

Apples to Apples? The Challenge of Assessing Oral Presentation Skills for an Online MBA Course

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Abstract

As the popularity of online courses continues to rise, there is a growing concern regarding the formative assessment of these courses. Specifically, how does a faculty member measure oral presentation skills when comparing an online Master of Business Administration course to a traditional on-ground class? This goal of this paper is to explain the process by which this author addressed the assessment gap between the modes of learning. This trial process of introducing an oral presentation resource guide will be implemented with a pilot group in spring 2018 with one MBA Information Systems course delivered through two modes: online and on-ground.

Keywords: formative assessment, assessment gap, distance learning, MBA, oral presentation skills

1. INTRODUCTION

The growth of online learning for the past decade has been on a steady incline. Almost 3.5 million students took at least one online course in 2006 (Allen & Seaman, 2007) compared to over 6.7 million students in 2015 (Online Learning Consortium, 2016) - this represents almost a 100% enrollment increase in the past 10 years. What's more surprising, is this growth in online enrollment is primarily from private and non-profit universities, whereas for-profit institutions have seen a steady decline in enrollment in the past year. More than a quarter (28%) of all students of higher education take at least one distance learning course (Online Learning Consortium, 2016). This in spite of the fact that almost one-third (32%) of chief academic officers report that their faculty members' attitudes towards online education is a "significant obstacle" to its further growth (Wang, 2016).

Benefits of Online Learning

A primary benefit of distance learning is the increased flexibility. Students are able to learn at their own pace, in the comfort of their own surroundings, and according to their schedules as opposed to a set day and time to be present in class. This is especially relevant for adult learners who have families and employment responsibilities. For those employees seeking to complete their degrees, distance learning provides an avenue to continue pursuing their career goals while still completing their degree.

Another benefit is the mode of asynchronous communication. This allows students to respond to questions and discussion prompts when it is convenient for the learner. As opposed to in-class discussions which are in real time and tend to be more spontaneous. Students in distance learning modes are able to be more thoughtful and reflect more in their discussion posts. Thus these students report their preference for online

discussion forums as they are able to be more thorough and comprehensive in their responses (Bender, 2012).

Costs can be lower. While most universities don't have a distinction in per credit costs for courses, the ancillary costs associated with traditional learning such as commuting, physical textbooks, room and board, parking, and facilities fees are not incurred for distance learners.

Online learning can be a driver as an agent of change within higher education. For instance, are contemporary practices enabling students to achieve deep learning (Ke & Xie, 2009)? Can online learning be a tool to engage minority students (Kuo & Belland, 2016) Online learning can force faculty to examine their teaching methodologies to ensure they are still relevant for today's students (Willcox, Sarma, & Lippel, 2016).

Drawbacks of Online Learning

There are limited opportunities to interact with professors and classmates. There is less face-to-face communication. Students find it more difficult to develop and establish significant networking relationships. There are limited opportunities to feel a "part of the community" (Visser, Amirault, & Visser, 2012, p. 61).

Issues with technology can be a significant detraction to distance learning experience. Software and hardware limitations can hinder the students' ability to access the information, links, and other material in a timely manner. Students that don't have experience with technology find completing assessments and actively engaging in discussion forums difficult (Ellis, Marcus, & Taylor, 2005).

From a program and curricular perspective, it is difficult to assess student performance. The learning outcomes are supposed to be identical between online and traditional classrooms, yet the results are difficult to compare because the expectations are not the same.

2. THE ASSESSMENT GAP

Assessment is a key component within higher education to measure and analyze the impact of curriculum to affect learning outcomes. That is, not only is assessment necessary for determining student achievement, it should also be used to implement continuous improvement for the academic programs. Essentially asking, are the student learning outcomes commensurate with

the programs the faculty have designed? In other words, are students learning what we think they should be learning?

