Viewer-Retention in Videos

Retaining viewers to the end of a video does not equate with viewers' retaining the content. In fact, efforts to capture students' attention can divert their attention away from what you want them to learn.

That said, a 2014 study of 6.9 million video-watching sessions provided a lot of data on what keeps students' attention.

Recorded classroom lectures, in which the professor interacts with students, can capture viewers' attention the longest and attract the most post-video participation in exercises, so long as the lectures are organized and recorded with the online audience in mind.

Professors as talking heads retain more viewers and encourage more post-video participation than do ordinary lectures that have been edited into shorter segments. They also outperform instructors' drawing on tablets, as well as screencasts and PowerPoint slideshows.

However, not all talking heads have the same impact. Talking heads' looking directly at the camera in informal settings -- e.g., from an office computer, a laptop at home, or a cell phone in the field or a lab -- hold students' attention for nearly twice as long when compared with professional lectures, such as those in a studio.

Drawing on tablets, like what Khan Academy offers viewers, garners more attention and encourages more post-video participation than screencasts, slideshows, or even professional studio lectures do, but not as much as an ordinary classroom lecture that has been edited into shorter segments can.

In the same study, faster speaking rates [up to 254 words per minute (wpm)] usually retained viewers twice as long as did slower speaking rates (below 166 wpm).

However, the study indicates that all of the above differences significantly shrink or disappear after 12 minutes. After 12 minutes, very little can keep students watching.

Guo, P.J., Kim, J., & Rubin, R. (March, 2014). How Video Production Affects Student Engagement: An Empirical Study of MOOC Vidoes. *ACM Conference on Learning @ Scale.*