

Reading *the Room*

Why teams try Google Vids once and ghost it — and the UX fixes that could change that.

■ psst — if you're from Google, this one's specifically for you. Pull up a chair.

PRODUCT Google Vids	FOCUS Onboarding · Retention · Avatars	TYPE Speculative Concept	AUDIENCE Workspace · Educators · HR Teams
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THE MOMENT THAT INSPIRED THIS

I don't have access to Google Vids. That's kind of the point.

I'm not a Google Workspace power user with a corporate email and a standing Monday meeting. I'm a UX designer who watched approximately fourteen YouTube walkthroughs, read the product documentation, went through user feedback threads, and thought —

"Oh, so it's Canva but make it corporate."

Then I thought about it more carefully.

And I realised that first thought — that instinctive Canva comparison — is actually the entire problem.

THE SETUP

Google Vids is marketed as the video creation tool for people who don't make videos. No learning curve. Familiar like Slides. Just press go.

The target audience is specific and genuinely underserved — school teachers creating lesson content, HR teams making internal communications, managers explaining a quarterly update without scheduling another meeting nobody wanted. People for whom “just record a Loom” feels too raw and “hire a video editor” feels too much.

The value proposition is real. The Gemini integration is genuinely useful. The Workspace ecosystem fit makes logical sense.

So why do users try it once and go back to Loom?

THE ACTUAL PROBLEM

Familiar enough to start. *Foreign enough to quit.*

Here is the tension Google Vids hasn't fully resolved yet.

The interface feels familiar — it looks like Slides, it behaves like something you've used before. So users start confidently.

Then they hit concepts like scenes. AI prompt refinement. Avatar selection. Retake management. And the confidence evaporates — not because these features are badly designed in isolation, but because nobody told the user they were walking into a new mental model.

It is the UX equivalent of a restaurant that looks exactly like your favourite café from the outside, same font, same vibe, same general aesthetic — but serves entirely different food. You sit down expecting a flat white and get handed a menu you don't recognise.

The learning curve isn't steep. But it's invisible. And invisible learning curves are worse than steep ones because the user blames themselves instead of the product.

“I guess I'm just not a video person.”

“It's probably fine, I'm just bad at this.”

Back to Loom.

01

The invisible learning curve

The interface feels familiar. Users start confidently. Then they hit "scenes."
Confidence evaporates — not because the feature is badly designed, but because nobody told the user they were walking into a new mental model. It's familiar like Slides but still a learning curve for fine-tuning AI scenes and prompts — people try once then go back to Loom or Canva.

02

The Canva comparison problem

This product should not be compared to Canva. The use case is completely different — education and internal workspace vs. creative marketing. Yet my first instinct was Canva. If a UX designer's gut says Canva, a school teacher's gut definitely says Canva. And Canva wins that comparison every time on the teacher's terms.

03

Creepy is a specificity problem

The AI avatars have a documented uncanny valley issue — lip freeze, retake awkwardness. The standard response is to make them less creepy. That is the wrong problem to solve first. The right question: creepy to whom, in what context, for what purpose?

When you design for everyone, *you design for no one.*

THE PARADOX OF SPECIFICITY · CORE DESIGN PRINCIPLE

THE PARADOX OF SPECIFICITY

Google Vids is solving for everyone and no one.

This is my favourite UX concept and it applies here almost uncomfortably well.

Google Vids' current onboarding and interface structure feels like it was designed for a hypothetical universal beginner — someone with no prior tool preferences, no specific job context, no particular reason they're making a video today.

But the actual users are not hypothetical.

[EDUCATION]

USER TYPE 01

Sarah, the Teacher

A high school biology teacher who makes explainer videos for students who missed class. She thinks in lessons, topics, and student attention spans.

x Does not think in scenes.

[CORPORATE]

USER TYPE 02

Rahul, the HR Manager

An HR manager at a 200-person company who needs to record a benefits update that people will actually watch. He thinks in announcements, clarity, and 'will people click play on this.'

x Does not think in AI avatar prompt refinement.

[TEAM]

USER TYPE 03

Priya, the Team Lead

A team lead who wants to replace a meeting with an async video update. She thinks in talking points and faces her team recognises.

x Does not think in lip-sync retake management.

