

Creating and Using Instructional CD-ROMs

New Ways of Creating Instructional Material for Journalists

Steven S. Ross*

NAPOMENA UREDNIŠTVA:

Steven S. Ross je poznati američki sveučilišni profesor koji redovito posjećuje Hrvatsku i druge zemlje u regiji kako bi sudjelovao u obrazovanju novinara i surađivao s regionalnim znanstvenicima i ustanovama iz područja novinarstva i masovnih medija. Kao jedan od direktora i čest pozvani predavač Međunarodne konferencije "Informacijska tehnologija i novinarstvo" <www.foi.hr/itn>, koja se svake godine održava u Interuniverzitetskom centru u Dubrovniku, Steven S. Ross je u svibnju 2001. godine sudionicima te konferencije prezentirao dva sveučilišna tečaja na CD-ROM-u. Takvi tečajevi razvijeni su za kolegije koje on predaje na Sveučilištu Kolumbija te nose nazive "Novi mediji 2" i "Analitičko novinarstvo", a "čitaju" se pomoću Web preglednika (kao što je npr. Netscape ili Microsoft Internet Explorer). Sadržaj tih CD-ROM tečajeva moguće je uporabiti na način koji je integriran s World Wide Webom, a moguće je i koristiti Microsoft Office programe kao što je tablični kalkulator Excel, kao i multimediju i programe za GIS (Geografski Infomacijski Sustav). U svojem tekstu Steven S. Ross opisuje CD-ROM tečajeve kao prikladan instruktivni materijal za studente i nastavnike novinarstva i novih medija.

Ključne riječi: CD-ROM, instrukcijski CD-ROM

Instructional material on CD-ROM discs offers substantial advantages over printed material, both for students and for instructors:

- CD-R discs are inexpensive compared to photocopies. My discs contain the equivalent of thousands of pages, but cost less than 50 cents to make. (In the

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United States, blank CD-R discs are sometimes available in bulk at 100 for USD 10, or 10 cents each – less than a kuna!

- Material on CD can include audio and video, as well as full-color images.
- If the CD is used in a computer that is connected to the Internet, instructors can embed links to Internet sources.
- When teaching computer software, as I often do, it makes sense to teach using the computer.
- Students find it easier to handle CDs than large printed texts.
- Material can be updated quickly, compared to books.
- Unlike Web-only teaching materials, the material on a CD can be used on a computer that is not continuously connected to the Internet. CD-based materials can also be accessed from a computer server where that is more convenient, however.

For the past four years I have been coming to the region to teach computer-assisted reporting and new media. For me, the discs offer another advantage: I can carry large numbers of them in my luggage. Also, I can amplify my classes (which, at most last just a few days) by leaving the discs behind in the hands of journalists in the region. I allow royalty-free copying and modification of my discs by non-profit organizations in the region, and by profit-making news organizations for their own internal use. Some of my lessons have been translated into local languages, and expanded with local examples.

Producing a CD

Instructors generally have confidence that their teaching materials will work well on CD, but worry that the technology is difficult to master. In reality, the situation is just the opposite. Instructors will find the technology easy. But to maximize the benefit to students, they should use transfer to CD as an opportunity to review and modify their teaching materials.

I started producing this kind of material in 1993. My first efforts used hypertext links, but not HTML – the Web was in its infancy and there were, at the time, no graphical Web browsers. Instead, I created files in rich text format (RTF) and used a Microsoft tool that compiled my files into files that Windows read as if they were help files attached to Windows programs! In fact, I used my materials that way, attaching them to copies of Excel on my teaching lab's computers. A complete set of my first eight lessons could be held on eight 1.44 MB floppies, compressed with Pkzip. They expanded to a total of 20 MB. My current discs for teaching analytic journalism and for new media hold more than 600 MB each!

In my tutorial materials for using software, I provide step-by-step instructions in text, with still images. I also usually include videos.

To capture still images of what is happening on-screen, I use software built into Windows. First, I set the software in a small window – about 580 by 400. The size of the resulting screen capture, plus the border of the window, will be less than 640 by 480 pixels, and thus will fit on the smallest, oldest Windows or Macintosh computers.

Holding the ALT key and pressing the PRT SCR key will place a copy of the window on the clipboard. From there, it can be pasted into any standard “paint” program. Windows Paint, which comes with the operating system, is not ideal because it cannot save the image as a GIF – the ideal format for HTML use. But there are many shareware programs available.

