

Digital Skills Workshop

Teacher Guide

These guidelines are designed for secondary-level teachers who want to introduce students to digital storytelling and journalism as a way to address Common Core Standards to enhance language arts through use of technology and media. This user-friendly teacher guide is designed to accompany the video learning modules found at: <http://digitalskillsworkshop.com>.

The course was created by researchers at the School of Journalism and Communication (SOJC) at University of Oregon, who have found that these skills can significantly strengthen students' critical thinking, research, and writing skills. Students who participate in the course are often empowered to develop their "voice" and become more effective communicators and engaged citizens.

Our intention is for you to be able to modify or replicate the five-day course we presented at Roosevelt High School in Portland, Oregon.

Curriculum Goals

Students will:

- Connect writing skills with digital storytelling skills
- Strengthen research and critical thinking abilities
- Ease inhibitions about meeting and interviewing new people
- Learn basic video shooting and editing principles

Course Design

The course is designed to be delivered in five consecutive sessions, which can be scheduled over a week. Two to three hours of daily instruction is optimal. However, modifications can be made to this schedule.

Best results will be achieved with a group of 18 students or less who are organized into teams of three. Encourage students to pick teammates who are outside their ordinary social circle as an opportunity for growth. Seek to organize the groups in a manner where each team has a member who may be more "tech savvy" than the other members. It is advisable to enlist mentors to support the teams and to acquire the necessary gear. The next section offers tips.

Resources

Mentors:

We realize that you may be as new to video skills as your students; that's why we suggest the following strategies for support. In the series of sessions offered at Roosevelt, we assembled a team of talented SOJC students to join us in mentoring the high school students. Securing support is often easier than you might think. In the U.S., there are more than 500 colleges and universities with active journalism and/or media programs. Thousands more exist throughout the world. Many offer their students and faculty some form of credit for engaging in community service projects. Media companies also reward employees who engage in service-oriented

outreach. Watch the video labeled “[Need Mentors](#)” for ideas about how to establish alliances within your community.

Technology:

Access to technology can be a challenge for teachers and administrators, especially in underserved communities. Watch the video labeled “[Need Tech](#)” for ideas on how to acquire donated video gear and software. For the Roosevelt project, our journalism school donated older model iPod Touch devices that were being retired. Additionally, we used mCAMLITES, which are aluminum-bodied shells that minimize the shakiness of handheld shots. They are made by [Action Life Media](#), and are sold as a kit that includes interchangeable lenses and microphone attachments for about \$100.



iPod Touch



mCAMLITE from Action Life Media

Otherwise, inexpensive tripods or gorilla pods can be purchased for as little as \$10 through Amazon.com. Steadying the camera is essential for recording good quality video.



tripod



gorilla pod



mini table pod

The iPod Touch and similar devices record digitally, avoiding the complexities of videotape formats. We use Apple MacBooks for post-production, which ship with iMovie. However, Adobe Premiere Elements is another viable option. Additionally, YouTube offers a free option, all discussed in the Day 4 section.

Day 1: Plan - “Distinguishing Stories”

Goals:

Students will:

- Distinguish elements that make for a “great story,” including identifying a narrative arc.
- Identify strong topics and individuals who can speak about those topics.
- Learn to craft interview questions and how to ask them.

Begin with introductions. Explain the goals of the course, and inspire students to challenge any perceived limitations.

Segue into a conversation about “stories” and what makes a good story. Your Day 1 objective is to set students on the right track for success throughout the week. You want to engage them in brainstorming about possible stories they might pursue.

Start the discussion on this point: Everyone has a story, but not every story is for video.

Passive activities, stories about the past, stories that present issues of access (such as stories that involve young children or stories that might jeopardize one’s personal safety) are all bad places to start when you’re looking for a video story.

Better stories are about something that a person does, involving an active process, in the present day. That said, video is not necessarily all about action. Photography is actually the best means by which we capture moments in time.

Video is actually used to capture emotion, because emotion is something uniquely experienced over time. Words are used to capture and communicate thought and reason—as well as emotions.

Talk about sound and how sound can be used to convey feeling, tone, and location. Discuss how sound affects mood. Natural sound: Ocean waves, blustering winds, campfire crackles versus the added sound of music.

Group discussion: Let’s imagine that we want to tell a story about something related to education—more specifically a story about people who are involved in public schools. Who could you talk to?

What might you talk about?

