Twitter Thread by Rob Sansom



Rob Sansom
@Sansom_Rob

Many of us are about to begin a new semester of online teaching. The learning curve for moving my lecture units last semester was STEEP, so I compiled some sort of hand over notes to people approaching this for the first time. I hope it's useful for someone somewhere.

Reduction in the amount of content was important. What used to be 2 x 1 hr in-person lectures/week had to be condensed down into 6 x 10 minute prerecorded videos (aka aynchronounous content) with 1 x hr live zoom session (synchronous). Even that was too much.

For the sake of yourself and your students, SLASH. Slash your content down. This doesn't mean having to lose important stuff, but keeping it short and sweet.

10 minute video chunks was just about short enough to hold attention. Have you tried watching an online lecture? It is HARD to maintain focus. The shorter the better.

Importantly, each 10 minute video had an explicit Intended Learning Objective given at the end and in the associated text, so that everyone knew what the point was (and how this might relate to assessment later).

5.4 Animals on Land

There have been multiple instances where animals have independently made the transition from aquatic living to terrestrial living. Here we look at four main groups of land living animals, the **arachnids** (spiders and scorpions), **millipedes** (formally called Myriapoda), and **hexapods** (mostly insects) from the phylum Arthropoda, and the **tetrapods**, our own group of vertebrates. In this short video we consider their characteristics and close relatives.

Intended Learning Objective: Define the major clades of terrestrial arthropods and vertebrates.

Associated Task: Why are insects so successful? *Have a think about this and spend no longer than 10 minutes researching ideas.*



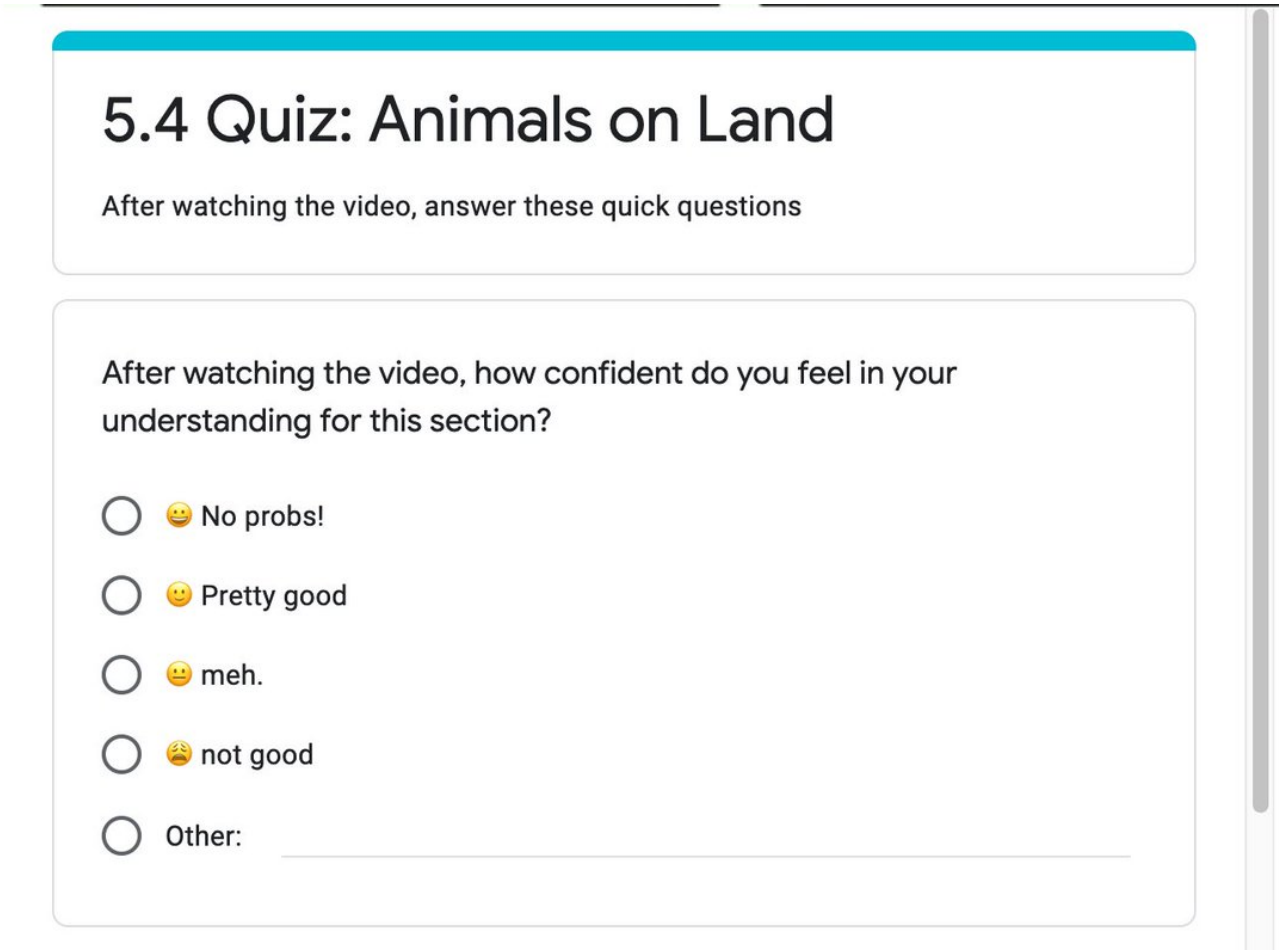
This format seemed to be very well received by the students in terms of concision and expectations. They were exposed to a lot of different formats last semester, but this appeared to be one they favoured (maybe they are flattering me though)

