

CHAPTER

2

The Appetizer *(Part I)*

The appetizer sets the tone for every amazing, memorable meal. It is the first thing you taste, and it whets your appetite for what's next. In schools, video lessons offered in the weeks leading up to the school year and during those first few days of school can be like appetizers, setting the tone for the rest of the year.

The videos in this section will help you get your year started on the right foot. If you're just starting out making videos, the first recipe below, Daily Announcements, is a great way to kick-start your video creation journey—and to set the tone for the school day.

Daily ANNOUNCEMENTS

POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS: Teacher to Student

The beginning of class is always hectic. I like to check in with students early on, but first I need to take attendance, and Kiera has a question about the writing assignment from last Thursday, and Oliver is crying because Brooklyn said something mean to him in the hall, and then I'm supposed to ask every student to attend the mixer after school today (at least, I think that's what the e-mail said—or was the mixer tomorrow?), and on top of that, I want to build a relationship with the quiet student who hasn't spoken the last few days. It's a lot to accomplish.

I used to start every class period by reading off class announcements—things like birthdays, assignment reminders, reading goals, and quotes of the day. As a middle school teacher, I was doing this for five classes a day. Every day. All that repetition was exhausting and felt like a waste of time, but I also knew that consistency was important for many of my students. I love to mix up seating arrangements and experiment with the structure of class activities, so announcements give us an anchor to start from, a calm, predictable moment before we launch into something amazing. (Offering routines like this is especially helpful for students who have executive functioning challenges.)

To make these announcements less exhausting, I decided to start recording them. I wanted a one-stop shop for all the most important events coming up, something I could show students at the start of class while I completed the usual beginning-of-the-hour tasks. The purpose of the video was to walk through this information once and then be able to reuse it for the rest of the day. And it worked great.

The first few times I did it, it took me about fifteen to twenty minutes to record the video because I kept restarting if I made a mistake. I wanted the video to be absolutely perfect. I noticed every “um” or “uh” or awkward pause. It was so time-consuming that I nearly gave up. But once I stopped worrying about perfection, I was able to get the time frame down to five to seven minutes for most of my announcement videos. I made a rule to limit myself to no more than three takes. Most days, I only needed one.

These videos freed me up to meet with individual students and complete administrative tasks, and they engaged the students a lot more than I would've just reading off upcoming due dates. Students pay more attention to a video than they would to me, because the videos are unique.

I also started to vary the way I presented information in the videos. Sometimes I would say a date for an assignment and have it written on the board behind me in the video; other times I would also point to the due date on the calendar. These variations were meant to engage different parts of students' brains.

My daily announcement videos usually follow the same general format:

- 1.** First, I go through the daily announcements. These usually include upcoming assignments, reading checks, challenges, and anything else students may need to know in the near future. I always try to hold up a physical version of the actual assignment so they can visualize what I'm talking about.
- 2.** Next, I do birthday announcements. I want to make sure every student who celebrates a birthday gets a shout out. I wasn't sure how important this was until I missed my first student, who was super bummed. Most students value this kind of positive affirmation, so anybody I miss always gets a special birthday shout-out the next day... usually with a guest like Batman. (To see what I mean by this, look at the Characters section in chapter 7.)
- 3.** Finally, I wrap up the announcements video with the quote of the day. I have a chalkboard in my room where I always write a positive daily quote. Sometimes I just read the quote, and that's the end of the video. Other times I ask the students to talk about the quote when the video is over.

The last thing I include in my announcement videos is my catchphrase. Somehow it caught on and now the kids think it's weird if I don't end by saying "Until next time, book it forward and be awesome!"

STUDENT-CREATED VIDEO

Students earn celebrity status when they pop up in my announcement videos. Sometimes a random student will stop by in the morning when I'm recording; other times I'll find random students in the hall to record. One of my favorite approaches is to find students who need an extra emotional boost. I'll record them, hype them up, and make them the star of the show. It's a great motivator.

DAILY ANNOUNCEMENT VIDEOS

Ingredients:

recording device (I usually just use my phone)

tripod (optional)

list of announcements

list of upcoming birthdays

Awesome Sauce

Prep Time: 2 to 5 minutes

Recording Time: 2 to 5 minutes

Difficulty: ● ● ● ● ●

Directions:

1. Write down a list of the announcements you want to record; a bulleted list or script works. The more often you record these, the easier it will be to have a structure for what you want to include each time.
2. Find a location for the background of your video.
3. Gather any upcoming assignment materials or props you want to use in the video.
4. Set up your recording device.
5. Record an epic announcement video hitting all the main points for the day.
6. Post the video on YouTube.
7. Embed the video in your daily agenda slides, pull up the video on YouTube, or post the video for your students to view on their own time.
8. While students are watching the video, use the time to complete administrative tasks or check in with students.