These three people have completely different mental models, completely different success metrics, and completely different reasons to quit.

The current onboarding treats them as the same person.

THE PROPOSAL

The fix is not a redesign. *It's a reorientation.*

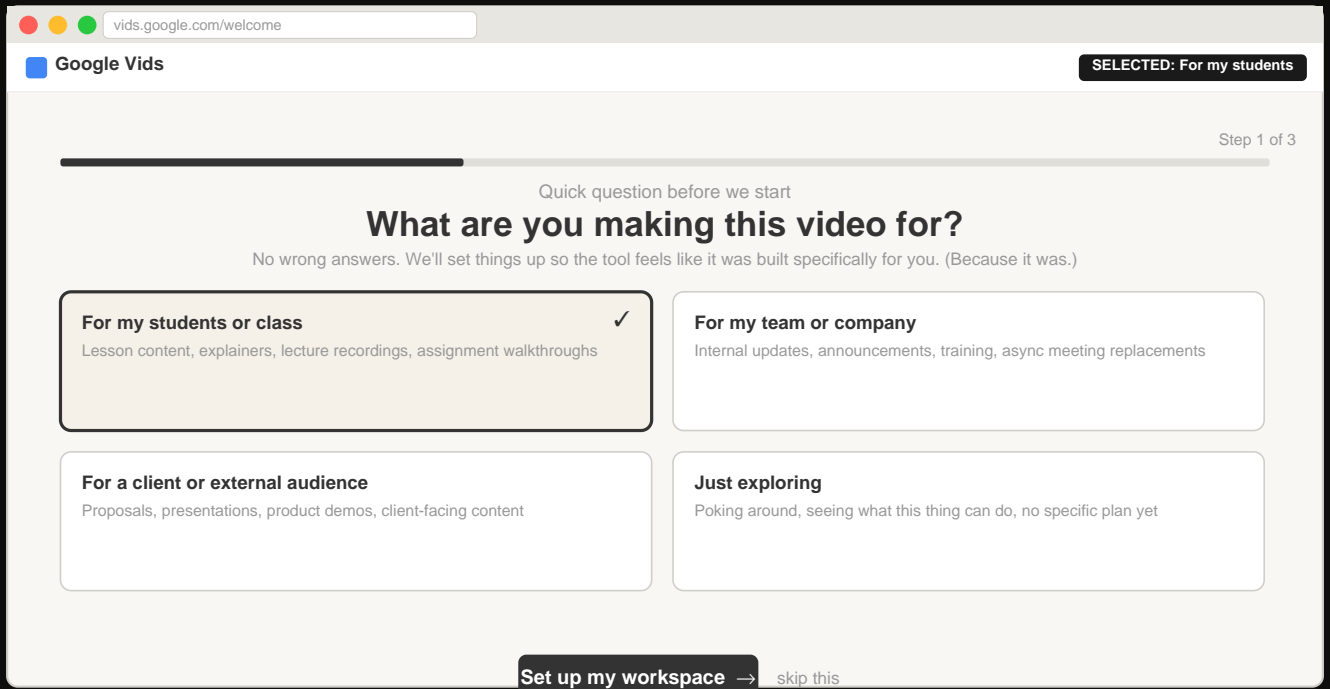
What if Google Vids asked one question before anything else?

Not "what's your name" or "connect your Google account" — it already knows those things.

"What are you making this video for?"

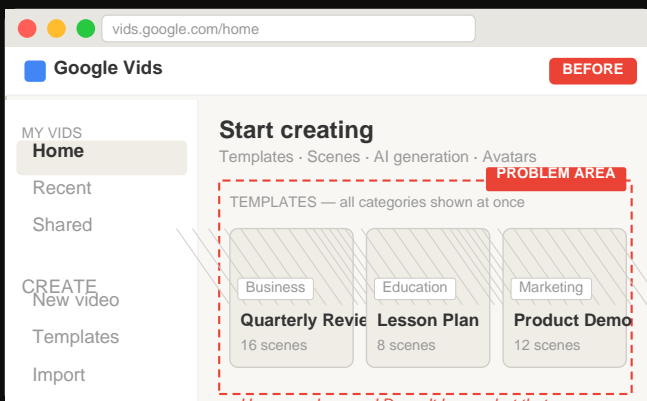
Three options. Maybe four. Visually distinct, specifically worded for real use cases rather than abstract categories.

