How to Record Videos with a Webcam

Introduction

It is possible to create videos for your online course by using your webcam. It is a good idea to create an introductory video to introduce yourself and the course to your students. When preparing to do a webcam video, there is some equipment you will need.

Webcam

Your computer may be equipped with an internal webcam. Most laptops have them. If you do not have an internal webcam, you will need to use an external webcam. These connect or sit on top of your monitor so they are pointed directly at you as you are facing the computer screen.
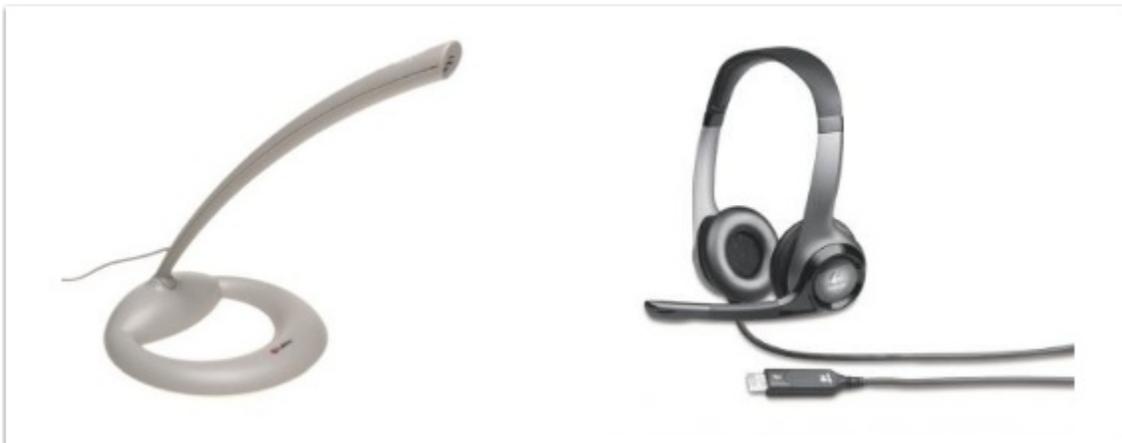
Microphone or Headset

Many computers come equipped with an internal microphone. It is not recommended that you use this microphone as it picks up a lot of background noise. If you decide to use this microphone, make sure you are in a very quiet space, but even then the computer's internal fans may create unwanted ambient noise.

There are options for external microphones you may want to explore:

Microphone: This is one option. You can position the microphone right in front of you while you are recording. Be careful to not move away from the microphone as it will greatly affect the quality of the sound.

Headset: This is a great option because it is hands free and you don't have to worry about moving too far away from the device.

Connecting your Devices

Most modern hardware extremities (webcams, microphones, headsets, etc) are connected to your computer via a usb connection. Find an open usb port on your computer and simply plug your devices in. Your computer should detect them automatically and have them available for use. If you are having issues with any of your devices (sound not recording, webcam not showing video, etc) you should make sure the computer recognizes your devices as being active. For Windows users this is done from the Control Panel. For Mac users this is done through System Preferences.
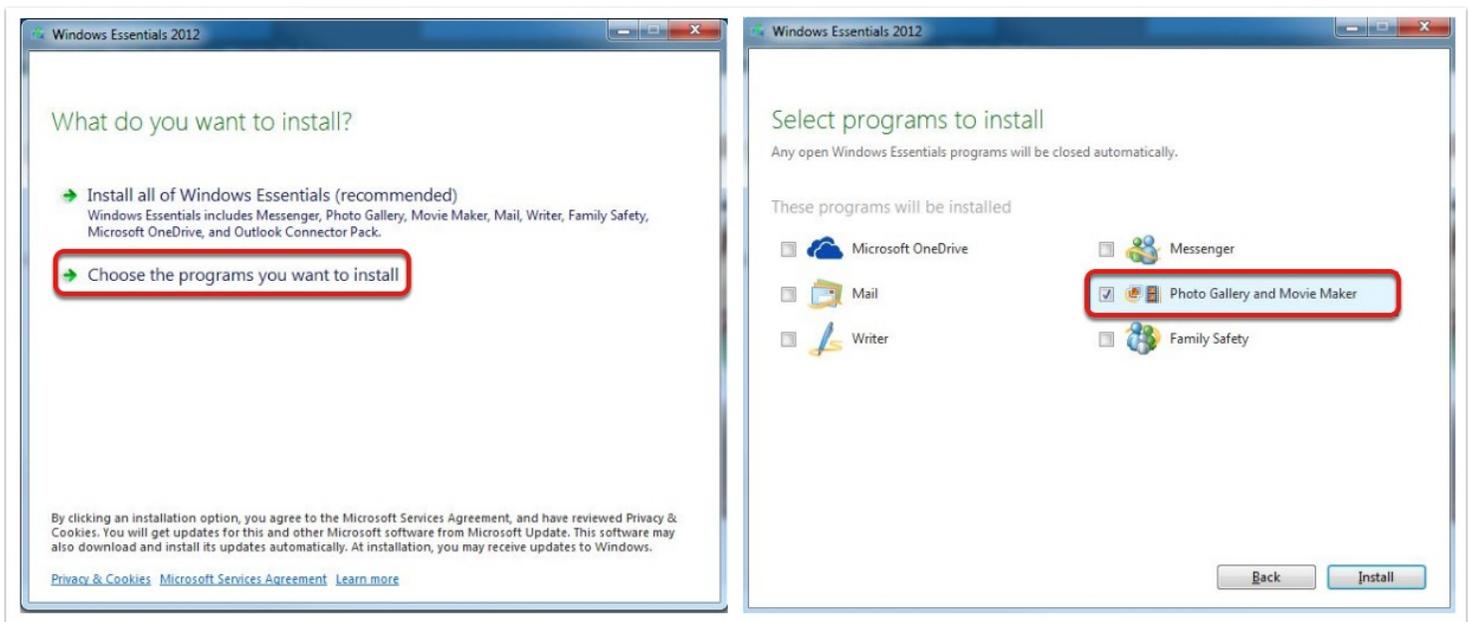
Distance from the Webcam