Side note: To embed your YouTube video in Google Slides, go to Insert>Video. Then paste in the YouTube URL. To embed your YouTube video in Microsoft PowerPoint, go to the Insert tab, then Video>Online Movie. Then paste in the YouTube URL.



Check out this example: youtu.be/HRMKnEwe5S8

I share the videos in one of two ways. Sometimes I'll play the announcements on the big screen for all the students. Other times I'll share it on Google Classroom and let the students play it on their own.

To keep things interesting, I use variations from a lot of the other recipes in this book (see chapter 7 in particular for great ideas to incorporate into these videos).

CLASS Trailers

POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS: Teacher to Student

When I go to the movies, I love to get there early. I want to be in my seat with a large Pibb Zero and some popcorn, ready to roll when the first movie trailers pop up on the screen. I love the art of a great movie trailer. A good trailer will tell you what to expect when you go see a movie. A great trailer will make you count down the days until the movie comes out. An epic trailer will make you so excited for a movie that you go online to watch it three more times. Then you even research how many other versions of the trailer exist, and you try to watch all of those.

No trailers are more epic to me than the ones for Marvel movies. I'll watch the trailers online, then I'll search for follow-up information about the characters in them. From the heart-pounding music score to the action scenes to the comic relief, I love it all—and I want that same energy and hype for my classroom. I want my kids so excited for what's coming up in class that they repeatedly ask me when it's coming. I want them breaking down the doors to get into class. Class trailers can have that effect.

Every year when parents come to back-to-school night, I show a trailer promoting my class. This isn't just any trailer; it's a trailer for my gamified class, and it builds up all the energy, excitement, and chaos that is my class.

I preface the video by explaining the awards I've received, the articles and books I've written, and the conferences I've presented at—not to brag, but to assure parents that although my class is a little different, everything I do has a sound foundation to it. Then we roll into the trailer.

STUDENT-CREATED VIDEO

At the end of each unit, students can create a trailer highlighting everything they've learned. You can then use their trailers with your students the following year.

- 1. Brainstorm the most interesting elements from the unit.**
- 2. Discuss how to build suspense and not give everything away.**
- 3. Have groups of students write scripts based on the brainstorming.**
- 4. Give the students time to record the video.**
- 5. Select the best video(s) to use the following year.**

CLASS TRAILERS

Ingredients:

background music
video snippets or photos
of class
video-editing software
script
Awesome Sauce

Prep Time: 10 to 15 minutes

Editing Time: 45 to 60 minutes

Difficulty: ● ● ● ● ●

Directions:

1. Make a list of three to five things about your class that make it the most amazing, epic place any student will ever experience.
2. Choose what movie genre your class would be. (For example, is this a comedy or an action thriller?)
3. Find background music that fits your personality but also builds energy into the video. It should fit with your genre. (YouTube has library of free music for any video. Just search YouTube Audio Library or go to youtube.com/audiolibrary.)
4. Choose photos that fit with your genre and help tell the story.
5. Find or record video clips that help tell your story.
6. Edit your photos, video, and music together into a movie trailer with the Awesome Sauce. Keep it short, about one or two minutes.
7. Post your video on YouTube.

Share your video at back-to-school night, on your website, and on social media. You want every person who comes into your room to associate your class with the trailer.



Check out this example: youtu.be/psemCDR-LMg

The trailer starts out with an exciting rock track. This is vital to get everyone who watches the video hyped up and sucked into the video. The music rises to a crescendo, and a voice-over (which I attempt to read in the manner of a movie trailer narrator) explains the epic journey students will be embarking on in my class. It's just a taste of the meal that will come throughout the year. I also share the video with students, and they can't wait to start on the journey.

BEGINNING-OF-THE-YEAR *Welcome* *Pack* (WELCOME VIDEO/ROOM TOURS)

POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS: Teacher to Student

What if you could start shaping your future students' perceptions of your class before they ever set foot in your room? What if you could build up anticipation and excitement before the school year even starts?

