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Going Live!

Owning The Breaking News Story

Please describe in 1,000 words or less all pertinent details about your GIFT entry, including:

□ **What is your idea?** Technology has allowed us to go live from more places, more often. Often times, students do not have the opportunity to hone “live” skills in many college programs. My idea was to put students in a breaking news situation, complete with press conference and active scene behind them. Then, have them “go live”, with a 2:00 report, “at the scene” (in front of the chroma key) interacting with video, using it to tell the story. You can also introduce live interviews to make the exercise more in-depth. Live interviews introduce a whole host of teaching objectives (interviewing skills, knowing when to stop an interview, timing, asking the right questions).

□ **Goals?** The goal of the teaching assignment is to get them to work on their extemporaneous speaking skills. Taking and crunching changing information into easy to understand bulletins for the viewer to understand. The other goal is also for students to utilize their surroundings and avoid pitfalls that new reporters often find themselves in (falling for bad information, using a poor source for an interview, not paying attention to the scene and not reacting to the changing scene.)

□ **How does it work in the classroom?** Students come in to class and the instructor tells them they are being sent out on breaking news. The instructor tells them they are stepping out of the role of professor and when approaching the podium they are strictly a PIO (Public Information Officer) or some other official that will be there to give them information on the scene.

Once the press conference starts, play some of the video from the scene (usually raw video) and describe (not in great detail) what they are seeing. Give them “some” nuts and bolts of who, what when, where, but leave out key details hoping they will ask “the official”. Often times this will expose basic reporting flaws we often see in the classroom setting.

Students then have a small amount of time (10-12 minutes) to put together a 2-minute

live report. It is important to do this assignment without them knowing too much about it in advance. This enables you to control the environment and prevent too much preparation.

To keep it fair to the students you draw numbers as to who will go in what order. You then have the student (one by one, you do not want the other students to see what went well or could be improved) enter your studio and they will present their live report in front of a green screen with the raw video of the scene behind them. This works great for active scenes (fires, weather, events). You have the video looping so that it does not run out. If you have raw video that zooms and pans that can also work as the students will learn to reference what their videographer is picking up at the scene.

If you do not have help in the studio you can read an anchor intro and toss to the reporter as if they are “live”. You time them 2 minutes and let them know you will give them time cues (or, if your studio has IFB capabilities you have someone give them time cues in their ear).

Options for instructors: You may offer to your students a “live interview”. I tend to play the role of a witness that is standing by near the scene. If you allow this, it is important to mix up your answers to the students. In reality, everyone will approach or be approached by people in the field. This is a good way to test their interviewing and ad-lib skills. It also is a way for the reporter to weigh the risks of a live interview at a scene. Sometimes this can go terribly wrong and it is best not to interview people standing by a scene.

-Once the exercise is completed for each person, it is time to watch each live shot back. Listen for details to see what facts are included, which facts were left out. Did they serve the viewer as best as possible?

Student Reaction: I have been doing this exercise for a couple of years. The sections that I am able to work this into the curriculum (it takes a full day or two to complete depending on class size, along with critique) tell me that this is one of the most valuable things they have done in class.

“I learned more in that two minute live shot than I ever could doing a news package or practicing on tape in the field.” - Taylor Jacobs, Senior

“This is something I wish we could do more of. It made me more aware of timing and facts and telling the story to viewers. I have a new respect for reporters that I see every day on the news.” - Aundrea Murray, Senior

Many students have a hard time watching themselves on camera, this exercise is typically hard for them to watch. I tell them to take notes on facts and details and I award those who find the most errors. I also encourage the class to decide on who handled the live shot the best and why.

This exercise has consistently shown up in my evaluations one of the most popular exercises they completed for their broadcast courses. This can be done as an introductory assignment or for advanced students.