When recording on your webcam both Windows Live Movie Maker and Photo Booth for Macs show you as you are recording. This allows you to see what you will look like, what the background looks like, and how close you want to be to the computer and webcam when you are recording. Expect to be close to the position you would be in when normally working on your computer when recording on your webcam, but adjust to the frame as needed.

Download and Install

How to record: Once you have your mic and webcam available you will need to install software to record yourself. For Windows users, Windows Live Movie Maker is a free download that can be found here: http://explore.live.com/windows-live-movie-maker

IMPORTANT NOTE: Movie Maker's default settings install several programs in addition to Movie Maker. It is suggested that you choose only the programs you want, in this case Photo Gallery & Movie Maker (they come as a package together). Deselect the other programs to prevent them from installing.
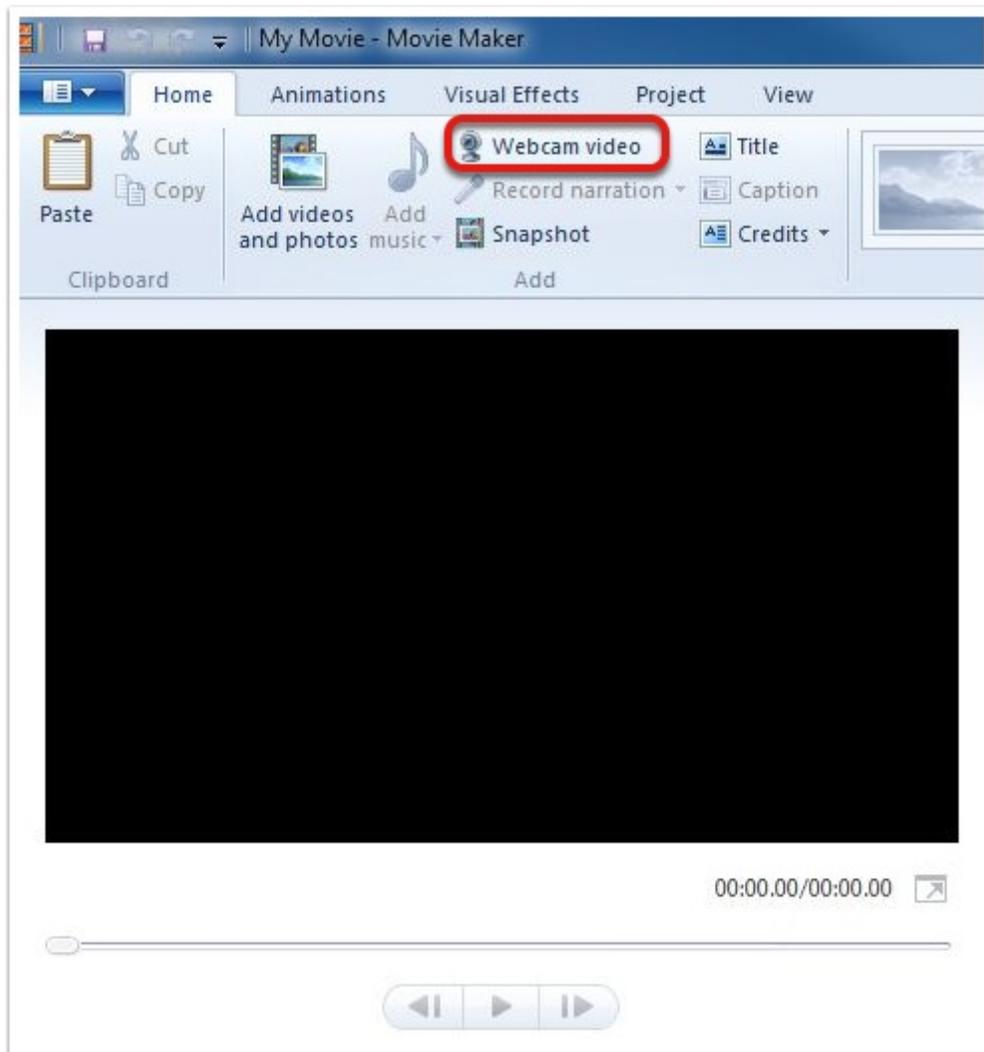
Download and install the program following the on screen prompts.
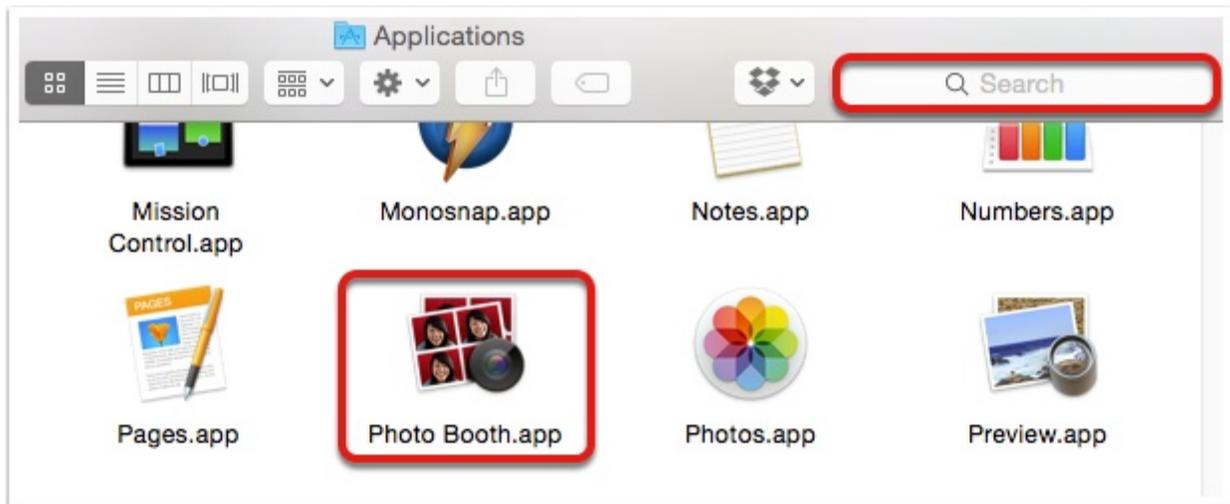
How to Record in Windows

After the installation is finished it should be able to be found in your Program Files. Choose Start and find Windows Live Movie Maker.

Once in the program select Webcam Video. This brings up a screen that allows you to record from your webcam. You may now record and save those files on your computer as .wmv files. Once your recording is finished you are able to play back and watch your recording. Some basic editing features are available and if you choose to record multiple sessions you can save them as one file.

Photobooth

In Photo Booth, click the film icon to switch the program to a video recording mode (1). After you click the film icon, the Red camera button in the center will change to a red projector button (2). Click the red projector button to begin recording your video. After a brief count down, Photo Booth will begin recording and a timer will appear (3). When you are done recording, click the red square button once to stop recording your video (4). Your recording will appear in the "tray" at the bottom of the screen (5). Simply click and drag it from the tray to your Desktop to create a copy of the file. This is what you will need to upload your recording to KSUtube or your Blackboard Learn site. Your video will be saved as a QuickTime Movie (.MOV) file.

Keep in Mind

The following are helpful tips to utilize while recording videos with a webcam.

What to Wear: Your outfit should reflect what you may normally wear in front of an in-person classroom, but remember that the human eye is different from the recording of a webcam.

Some helpful tips for what to wear while recording:

- Blues, greens, grays, and earth tones all tend to do well rendering on camera.
- Simple and tasteful are good values to have when choosing jewelry. Less is often more.
- Be mindful of how shadows appear on you, especially from your hair and glasses.

