Playlists With Video Instruction

The Playlist Model, or Individual Rotation Model, has each student work through an individual playlist of activities. Playlists work well for formal writing assignments, projects, and entire units of study. The goal of the Play-list Model is to provide students a higher degree of agency and a more per-sonalized learning experience.

When I design a playlist, I always start with a basic template. I include all of the activities that I believe *most* students will benefit from, and then I cus-tomize individual playlists to ensure that students who need additional scaf-folding receive it, and those who are ready for next level work are challenged.
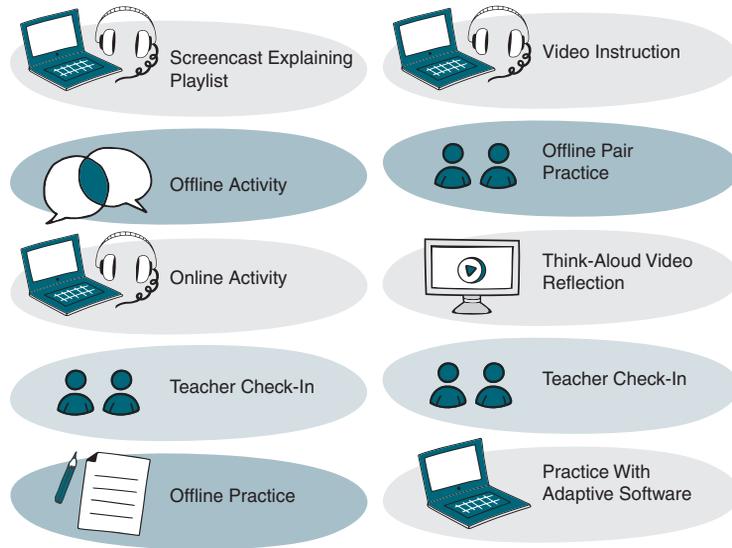
My playlists mix the following elements:

- Screencasts
- Offline tactile activities
- Video explanations, instruction, and modeling
- Online quizzes
- Personalized skill practice with adaptive software
- Offline pair practice
- Online exploration and research
- Peer evaluation
- Self-evaluation
- Conferencing
- Side-by-side assessments

The Playlist Model requires significant time on the front end as teachers pull the various parts of the playlist together. However, once a playlist is created, teachers enjoy copious time in class to conference with students, coach individual students, provide personalized support and feedback, and assess student work.

When I design a playlist, as pictured in Figure 5.3, I try to balance online and offline tasks so students are not staring at their computer screens for long stretches of time. There are moments when they have to seek out other students to complete collaborative tasks because I want them interacting with each other. I worry that teachers with unlimited access to technology neglect

FIGURE 5.3 Planning a Playlist With Video

Screencast Explaining Playlist

Video Instruction

Offline Activity

Offline Pair Practice

Online Activity

Think-Aloud Video Reflection

Teacher Check-In

Teacher Check-In

Offline Practice

Practice With Adaptive Software

offline learning, which is essential to forming meaningful relationships and developing critical soft skills. Blended learning should strive to achieve a balance between online and offline work in the classroom.

I also build "Teacher Check-Ins" into the playlist. When students hit a "Teacher Check-In," they bring their work to my desk so we can review and discuss their progress. These teacher check-ins are a powerful way for me to connect with individual learners, track their progress, and make sure they have everything they need to be successful. During these conversations, we can discuss strategies and additional practice that will help them to continue to improve and make progress. I use these moments to provide additional instruction, support, and feedback. I also add tasks to a student's playlist if they need more practice or review in a particular area.

Video plays a key role in these playlists because I record an introduction to the playlist, instructional videos, and videos that model a process. Incorporating videos into a playlist means I can use my teacher check-in time to build on video instruction or clarify areas of confusion without having to repeat the same instruction multiple times. Essentially, the video allows me to replicate myself so that students get the explanation and instruction they need when they need it.

ADDRESSING CONCERNS ABOUT USING VIDEO IN SCHOOL

I've met plenty of educators who question the value of video. They raise concerns about the time it takes to produce videos, they point out that it is

simply a virtual "sage on the stage," or they worry students don't really learn anything when they watch videos. On all three counts, I disagree.

First, creating a video does not need to be a time-consuming endeavor. In the next section of this chapter, I describe a quick two-step strategy for creating and sharing video content. It is important for teachers to remember that their live instruction is not perfect, so they should not expect their videos to be free from flaws.

Second, the virtual sage-on-the-stage argument is only valid if teachers are recording long lecture-style videos and simply asking students to take notes on the information. I encourage teachers to keep their videos short. A good guideline for video length is to limit the length of their videos to approximately 1 minute for each year their students have been in school. For example, if you are working with first-grade students, I would not record anything over 2 minutes since they have only been in school for 2 years. If you are recording videos for sophomores in high school, you can probably get away with videos that are 11 minutes long. In addition to keeping the videos short, teachers should focus on "flipping and engaging," so students are doing something that encourages them to interact with the new information. Teachers can use a tool like Edpuzzle to wrap a video in a lesson, so that students are asked to respond to questions as they progress through the video. Alternatively, teachers can pair a video with an online discussion prompt that asks students to take a position on an issue or reflect on a topic that was presented in the video. Teachers should not relegate students to passive consumers of information—live or via video. We must engage their higher-order thinking skills when designing flipped lessons.

