

Video diaries

What are they?

A method of recording reflective diaries and / or eliciting views and comments from individuals.

Strengths

- Flexible and empowering: both the content of the diaries and the time and location of recording are under the student's control rather than being constrained by the researcher.
- The spoken word may be preferred to the written word by some students.
- Good for eliciting personal opinions; the diaries are generally relatively freeform and unstructured and are usually recorded in private.
- Excellent for capturing thoughts and feelings "in the moment"; speaking to camera often encourages a chattier and less formal approach than writing.
- Often yields detailed, high quality data, particularly once students have had some experience using this method.
- Video diaries provide researchers with both visual and verbal clues, which can be helpful during analysis.

Weaknesses

- Some students may not be comfortable "talking to camera".
- The written word may be preferred to spoken word by some students.
- There is a risk of alienating less tech-savvy students who may not be confident about using the technology (webcams etc).
- Video files may be very large and in different formats: devising a straightforward way for these to be submitted is not trivial
- Video data is hard to analyse, however some of the depth is lost in transcription
- The process is a one-way transmission rather than two-way conversation. Follow-up questions etc. must take place later (e.g. by email, phone or in-person) which is time-consuming and may not yield as much useful information as direct dialogue.

Process

1. Provide clear instructions and offer help for both recording and submitting diaries.
2. Be flexible – offer alternatives for students who are not comfortable using this technology.
3. Using themes and providing guiding questions or prompts may help to elicit high quality data.

Examples from the Learner Experience projects

The LEaD project used reflective video diaries, together with surveys and focus groups, at key points over students' first year at university in order to elicit their experiences of the ways that institutional and personal technology were used to support teaching and learning.