

The Process for Producing App Tutorials

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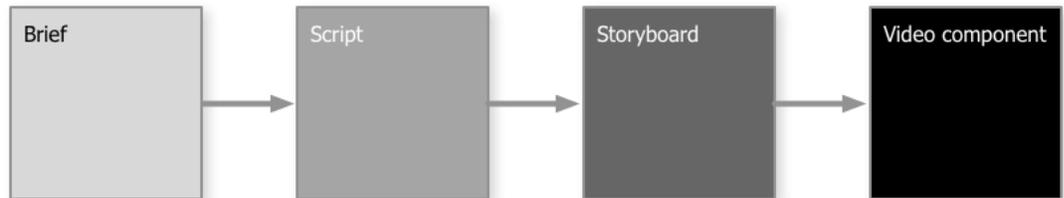
Why do so many app tutorials and screen recordings look and sound so bad? A successful home/office studio environment requires a proper recording environment, consistent audio/display setup, and extensive planning. I propose adopting a flexible and modular process for creating instructional content.

Consider that what is required to create quality video tutorials rests on a three-legged stool. The first article in this series, update to [Creating an eLearning Home Office Studio](#), covered the hardware and working environment. The second article, [Recording Professional App Training Videos](#), demonstrated using software tools to record screens and voiceovers.

This last installment (the third leg of the stool) is the most challenging and the most important. With careful planning and a consideration for design, you can optimize the execution of a video making project. Lack of planning can result in re-recording, poor quality, disjointed flow, and lots of wasted man-hours. I would venture to say that [LinkedIn Learning \(Lynda.com\)](#) spends an unusual effort in planning. This ensures that the actual act of recording and production is effortless. Competing, lower-cost education video training providers haven't figured that out. Yet.

Preparation for Recording

There are four planning steps that can help any video project:



- **Brief:** This simple document is the heart of the project. If you are familiar with Simon Sinek's brilliant [Start with Why](#), this is the document that should explain the benefits, target audience, passion, and goal of the project. Without this stated focus, prepare to struggle with completing your work on any timeline. I'm serious. And if you are entertaining outside funding for your work, you'll need this document.
- **Script:** Few of us take the effort of scripting seriously. Most of us prefer to "wing it." Because I move the sequence of video parts, I'd be lost without a killer outliner app. The outline holds each topic's voiceover script. PC (Windows) users are going to not like this, but I swear on using [OmniOutliner](#) on the Mac or iPad. Especially for closed captioning, you'll need to simplify sentence structure. Use the [Hemingway](#) desktop app to help your script hover no higher than an eighth-grade reading comprehension level.
- **Storyboard:** Although this is optional, visually-intensive recordings (like PowerPoint) may use a series of sketches showing transitions and artwork. The most impressive tool I've found is Autodesk's [Sketchbook](#) app available on PCs, Macs, and iPads. For some odd reason, this fabulous software is free.
- **Video component:** Now we're getting into something interesting. Think in terms of video shorts composed of video parts (or components). Read on ...

Planning for Reusable Components

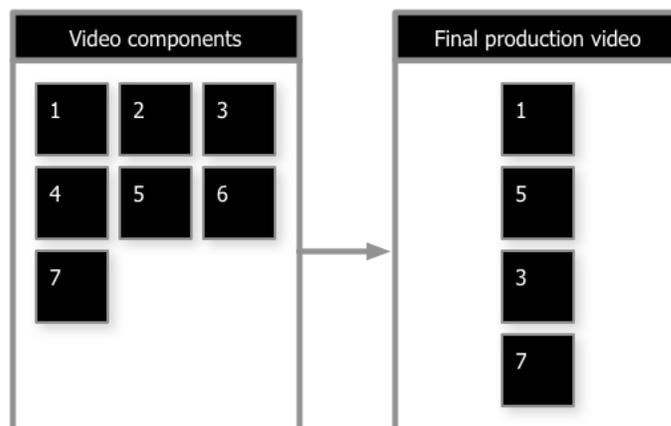
Over the years I became passionate about reusable, object-oriented programming. There are many benefits to examining functionality of code as black boxes with published interfaces. Design it once and reuse everywhere. Test it once and reap the benefits of long-term quality. Ensure consistency among your projects to establish a common look. App building becomes easier by stitching together components thus removing the need to reinvent the wheel on every project.

