

Take Out Your Cell Phones! Selfie Videos in College ESL Classrooms, Part II

by Christine Discoe




In the last [College ESL Quarterly](#), I asked “why Selfie Videos?”, in the hopes that ESL teachers would consider using them as a tool to tap into students’ comfort zones, increasing students’ linguistic ability and self-awareness, and capitalizing on an emerging social phenomenon (the Selfie) to enhance and improve language production, fluency, and pronunciation, among other benefits.

Continuing the discussion about Selfies, I’ll outline some how-to’s, so those instructors who’ve never tried can begin to use Selfies. I’ll also identify two sample assignments and grading guidelines.

Part II: Getting Started with Selfies: A Beginner’s Guide

The first time I ever had my students create a Selfie, it was pretty spontaneous. Having 20 minutes left in the class, I asked students to take out their smart phones, and make a video, which most students can do without direction. However, to understand how to create a polished assignment, you may wish to record your own Selfie Video. A quick how-to:

1. On your smart phone, click on the photo app that looks something like this: 
2. Next, turn the visual orientation of the camera around (this is an icon located in the upper right corner of most smart phones). This way, the screen of the phone is pointing toward your face, and you can see yourself and speak at the same time.
3. Make sure you are in “video” mode (vs. “photo” mode). To do this, at the bottom of the smart phone screen (still in the camera app), move the small dot above “photo” to the “video” mode. Now you’re ready! Press the large red dot to start recording.
4. You may want to set up your smart phone/camera on a level surface to record your video, or you can simply hold your phone. Some students like to use headphones that have a speaker— you can plug in headphones, and talk directly into the speaker, which is usually on the headphone wire.

Using the four steps above, you are ready to record a Selfie Video or teach someone how to do so. When you’re finished with your video, you simply open it in the “camera app” and hit play.

As mentioned, record a Selfie Video to become familiar with the process or to create a model for an assignment. I usually create a sample video for each assignment (see an example here) or I give directions on how to do the assignment in a Selfie Video, which I can upload to my university education platform (at INTO CSU we use Canvas. Check with your platform: most have a way to upload video content). If you’re not using an educational platform, don’t worry. Your portable smart phone can be easily plugged in to any speaker, and you can show the video on your (or a student’s) phone simply by putting it on a document cam/projector. I’ve used this technique

successfully in class. Just make sure you're in airplane mode before you show your video, so that you won't receive texts or notifications during the video.

Assignments: Now What?

The range of topics, assignments and exercises you can create that incorporate Selfies is truly limitless. Since ESL teachers have started using Selfies, assignments have included ones that focus on pronunciation, grammar, summarizing, rehearsal (practicing a speech, for example), evaluating, review of material, and critical thinking, among many other possibilities. You are limited only by your imagination. To help you along, here are some guiding principles that you may wish to consider:

1. Spring Board

Selfie Video assignments can be a springboard from a topic, content area, class discussion, reading, or video to critical thinking. Out-of-class Selfies can give students time to ruminate about a topic, and practice thinking and talking about it in a quiet, safe, self-reflective place (for more on this reasoning, see [CEQ Selfie article, Part I](#)). Often, when students are learning new information, whether from reading or in discussion, they touch on it briefly, perhaps in writing, rarely having adequate time to contemplate deeper meanings or spring board from the content into making complex connections, a crucial part of critical thinking. An example of spring boarding with Selfies is the Marketing/Advertising Assignment, which follows in the example section.

2. Integrate

Especially in teaching vocabulary, ESL teachers struggle with the gap between students' learning a particular word form and students' using that word in their everyday language, which often requires changing the part of speech. To fully integrate a new vocab word, students can benefit from the Selfie Video, which allows them to adapt not only the pronunciation, but also the changing intonation of other word forms, allowing students to fully integrate the vocabulary into their own grammar within the flow of speech. With Selfie Videos, students must pay attention to the word forms' various patterns of intonation and pronunciation, adding a layer of linguistic complexity, which may not be apparent when they are writing about or memorizing new vocabulary. An example of integrating oral/aural skills using a Selfie is the Compare/Contrast assignment below.

Example Assignments and Some Grading Approaches:

I. UNIT TOPIC: Marketing/Advertising (Note: This assignment was used in an advanced business-themed AEP class)

Find a short, 1-2 minute advertisement that sells a popular product (https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=best+ads+2016 is one place to start).

