

# How-to-do-it

## Television Videotapes in the Biology Classroom

James A. Brenneman  
University of Evansville  
Evansville, Indiana 47702

Keeping a course interesting, up-to-date, and relevant to students' interests are important goals in any biology course, but especially so in a nonbiology majors' course. One technique that has been very successful in helping to achieve these goals in my nonmajors course (*Biology and Society*) is the use of videotapes in the classroom to supplement lecture information.

During the past several years our Center for Instructional Services has accumulated a large number of informative and interesting videotapes, recorded directly from television specials and news programs. These include many excellent programs that have been telecast in recent years, such as the *Killers* series, the *Nova* series, and specials on such topics as marijuana, methadone, alcoholism, vitamin E, obesity, the food crisis, cancer, heart disease, and many others. These are generally advertised in advance, so there is ample time for taping preparation.

These tapes have been most useful in supplementing lecture information and stimulating class discussion, and the students can relate better to the topics discussed in class. Recently I showed a segment of a special on heart disease, which illustrated selective coronary arteriography and a coronary by-pass operation at the Cleveland Clinic. After class a student told me that her father was going to undergo arteriography at

the Cleveland Clinic the next day, and now she understood what was involved. She could not believe the coincidence.

Equally useful and often more adaptable to a classroom situation (because of brevity and a single-topic emphasis) are 5-10 minute segments taken from network news programs and talk shows. These are generally not preadvertised, since they represent "news," but these shows can also be taped with minimal difficulties. All that is necessary is for someone (a student assistant, audiovisual personnel, or the instructor himself) to monitor these programs and be prepared with a videotape recorder.

I have a student assistant who daily monitors the evening news programs of the three commercial networks. (The task is simpler if more than one television set is available in order to avoid a lot of channel switching.) The news commentators usually announce at the beginning of the program the news items to be covered that evening, so there is some advance warning. If a report on a relevant biological topic begins, the student immediately turns on the recorder, tapes the report, and turns it off at the conclusion. Since these segments are usually no more than five minutes long, the same tape can be used for several weeks or longer and a contents log maintained.

On many days the news programs include nothing about biology, but

they do so frequently enough so as to justify the time and minimal expense involved. It is unusual for a week to pass without some news in the areas of health, environment, drugs, etc. And, of course, they are of current concern and interest.

The *Today Show* frequently (as does the *Tonight Show* less frequently) has interviews with various scientific authorities. For example, Paul Ehrlich occasionally appears on the *Tonight Show*. We have a tape of one such appearance during which he discussed the food-population crisis. (It is a strange experience seeing Johnny Carson in the daylight). I use this tape to introduce the topic of population. This is especially useful not only because of what he has to say, but also because he is the author of one of the books we use in the course.

There have been several occasions on which a news item was reported on TV (and taped) at about the same time a related topic was being discussed in class. For example, on one occasion, three days before we were to discuss environmental causes of cancer, there was a report of the presence of carcinogenic chemicals in the Mississippi River used for drinking water in New Orleans. The report was taped, and I used it in class three days later. On another occasion, about one week before we were to discuss biological control

**(Concluded on p. 256)**

## Letters

...from p. 249

thetic Theory as Ernst Mayr has to confess bankruptcy (Mayr 1961).

## References

- HARDIN, G. 1959. *Nature and man's fate*. Rinehart and Company. 260-261.
- MAYR, E. 1961. Cause and effect in biology. *Science* 134:1501.

## Errata

We are indeed sorry about the missing photo on page 80 of the February issue of the *ABT*.

I have talked to everyone that was involved to determine what would cause this to happen. As you may know, the negatives are furnished to us on a separate flat from the type matter. This involves what is termed a double burn to make the plate . . . one burn for the halftones and one burn for the line copy. Unfortunately, in masking the edge of

the plate to burn the photos, the small picture of George H. Kieffer was inadvertently covered up with the masking material resulting in the page being printed as you saw it.

We shall strive to do better and we appreciate your understanding.

Leo R. Connelly  
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## Videotapes

...from p. 237

methods for insects, two University of Arkansas biologists appeared on the Today Show to discuss a new anti-insect virus they had developed that was about to be marketed. The interview was taped and used in class one week later.

Using videotapes in the classroom has certain advantages over showing movies. For one thing, they are generally more current. Also, it is much easier to show just a portion of a topic that relates directly to what is being discussed. Videotapes are

available when needed, which is not always true of rented movies. Finally, videotapes are more economical than rented movies, since they can be used repeatedly over a long period of time.

Based on student reactions in my course, I would strongly recommend the use of videotapes in the classroom. All that is needed is a videotape recorder, a television playback unit, some videotape, and someone to monitor and tape television specials and news programs. Costs are minimal, after the initial investment in equipment, and the benefits are maximal.

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Thinkers help other people to think, for they formulate what others are thinking. No person writes or thinks alone—thought is in the air, but its expression is necessary to create a tangible Spirit of the Times.

*Elbert Hubbard*

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