

Unit 4: Producing TV News

These learning materials comprise several short tasks with key questions and resources focusing on developing a practical approach to the demands of producing TV news as well as an analysis of the key roles and processes of TV news production. Guidance is included to support a simulated news production event.

The materials are available in downloadable PDF or in Word files that you can tailor to your own requirements. The tasks are suitable for a range of attainment levels, and teachers are advised to select the material most appropriate for their students.

Introduction

ACTIVITIES

1. Planning for news production
2. Preparing and editing material
3. Evaluating the project

General information about these lesson ideas:

Aims and Learning Outcomes

What students can expect to learn and achieve.

Assessment

Ways in which tasks might be assessed, either formally or informally.

Curriculum Context

How the materials relate to the requirements of GCSE, AS/A2 Level and BTEC qualifications in Media Studies as well as the Programme of Study for Citizenship and English Language at Key Stage 4.

Introduction

These activities are designed to help students focus on the practical demands of news production. Building on the knowledge gained throughout the first three units of the course, pupils will be encouraged to investigate the roles and skills of the members of a news team. Emphasis will be placed on gaining an awareness of the various stages through which a news story travels, from conference to bulletin and final debrief.

As part of this unit, students will be required to reflect on their own participation in the course, paying particular attention to the skills that they have acquired and the knowledge that they have gained.

ACTIVITY 1: Planning for news production

Personnel

1.1 Focus on the roles and key skills of the personnel involved in producing a news story. Ask students to watch the video interviews with TV news staff hosted on the website.

Students should take notes during these interviews under the following headings:

- job title
- key responsibility
- skills necessary for the job
- who they work closely with
- who is this person answerable to (e.g. line manager)?

Use **Worksheet 4.1** to build up profiles of the members of the news team. Discuss the typical make up of a news team, paying particular attention to determining which members of the team work together. Plot the relationships between these individuals on a whiteboard or similar.

1.2 Worksheet 4.2 asks students to identify the key skills necessary for roles involved in news production should you choose to simulate a news day in the classroom. Students are asked to identify the roles that would suit their qualities and skills.

Stages in production

1.3 Help students to understand the different stages involved in the production of TV news. These include:

- conference
- identify sources
- script
- record
- select
- edit
- report
- bulletin
- debrief

In each case, identify:

- who is involved
- what is the main objective
- what technology is used
- how long the task takes.

Now refer to the interactive timeline on the site and ask students to identify and comment on each of the stages.

Does the timeline conform to their expectations of a day in the newsroom? Are there any surprises? What happens if there is a delay in completing one of the stages?

1.4 One of the toughest challenges facing students involved in a news day simulation is organisation. Use the classroom walls or a dedicated notice board to host a map of the day which could be constructed from separate pieces of paper (colour coded to represent the activities of each of the teams) and linked by string or ribbon to show how the work of each team impacts upon the project as a whole.

Deadlines and targets

1.5 In a news simulation, students could work to similar deadlines to the Channel 4 News team. Discuss the nature and importance of TV news production deadlines. Explore the site to find answers to questions such as:

- what happens when something goes wrong?
- what happens if a story breaks late or whilst the bulletin is on air?
- who takes responsibility for ensuring that deadlines are met?
- what are the consequences of an individual or group missing a deadline?

Refer back to the interactive timeline if necessary to clarify any planning issues which may arise from this conversation.

1.6 Help students to plan for a news simulation by asking pairs or groups to fill in **Worksheet 4.3**.

Take stock of the technology and space needed to complete each stage of the process.

Preparing the teams

1.7 As with the schools involved in news day, students could prepare stories such as:

- a local news feature completely shot, scripted and edited in the school
- a news feature or topical story created from ITN assets in e-SEQ or self-generated footage

Allocate roles and ensure team members are clear of their roles and responsibilities towards the team. Students may fulfil more than one role in the team. Activities might include:

Local news feature

- brainstorm a list of local stories which might be of interest to a national audience
- think of an 'angle' which might appeal to a 'youth' audience
- identify research required
- brainstorm local contacts who could be contacted to comment
- identify required visuals and audio
- draw up a timeline with deadlines.

