

Lights, Camera, AG-tion: Promoting Agricultural and Environmental Education on Camera

Abstract

Viewing of online videos and television segments has become a popular and efficient way for Extension audiences to acquire information. This article describes a unique approach to teaching on camera that may help Extension educators communicate their messages with comfort and personality. The S.A.L.A.D. approach emphasizes using relevant teaching tools to decrease anxiety, implementing effective questioning as a natural segue to a deeper discussion in a follow-up segment, and sharing examples or case studies in the form of stories with characters. Extension educators should engage with local television outlets and their own web cameras to reach broader and more diverse audiences.

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Introduction

Public speaking can be an intimidating activity, even for the most experienced Extension professionals. Speaking on camera may cause even more anxiety. However, viewing online videos and television segments is quickly becoming a popular and efficient way for Extension audiences to acquire information (Case & Hino, 2010). In addition to writing effective bulletins and fact sheets, today's Extension professional must also be skilled in teaching on camera.

Most Extension organizations promote three program types—base, proactive, and reactive (Boone, Safrit, & Jones, 2002). Television stations and public broadcasting producers most often contact Extension professionals regarding newsworthy reactive programmatic efforts. From crop disease outbreaks to nuisance wildlife problems, the agricultural and environmental fields offer a variety of topics relevant for reactive news stories. Whether a program is base, proactive, or reactive or an Extension professional is responding on camera or in person, effective public speaking skills are particularly important when promoting agricultural and environmental topics (Kaufman, Rateau, Ellis, Kasperbauer, & Stacklin, 2010).

Although late-breaking stories seem to attract attention, Extension educators should be encouraged to engage with local television outlets to share the stories of their base and proactive programming.

In fact, many state Farm Bureau agencies, through their public relations offices, offer television programming opportunities suitable for showcasing all three types of Extension programs. The tips shared in this article may help even the most anxious Extension professional communicate comfortably and with personality on camera.

Tips for Teaching on Camera: The S.A.L.A.D. Approach

S—Stimulating Viewers' Thoughts and Interest

Your anxiety may be high in the moments before the camera starts recording, so consider introducing your segment by holding a relevant object. For example, before going on camera to describe differences between venomous and nonvenomous snakes, consider acquiring model replicas of a venomous snake and a nonvenomous snake to demonstrate identification features. Acquiring *living* venomous and nonvenomous snakes may generate even stronger interest, but may also increase your anxiety! Likewise, if describing diseases that may impact deciduous and coniferous trees is your goal, consider holding a branch segment from an oak tree (deciduous) and a pine tree (coniferous) to visually point out differences in disease characteristics. Psychologically speaking, this technique might decrease your nervousness by making you feel that viewers' attention is drawn away from your face (Brickel, 1982).

A—Attention Grabbing

Ask yourself, "Why should someone want to watch this?" Although not every Extension-related topic lends itself to educating teaching techniques, the importance of voice tone, subtle hand movements, and overall enthusiasm cannot be overemphasized. If teaching on camera for television, remember, you likely know more about the topic than the individual operating the camera. Do not be afraid to ask the camera operator to capture a particular angle or to focus on a specific aspect of an object you are discussing. The camera is the eyes of the audience, so look at the camera and talk to it as if you were speaking with Extension clientele in person.

L—Leading into Discussion

Consider hooking your viewers to continue watching by ending one segment with a question that you will answer at the start of the next segment. For example, close a segment by saying, "So how do you determine the difference between [tree disease A] and [tree disease B], you ask . . .," and start the next segment by saying, "So here's how you tell the difference between those diseases." The object(s) used to stimulate viewers' thoughts and interest may also provide a natural segue to a deeper discussion in a follow-up segment.

A—Audience Relevance

One key component of both youth and adult teaching and learning is the importance of sharing information applicable to learners' current life situations (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Enhance the local relevance of your message by sharing an example or a case study on camera in the form of a story. When a character in the story with whom viewers identify is affected by an

issue and makes a change, viewers might be able to imagine themselves being affected and changing too (Rossiter, 1999). To use the earlier example about local wildlife, demonstrate your point by using a native species of snake likely to be seen by viewers in the local area. This strategy may convey the local relevance of your information and enhance the likelihood that viewers will engage in a behavior you are advocating because your message has meaning to their lives personally. If you are using a relevant animal ambassador to convey your message, the animal may become the character in your story that viewers identify with and have empathy for.

D—Do Not Forget to Return to Your Original Message

At the conclusion of your online video or television segment, return to the object(s) you used to stimulate viewers' thoughts and interests at the beginning of the segment. Showing the object(s) again will remind viewers of your educational goals, bring closure to the segment, and serve as a way to call viewers to action in their local community. For example, community-based social marketing theory suggests that viewers are more likely to act in their local community when clear communication and prompts are used to suggest a desired action (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 1999). Revisiting the object(s) that viewers saw at the start of the segment may help enhance the clarity of your message and remind viewers of the behavior you are advocating.

Conclusion

In the same way that a salad serves as an appetizer for a meal, these steps may help ensure that your next television or online video appearance will "stimulate the appetite" of viewers to learn more. In Georgia, the Farm Bureau's television program, *Georgia Farm Monitor*, has provided this author with the opportunity to educate the public about agricultural and environmental issues through monthly television segments viewed nationwide. The S.A.L.A.D. approach has guided the planning of each "Ranger Nick" television segment. Perhaps it will help you too.

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