When I was a kid, I had a few ways of knowing that summer was winding down. The first sign was our yearly pilgrimage to Walmart, school supply lists in hand. We would spend hours wandering aisle after aisle of tubs of crayons, shelves overflowing with crisp, clean backpacks emblazoned with superheroes, row after row of spiral notebooks with adorable kittens or Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, folders sporting the greatest athletes of the day, and of course every Lisa Frank product imaginable, items spilling off shelves and littering the floor. I loved all of it.

Another sign that signaled summer's end was the much-anticipated teacher reveal. I still remember being driven by my mom up the school's circular drive in our maroon Safari minivan and walking up to the front door where the school rosters were always posted. My brothers and I would frantically scan the lists with a mob of other anxious students, ready to whoop with joy or bow our heads in dread as we saw who we would be spending 180 days with in the near future. Once middle school hit, my friends and I would pore over our schedules trying to track down any and all information we could about our new teachers.

Every year around school registration, my team and I release our welcome website, welcometosft.weebly.com. It has everything an incoming sixth grader could want. There are links to videos that might interest the students, websites and games for the students to explore, photos from previous years showing exciting things students might get to participate in, and a video tour of the building.

In this way, students get to see video interviews with each of the team teachers, administrators, and counselors. Students want to see who they will be spending most of their time with. I want them to know our faces from Day One. I want them to know exactly who to go to if they need help during those first few days of school. A name on a schedule doesn't mean much, but kids are hooked if they see Mr. Stock talking about his class, hear the excitement in his voice, and find out about the spectacular things we might do.

CREATING A WELCOME VLOG

Ingredients:

recording device (I usually just use my phone)

tripod (optional)

Awesome Sauce

Prep Time: 1 minute

Recording Time: 2 to 5 minutes

Difficulty: ● ● ● ● ●

Directions:

1. Create a welcome website. This could be part of an existing website, but it should be a standalone site if possible. This is time-consuming the first year, but each year after that it's just a matter of updating the content. Check out my welcome website: welcometosft.weebly.com
2. Record a daily update starting in the middle of the summer.
3. Include things like the following:
 - sitting in the sun
 - enjoying family time
 - setting up your classroom (time lapse videos are fun for this)
 - any summer meetings you attend
 - the night before the first day of school
4. Post your video to YouTube.
5. Post a link to the video on your welcome website.
6. Repeat all summer leading up to the first day of school.
7. Share QR codes linking to the website on the front door of the school, in any welcome newsletters you send out, and anywhere else students and parents might see it.



Check out this example: youtu.be/b8-9IS2nt5g

Around mid-July, I start posting a video blog, or vlog, on the site. This leads up to the first day of school, and the goal is to build up excitement and suspense. I document everything going on at the school. I show videos of my room as it starts to come together. I share videos from meetings with the team to show how we are all in this together. I pull out books and do quick book talks to promote some of the exciting books students can borrow from my classroom library. All of these videos give students a feel for who we are. My goal is for the school to feel like a second home, and this is a small step toward meeting that goal.

SCHOOL *Tours*

POSSIBLE APPLICATIONS: Teacher to Student

Any time I'm in a new city or town, I love to explore. I love to go on adventures and discover hidden parks and restaurants. I hate crowds, so I like to avoid touristy areas if I can. But I'll be honest: I'm not a brave explorer. I do TONS of research before I go somewhere, looking up maps and videos of different parts of a city.

Students start their own adventure every year. New students are learning an entirely new building for the first time, and returning students may be exploring new parts of the building they never even knew existed. My school is a bizarre network of interlocking pods plus random hallway offshoots scattered throughout. It's fifty years old and has been remodeled over and over. It's a maze for experienced patrons—and a nightmare for newbies.

To alleviate student stress, I give video tours of the school. I share these with incoming sixth graders and students new to our team, but they can benefit anyone who is in the building for the first time. For my sixth graders, I give tours of the team classrooms, elective classrooms, the cafeteria, and the office. I also point out where a few of the best bathrooms are in the school. Students can watch the videos and visualize the school before they even arrive.

STUDENT-CREATED VIDEO

Students love to hear tips and tricks from other students. The older students know the best shortcuts, the hallways that are always congested, and the water fountains with the coldest water. Share tips for parts of the school students care the most about. Include a video for some of these areas:

1. **CAFETERIA.** What are students' favorite meals in the cafeteria? How do you get through the lunch line?
2. **LOCKER.** What are some tips for remembering locker combinations? What are some decorating tips?
3. **COUNSELING OFFICE/NURSE'S OFFICE.** Where can students get help if they need it?
4. **WATER FOUNTAINS/BATHROOMS.** Where are the nearest bathrooms? Which water fountains have the coldest water and the shortest lines? What is the school policy for hall passes?