Now, how do we prioritize the choices you can make? Who comes to mind as strong and articulate speakers on the subjects? How might you represent diverse points of view? How accessible are the individuals you might choose? How informed are they about the topic?

Caution students not to limit their choices to “authorities.” Note that many of the best stories are told by people impacted by policies rather than those who make policies.

Step 1: Encourage students to engage prospective subjects in preliminary interviews, by phone or in person.

Step 2: Instruct students to take notes during the conversations, drafting details about who the person is, what they do, why they do it, and how they do it. Students should inquire about logistics, in terms of shooting dates, possible distractions that might disrupt the interview, and parking. Other issues to consider include: the proximity of power outlets, the amount of available room light, and noises such as humming or buzzing that lower audio quality.

Step 3: Ask students to imagine how they plan to use a video camera to show when and where a person does the thing the students are trying to capture on video. Think about how video will communicate emotion. Will there be space limitations? Access limitations?

Step 4: Support students in formulating their story pitches, nailing down the who, what, and why, and then understanding how video will articulate the when, where, and how. Vet the stories in terms of practicality. Is this a story that is doable, given the production team's skill set, available gear, and time limitations? Support students in having alternate plans in case their original story idea falls through. Encourage them to venture beyond what's familiar. This is an opportunity for them to spotlight unsung heroes and intriguing people in their community. It's a chance to give voice to the voiceless, which is what democracy is all about.

Day 2: Explore - Video Production

Goals:

Students will:

- Develop research skills
- Become comfortable interviewing strangers.
- Learn basic aesthetic visual principles

Day 2's opening exercise prepares student for journalistic interviews.

Conversation Exercise - (10 minutes)

Ask students to turn to a partner whom they don't know very well. Taking five-minute turns, they are to interview one another with the intention of learning something new. They should have pen and paper to take notes about what they discover. Suggest that they inquire about hobbies, cultural practices, family history or dreams and aspirations.

A good place to start is: "Tell me about something you like to do?"

Encourage them focus on getting to "why" their peer pursues a particular interest.

Explain that they are seeking to identify motivations. These often fall into two categories: internal, which are tied to emotional gratification; and external, which are often tied to other's expectations.

Debrief Session - (10-20 minutes depending on class size)

After each has taken his or her turn, lead a debrief session about what students discovered. What had they not previously known? What areas of inquiry might make for a good story and why? Ask them to acknowledge any discomfort they might have experienced. Did that discomfort ease further into the process?

Engage students in the following discussion:

There are two basic approaches to interviewing people: the top-down approach and the bottom-up approach.

The top-down approach starts with an abstract theme or idea. You already know something about the person and what they do, and you have some research that you can conduct beforehand that informs the questions you want to ask. Ask students to use Google and other sources to find out more about their subject. Discuss how to assess credibility when searching the web. Who funds the website? Would you categorize the site as academic, commercial, nonprofit, political, or journalistic? Is the information presented accurate? Might the site's owners have an agenda? Good research starts with a narrow topic in mind; something that helps focus your questions.

When you can't Google details about a person, you need to start from somewhere. Students can conduct a preliminary interview with some goals in mind: find out about this person's past, find out about what motivates this person in the present, and find out where this person wants to go in the future. This is the bottom-up approach.

Writing down some basic talking points can help you organize your thoughts during a potentially stressful situation.

The Language of Video

Have students reflect on some of their favorite movies and television shows. Talk about the film storytelling conventions we all recognize:

Wide shot: Establishes a location; gives audience a sense of place; generally begins a scene.

Medium shot: Brings us closer into the space of the characters.

Close up: Shows us details, commands our attention

Extreme close-up: Conveys intensity, such as when a person is crying.

Over the shoulder shot: Shows relationship between people, or between people and objects.

Point of View (POV) shot: Shows us a character's perspective.

High angles look down, making people appear less powerful and subordinate.

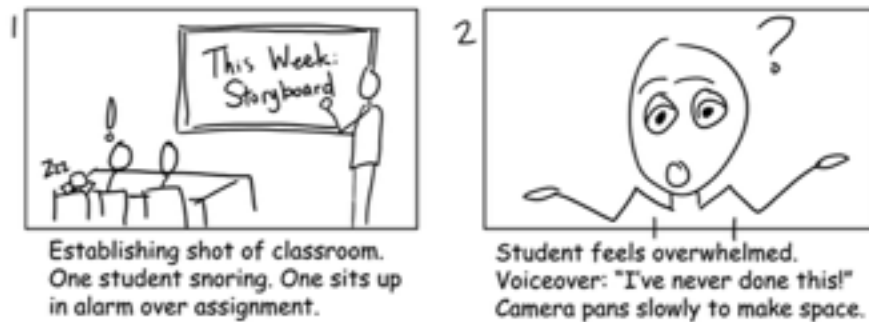
Low angles look up, making people appear more powerful and ominous.