News feature or breaking story

- draw up a list of criteria against which to judge assets
- brainstorm additional resources that the group is able to bring to the story
- read a newspaper or look at a news website and write a list of the current top stories in order to keep abreast of topical issues (or fill in a daily news log on a rotational basis so that students take responsibility for informing others about news events)
- take a news story and devise ways of approaching it from a 'youth' angle
- brainstorm local contacts who could be contacted to comment
- draw up a timeline with deadlines
- draw up a strategy for acquiring research resources.

ACTIVITY 2: Preparing and editing material

Understanding the technology

2.1 Promoting the safe and effective use of relevant hardware and software is an essential part of the preparatory process. Because different groups of students will be working with different systems and technologies, it might be useful to allocate activities to small groups of students rather than involving the whole class.

Camera operators

Ask students working with cameras to make an inventory of the equipment available to them.

Ensure that students are briefed on how to use the recording equipment (involve the school technician, if operating instructions are required). Ask students to record some shots of a typical school day, demonstrating the range of camera positions and types of shots available to them. Ask these students to discuss the relative pros and cons of the shots and techniques they have learned, paying particular attention to:

- close up
- panning shot
- establishing shot
- the effect of zooming in or out
- the 'eye line' of the camera.

Finally, ask the camera operators to draw up a one-page dossier entitled 'An Introduction to Cameras' which should feature their findings, any settings which need to be recorded, tips and general guidance.

VT editors

Ask the students who will be editing footage for stories to make an inventory of the equipment available to them.

Using footage gathered from the camera crew (see previous activity), ask the editors to create a meaningful edit of the footage. Ask the students to record the decisions they make in the **Worksheet 4.4**. Students should then reflect on the final result of their edit.

Finally, ask the VT editors to draw up a one-page dossier entitled 'An Introduction to Editing' which should feature their findings, any settings which need to be recorded, tips and general guidance.

Sound technicians

Ask students working with sound to make an inventory of the equipment available to them.

Ensure that students are briefed on how to use the sound recording equipment (involve the school technician if operating instructions are required). Ask these students to record and edit a montage of five or so sounds (including at least one interview) which represent a response to the school environment. Allow the students the freedom to experiment with the technologies at their disposal and to find out more about best operating practice for themselves.

Finally, ask the sound technicians to draw up a one-page dossier entitled 'An Introduction to Sound' which should feature their findings, any settings which need to be recorded, tips and general guidance.

Graphics

Ask the students who will be creating graphics to make an inventory of the equipment available to them.

Encourage students to explore the technologies available for the production of graphics by asking the group to provide graphics for a sample news story (or a short film representing a day in the life of the school). Students should watch some of the news stories featured online, taking notes on when and where graphics are used.

Finally, ask the students working with graphics to draw up a one-page dossier entitled 'An Introduction to Graphics' which should feature their findings, tips and general guidance.

Production systems

Channel 4 use production system software known as ENPS. It was developed by Associated Press to meet the demands of modern news production. A demo of the system is available from www.enps.com. Check the online video timeline for more information about ENPS.

To understand how news is produced in the ITN newsroom, ask students to find answers to the following questions:

- what does ENPS allow the user to do?
- what are the special features of ENPS?
- define the following terms: 'live images', 'wire stories', 'breaking news'
- what are the most important tools available on the system?
- how would you explain what ENPS does to somebody with no knowledge of the system?
- what is the MOS?
- how might a roving correspondent use ENPS?
- what is Follow-Me Messaging?

Using e-SEQ

The e-SEQ tool contains assets from ITN that can be used to make a news story. Ensure that students understand how to use e-SEQ.

Students will need to:

- sequence these rushes into a two and a half-minute clip
- write a script for the clip.

Note that the e-SEQ server will be updated with new footage on a regular basis so that different stories can be created.