The same approach works with video production.

I found that some parts were common between "how to" tutorials, product overviews, and even crowdfunding video shorts. In fact, some of these video snippets could be shared among all of my eLearning projects.

Examples include prologues (introduction) and epilogues (closing). Using the powerful [Camtasia](#) app (PC or Mac), you can develop a multitrack component and save it as a library item. Whenever you start a new project, drag it on the timeline and customize it as you see fit.

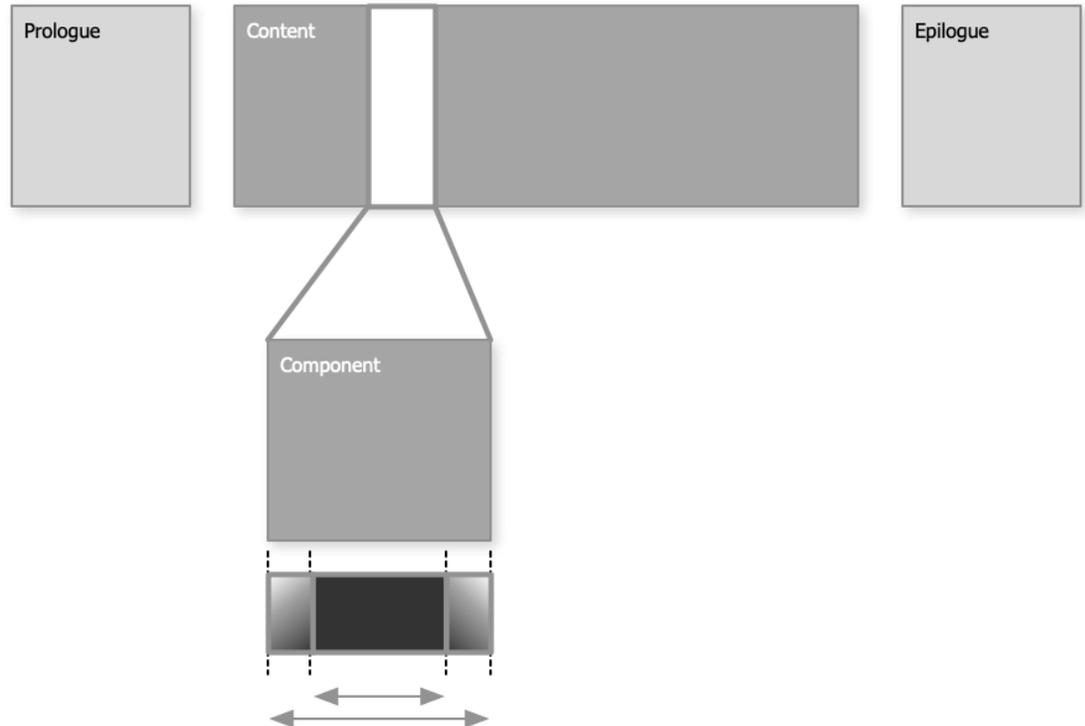
Use the same approach to construct common components like lower-third animation and slide backgrounds. In producing two distinct crowdfunding projects, many parts of both videos can be stitched together as a sequence of components:



This has worked wonders for one of my apps has simplified the creation of a crowdfunding pitch, product overview, and a how-to instructional video. To vary the introduction tuned to a specific audience, I created three types of prologues (abbreviated, normal, and longish version with a countdown) for fun.

As in movies, sometimes clips abruptly switch between them and other times they fade to black. For that reason, Camtasia makes it easy to add transitions at the beginning and ending to any video clip. By splitting tracks and adding fade in and

fade out markers, each component has two variations: one with fades and one without:



Feature-rich Camtasia makes professional video production possible for us novices. For example, transitions, animations, and closed-captioning is a breeze with Camtasia.

It is good practice to ensure that you don't discourage any potential customers by embedding closed-captioning. Designing for flexibility in the planning phase of your work gives you a lot of options.

Personalization: The Human Connection

In marketing and especially crowdfunding videos, rule #1 is to establish a rapport with your viewers. There's a reason LinkedIn Learning films the course instructor talking directly to you at the beginning of a training video. That human connection is absolutely necessary!