You can also physically move the camera in, out, or alongside a subject.

Discuss how combinations of these shots and strategies help stories unfold. When are they naturally appropriate?

Storyboarding:

Storyboards are roughly sketched drawings of envisioned shot sequences. Search Google for “[storyboard templates](#),” then download and make copies of the form. Talk students through the process. Support them in planning their shot sequences. It’s helpful to make shot lists ahead of a production. They will want to make sure to get wide shots that establish where they are—and close ups that fulfill our curiosity about details.



Source: <https://acompan.stanford.edu/tutorials/storyboarding>

Framing Shots:

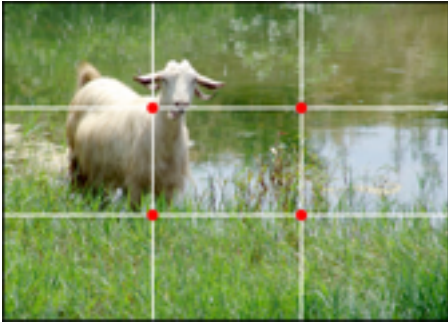
Following a few aesthetic rules can make a tremendous difference in the quality of video productions. Our senses are trained to prefer shots that are off-center, rather than centered. Generally, it is best to follow the “rule-of-thirds,” which divides the frame with two vertical and two horizontal lines. Frame subjects so that important elements of the picture aligned near the one of the intersections of these lines. For interviews, you want the subject looking slightly to the left or right of the lens, speaking with an interviewer who is positioned off-camera at eye-level. In the instance shown below, the subject is looking slightly left, so you want lead space or “nose room” on the left side of the frame. Also, one or two inches of headroom is preferable.



Source: <http://ohda.matrix.msu.edu/2012/08/quick-tips-for-better-interview-video/>

“A-roll” versus “B-roll”:

“A-roll” is industry jargon for the main interview footage with your subject. Typically, you will frame and lock your shot on a medium closeup for the interview. Watching too much of a “talking head” bores audiences. You enhance your video by covering most of the “a-roll” with “b-roll.” Simply stated, “b-roll” is additional footage of your subject in action or of things he or she is speaking about. The rule-of-thirds is also followed when framing “b-roll” shots.



For the remainder of the second day, have students practice setting up interview shots and shooting “b roll.” If they begin shooting material for their stories on this day, cover some of the Day 3 instructions that relate to use of light and capturing quality sound.

Day 3: Document - Capturing the Best Footage

Goals:

Students will:

- Develop an understanding of how to use natural light.
- Understand to shoot more footage than they think is needed.
- Learn whether they are hitting story points.

Natural Light:

Professional video crews have light kits to enhance dark spaces. It’s unlikely your students will have that luxury. Encourage them to shoot most of their material in the early morning or late afternoon when natural light is less harsh. It is best to place subjects in front of dark backgrounds and to shoot with the sun behind you. When indoors, take advantage of natural light entering a room through windows.

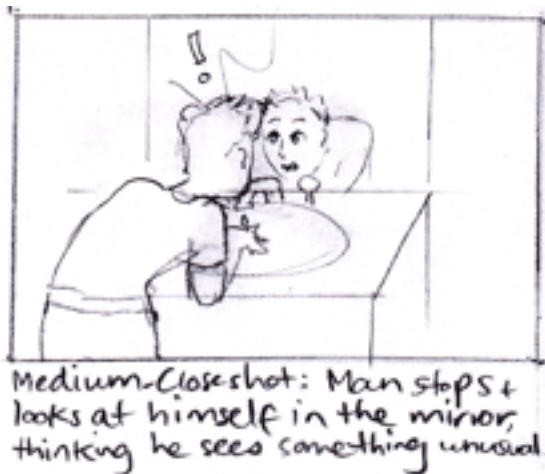


Source: <http://www.magicgoggles.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/forest1.jpg>