Discuss with students the advantages of a system like e-SEQ in terms of:

- security
- time management
- efficiency
- reliability
- simplicity.

Working with language, images and sound

2.2 The selection of key language, images and sound will play a large part in the success of the news stories produced by the class. Over the last 50 years, TV news has provided the most haunting, iconic and joyous images of history in the making – some of these sounds and images will never be forgotten. Ask pairs of students to discuss and answer the following questions:

- which images, first seen on TV news bulletins, have stayed with you over the years?
- which sounds, first heard on TV news bulletins, have been the most memorable?
- can you remember hearing a particular word, phrase or sentence on a TV news bulletin which has stayed with you over the years?

2.3 Having discussed the importance of selecting effective language, images and sound in order to create a meaningful and exciting bulletin, ask groups of students to decide on the information that they would need to capture for a range of hypothetical news stories, detailed in **Worksheet 4.5**. The table is designed to help students (particularly the news producers, camera operators and sound operators) decide on the most appropriate images and sounds to capture for stories. Students who will be taking on the responsibilities of the news journalist should be encouraged to focus on the language used in each of the stories.

Discuss the contents of each group's table with the class, paying particular attention to the identification of key images, sounds and language.

Editing

2.4 Ensure that students understand the importance of editorial decision-making. What effect does editing have on the representation and delivery of news stories? Examine the different purposes of editing:

- clarity
- impact
- quality
- compliance.

Watch a section of a news bulletin with the class and ask students to take notes on how the piece has been edited. Discuss these notes as a group and establish some principles of good editing. Display the students' views on editing on the wall of the classroom in readiness for a news simulation and ensure that the students taking responsibility for VT editing are fully briefed on their responsibilities.

2.5 Construct an exercise in which the students taking on the role of VT editors are asked to demonstrate the ways in which the meaning of a news story can change depending on the way it has been edited.

Instruct the students who will be taking on the role of cameraman to film some footage of a topical story which relates to the school environment (e.g. a proposal to dispense with school uniform, a debate about a rock concert). You might also want to involve the sound crew in this task. Challenge each of the VT editors to edit the footage in a wholly different way (for instance, ask for 'bad' editing, 'illogical' editing or 'biased' editing) and watch the finished result with the whole group. Use the finished news stories, however ludicrous, to demonstrate the importance of careful and intelligent editing.

ACTIVITY 3: Evaluating the project

What is a debrief?

3.1 The debrief is central to the TV news production process as it enables editors and journalists to reflect on the day's bulletin whilst looking forward to the ways in which key news stories are set to develop over the coming days.

Discuss the importance of the continuing narrative of news production. In order to examine the way in which stories are broken and developed over a news cycle, it may be helpful to look at an online news provider (such as www.guardian.co.uk), typing a name or topical story into a search engine before tracking the date when the story broke and the insights and developments offered by each successive article. Students should record their findings using **Worksheet 4.6**.

Of course this activity could be repeated for TV news bulletins if access to a week's worth of footage is available. The Channel 4 News site contains recent stories, for example.

3.2 Discuss the concept of a news cycle and the importance of a debrief or conference session in determining the priorities for the planning of subsequent bulletins.

How is a debrief used?

3.3 Watch part of a news bulletin with the class (either on video or online) before conducting a role-play exercise in which students take on the characters of members of a TV news team. These roles might include:

- news editor
- bulletin editor
- producer
- journalist / reporter
- camera
- VT editor
- presenter.

Ask students to recall the information presented earlier in unit 4 about the nature of these roles, and to use this knowledge to inform an in-role discussion of the successes and shortcomings of the bulletin. Responses could be structured around the following questions:

- which of the items had the most impact?
- which was the least successful?
- where are the opportunities to cover follow-up stories?
- which of these items could be investigated or extended in tomorrow's bulletin?
- are there any potential problems with compliance?
- does the style and content of the bulletin reflect the brand image and news values of the broadcaster?