SCHOOL TOURS

Ingredients:

recording device (I usually just use my phone)

tripod (optional)

map of the school

list of important locations (teachers in those locations if possible)

Awesome Sauce

Prep Time: 10 to 15 minutes

Recording Time: 30 to 45 minutes

Difficulty: ● ● ● ● ●
(more if you want to edit them together)



Directions:

1. Think about your audience. Who will be looking at these room tours? Plan out what school tour videos would be most beneficial for those audiences.
2. Make a list of every room you want to record and any hallway path that would be beneficial to know about.
3. For each room:
 - a. Record the outside room door with the room number then walk inside.
 - b. Record each room by doing a 360-degree turn inside it and explaining who is there.
 - c. Try to come up with something unique for each room to help students remember it.
 - d. Repeat for each room.
4. Record the hallway paths between rooms, especially those going from one important location to another, such as the path from the classroom to the cafeteria.

Check out this example: youtu.be/wsa9YJNdqfo

Imagine being a new student who transfers to a school. It's the middle of the year. Most of the students know exactly where to go. They are buzzing past this new student, who is lost and frustrated. Now imagine if this student watched a virtual tour of the building and knew exactly where to go on Day One. Imagine how that student is going to feel about your school. Or think of substitute teachers who are in the building for the first time; imagine how helpful they would find a quick video walkthrough.

VIDEO *Introductions* FOR NEW STUDENTS

At 9:30 a.m. on a Thursday, my students and I heard a knock on the door. I was in the middle of giving a life-changing speech; my students were perched on the edge of their seats, enthralled by my amazing words. (Okay, I was probably just saying something silly to get the class to laugh.)

One of my former students stood at the door with a student I had never met: “Uh, this is a new student. We’re showing her around.”

I tried to make the new student feel welcome, of course. I said “hi” and introduced her to the class before she continued her tour. But I could see the fear of starting a new adventure on her face.

I love meeting new students, and I’m glad they get to tour the school, but what if we looked at these tours differently? What if new students could watch a couple of quick videos to get to know their teachers before they even set foot in our classrooms? New students are already at a disadvantage because they have less experience with the adults in the building than the other kids. A quick peek in each of the rooms is great, but it doesn’t come close to teaching new students everything they want to know.

We receive a lot of new students every year. Video introductions get them excited about school and give them a bit of comfort. Pair these with a video tour and they feel more confident about joining in with their new classmates. Videos let students see who’s who among the teachers and practice teachers’ names at home.

Parents of new students are also playing catch-up, and this tool gives them a jump start on their own journey, helping to build trust with the new

STUDENT-CREATED VIDEO

Being a new student can be scary. Starting off knowing someone right away can help. One way to make that happen is to form a welcoming committee of students who are assigned to make newcomers feel at home.

My team has a welcoming committee of about six students. On their first day, new students sit with one of the welcoming committee members to watch a one-minute video introducing the members of the committee. It’s nothing fancy, just the students introducing themselves and letting the newbies know they can always ask them questions. Then the welcoming committee member walks the new student around the halls. Having several students in the video gives new students multiple opportunities to make new friends quickly.

VIDEO INTRODUCTIONS

Ingredients:

recording device (I usually just use my phone)

tripod (optional)

staff members

Awesome Sauce

Prep Time: 5 to 10 minutes

Recording Time: 30 to 60 minutes

Difficulty: ● ● ● ● ●

Directions:

1. Set up a time to interview all the people new students will interact with, including the following:
 - secretaries
 - counselors
 - librarians
 - nurses
 - principals
 - assistant principals
 - teachers
2. Record a quick introduction from each person (or have each person record a quick introduction and send it to you).
3. Post the videos on YouTube.
4. Host the recordings in one central location (e.g., a website) and create a one-page document with links or QR codes that new students can look over as needed.
5. As a bonus, record a video from the principal directly to parents and include a link to it on a welcome letter that goes home the first day.



Check out this example: youtu.be/iIODkPnv5yE

adults in their children's lives. Transitions are tough for anyone, and the faster the student-teacher-parent connections can click, the faster learning can take place. Trust is a necessary foundation for learning content, and introductory videos help to develop it.