Figure 1. A still image capture of a lecture on JavaScript from the “New Media 2” CD-ROM tutorial by Steven S. Ross and Paula Park

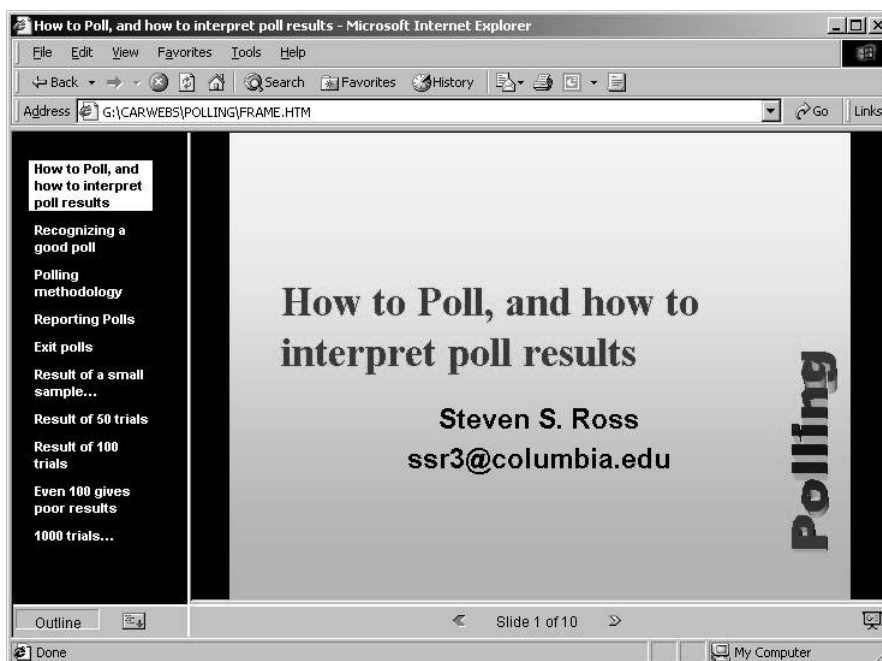


For videos, I use shareware programs from Techsmith (www.techsmith.com). SnagIt captures the videos and DubIt handles the voice-overs. Each costs about \$30. You can download 30-day trial versions. First, the video of an operation is captured as an AVI at 2 to 4 frames a second. Then I do a voice-over with DubIt. The program is simple to use, but does require that the voice-over be done in one continuous session. This is usually not a problem, because most of the videos are only 30 to 45 seconds long. AVI will play on a Mac or PC using QuickTime, Windows Media Player, RealPlayer, and many other “free” packages.

About half of my lessons are now based on PowerPoint. Since the 1997 version, PowerPoint can save a presentation as a Web site. Do not accept the defaults offered by Microsoft. In particular, force short file names for your save. This will allow the PowerPoint-derived Webs to run properly on a CD-R disc formatted to the ISO 9660

(“High Sierra”) standard. This, in turn, allows the disc to be read by Windows, Mac or Linux computers.

Figure 2. A still image capture of a lecture on polling from the “Analytical Journalism” CD-ROM tutorial by Steven S. Ross.



I am under contract to McGraw-Hill to produce book-disc packages based on my teaching materials. The first book, *Analytic Journalism*, is due out at the end of 2002. I'm also willing to send a copy of the discs, either for new media or for analytic journalism, to anyone who asks. This is because it is a duty of journalists to help their colleagues in need. Some examples of my teaching materials are on line. Here's a partial list:

Using Geographical Information Systems in the former Yugoslavia: <http://people.bu.edu/ssr3/bosgis.htm>

Covering conferences: <http://people.bu.edu/ssr3/Cover.htm>

Searching for information on the Internet: <http://people.bu.edu/ssr3/SEARCH3.htm>

Tracing e-mail through the headers: <http://people.bu.edu/ssr3/tracing.htm>

Basic statistics: <http://people.bu.edu/ssr3/stat2.htm>

Infographics: <http://people.bu.edu/ssr3/infograf.htm>

Using GIS to explore the American Census: <http://www.columbia.edu/~ssr3/census.htm>

EDITORIAL REMARK

Steven S. Ross is a recognized American scholar who regularly visits Croatia and other regional countries to participate in education of journalists, and also to collaborate with regional journalism and mass media scientists and institutions. As one of the directors and frequent invited lecturer of the International conference “Information Technology and Journalism” <<http://www.foi.hr/itn>>, that is held annually at the Inter-university Center in Dubrovnik, Steven S. Ross has presented two CD-ROM tutorials to the participants of this conference in May 2001. The two CD-ROM tutorials were developed for his courses at the Columbia University and are entitled “New Media 2” and “Analytical Journalism”. They are easily viewed with Web browsers (Netscape or Microsoft Internet Explorer). The content of those CD-ROM tutorials is linked in an integrated way with the World Wide Web and can utilize Microsoft Office programs like Excel spreadsheet, as well as multimedia and GIS (Geographical Information System) applications. In his text Steven S. Ross describes the CD-ROM tutorials as convenient instructional material for students and for instructors of journalism and new media classes.