Formative and Summative Assessment

Formative assessment can be described as ongoing evaluation throughout the semester. This can be both formal and informal. Formal formative assessment methods may include in-class or homework assignments, quizzes and exams, and oral presentations. Informal formative assessments might be impromptu discussions, casual observation of non-verbal cues, or observing how students interact in team settings (Angelo & Cross, 1993). This can be one of the benefits of assessing student performance in a traditional classroom setting. As these types of informal assessments would be difficult to measure in a distance learning format.

Summative assessments are commonly conducted after a course is completed and is geared towards measuring the validity of the instruments used in the course. Do the student outcomes from the year align with the learning outcomes of the course? Are there improvements to be made in the course as it stands now? Are the artifacts still relevant or should the prompts be modified to better reflect the course objectives?

This report is an identification of an assessment gap resulting from the year end summative assessment process conducted at the end of the academic year 2016-17.

For several years within our online curriculum, like many other programs, we have required online forum discussion posts, reading links, written assignments, and other assessments such as quizzes and exams. But we have not implemented a formal or systematic approach to oral presentations for our online courses. Yet, within each of our traditional courses, there is an oral presentation component with a clear and explicit rubric outlining project and student expectations. Beyond a cursory explanation of the oral presentation portion of the final project, there is no clear expectation of faculty or students to adhere to a single oral presentation standard. Not surprisingly, the feedback from MBA students as well as adjunct faculty has been mixed. Yet, the challenge still remains - while our summative assessment process includes an evaluation of students' ability to give oral presentations, how does this apply in an online setting? And for the sake of course integrity, if the learning outcomes

are identical between online and traditional course delivery, what steps can be taken to remediate the assessment gap between these two modes?

3. ORAL COMMUNICATION

Universities and hiring organizations continue to recognize the importance of oral presentation and communication skills for their graduates. Oral presentations are useful because they exhibit the students' ability to demonstrate higher levels of cognitive thinking (Gray, 2010). This is especially true for MBA students. As a graduate-level student, one would expect a higher level of understanding and as such the expectations of the MBA presentations should be greater than the traditional undergraduate examples. However, the issue of self-selection bias may come into effect. The students that choose online courses may indicate an inherent preference for electronic modes of communication such as discussion forums, emails, and virtual chats (Anstine & Skidmore, 2005).

Paradoxically, employers are seeking not only technically proficient job candidates, but those with strong communication skills (Ulinski & O'Callaghan, 2002). Similar to reading and writing across the curriculum, there is an argument to be made for effective communication skills across the curriculum.

However, there is a lack of research as relates to measuring the efficacy of oral presentations within an online versus traditional MBA classroom setting. This goal of this report isn't necessarily to analyze the difference between the two modes, but rather provide a model for other online programs by presenting a resource for online faculty and students to use easily accessible and affordable video technologies for their oral presentations.

Course Fidelity

The first challenge is to provide students with a clear and consistent message regarding the expectations of all oral presentations regardless of the mode of delivery (online, hybrid, or traditional).

All of the MBA courses have an agreed upon written rubric and oral presentation rubric. This is to ensure fidelity of learning outcomes between the courses regardless of instructor or mode of delivery. There has been and continues to be an issue with the level of rigor applied to these

assignments among full-time faculty, newer faculty, and adjunct faculty (Berschback, 2011).

In this case, there were some instructors that allowed a voice over narrated PowerPoint presentation for the final project. This was not sufficient. When conducting the summative assessment, it was noted that several of the oral rubric (Appendix A) elements were unable to be assessed. These included "Organization, Facilitation, and Discussion." While organization could be assessed on a pre-recorded PowerPoint presentation, course discussion and facilitation could not be observed. Another rubric element entitled, "Cohesion and Transition" was difficult to assess in a voice-over narrated presentation. And the last rubric element, "Elocution and Public Speaking" was unable to be observed in any meaningful way.

Implementing a clear course guide for each of the courses also ensured that all faculty across disciplines have a shared understanding of course expectations regardless of delivery mode or who is teaching the course.

