

Easter eggs in videos can increase student engagement

Oftentimes, when developing and delivering instructional videos for an online course, we wonder how many students are actually watching and, perhaps more importantly, understanding the information. Carmichael, Reed and Karpicke (2018) note that video aids in the learning process and can likewise influence students to remain engaged with course content. Still, there are times when we question the level of engagement from one student to the next after they have failed to follow the instructions or demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of course content. In addition to [viewing analytics, such as those available in Kaltura Mediaspace](#), there is a simple method instructors can employ.

User	Plays	Visits	Plays to Visits Ratio	Avg. Drop-Off	Avg. View Time	Total View Time
Christen Bouffard	2	3	67%	50%	00:01:24	00:02:49
Joseph Jackson	1	2	50%	100%	00:02:49	00:02:49
Sean Holland	1	2	50%	100%	00:02:49	00:02:49

ENTER THE EASTER EGG

“Easter eggs” are commonly used in movies to depict clever meanings, reference a joke or sometimes hint at other associated films. Viewers must focus on the film in order to find these hidden meanings and references. While an Easter egg drop to a hidden reference may prove impractical for instruction, inserting an Easter egg that encourages a student to watch a video from start to finish can be an effective way to win students’ attention.

Developing an Easter egg to either encourage or reinforce student engagement is a relatively easy process. One form of an Easter egg may be to plant an extra-credit opportunity in a video. For instance, while developing a video overview of the class each week, I will take a brief pause at some point during the overview and ask a question regarding some aspect of the material being covered. My intent is to keep it brief, ask the question and to ask the students to respond to me at some point during the week with an answer. Those who find the extra-credit Easter egg and email me with their response earn a couple of points on their grade.

In weekly videos for his Massive Online Research Experience (BIOL F193) course, Abel Bult-Ito uses a Snoopy doll as a subtle kind of Easter egg. Each week, [he places the doll in a different spot in the background](#) of his webcam video. Students who notice have remarked that it added a motivating factor, if small, to each video viewing. While there is no extra credit attached to finding the doll, it adds a layer of potential engagement and Bult-Ito found it motivating in his own quest to produce 108 short videos for his course.

Easter eggs can be both playful and motivating but should not be treated as a catchall solution for student engagement with video content. If the video does not use [best practices for instructional videos](#), it will be difficult to obtain the level of engagement needed to ensure that students absorb the content. Before instructors attempt the Easter egg approach, they should review their videos for quality. If many students are not watching the videos, [survey the class for feedback](#) before attempting engagement tactics.

There is some labor involved in warning students of the Easter egg (thus encouraging them to watch) and balancing extra-credit opportunities with the total number of points for the course. The benefit of planting an Easter egg however may be a higher rate of student engagement as a result of a more determined examination of the video narratives. Ideally, this should translate into a reduced number of student questions from those who did not previously watch the videos while simultaneously reinforcing the desire of other students to pay more attention.

This tip is the first in a series of teaching tips provided by the 2019-20 participants from UAF eCampus’s Expanding Pedagogies, Innovative Courses (EPIC) program. EPIC supports UAF instructors working together to build and deliver innovative online courses. [More information about EPIC and other opportunities with eCampus.](#)

RESOURCE

Carmichael, M., Reid, A. K., & Karpicke, J. D. (2018). [Assessing the impact of educational video on student engagement, critical thinking and learning: The current state of play](#). white paper, Sage Publishing. (accessed 6 June 2018).