

# Choose the Right Media

## A Job Aid for Teachers

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What can you teach with media, and when should you teach it? Media can help teach certain concepts, but how can you be certain which media type is most appropriate. Is video more effective, or will audio suffice? Or is just a picture just as effective? These questions don't even begin to take cost into account.

### ***Different Media for Different Purposes***

Different kinds of electronic media fall into a kind of continuum that looks like this:

Text > Pictures > Sound > Motion > Video > Computer Interaction > Social Interaction








### ***Also, Consider the Costs***

Before you check out the worksheet, consider costs. If you haven't already noticed, the farther up the continuum you go (that is, to the right of the diagram or down the page), the more expensive media is to produce. Text and other symbolic media are the least common denominator, and they are the cheapest to produce (all you need is paper and pencil or a chalkboard). Professional-quality sound, motion, movies, and interactive media require the efforts of specialists such as videographers, artists, and programmers. Yes, audio/video or interactivity for many concepts would be wonderful, but can we afford it? On which concepts should we spend scarce resources to get the best effect?

### ***Using the Worksheet***

Which is best for your purpose? On the back of this instruction is a Media Decision Worksheet with questions to ask yourself to help you get clear on which media would be best suited for your particular purpose. As you consider these questions, also ask whether it's worth it or not. Does the concept *need* it, or would it merely be interesting or "cool"?

## Media Decision Worksheet

	<p><b>Text</b></p> <p>Text refers to the written word, or any other symbols to represent concepts or ideas. We label this text, even though the symbols may also be equations, musical notations, and so forth. Text, or symbolic media requires the student to do a lot of mental processing to understand it, but, you can represent nearly any concept symbolically. Very often, learning to “read” the symbolic language is important to be “literate” in the content—a valuable skill.</p>	<p>\$   \$\$</p>
<p>Question:</p>	<p>Would students understand this concept better if I explained it or described it? (Since the answer to this question will almost never be “no,” this is the foundation of teaching and learning.)</p>	
	<p><b>Pictures</b></p> <p>Pictures, or visual media, may be very realistic (like photographs) or abstract (like diagrams). Pictures <i>may</i> require less processing in the student's mind. Remember that famous quote by Confucius? Well, it's almost right: the <i>right</i> picture is worth a thousand words—the <i>wrong</i> one may take a thousand to explain! Many concepts benefit from visual representation.</p>	<p>\$   \$\$\$</p>
<p>Question:</p>	<p>Would students understand this concept better if they saw a picture of it?</p>	
	<p><b>Sound</b></p> <p>Sounds may be spoken words (narration), music, or any other audio (such as the call of a bird or the sound of an engine needing attention). Relevant sound tends to make the learning experience richer—especially when combined with other media, like pictures and color. One good use of sound is to combine text with narration to reach more types of learners.</p>	<p>\$   \$\$\$</p>
<p>Question:</p>	<p>Would students understand this concept better understood if they heard it? Does sound add something significant to the richness of this concept?</p>	
	<p><b>Motion (without sound)</b></p> <p>Motion media is pictures that move (without sound), in other words, something visual that changes over time. There are times when a video or animations make a vague concept clear. Do you remember the first time you saw a time-lapse movies of flowers blooming or storm clouds gathering; or, a slow motion of a bee flying? These complex things are greatly enhanced through artful use of motion.</p>	<p>\$\$   \$\$\$\$</p>
<p>Question:</p>	<p>Would students understand this concept better if they saw it move or changing over time?</p>	
	<p><b>Movies (with sound)</b></p> <p>We’re using the term “movies” here to refer to motion plus sound. Some concepts and processes benefit from having both. In particular, the ability of sound to increase the richness of an experience can be used artistically, with well produced video, to influence the observers emotions and mood. This is why movies and television can be so powerful—they can communicate emotionally as well as literally (though it is generally very expensive to produce video capable of such influence).</p>	<p>\$\$\$   \$\$\$\$\$</p>
<p>Question:</p>	<p>If students saw this in a movie, would they understand it better? Are there emotional aspects to this that are important for students to feel, that a movie would convey better than other media?</p>	
	<p><b>Interaction</b></p> <p>Interaction is when the student is required to do some action in the context of the media. Good interaction, is more than just “hitting Play.” Good instructional use of interaction gets the students into the concept by having them manipulate objects on the screen to understand how they react. Games, simulations, and some other learning activities where students are interacting with the machine or the media are examples of what we mean by interaction.</p>	<p>\$\$\$   \$\$\$\$\$</p>
<p>Question:</p>	<p>Would students understand this concept better if they could manipulate it or control it or play with it?</p>	
	<p><b>Social Interaction</b></p> <p>Social interactivity, facilitated by media is a relatively new category. Students in this situation communicate with other students by means of some kind of media. Messaging and texting (when did that become a verb?), blogs (weblogs), wikis, and other media are now commonplace among those who use technology. They can be employed in learning. To a greater or lesser degree, students must be in certain places at certain times (though not necessarily the same places and times) for it to work.</p>	<p>\$   \$\$\$\$\$</p>
<p>Question:</p>	<p>Would students understand this concept better if they could manipulate it or control it or play with it?</p>	