The next question then is how can we best enable students to present their oral presentations to achieve a similar learning outcome as the traditional MBA classroom experience? The rest of this paper will provide and describe the methodology of how we created a simplified resource to assist online MBA students to improve their video-enabled oral presentations.

4. VIDEO PRESENTATION RESOURCE

While a live presentation in front of an audience would maintain the highest fidelity between the online course and the traditional in-class experience, this eliminates one of the key benefits of distance learners – to be able to learn and engage at their own pace. Yet, for exams and other formal assessments, students understand there may be various controls implemented (proctors, browser locks, webcams, and time, location, and IP constraints to ensure proper security and authentication of the learner. Similarly, we argue the need for a formal methodology for submitting oral presentations.

Reference FAQ

Rather than reinventing the wheel, we tasked our Graduate Assistant, also a current MBA student at the time of this project, to conduct a thorough review of all the free and fee-based subscription models that assist students in creating online video presentations.

The review process focused on three main elements: cost, complexity, and accessibility. As with many price sensitive consumers, college students are becoming increasingly reluctant to purchase course related materials such as textbooks, software, or additional learning aids. Some are even willing to risk a lower grade to avoid having to purchase course-related materials (Bidwell, 2014). It was important that costs associated with a new resource were not a factor. The resource had to be user-friendly, and easy to integrate into a familiar platform, such as Microsoft Office or Google Docs.

Based on our review of online presentations, including webinars, MOOCs, learning management systems the goal was to find a platform that allowed students to present themselves as well as their slide content. Unfortunately, the majority of free online programs placed a small video tile in the corner of the presentation screen, which was unhelpful for assessing our online MBA oral presentations.

The programs that were considered included Adobe Presenter, Fishbole, Present.me, Articulate 360, and iSpring Presenter. Each program had a free trial subscription for 30 days, and they all had a full version premium license fee.

iSpring Presenter (2017) seemed to be a strong possibility. iSpring is a video presentation software that allows the user to create an interactive presentation experience. iSpring integrates with PowerPoint and provides a free step-by-step PowerPoint tutorial. This software was ideal because our students are already familiar with Office products, thus reducing the learning curve. The screen can be set to display both video narration and PowerPoint slides simultaneously. The software is accessible and supported on various devices including Windows PCs, Apple Macs, iPads, iPhones, Android Phones, Android Tablets, and Windows Phones (iSpring, 2017). Unfortunately, the price per student was over \$400.

We decided to mimic the split-screen presentation layout using available resources, and provide students with clear, step-by-step tutorials to eliminate any confusion that could occur during the process of creating, uploading, and submitting individual or group presentations. Based on the review, we created a Reference FAQ document (see Appendix B) for all online MBA students. It will serve as a reference document, a decision tree, and a resource link for any relevant questions related to creating an online

presentation. Some of these range from "How Can I Record My Presentation?" to "Which Device Should I Use?" It continues on to providing resource links to creating a YouTube account and uploading videos. For those students that are unfamiliar with PowerPoint or Prezi, there are the appropriate resource links for those platforms as well.

While some of these resource links may seem rudimentary, there is benefit to creating a reference document for the wider audience. We also intend to keep this document evergreen in the event that links become unavailable, technologies change, or new technologies become more relevant.

PowerPoint Tutorial

In addition to the Resource FAQ, we have created a sample model PowerPoint slide presentation for students to use as a template. They are able to freely edit according to their objectives.

Attached below are some screen shots of the PowerPoint Tutorial:

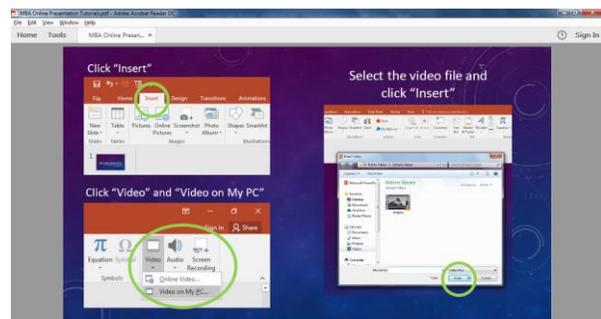


Figure 1 - PowerPoint Tutorial

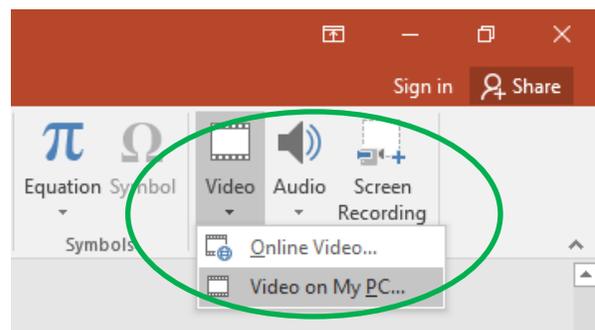


Figure 2 - Insert Video from PC

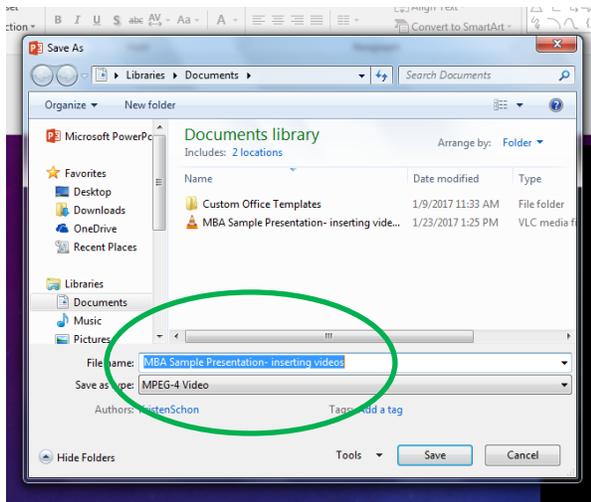


Figure 3 - Insert MPEG4 file into PPT

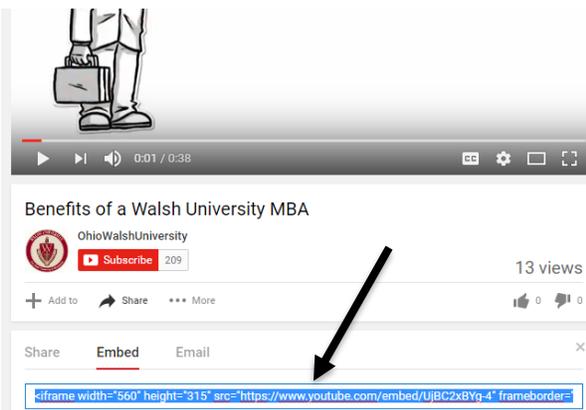


Figure 4 - Embed YouTube Video



Figure 5 - Prezi Sample

The PowerPoint Tutorial is meant to be easy to follow and have clear visual cues with highlighted areas to initiate a task or process. As indicated in Figures 1 through 5, several of the PowerPoint

slides have bright colored circles and arrows to denote actual steps in the video creation process.

5. DISCUSSION

Will video presentations truly create an equitable assessment artifact to ensure oral communication skills are being evaluated? Does an edited video represent a true live presentation environment? As this was a pilot experiment, there are no clear answers to these queries, however based on initial feedback from MBA faculty members, the Online Presentation Reference FAQ document and the PowerPoint Tutorial have been useful in standardizing the expectation among the faculty if not the students. As video presentations become a requirement for all MBA online courses, we as a faculty will determine what changes need to be made in order to meet the assurance of learning objectives as well as the needs of our students.

As we expand the scope of this project, we will explore the possibility of requiring live presentations in real-time. Is the use of Facebook Live or Snapchat Stories a possibility in the future for students to give oral presentations? This is also intriguing as would eliminate the effect of editing and create a true live environment.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Regardless of the mode of delivery, it is important that all MBA students' oral presentations skills should be assessed equitably across the curriculum. And thus all presentation rubrics should be consistently aligned with the program learning objectives and steadily applied by all faculty members. However, the reality is the assessment of oral presentation skills remains a subjective endeavor.