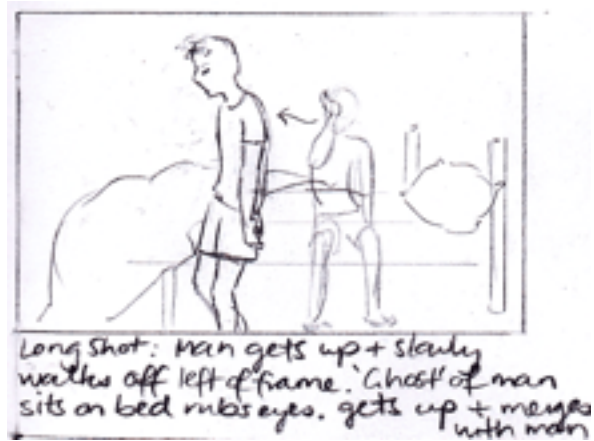
Getting More Than You Need:

New digital storytellers always underestimate the amount of interview and “b-roll” footage they will need. Have students over-shoot to make sure they have sufficient coverage. Train them to think in terms of sequences that will match actions and what is being spoken about: from wide shots to medium shots to closeups. This allows digital storytellers to give audiences multiple perspectives.

Allow subjects to walk into the frame, and walk out of the frame. This provides you with clean cut points when editing.



Over the shoulder shot



Man exits frame.

Source: http://mjmediablog.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/vfx_storyboard_31.png

Returning from an initial period of fieldwork allows students to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their acquired footage. It is not uncommon that reshoots will be necessary, and additional time will be needed to secure essential shots. Inevitably, beginners fail to get enough close-ups. Sound can also be a challenge.

Sound:

Speak in more detail about sound. Students need to train their ears to notice distracting sounds, such as air conditioners, airplanes flying overhead, and street traffic. Sometimes it is best to move the interview location to a quieter place. The mCAMLITE shell kits come with a small directional microphone that plugs into the side of iPod Touch devices. However, students must still find a relatively quiet location for their interviews and have their subject seated fairly close.



Day 4: Edit - Crafting Video Stories

The video editing process is where stories really come together. Apple MacBooks ship with iMovie software, and Adobe Elements is another affordable option. Also, YouTube Editor is a free online editing option: <https://www.youtube.com/editor>



Essentially, video editing entails selecting your best clips and reordering them to most effectively craft a story.

Step 1: Select and lay down “a-roll” (interview soundbites), cutting out rough transitions and including only the best soundbites.

Step 2: Begin covering “a-roll” with “b-roll,” working to establish locations, reveal subjects speaking, and to take audiences deeper into the story. For example, if a subject mentions how much enjoyment he or she receives from volunteering at a local animal shelter, place the appropriate “b-roll” of the subject playing with animals at the shelter over this soundbite.

Step 3: Add name identifying lower-thirds, opening titles, end credits, and music.

Step 4: Output the video, upload it, and share it via YouTube or another social sharing site.

Numerous tutorials offer more specific editing instructions:

iMovie: <https://www.apple.com/mac/imovie/>; <http://help.apple.com/imovie/mac/10.0/>

Adobe Premiere Elements: <http://tv.adobe.com/show/learn-premiere-elements-11/>

YouTube Video Editor: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A3ypVoN4NVM>

Day 5: Refine and Share - Screening the Results

On the final day of the course students will refine and share their work. They might take some time to put finishing touches on their videos and export them as .mov files. Keep in mind that sometimes exporting can take up to several hours, so plan that time into your schedule. When holding the screening, we suggest hooking up a laptop or desktop computer to a projector and playing the videos from that central location to minimize transition time between videos. Students can email the instructor their files or put them on a thumb drive if they are too large to be sent via email.

The screening is an opportunity for participants to invite friends and family to celebrate their accomplishments. We also recommend they invite their interview subjects. You might choose to serve refreshments and create a real sense of celebration.

Before guests arrive, lead students in reaffirming what they have learned by participating in the course. Discuss how these skills can inform their other studies. Explore ways students can keep these skills alive. By participating they will have walked away from the course having learned a powerful new language: the language of digital storytelling with video. You have introduced them to marketable skills that they can apply in college and in their careers. Congratulate yourself for taking this project on and choosing to empower your students to develop their “voice.”

Notes:

This curriculum was designed by Iris Bull and Ed Madison, with support from Maya Lazaro, Alan Sylvestre, Alex Sacco, and Jonas Anim. Jordan Bentz was senior videographer on location at Roosevelt High School. Scott Proctor designed the website.

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