I invested in a green screen and high-quality webcam just for that reason until I realized a better—if not riskier—technique. With the assistance of AI and software gaming rendering technology, it is now possible to create realistic live recordings

using facial animation. Being used by a [Chinese state-run news agency](#), I decided to try it out with an absolutely amazing tool called [CrazyTalk](#) from Reallusion. With a frontal photograph and some clever facial animation configuration, a personalized voiceover can be rendered in a very [lifelike way](#).



The software automatically renders control points on the face to mimic head movement, blinking, facial expressions, and mouth movement. You can easily change the background graphic for different.

This facial animation component has become very important to drop into most of my video projects. No green screen backdrops, no hour-long equipment setup, and no stress.

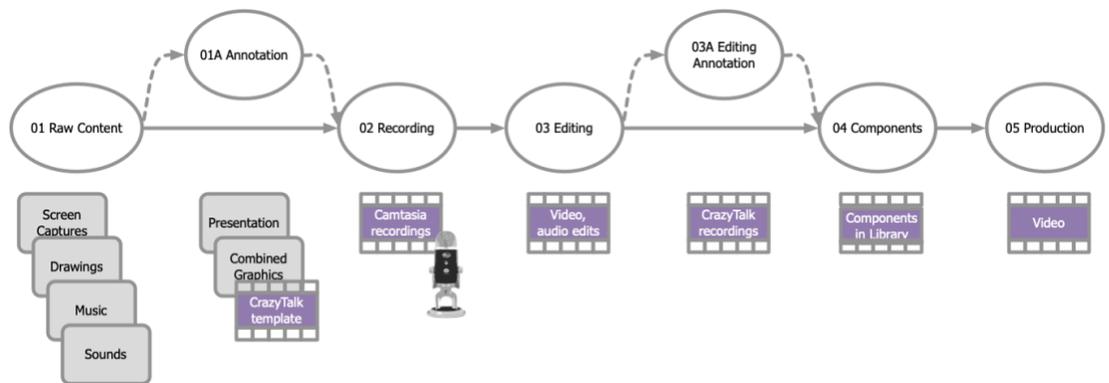
What About Voiceovers?

In recording PowerPoints (or demonstrating how an app runs), I struggled with what I call the “bobble head syndrome.” I know that sounds rather funny, but my audio recording quality suffered as my eyes darted between the screen and the mic. I asked the noted eLearning video recording expert, [Chris Mattia](#), about the dilemma. His suggestion was to record the audio separately. That seemed illogical, but I tried it anyway. Surprisingly, it was actually easier! Practice the voiceover script and record the script as a voiceover using the [PromptSmart](#) app on your iPad. Then record the screen (app or PowerPoint) similar to the pace of your voiceover. Camtasia makes it easy to align the voiceover with the screen recording.

Organizing the Assets to Your Process

It can be easy to forget where your file assets (sounds, videos, components, graphics, and recordings) are located on your computer. It is also very frustrating to look at computer files and not have a clue how they were created. For example, which computer did you record the PowerPoint on? What display resolution was used during the recording?

Often, file assets are exported from one procedure and used in another step of the process. Keeping all of this straight is no fun at all. The best approach I've found is to use a numbered folder system that mimics the steps you use. This folder hierarchy represents the sequence of steps I use:



If a screen capture is used as a still in the video, include the source in the file name: *App Main Screen Capture (144ppi, MBPR13-MOS1014).png*. This means that the app's screen capture was taken on a Retina (144 pixels per inch) display and not on an external 720p display monitor. The computer was a MacBook Pro 13 and its operating system was macOS 10.14. Include source information for drawings, audio files, voiceovers, and recordings. You get the idea.

There's one more thing!

Don't forget to take version backups of your project work. We've all suffered when key files were accidentally overwritten or corrupted.

I do hope this article helps you organize and plan your next recording project.

Bio

Ken Whitaker, managing director of [Leading Software Maniacs](#), has more than 25 years of software development leadership and training experience. He is an app developer and has written books on leadership and is an innovator in instructional design and agile project leadership workshops. Ken is the creator of PM Chalkboard and most recently the editor for *Better Software* magazine. He is creating a unique The Nerd Herd Game gamification product that redefines learning and compliments a visual book/workshop called *Young Person's Guide to Software Project Management*.