**Making a Screencast: Best Practices  
Dr. Mark Morton, Centre for Teaching Excellence**

**Should you make one?**

1. How many screencasts will you be making? If you’re only making a couple, then is it worth the time it will take to learn how to use a program like Camtasia? Could you make the screencast with a simpler program such as SlideShark or Screencast-o-Matic?
2. Assuming that you know how to use Camtasia, making a screencast still takes a fair bit of time (a seven-minute screencast, if you need to edit it, could take a couple hours to make). Will the making the screencast save you time later on? (For example, because it will mean that you don’t need to explain something many times to many people.)
3. Who will benefit from your screencast? How many will benefit from it? Are there people who would prefer a screencast (for example, because they have English as a second language and will want to watch the screencast several times)?
4. Is the content you want to share suitable for a screencast? Some content, such as a discussion of a policy, is probably better presented in document form than in a screencast. Other kinds of content – such as a demonstration of how to find and reserve a library book online – is well suited to being a screencast.

**Length**

1. Try to keep your screencasts to less than seven minutes in length. If you have a lot of content to cover, break it into several screencasts (or into a longer screencast that has explicit “chapters” in it).

**Where will you put it?**

1. After you make a screencast you can upload it to a public space such as YouTube or Vimeo. Or you can put it in a private or controlled space such as SharePoint or a Learning Management System. Unless there is some compelling reason to control access to the screencast, it’s probably best to upload it to a public space: it will be easier for your intended audience to find it, and you will also benefit other people who might not be part of your intended audience. (For example, I created a two-minute screencast for my 20 co-workers in the Centre for Teaching Excellence that explained how to add a link to SharePoint; I put it on YouTube, and it has now been viewed more than 4000 times by people all over the world (some of whom have added comments to the video expressing thanks for my sharing it).

**Use images (but use them effectively)**

1. A screencast that that is just made of text with you narrating it will not be very engaging. Use images to create visual interest, and to reinforce what you are saying.
2. Make sure that you have permission to use the images that you use. One good source is Flickr. Do an advanced search in Flickr, searching for images that have been labelled as free-for-use under the Creative Commons License.

**Should I use the picture-in-the-picture feature?**

1. The picture-in-the-picture feature is where a small video of you appears in the lower part of the screen as you are narrating something on the screen. Some people say that this helps to “humanize” the screencast. To my mind, it’s one more thing to worry about, and unless you are George Clooney or Angelina Jolie, it probably doesn’t add much to the screencast. ☺

**Do you need to create a script?**

1. Some people have the ability to “speak in paragraphs”; such people can probably make a screencast without first creating a script, especially if they know the content well. Most people, though, will find it much easier to make a screencast if they first create a script for themselves. The very act of writing the script will help them organize their thoughts; as well, as they are making the screencast, having the script in front of them will keep them on track. However, if you do work from a script, try to make your narration sound natural and even “off the cuff.”

**Providing captions**

1. Legally (in Ontario) if the screencast is on a public site, then it must be captioned or a script must be available (e.g. you could link to it online, or if you put it on YouTube you could add it to the description). If your screencast is on a password protected site, then this legal requirement doesn’t apply. However, Waterloo still recommends captioning or making a transcript available. If you have written a script before making the screencast, then making this script available will be fairly easy. If you want to go one step further, and caption your screencast, then there are tools that can assist you. For example, you might start by using YouTube’s captioning tool: it will attempt to transcribe your narration into text. Once it has done so, you can download it and make corrections; after doing so, you can then upload it again to YouTube (or use it elsewhere).