

SECTION B:

Getting Started

IN THIS SECTION:

Knowing Your System

Introductory Video Conferences - five step-by-step ideas



KNOWING YOUR SYSTEM

It is essential that users feel confident using their video conferencing system.

A good way to start video conferencing is to link with another school, ideally one that you already know, and plan a range of activities together. You can develop your skills and confidence at your own pace and take advantage of the many opportunities there will be for working together.

The first step for the teachers and children is to become familiar with the equipment and learn how to make best use of it. This comes quickly with experience and is absolutely essential for the success and sustainability of any video conferencing initiative.

Ensure that users can:

- Set up the system. If your system is disconnected and stored between use, ensure that users can reconnect it. Draw a diagram and label cables and connections. Check that batteries are in remote controls and that spare batteries are available. Prepare a 'Quick Start' guide for colleagues who may have been unable to attend the training or who might need a reminder.
- Plug in the line that will make the connection (ISDN, IP or both).
- Switch the system on!
- Make a call - initially to an automated test system.
- Control the camera.
- Mute the sound when necessary.
- Check the picture you are sending to the far-end using picture-in-picture.

Later you may also want to:

- Attach a video cassette player or camcorder to play in pre-recorded video to the far-end
- Attach a camcorder to act as a second camera
- Attach a video cassette recorder (VCR) or DVD recorder to record a video conference
- Attach a digital stills camera to show pictures to the far-end
- Attach a document camera to show artefacts and pictures
- Attach a PC to show presentations

TRAINING

Contact your Local Education Authority, City Learning Centre or Regional Broadband Consortium to see if they run training courses on using video conferencing in the classroom. If you need help arranging training, contact www.global-leap.com or email tjarnold@devon.gov.uk

INTRODUCTORY VIDEO CONFERENCES

It is well worth taking the time to practise with a friendly 'far-end' before starting to set up curriculum links. When you use the equipment for the first time there will be the excitement of the children seeing themselves on television to contend with and then the excitement of seeing their first far-end partner. You will need to take this into account and build a familiarisation and 'settling down' period into your first sessions.

These sessions can take a number of forms:

The 'Video Conferencing in the Classroom Project', offers regular sessions called "My First Video Conference", suitable for all Key Stages, intended for teachers and pupils who haven't video conferenced before. To sign up for one of these sessions, visit the Global Leap website www.global-leap.com and click on 'Video Conferencing lessons and events for schools - book your place'. You will need to add your details to the Global Leap Classroom Directory to be able to book one of these "My First Video Conference" sessions.

The aim of these sessions is to enable everyone to feel relaxed and comfortable using the equipment and to iron out any audio or other practical issues involving the equipment or the room. It is also an opportunity for teachers to see how additional cameras, and perhaps a laptop, can be used to incorporate pictures, text or objects into the lesson, and to observe their class's participation in, and reaction to taking part in, a live link.



Observing and taking part in the session with their class often helps teachers to begin to think creatively about how they themselves could develop ideas for video conferencing applications. It also gives them the opportunity to ask any questions, note what might work successfully and highlight what could be improved in the room environment that they are using.

Alternatively, here are some ideas for introductory video conferencing sessions you can set up yourself. First you need to establish a link with a teacher in another school with video conferencing facilities. Ideally this will be someone you know in your own area, but there are plenty of other options - with so many schools starting to video conference, there will always be schools looking to establish links. You can try your local education authority which may well have details of schools in

your area with video conferencing facilities. You can also visit www.global-leap.com and click on 'Classroom Directory' where you will find contact details of video conferencing primary and secondary schools around the country.

See Section D 'Making Contacts' for further information

IDEA 1 - PRESENTATION AND Q & A SESSION

STEP ONE

Contact the teacher in your partner school and arrange a date, a time and a structure for your video conference.

STEP TWO

Do a test call with the school to check that both sets of equipment are working and that contact can be established. (see FIGURE 1)

FIGURE 1

Making a video conference call is straightforward.



When you turn on your video conferencing system you will see a startup screen. Select 'make/place a call' and enter the ISDN number or IP address.



