Using video clips in the classroom

by Bill Seibel

We live in an active, moving, electronic age. Yet many of us insist on putting our squirming, rock music-brained students to sleep with long lectures, punctuated by static slide photographs. Does this work? Sometimes. Does it fail? Often.

The name of the game is communicating. And to communicate with today's youngsters and not-so-youngsters, we must present materials in a way that grabs their attention and holds their interest. Yet, giving them a solid dose of anything or trusting them to cover the material at home with pure video or computer study courses is not the answer in the minds of many instructors.

So how do we keep shifting gears, tickling imaginations, boosting interest and lengthening attention spans? With short, hard-hitting, well-timed clips of action-filled video, which are fitted carefully and appropriately into our other techniques.

While nothing replaces human instructors who read and react to their specific classes; are there ever two that are exactly the same? There are different techniques that work well for each of us as we teach specific topics.

Slides have long been a part of many presentations and they are great because they can show enlarged and specific items necessary for the increased knowledge of the students. However, as noted earlier, slides are static. They do not move. Why not substitute a short clip of video as a living, moving, functioning slide. Note the words "substitute" and "clip." We're not talking about replacing your presentation with a long-winded video.

It takes some work to view videos, pick out and cue up specific segments which expand, enhance, and illustrate a major point in your presentation, but it works ... well. For example, when teaching the five basic actions of long guns doesn't it make sense to have a short clip of video of each action being loaded, fired and reloaded rather than just a slide, an example of a real firearm being held up or both?

To emphasize a point on waiting to clearly identify your target or for the perfect shot to ensure a quick, clean kill, there are dozens of commercially-produced videos that can be used.

Don't try to let the video teach your class, simply use 30-second to two-minute clips to emphasize, enhance, illustrate or strengthen your point in an action-packed way. Then shut it off and continue with your lesson.

This technique can be used for Hunter Ed classes, seminars on hunting specific game animals or birds, or for just about any type of presentation you want to make.

Step one is to outline your topic, then completely view the videos, which might be applicable. Knowing in advance what is there will help you fine tune your presentation plan, working in the video clips with slides, firearms, dummy ammo, clothing or whatever other teaching aids you plan to use.

Queue the video to the exact point you want to start and be sure you know exactly where you want to stop it. Number your videos and put them in order of use, just as you would slides in a tray. You may need a partner to change tapes and run the VCR for you.

Be sure to identify the title and producer of each tape in the presentation. This is the same as citing a source in written material and avoids problems with copyright laws. Since you are not showing the full tape and because you have identified it so the student can at a later date buy or rent that video for complete viewing, there is no copyright violation to our knowledge.

Sometimes you can set up a complete short tape by using a short clip first. For example, if you are to make a gun safety presentation to younger children and plan to use the NRA's great "Eddie Eagle" video, first talk about firearms being fun when used properly.

Then explain that firearms are powerful and can hurt someone. Show a clip from Alan Madison's Firearms Safety and The Hunter which shows the power of the center-fire rifle, .22 rifle and shotgun, starting with the .30-06 being shot from the bench at a can of beans 100 yards away and ending with the 12-gauge shredding a head of cabbage. Point out how powerful firearms are verbally as you stop the video, then show "Eddie Eagle." The kids get the message!

Video clips can become living, moving slides, a teaching aid that makes your presentations memorable.

Bill Seibel of Ballwin, Missouri, has been a hunter education instructor since 1964; reporter and outdoor writer for the old St. Louis Globe-Democrat from 1966 to 1985; and recently retired from his position as the St. Louis Regional Programs Supervisor for the Missouri Department of Conservation.