Screen Design/ Camera Angles

Wysocki (2003) encourages students producing video products to consider camera angles and backgrounds relative to elements of visual rhetoric (p. 183). In print-linguistic document terms, this is similar to careful consideration of the type of graphics used and their placement in a document or PowerPoint slideshow. Particular kinds of graphics are better suited for certain rhetorical purposes. For example, a line graph is most effective for calling attention to a trend over a period of time than a table is. Also, if one wishes to emphasize a particular section of a pie chart, he can explode that section out of the pie. Further, one can place a graphic in a document near the text that describes it so the reader can look back at the graphic as she reads the printlinguistic textual information about the graphic.

Generally, designers can use camera angles to create impact and provide information in a certain way. A long shot of a subject (subject some distance from the camera) shows more contextual elements of the setting, while closer shots of the subject emphasize the appearance of the subject. Camera angle also affect one's perspective of a scene; a particular camera angle can hide certain attributes of a scene (Cozic, Boyd Davis and Jones, 2004). Further, camera angle can effect a certain perception from the viewer. Steve uses several camera angles throughout the video. Generally, these are effective because he limits the image shown in the screen to relevant material, avoiding inundating the viewer with information while moving the discussion to new information. However, at times, he shows large amounts of space that are irrelevant, violating the principle identified in both the design-oriented terminology as well as the audience-oriented terminology to use graphics to help focus the readers' attention to a particular element.

He starts the *SL* portion by showing the back of the avatar, much as the default camera setting in SL does (Figure 4).

Figure 4



This permits the viewer to anticipate what the avatar image will look like on their own machine when they first arrive in *SL* and to focus on the information Steve provides without worrying about how to control the camera angle. Also, positioning the camera behind the avatar when moving the avatar forward gives the viewer the perspective of toward what the avatar is moving. Steve does not change the camera angle until he begins discussing the use of the camera controls to change camera angle; that is, he does not show another camera angle until information about camera angles becomes relevant, which occurs with Figure 5 (Click on <u>Video</u>

<u>1</u> to view segment). This allows the viewer not to be inundated with too much information at one time while learning the interface. Steve shows the viewer a couple of tools and movements at a time, building on each set of information.



Figure 5

Rule of Thirds

A generally accepted rhetorical practice with video and images is "the rule of thirds" (Johnson, 2008; and Eastern Washington University, 2008). According to the rule, one should split the screen into thirds horizontally and vertically, as if creating a tic-tac-toe board, and mark all four corners of the center box with a red dot. According to the Eastern Michigan University site, "Place your subject on any of the red dots (the "thirds") and it will make your shot look much more professional" (parag. 3). Steve seems to have attempted to do this by positioning his avatar in a central position on the screen (Figures 4 and 5 above). However, the camera positioning relative to his avatar makes for a lot of irrelevant space between the top of the screen and the avatar's head. EWU's Website acknowledges that, [t]he top of the frame, in a classically composed shot, should be just above the top of your subject's head" (parag. 3). Steve eventually "zooms" into the avatar to reduce that "head room," making less work for the viewer to watch the menu-related actions (Figure 6). However, there is still considerable space above the avatar that is unnecessary.

According to Arnheim (1969), people process an entire image in context and having to break an image down into text forces one to divide the various parts. He states, "The mind visualizes the whole image, whereas text must piece the image together through a linear process" (p. 249). Showing what the entire screen looks like while narrating the various actions allows viewers to see the entire context of the activity. This helps the viewer become oriented to the interface and see where different menus and action will occur on the screen.

Figure 6



Zooming in also could be used as a visual tool to draw attention to the avatar. One can use a variety of means by which to call attention to parts of a screen, much like one can highlight portions of a graphic in a print-linguistic document using different colors or shading patterns or fonts.