Finally, the argument that kids don't learn effectively from video does not reflect the habits of young people, who frequently turn to YouTube to learn beyond the classroom. When kids want to learn how to do something at home—apply makeup, play a video game, or build gadgets—many go to YouTube to find a video. This tendency to turn to video for explanations, instructions, and tutorials outside of school makes a compelling case for using video content in school. If students are going to rely on video content to learn, then we can help them to be more effective consumers of video content.

CREATING YOUR OWN VIDEO CONTENT

Teachers often ask, "How do you create your videos?" I follow a simple two-step approach to creating and sharing my videos. First, I create a Google Slide presentation with all of my content. Teachers can use any presentation software, including PowerPoint or Keynote, to create slides, but I like Google Slides because those files live in my Google Drive and do not take up space on my computer.

I have some basic rules that I keep in mind when I am creating my presentations:

- *Less is more.* I keep the word count on my slides low and try to be as clear and concise as possible. I do not want to overwhelm my students with verbiage. Instead, I use bulleted information that I can expand on with my verbal explanation. The more words that a teacher adds to a slide, the longer it will take students to get through the video because a lot of students will try to copy the content word for word.

- *Media is a must.* Media can help to make a concept clear, engage the audience, and help students to remember key concepts. I include photos, graphs, charts, and images in my presentations to help students understand and remember the content.

- *Animations draw attention to key pieces of information.* Adding animation makes it possible to reveal information on cue so students are not jumping ahead to take notes on information I have not explained yet. Instead, I display information as I am talking about it. I also use animation in the slide to underline or box keywords and phrases to draw the students' eyes to specific words or information on the slide.

Once I have my slides ready to go, I record a screencast. Unlike a movie, which records my face, a screencast is a recording of what is viewable on my computer screen and the audio of my voice. So, my students see my presentation projected and hear my voice, but they do not see my face. There are some recording tools, like Screencastify, that allow teachers to record a screencast and display a small image of themselves presenting in the corner of the screen. I find the small video of the teacher presenting distracting as a learner, so I always limit my instructional videos to a screencast with audio.

I use QuickTime on my Mac or Screencastify—a free Chrome Extension—to record my screencasts. The benefit of using Screencastify is that it allows teachers to automatically save video recordings to Google Drive, where they can be shared directly with students. For teachers working with younger students or at schools that block YouTube, saving videos to Google Drive makes it easy to bypass a video hosting site. Instead, teachers can share the video from Google Drive with a link, just like they would share a Google Document.

CURATING VIDEO CONTENT ONLINE

I upload my videos to YouTube and share them with anyone who wants to watch them. At first, the idea of sharing my videos online was daunting. I am not perfect, and my videos are not perfect. I worried that people online would be critical and cruel. To my surprise, the response from students around the world has been incredibly positive. I receive comments on my YouTube channel weekly from students all over the world who have watched and enjoyed my vocabulary and writing videos. It is pretty incredible to live in a time

when I can literally teach students I will never meet simply by posting my video content on YouTube.

I realize that some teachers will like the idea of using video with students, but they will not want to create their own videos. Some teachers may not have the equipment they need, the time, or the confidence to create their own videos. That is okay! There is so much high-quality video content available online that teachers can access and use in their classrooms. I would encourage teachers to search YouTube for video content. You may need to sift through videos, but there are some reliably strong video producers posting content on YouTube.

The beauty of using video content to flip learning has very little to do with the videos. The magic of this approach lies in the ability to shift the control and the focus from the teacher to the students. When done well, the flipped learning model—whether integrated into a Whole Group Rotation, Station Rotation, or Playlist—should create time and space for the teacher to provide more personalized support as students work.

BOOK STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How much time on average do you spend in class on direct instruction, modeling, or reviewing directions? What type of content can you imagine recording and making available via video?

2. Do you currently use any video content with students? If so, what types of videos do you use? How do you use them? If not, why haven't you used videos with your students? Are there any obstacles or challenges you face when it comes to using video content with students?

3. What are the potential benefits of using video? Do you have concerns about using video content with your students? How might you mitigate these potential challenges?

4. Which blended learning models do you currently use? What role does video play in those models? How might you expand your use of videos? If you add more video content to your lessons, how might that impact the way you use your time in class with students?

5. Will you create your own videos or curate online videos to use with students? What are the benefits and drawbacks of each approach? If you are going to create your own video content, what process will you use to produce and share them?

6. How can video content help you to actualize the partnership model described in Chapter 2 of this book? How can video help teachers to create more time and space to work directly with students?