When the call has been established, the picture of the far-end will appear on the screen.

STEP THREE

Both schools need to do the following preparation:

As a class, prepare a presentation which will be delivered by a small group of pupils, each member of which will talk about an aspect of the school and locality. Build in opportunities for questions, discussion and other interaction.

To assist with the smooth running of the conference, it would be helpful to liaise with your partner teacher in advance of the conference over the presentations and what questions the pupils will ask.

STEP FOUR

Practise the presentation with the video conferencing system, paying special attention to the seating arrangements, who is going to chair the conference and who is going to speak when. You will also need to decide who is going to operate the camera and what camera shots you are going to use, using the preset facility of your system if you so wish. (see FIGURE 2)

FIGURE 2

If your camera can be remotely controlled, you operate it using the arrows and the zoom in and out buttons on the remote control.

During a conference, you will probably want to use a shot of the whole group as well as close ups of individuals and small groups.

As part of your preparation, the camera operator, who can be the teacher, classroom assistant or one of the children, can use the 'pre-set' facility to set up all or some of the shots beforehand. When you select the preset number during the conference, the camera will automatically go to the pre-selected shot.

**STEP FIVE**

The conference itself. Arrange in the class in the positions you planned in step four. Select the 'near-end' picture you want your partners to see first. Dial up your partner school. Carry on with the conference as planned.

STEP SIX

When the formal part of the conference is completed, you and the pupils will be more relaxed. Allow some time at the end for an informal session when the pupils can ask each other additional questions. This section can involve the rest of the class as well as the original six initial participants.

IDEA 2 - PRESENTATION AND Q & A USING ARTEFACTS

STEP ONE

Contact the teacher in your partner school and arrange a date, a time and a structure for your video conference.

STEP TWO

Do a test call with the school to check that both sets of equipment are working and that contact can be established.

STEP THREE

Both schools need to do the following preparation:

Each pupil in the class, or a selected group of pupils, needs to bring an artefact to school which best represents themselves, an aspect of themselves, the school or the locality. They need to be prepared to talk about this artefact for 30 - 60 seconds.

STEP FOUR

Practise the presentation with the video conferencing system, paying special attention to the seating arrangements, who is going to chair the conference and who is going to speak when. You also need to decide on who is going to operate the camera and the camera shots you are going to use, switching from shots of the artefacts to shots of the speakers, using the preset facility of your system if you so wish. You may decide to attach a camcorder or document camera to the video conferencing unit to show the artefacts. (see FIGURE 3)

FIGURE 3



When you are video conferencing, you can attach a camcorder to the video conferencing system and use it as a second camera during a video conference.

Step one - plug the camcorder into the auxiliary input on the video conferencing system. Remember only to plug the yellow plug in, which carries the picture, not the red or white plugs, which carry the audio and would cause feedback.

Step two - select the auxiliary input using the handset





Step three - the picture from the camcorder will appear on the screen.

In addition to using the camcorder to quickly select close-ups of speakers in a spontaneous discussion, you can use the camcorder for showing pictures, documents and artefacts.



Step four - use the handset to return to the main camera on the video conferencing unit.

STEP FIVE

The conference itself. Arrange in the class in the positions you planned in step four. Select the near-end picture you want your partners to see first. Dial up your partner school. Carry on with the conference as planned.

STEP SIX

When the formal part of the conference is completed, you and the pupils will be more relaxed. Allow some time at the end for an informal session when the pupils can ask each other additional questions. This section can involve the rest of the class as well as the original six initial participants.

IDEA 3 - PRESENTATION AND Q & A USING A DIGITAL STILLS CAMERA (NB some video conferencing systems do not support this feature)

STEP ONE

Contact the teacher in your partner school and arrange a date, a time and a structure for your video conference.

STEP TWO

Do a test call with the school to check that both sets of equipment are working and that contact can be established.

STEP THREE

Both schools need to do the following preparation:

Take 12 pictures of your school and neighbourhood, using a digital camera with a video or AV output.