3.4 Ask pairs or small groups of students to find five ways of completing the sentence 'The daily debrief is useful because...' and exchange these with the rest of the class. Together

the class might like to assign each of these responses a value, ranking the most important as number 1 and the least as number 10.

After taking part in a news simulation, ask students to engage with an evaluative debrief. View the debrief on the interactive timeline to see how debriefs are held at Channel 4.

Aims and Learning Outcomes

At the end of this unit students will:

- understand the roles and skills of the personnel involved in news production.
- understand the stages in production through which a news story travels.
- understand the technology used in news production.
- understand the importance of and issues surrounding the editing of material.
- evaluate their role in a news simulation.

Range of Activities

- Independent research.
- Whole group debate.
- Structured small group discussion.
- Role play.

Assessment

To ensure that students have a full grasp of the practices and technologies relevant to news, assessment of this unit might take the following form:

1. Planning for news production

To consolidate an understanding of the different roles and skills involved in TV news, construct a timeline of the processes integral to news production (conference, identify sources, script, record, select, edit, report, bulletin, debrief). Ask students to draw a line underneath the timeline to represent the stages during which each of the following personnel are involved, using different colours or symbols to label each of these lines, and to provide a key to the diagram:

- programme editor
- newsbelt producer
- producer
- journalist / reporter
- camera
- sound
- VT editor
- graphics
- presenter.

2. Preparing and editing material

Students should write a user's guide to one of the following, based on the information they have gathered over the course of this unit:

- miniDV / DVCAM
- e-SEQ
- ENPS.

Alternatively, students might be asked to create a paper storyboard of a news story, annotated to show evidence of an understanding of:

- editing
- the importance of key images
- impact
- compliance.

3. Evaluating the project

Students who will be using the *Breaking the News* course as part of GCSE or A-level coursework, or as a part of the BTEC record of work, will need to participate fully in a debrief session after a news simulation exercise has ended. Assessment tasks might include presenting a formal debrief of one of the preparation activities they are engaged in. After the news simulation has come to an end, students should evaluate their participation in the project by recording and responding to the decisions that they have made.

Worksheet 4.7 can be used for this.

Contributions could be assessed in line with the relevant Assessment Objectives of the GCSE or A level course.

Curriculum Context

These materials can be used with students of Media Studies at GCSE and AS/A2 Level as well as for teaching the National Curriculum Programme of Study for Citizenship and English at Key Stage 4.

The activities require students to reflect on the practical challenges faced by TV journalists, and provide opportunities for them to explore the conflicts faced by editors and reporters (Citizenship 1g). Structured small group discussion is used to afford students the opportunity to justify their opinions orally (Citizenship 2b). Discussion of the competing demands of the various individuals involved in the news production process allows students to take part in exploratory discussion (Citizenship 2c). Throughout the unit students should be encouraged to empathise with the stages through which stories pass before they hit our screens and to imagine another person's point of view. They should be encouraged to articulate viewpoints other than their own (Citizenship 3a, English *EN1* 3a - e). In studying the different roles and skills of individuals and groups involved in the production process, students will be able to identify the perspectives offered on individuals, communities and society at large (English *EN2* 1d, 1e). Students will be taught to appreciate how meaning is conveyed in a short news bulletin (English *EN2* 5a) as well as the ways in which the audience of TV journalism responds to the media (English *EN2* 5d).

Work in this unit will enable students of Media Studies to become more familiar with the practical demands of news production. The activities suggested support GCSE and AS/A2 Assessment Objectives in the following ways:

OCR GCSE Media Studies AO4, AO6
AQA GCSE Media Studies AO1a, AO3a, AO3b
WJEC GCSE Media Studies AO2
OCR AS Level Media Studies AO2, AO4, AO8
AQA AS/A2 Level Media Studies AO4
WJEC AS/A2 Level Media Studies AO5
BTEC Level 4 Certificate in Media: Professional Context for Digital Video Editing

The unit can also be used in Scottish Qualifications Authority Intermediate 2 and Higher Media Studies courses: Media Production.