Some things to avoid:

- Certain patterns do not show well on camera: thin stripes, tight patterns, busy plaids, and even corduroy can cause a rainbow-like wavy pattern on camera that can be a serious distraction.
- High contrast clothing from skin tone or from other clothing can cause lighter colors to glow as the camera attempts to adjust the proper contrast.
- Cameras can also have issues rendering bright colors, especially reds and oranges. Check yourself on the webcam to see if there is any glow to yourself or your clothes.
- Large and ornate jewelry may have gems that will sparkle depending on the lighting. Earrings, necklaces, rings, and watches are all items to keep in mind when recording.

Lighting: This is a very big consideration when creating a webcam video. You will need to set up lighting in the room where you are recording. While the lighting in the room may appear to be enough for everyday living, office work, or even reading, the lighting may appear very dim when shown on a webcam .

Set up your computer area with lights with recording in mind, even if just for a temporary session to record an intro to your class. Where your computer is normally located is likely fine, but you may need to move around some lamps. You do not need to have professional movie studio floodlights, adjusting a desklamp and moving a few floor lamps will likely suffice. A standard method used for recording is called the Three Point Lighting Technique (see http://www.mediacollege.com/lighting/three-point/ for more information).

Main points from the 3-point lighting technique:

- Have two lights on either side of you for you to appear evenly lit
- Have a bright light on the background of the recording area, or on the back of yourself to give a more 3-D appearance

Where to record: The area where you will record your video will likely be dictated by where your computer is located, unless you have the freedom of a laptop.

Some tips concerning recording location:

- Choose an area where you won't be interrupted and have some privacy
- Avoid people or pets moving around in the background
- Reduce ambient noises as much as possible
- Turn off large applicances that may be heard during recording
- Shut any nearby windows and doors

What to say: For typical recording sessions that cover a lesson, the material you will want to cover will give you a guideline for what you want to record. For an introductory video for your class, the basics you will want to cover will include the following:

- A welcome to all of your students
- Any pertinent information from the syllabus that requires highlighting, but do not simply read your syllabus. They should have a copy in the course to refer to for the majority of the information.
- Goals and overarching themes of the class to give an idea of what to expect over the term.
- Some information about yourself. During online classes it is much harder to get to know your students without the visual reinforcement from an in-person class. The same is true for them getting to know their teacher. Show them you are an actual person.
- Contact information. While available in other areas of your course this bears repeating. Make sure your students know how to get a hold of you, especially in case of emergency.

Working from a prepared script: It is recommended to write out what you want to say beforehand. Many professors are used to having a few lecture notes and getting up in front of a class with little to refer to. While this often works well for an in-person setting, online classes are much different. There will be no feedback from student reactions while talking to your monitor. You will not have the chance to answer questions on the fly that would take you in different and interesting directions. You won't have the chance to feed off the information your students give you to reinforce what the lecture is about.

Because of this difference, you will likely find it beneficial to work from a completed prepared script for your lectures and for your introduction. This will be a helpful tool that will allow you to plan out what you want to talk about ahead of time and give yourself the chance to edit before recording. It is also a strong support for when you need to refer to something while you are talking or for direction if you lose your train of thought.

You can have a copy in a word processor on your monitor while you are recording. This way, if you position the camera correctly, you can appear to be facing the camera and yet be reading from your prepared statement.

Listen to your recording: Many people do not like the sound of their own voices, but it would be very beneficial to listen and watch any recordings you make prior to posting them for student viewing, even if you are certain that you did a good job during recording. Odd feedback sounds, noises you didn't notice, and the webcam cutting out from the cat unplugging the usb cable can all go unnoticed during recording and would go up for student viewing without your knowledge unless you sit and watch what you have recorded yourself. Taking the time now to make sure what you are producing is of worthy quality will save you time and effort later.

Reusability: If you would like to save your recordings for future classes beyond the current class you are recording for, you will need to keep this in mind while recording. Being able to reuse your recordings can be an efficient and practical decision, but effort must be made to make sure that you are not referring to anything that would cause the recording to be less useful or unclear for future classes:

- Do not refer to any dates, times, months, or school terms. Do not say your first discussion post is due on Monday the 17th. Monday will not be on the 17th the next time the class runs.
- Do not reference any holidays. Don't refer to the work they will need to cover over Spring break because your next class term may be in the Summer or Fall.
- For your introduction video, do not reference specific assignments. This will be confusing to students if you spend 10 minutes talking about the importance of a case study that you replace in a future term.