As a class, prepare a presentation which will be delivered by a small group of pupils, each of whom will talk about one or two of the pictures. Build in opportunities for questions, discussion, other interaction.

STEP FOUR

Practice the presentation with the video conferencing system, paying special attention to the seating arrangements, who is going to chair the conference and who is going to speak when. You also need to decide on who is going to operate the camera and the camera shots you are going to use, using the preset facility of your system if you so wish. Practise playing the digital pictures into the presentation. (see FIGURE 4)

FIGURE 4



When you are video conferencing, you can play pictures from a digital camera to the far-end.

Step one - plug the camera into the auxiliary input on the video conferencing system.

Step two - select the auxiliary input.

Step three - the digital pictures will appear on the screen as you select them on the camera.

Step four - return to the main camera picture on the video conferencing unit.



STEP FIVE

The conference itself. Arrange in the class in the positions you planned in step four. Select the near-end picture you want your partners to see first. Dial up your partner school. Carry on with the conference as planned.

STEP SIX

When the formal part of the conference is completed, you and the pupils will be more relaxed. Allow some time at the end for an informal session when the pupils can ask each other additional questions.

IDEA 4 - PRESENTATION AND Q & A USING VIDEO CAMCORDER

(NB some video conferencing systems do not support this feature)

STEP ONE

Contact the teacher in your partner school and arrange a date, a time and a structure for your video conference.

STEP TWO

Do a test call with the school to check that both sets of equipment are working and that contact can be established.

STEP THREE

Both schools need to do the following preparation:

Take a video of your school and locality using a camcorder. For instance, you might arrange with your partner school that you each make a video lasting about six minutes of various aspects of the school, for instance the school buildings, the playground and school grounds, the displays in the classroom, a sports session, an extract from a lesson, and lunchtime.

Then split the class into six groups, each of which will do 60 seconds or so of videoing. Each group would then prepare a presentation which would include their videoclip. As a class, prepare a presentation which will be delivered by six pupils, one from each group, each of whom will talk about their topic, illustrated by the relevant part of the video. If you don't want to show all the video, you can select the parts you want by taking a note of the counter/timecode beforehand. Build in opportunities for questions and discussion.

NB. The picture quality of the video viewed at the far-end may be variable, so experiment before the conference. Short clips should be suitable for use during a conference, although if you plan to use longer sections, you might consider sending them a copy on a tape, CD or DVD in advance for them to use before the video conference rather than in the video conference link itself!

STEP FOUR

Practise the presentation with the video conferencing system, paying special attention to the seating arrangements, who is going to chair the conference and who is going to speak when. You also need to decide on who is going to operate the camera and the camera shots you are going to use, using the preset facility of your system if you so wish, and check that you know how to play in the video.

Practise playing the video into the presentation. The far end will hear the soundtrack on the video but they will also be able to hear you speaking, so you can add your own comments while the video is playing if you so wish. (see FIGURE 5)

FIGURE 5

When you are video conferencing, you can play video to the far-end by either connecting a video player or a camcorder to the video conferencing system.

Step one - plug the videoplayer into the auxiliary input on the video conferencing system. The yellow phono plug carries the picture; the red and white phono plugs carry the audio picture of camcorder attached to unit.

NB If you are using a camcorder, switch it to play. When it is set to record, the sound will feed back and make a loud humming noise. If you don't want the sound, only use the yellow plug.

Step two - select the auxiliary input using the handset.

Step three - the video will appear on the screen as you play it on the videoplayer or camcorder.

Step four - return to the main camera picture on the video conferencing unit.

**STEP FIVE**

The conference itself. Arrange in the class in the positions you planned in step four. Select the near-end picture you want your partners to see first. Dial up your partner school. Carry on with the conference as planned.

Rather than School A doing their whole presentation, then School B, you may decide to structure the conference so that School A's presentation of each section is followed by School B's presentation of their corresponding clip. This will encourage comparison and discussion.

STEP SIX

When the formal part of the conference is completed, you and the pupils will be more relaxed. Allow some time at the end for an informal session when the pupils can ask each other additional questions.