Then, in a 1-3 minute Selfie Video:

1. Describe the advertisement. Remember, I didn't watch it. Summarize the main ideas and important elements.
2. Explain to me how the ad uses *humor, concrete or abstract concepts and/or group buy-in* to grab the viewer's attention. Make sure you follow the definitions discussed in class. Be sure to use the unit vocabulary in the Selfie.
3. What did you think of this ad? Was it persuasive? Would it lead you to buy this product? What would someone from your country think of it and why?

Possible Marketing/Advertising Selfie grading rubric:

<p>Summary: Clear, short and easy to understand. Covers major points of the ad. /5</p>	<p>Use of vocabulary: Shows understanding of unit vocab, and is able to apply it in the Selfie. /5</p>	<p>Critical thinking: Expands and/or integrates the concepts in the unit to the ad you chose. /5</p>	<p>Requirements: Meets length requirements and sufficiently answers the questions in the directions? /5</p>
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Another example Assignment:

II. UNIT TOPIC: Compare/Contrast (Note: this assignment was used in an intermediate EAP speaking class)

- Study this week's vocabulary (a) joy, joyful, (b) happy, happiness, (c) fear, fearful, afraid and pay attention to the changing parts of speech.
- Study the compare/contrast transition words that we studied: however, on the other hand, in contrast. Think about which one to use in your Selfie.

Now, get together with a partner. Ask your partner the following question: "What is your greatest joy and your greatest fear?" Together, take two minutes to think about it. Do not write notes. Go outside and find a place where you can record each other in a Selfie Video of 1-2 minutes.

- With your partner, review the videos and take notes. Does the video use details and correct grammar and is it easily understood? Does your partner use the assigned vocabulary? If not, where can he or she go back and add the vocabulary? Are transition words present, showing contrast?
- In your video, you MUST use at least ONE word from A, B and C above and one (or more) transition word to show contrast. Did you use them? If not, go outside and re-record the video so that you're using the vocabulary. Upload the video and be prepared to show it to the class.

Possible Compare/Contrast Selfie grading rubric:

<p>Vocabulary: Correctly uses words from A, B and C and a transition word. Uses correct parts of speech. /5</p>	<p>Details: Uses details and elaboration to explain why or how you have joy or fear. /5</p>	<p>Grammar: Uses correct grammar throughout, and makes attempts at self-correction as necessary during the video. /5</p>	<p>Requirements: Speaks at least one minute and doesn't repeat information. /5</p>
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How to Give Feedback

Now that you've created some Selfie Video assignments, how do you respond? Here are some ideas:

- 1. Recorded video response:** My students love this! They make their video, and I respond with my own (this may require an educational platform). This feedback is a productive way to give very specific responses. The teacher can say what the student said, and then say what they should have said much more clearly than in writing. Also, this is a good way to focus on pronunciation. In my video response, I like to “mimic” the students’ pronunciation—upon review, students can really hear my mistakes sometimes better than their own, allowing them to reflect and integrate changes. One word of caution: if you record a video response, add a requirement that the students watch it. I ask my students to write a response about specific comments that I made in the video, and give at least 5 points in their responses. For example, students might respond with “thanks for letting me know my intonation was incorrect on the word *analysis*—I got it now and will practice more.” It is good to model in class before the assignment.
- 2. Respond with links:** When you give a written response to students, you can easily send links relating to specific pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary. If a student mispronounces the “th” sound in “I think,” for example, teachers can send a link which focuses on correct production of that sound. Or, if a student is not inverting the subject and verb in a question, you can send a grammar link related to that topic, reinforcing the grammar-speaking connection.
- 3. Conferences:** I've successfully reviewed Selfie Videos with students on their phones one-on-one; I give students a grading rubric (see above) and review the video with them, pausing and asking them to evaluate themselves based on the grading criteria. Students can also do this together with a partner and share with the class. It's also helpful to have individual students share the Selfie with the whole class, and have the class evaluate it. When I evaluate with the whole class, I usually have students follow the guideline of giving two comments, one that shows a positive aspect of the Selfie, and one that shows an area that could be improved.

Now that you've got some general ideas for how to integrate Selfie Videos, you can begin employing this tool in your own ESL classroom. Your imagination is the limit!

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