This single question does something the current onboarding doesn't — it tells the user that this tool understands their specific context before they've done anything. It establishes trust before the learning curve appears.



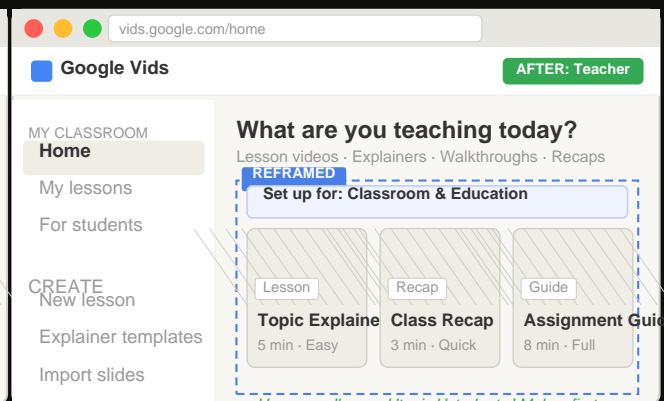
- A Progress indicator signals this is a lightweight setup — not an interrogation. 3 steps, one of which they've basically done.
- B Copy tone is intentionally warm and slightly self-aware — mirrors Google's existing Workspace personality without being corporate-bland.
- C "Just exploring" option is critical. Removes the anxiety of having to commit to a context. Lowers abandonment at this step.
- D "Skip this" is visible but deliberately de-emphasised. Skipping is always possible — but the framing makes choosing feel easier than skipping.

BEFORE — Generic (no context)



→ User sees 'scenes.' Doesn't know what that means. Closes tab.