For each of my videos (or at least most), I tied in some sort of open question to think about, short to exercise/task/website to attempt to seed discussion during the synchronous session rather than open Q&A silence.

I also gave guidance about maximum time to spend on each task (e.g. “spend no longer than 5 minutes thinking about/researching this”). This generally went well, but depended on the nature of the exercise.

I experimented with different ways of embedding quizzes and feedback but quickly alighted on embedding google forms to your teaching pages.
They are easy to use (point and click), provide instant feedback to students, and allow the instructutor to receive anonymous feedback.

Each 10 minute video was associated with a multiple choice question to gauge understanding, an MCQ question to gauge their confidence, and each lecture had an open form for students to ask questions anonymously or highlight topics for further discussion at the live session.



Further reading/viewing was embedded as usual, but it had to be made EXTRA clear to the students what was extra, and what was core. It is harder to distinguish in online learning format.

Through chatting with students, we found out that many were pausing the videos to transcribe and take notes. This was NOT the intention and certainly takes far too long. I have explicitly advised to NOT do that. Clear state expectations and guidance will help.

Uploading the content consistently one week before the live session helped. This isn't always possible because, you know, the chaos.

I used OBS to record videos (great audio filters and functionality) and Youtube to share, embedded in Blackboard. This helped with the accessibility and auto-captioning. https://t.co/LaNw5eqsdY

For the live (synchronous sessions on zoom) it was important to start with a general chat and some informality. I started with a musical intro and telling them about my week. Helped dispel the horrid horrid virutal default atmosphere. https://t.co/Ay5AmTSVNQ

> One problem with distance/virtual lectures is those awkward minutes at the start when people are joining the Zoom session slowly, stilted and interupted chat. Why not use the oppertunity to GET HYPE! (sound on) \U0001f4e2\U0001f4e2\U0001f4e2\U0001f389#BlendedLearning \U0001f389\U0001f4e2\U0001f4e2\U0001f4e2 pic.twitter.com/jAU7oNy404
>
> — Rob Sansom (@Sansom_Rob) October 20, 2020

I would then review the content and learning objective of each video in the most superficial terms, just as a reminder (no more than 2 slides for each 10 minute video). This seemed to go down quite well as a format.

This was followed by reviewing the answers and feedback to the google forms in the asynchronous material.

I used zoom breakout rooms as a forum for students to meet each other and discuss the Qs seeded in the asynchronous material. We would then return to the main group to discuss together, perhaps me calling on representatives for breakout rooms as to what they discussed.

The break out rooms generally worked well and were valued, but they need to be managed carefully (I popped in and out, as did the PhD demonstrator).

Many of students don't turn on their cameras, even for each other. We worked on this by agreeing that the lecturer would remind everybody to turn their cameras on for each other at least in the break out rooms and generally extolling the virtue and benefit of cameras on.

Some won't engage no matter what. Therefore bigger breakout rooms are better. After experimenting and using student feedback, we agreed on a minimum of ten people in each room. That means that at least some discussion will take place.

(you can't and shouldn't force cameras on IMO)

It was difficult to get student to ask questions in front of everybody, but when they did, a great dialogue could develop. To facilitate this, we made great use of the zoom chat function. However, this is very difficult to monitor when live presenting.

I tried to limit live sessions to 1 hour, but that is quite tight to fit in all the content and discussion. So toward the end of the semester, we developed a pattern where for the first hour of the live session we would do the essential content and chat, then...

We would stay on the line after that for extended discussions for those that wanted to be there (i.e. no longer taking register). This worked well to serve both those enthusiastic students and the ones that just wanted to get on with their day. Breaks help.

General thoughts - it was super tough, but those students that consistently had their cameras on an engaged in the chat, and showed their appreciation really made a difference and made it all just about bearable. They really made an impression. https://t.co/3y8XxqlBEI

> Final live session of "How to Grow a Planet" and the students showed their appreciation in visual form. Really touched, thanks guys. Look closely and you can see the tear in @Sansom_Rob's eye @UoM_EES pic.twitter.com/7mZeDtWphv
>
> — GilesNJohnson (@GilesNJohnson1) December 16, 2020

Good luck to everybody approaching online learning for the first time this semester, both staff and students!