



RECORDING HINTS and TIPS

How to make good recordings of mindfulness teaching practice

Please note: Your submitted recordings must allow the markers to see you well, and to hear both you and your participants clearly; if they do not, your recordings will not be assessed; this would mean recording and submitting another course.

Get some help! If you've never used a video camera before, find a friend or colleague who has and will give you some help and advice – perhaps even lend you a camera to practice with!

Pick the right camera. If you're buying a camera, it needs to have good sound, and a reasonably clear picture (don't worry too much about pixels - if it's a fairly recent digital camera, it will be good enough). In some cases, it is cheaper to buy a camera with poor sound and then get an external microphone attachment. Don't forget to make sure your camera has all the connectors it needs to transfer your footage to your computer!

There are lots of different types of software available on the Internet to convert your media to an appropriate format. In most cases the computer will come with software to do this. There are also more advanced software packages out there that can be purchased. There are also quite a lot of free downloads for PCs – have a look around. If you are producing videos that are on media / memory cards, or have a camera with a hard drive, this will be ideal; media / memory cards also need to have enough memory to record 2 – 2.5 hours (depending on the length of your sessions) – or a 'long-play' facility on the camera can extend the length of the recording; remember to initialise the card before reuse.

Make sure the sound is as good as the picture. To be assessed properly, it is essential that the sound is good enough for your speech to be heard clearly. The assessor also needs to hear what members of the group are saying to you, and some of them can speak quietly, or have accents that make understanding less easy – remember the assessor will not be able to see the participant's face as you can, which makes understanding what they say more challenging. Make at least one test recording before you start teaching. As far as possible make sure there are no loud noises from outside (like construction work or groups of people talking loudly) which might make it difficult to hear what's being said on the recording (you may need to shut windows or doors). If the sound quality is doubtful, try using an external microphone. For best results with low background noise, the recording

device or microphone should be as close as practically possible to the subject being recorded.

Put the camera somewhere stable. You don't want the camera to fall over or tilt while you're filming, so all of a sudden your feet are being filmed! It might be worth purchasing a tripod (these are inexpensive for most cameras). Otherwise, do make sure there is a table or other surface at the right height and in the right place for you to rest the camera on.

Light levels. Ensure that the light level in the room enables a clear picture.

Check where you're aiming the camera. It may sound obvious, but it's really important to make sure that you're filming what needs to be seen. Make sure that the camera is not turned on its side. Ensure that it records landscape (wide) rather than portrait (long).

Remember that you are filming your interactions with your participants, and as much as possible of you should be in camera view (including your whole body at least some of the time – the assessor will want to see if you're well grounded). But don't have the camera so far away that your facial expression isn't clear. If you sit on a cushion or stool, the camera distance should ideally allow the camera to record at least your head while you're sitting low down as well as on the chair. As far as possible your participants should not be in shot, for reasons of confidentiality. You may be able to position the camera between two participants (perhaps 'looking' over their shoulders) on the other side of the circle to yourself. Putting the camera inside the circle is very intrusive, but too far outside can make the picture too small and the sound too quiet – find a balance that works in your situation.

If at all possible, have an assistant deal with the camera. An assistant (preferably one who has done the course before) may be very happy to take charge of the camera for a reduction in the course fee or a free course. They can sit next to the camera, turn it on and off, move the camera angle unobtrusively to follow you when necessary, etc. An assistant needs to know what you require, and to practice working the camera before the initial recording of a session.

Talk with your assistant about what to do when you move elsewhere than your chair – e.g. to write on a flip-chart, or stand to teach a movement practice. While it can be fine to quietly redirect the camera to include e.g. a flip-chart piece of teaching, be aware of the disturbance to participants that could be caused by an assistant trying to 'follow the action' and make a movie! If moving the camera interrupts the teaching process, it's OK to have the sound only recorded for short periods. It is not appropriate to have the camera follow you as you move about the room, e.g. in a walking practice, as this is often distracting for the group. One possibility for a walking meditation is for your assistant to change the camera angle so the camera is pointing at the floor, or round to a nearby wall, and only your instructions are recorded – as long as this is unobtrusive, and they remember to point it back at you afterwards! The assistant may also be able to cover the lens discreetly when participants are moving across the camera if their faces would be in view.

Be aware of the possible effects of recording on yourself. If you are worrying about whether the camera is working, etc., it can distract you from your teaching – a very good reason for having someone else who is reliable doing the recording. Also, you may initially

feel very uncomfortable being recorded – having a sense of being watched or assessed while you are teaching can create anxiety and self-consciousness. Of course it's important and very helpful to stay grounded in your own physical sensations when dealing with these feelings (just as you would when dealing with any other difficulties when teaching). The more recordings of yourself you do, the less effect it will have on you – familiarity leads to ease! – so start recording your teaching as early as possible, and do enough to feel comfortable with it before recording the course where you are being assessed.

Also be aware of the possible effects of recording on the group. You need to tell your participants well in advance, talk it through with them if they have any concerns, and organise for them to come to a non-recorded group if they are unhappy about it. Be clear with them that it's you that's being filmed not them, and why. You can use the video consent forms as part of this process of discussion and reassurance. It's important to be clear with the participants beforehand and make clear agreements with them about whether and when they will be in shot – remember that inadvertent recording of participants often occurs, when they forget about the camera, or are doing mindful movement or walking. Where the camera is placed in, part of, or outside the circle can impact on the sense participants have of being a group. Usually, as long as you are relaxed and comfortable with the camera and the process of recording, your participants will accept it as part of the furniture, and will be supportive of this as part of your work; they can also see the process positively as part of ensuring high standards of teaching.

PRACTICE! This is the most important thing of all. Test out the functions and settings on your camera *before* you start recording teaching sessions, so you can be confident that you will be able to make a good recording even if the light is poor or your speaking voice is not particularly loud. Record yourself as much as you can (at home while practising teaching is one possibility). Remember that recorded teaching (preferably with some participants!) is very helpful indeed for you to watch and give yourself feedback on, and also as part of your supervision process.

By following these guidelines, you will be able to present a professional quality recording for your assessment – much better than running the risk of not being able to be assessed, and so not passing the assignment or the module, or having to do it all again! You will also most importantly be creating a very useful resource for your development as a mindfulness teacher.