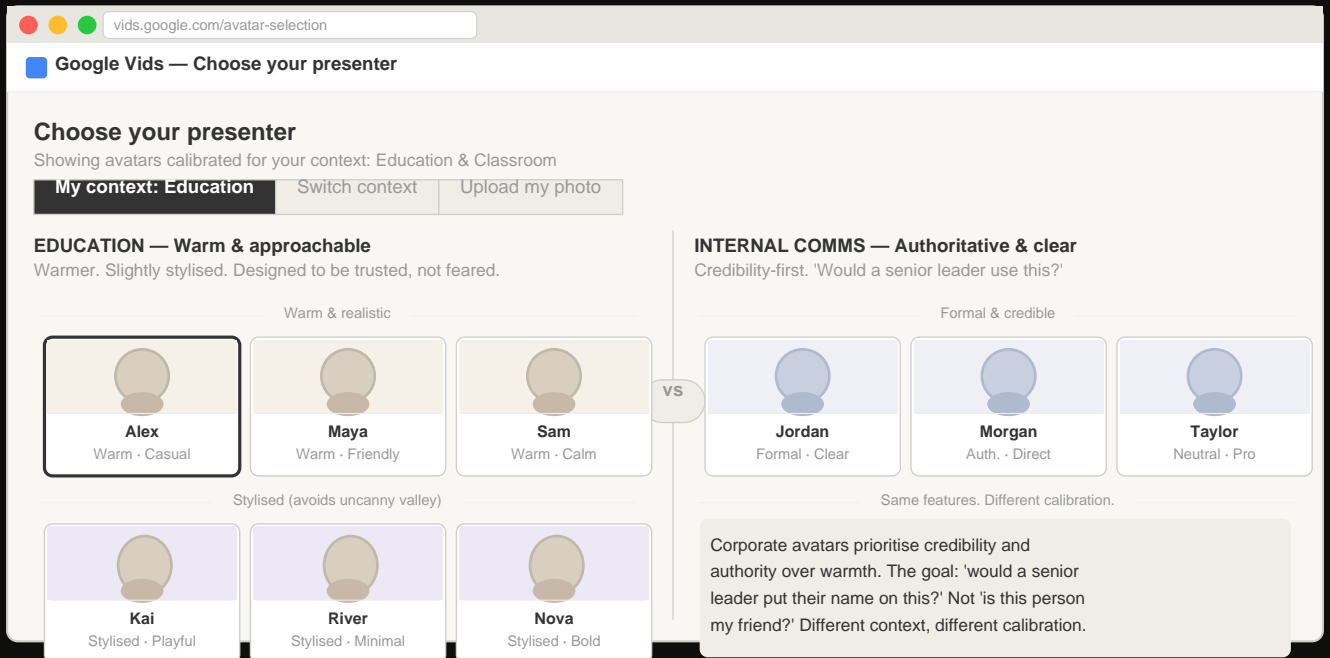
AFTER — Teacher path selected



→ User sees 'lesson,' 'topic,' 'students.' Makes first video. Doesn't go back to Learn.

HR / INTERNAL COMMS PATH FOLLOWS THE SAME LOGIC

The HR manager sees the interface framed around announcements and updates. Short format templates first. A "your team will see this" framing rather than a "your audience will watch this" framing. The team lead sees async meeting replacement templates first. Same product. Same features. Completely different first impression.



- A The 'stylised' avatar row for education deliberately sidesteps the uncanny valley entirely. A stylised avatar that looks intentionally designed reads as trustworthy — a realistic avatar that's 90% human reads as unsettling.
- B Avatar naming and tagging ('Warm · Casual' vs 'Formal · Clear') gives users vocabulary to make the choice confidently. Removes the paralysis of staring at faces and not knowing what to pick.
- C 'Upload my photo' tab is always present. Context calibration handles the users who don't have that option or preference.

WHAT THIS WOULD ACTUALLY CHANGE

A teacher in Nairobi opens Google Vids for the first time.

- 01 She selects 'for my students'**
The interface shows her a lesson template. The terminology says 'add a topic section' not 'add a scene.' The AI prompt says 'describe what you want to explain to your students.' The navigation says 'My Classroom' not 'My Vids.' The avatar options shown first are warmer, slightly stylised, less corporate.
- 02 She makes her first video in twenty minutes**
She does not encounter the word 'scene.' She does not have to figure out what a 'lip-sync retake' is. She describes her biology lesson to Gemini, selects a template called 'Topic Explainer,' and presses go.
- 03 She does not go back to Loom**
That is the entire goal.

DIFFERENT CONTEXTS. DIFFERENT CALIBRATION. SAME PRINCIPLE.

The avatar experience needs context-specific calibration, not universal improvement.

For education specifically — the avatar doesn't need to be more realistic. It needs to be more relatable and less corporate. Slightly less formal. Warmer. Possibly even deliberately stylised rather than hyper-realistic — because a stylised avatar in an educational context reads as intentional and approachable rather than “we tried to make a human and almost succeeded.”

For internal corporate communications — the avatar needs to feel authoritative and clear rather than warm. The uncanny valley problem here is less about creepiness and more about credibility. Does this avatar feel like something a senior leader would be comfortable putting their name on?

Different contexts. Different avatar calibration. Same paradox of specificity principle.

EXPECTED IMPACT

Why this matters beyond the onboarding.

Context-first onboarding isn't a UX nicety. It's a retention strategy. Every user who makes it past their first video is a user Google Vids keeps.

<p>↓ REDUCES</p> <p><i>Early abandonment from invisible learning curve</i></p>	<p>↑ INCREASES</p> <p><i>First-session completion rate</i></p>	<p>~ IMPROVES</p> <p><i>D7 & D30 retention for non-technical users</i></p>	<p>→ SHIFTS</p> <p><i>“It's like Canva” → “It's the video tool for my team”</i></p>
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THE HONEST PART

I haven't used Google Vids.

I don't have access to the full product, the design system documentation, the engineering constraints, or the user research Google has already done — which is almost certainly more comprehensive than fourteen YouTube walkthroughs and a feedback thread.

This is a speculative concept based on public information, genuine design thinking, and the perhaps audacious belief that the instinct I had in the first thirty seconds — “oh, so it's Canva but corporate” — is exactly the instinct the onboarding needs to immediately correct.

If I'm wrong about the diagnosis, I'd genuinely love to know why.

If I'm right — well. You know where to find me.