your device's camera app, and select the video function. Choose the front- or rear-facing camera. Always film horizontally (landscape). Tap the record button to begin and end filming. The simplest and most time-efficient way for teachers to make videos is to record them all in one take, without any editing. It's okay to make mistakes and correct yourself just like you would during class! There are lots of ways you can set up your smartphone to film. Here are a few of our examples:



#### **Step 4: Use the YouTube app on your smartphone to trim, upload, and publish your video clip.**

- Open the YouTube app, and tap the  icon. You'll need to allow YouTube to access to your camera, microphone, and photos, and then all the videos should show up at the bottom of the screen. Choose the video you want to upload.
- On the "Trim" screen, drag the box to cut off any unwanted beginning and end parts of your video. Then tap "Next" or the arrow button, depending on your phone.



- Give your video a title and description, and choose your preferred privacy setting: Private, Unlisted, or Public. Private videos will only be viewable by you. Unlisted videos can be seen by anyone with a link, but will not show up in public search results. Public videos will be discoverable by anyone in the world. These settings can be edited later from your mobile device or on a computer.
- Tap “Upload,” and wait for your video to process and upload.

**Step 5: Log into YouTube on a computer.**

On a computer, you can edit the settings of your video and share it with your students. You can share it with students by adding it to a YouTube playlist with other videos, or by linking directly to the video via email or on your learning management system.