The first step to addressing the assessment gap is identifying whether the faculty as a whole see this as a real issue. Once the gap has been identified and established, the faculty must then adopt a standard assignment to be required by all MBA faculty. And that assignment must be assessed equally across all courses. In this report, we have proposed a video-based solution that would allow students to present their projects and allow faculty to apply the same rubrics for both the online and traditional MBA classrooms. As this an experimental trial, we are currently recruiting faculty members to implement these oral presentation resources within their on-ground and online courses to solicit feedback and student

performance. Our goal is to conduct a pilot study in the Spring 2018 semester.

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Appendix A

	Below Average (5)	Average (6~8)	Very Good (9)	Excellent (10)
Organization, Facilitation, and Discussion	Student presents information in a disorganized fashion.	Student covers all of the necessary areas, but does so in an illogical format.	Student presents information in logical sequence which can be followed.	Student presents information in logical and interesting sequence which audience can follow, engaging them in discussion as appropriate.
(30 Points Total)				28
Subject Knowledge	Student does not have a grasp of information.	Student is uncomfortable with information being presented.	Student is at ease with the information being presented. Has a very good understanding of the topic and ancillary subtopics.	Student demonstrates full knowledge (more than required) by anticipating all class questions with explanations and elaboration.
(30 Points Total)			26	
Slide Grammar, Spelling, and Graphics	Slides are not formatted correctly and are difficult to read.	Slides contain no grammatical or spelling errors and are generally well-formatted, but could be improved.	Slides contain no grammatical or spelling errors, are well formatted, and easy to follow along.	Slides contain no grammatical or spelling errors, are excellently formatted, and easy to follow along.
(10 Points Total)		8		
Cohesion and Transitions	Student does not appear to have rehearsed or planned the presentation so that it fits together.	Transitions from one slide to the other are acceptable but could be more polished.	Transitions from one slide to the other are generally well-done.	Slide transitions from one slide to the other are expertly handled.
(10 Points Total)			9	
Elocution and Public Speaking	Student does not speak loudly enough to be heard and seems very uncomfortable presenting.	Student speaks clearly and loudly enough some of the time. Is comfortable presenting, but does not seem rehearsed.	Student speaks clearly and loudly enough much of the time for all in the audience to hear every word, throughout the presentation.	Student speaks clearly and loudly enough for all in the audience to hear every word, at all times throughout the presentation.
(10 Points Total)		8		
Length of Presentation	Within four minutes (+/-) of allotted time	Within three minutes(+/-) of allotted time	Within two minutes (+/-) of allotted time	Within one minute (+/-) of allotted time
(10 Points Total)				10

Appendix B

MBA Online Video Reference FAQ

How Can I Record My Presentation?

- Smartphone- Import video through USB cable or cloud, or upload directly to YouTube.
- Tablet- Import video through USB cable or cloud, or upload directly to YouTube.
- Digital Camera- Import video from SD card or through USB cable.
- Webcam- Save video directly to computer.

How Can I Edit My Videos?

- Directly on Smartphone or Tablet
- Windows Movie Maker (PC)
 - <https://support.microsoft.com/en-us/help/14019/windows-movie-maker-edit-movies>
- iMovie (Mac, iPhone, iPad)
 - <https://support.apple.com/imovie>
- YouTube Capture (Mac, iPhone, iPad)
 - <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2857835?hl=en>
- Editing applications

Importing Videos from a Smartphone:

Importing videos from iPhone, iPad, or iPod touch:

<https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT201302>

Importing Videos from Android Device:

<https://support.google.com/nexus/answer/2840804?hl=en>

Android Support Page:

<https://support.google.com/android/?hl=en>

Apple Support Page:

<https://support.apple.com/>

Creating a YouTube Account:

How to Create an Account on YouTube (Computer, Android, iPhone, iPad):

https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/161805?hl=en&ref_topic=3024170&co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&oco=1

Using your Google Account for YouTube:

https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/69961?hl=en&ref_topic=3024170

Uploading to YouTube:

How to Upload Videos to YouTube (Computer, Android, iPhone, iPad):

https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/57407?hl=en&ref_topic=2888648&co=GENIE.Platform%3DDesktop&oco=1

How to Upload Videos Longer than 15 Minutes (Video and Instructions):

https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/71673?hl=en&ref_topic=2888648

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Im1JpeRB9ec> (Video)

YouTube Capture: Record, edit, upload, and share on iOS devices

https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2857835?hl=en&ref_topic=2888648

YouTube Support:

Common Uploading Errors:

https://support.google.com/youtube/troubleshooter/2888438?hl=en&ref_topic=2888603

Video Stuck during Upload:

https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/4525858?hl=en&ref_topic=2888603

Prezi Tutorials:

Prezi Basics:

<https://prezi.com/support/article/steps/getting-to-know-the-prezi-editor/>

Getting Started with Prezi:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5vivOb4Fuo>

Creating your First Prezi:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ArGh6FurR0Q>

Inserting Videos:

<https://prezi.com/support/article/creating/inserting-video-files-including-from-youtube/>

Saving a Prezi:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjT5vzGeAQM>

Collaborating in Prezi:

<https://prezi.com/support/article/creating/co-editing-with-prezi/>

<https://prezi.com/support/article/sharing/collaborate-and-share/>

<https://prezi.com/support/manual/collaboration-tutorial/>

Emailing a Prezi:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LedvWAcjSmU>

Sharing a Prezi:

<https://prezi.com/support/article/sharing/sharing-prezis/>

Sharing a Prezi Using Prezi Viewer for Android:

<https://prezi.com/support/article/android/sharing-a-prezi-from-your-android/>

Sharing a Prezi Using Prezi Viewer for iPhone or iPad:

<https://prezi.com/support/article/ios/sharing-a-prezi-from-your-iphone-or-ipad/>

Downloading Prezi as PDF:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UYTDo_Xd8

Prezi Support Knowledge Base:

<https://prezi.com/support/>

PowerPoint Tutorials:

Inserting Videos into PowerPoint:

[https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Add-and-play-a-video-in-a-presentation-on-](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Add-and-play-a-video-in-a-presentation-on-PowerPoint-for-Windows-f3fcbd3e-5f86-4320-8aea-31bff480ed02?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US)

[PowerPoint-for-Windows-f3fcbd3e-5f86-4320-8aea-31bff480ed02?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Add-and-play-a-video-in-a-presentation-on-PowerPoint-for-Windows-f3fcbd3e-5f86-4320-8aea-31bff480ed02?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US)

[https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Video-Add-and-format-video%e2%80%8b-901252d8-](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Video-Add-and-format-video%e2%80%8b-901252d8-20f5-42c0-b463-3a403c0bed0d?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US)

[20f5-42c0-b463-3a403c0bed0d?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Video-Add-and-format-video%e2%80%8b-901252d8-20f5-42c0-b463-3a403c0bed0d?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJBCanWJD0k>

[https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Video-Add-and-format-video%e2%80%8b-901252d8-](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Video-Add-and-format-video%e2%80%8b-901252d8-20f5-42c0-b463-3a403c0bed0d?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US)

Embedding Videos into PowerPoint:

[https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Save-your-presentation-as-a-video-fafb9713-14cd-](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/Save-your-presentation-as-a-video-fafb9713-14cd-4013-bcc7-0879e6b7e6ce)

Other PowerPoint Tutorials:

<https://support.office.com/en-us/powerpoint>

[https://support.office.com/en-us/article/PowerPoint-training-40e8c930-cb0b-40d8-82c4-](https://support.office.com/en-us/article/PowerPoint-training-40e8c930-cb0b-40d8-82c4-bd53d3398787?ui=en-US&rs=en-US&ad=US)