

## **Running a Student News Program and Motivating Your Students**

These tips come from teacher Kerry Hrabstock

### **Classroom Basics**

Q. How do we start

A. Believe it or not some of the students have never watched a real news story on a local news station. Even if they have they certainly haven't dissected it. Have them do that or do it with them in class on the board. Great way to pick out who, what, where, why, when, and how. Also, good way to illustrate the way video matches up with the writing and how to use sound benefits a story.

Q. So now they're ready to go out on a story?

A. First we do fake news stories. They must use VO, SOTs, NAT SOT and a Stand Up.

Q. It has been production chaos. Now what?

A. Take back control, sit them down and get out the Fox 61 Student News manuals, one for each student. Use the board for examples, definitions, whatever. Assign pages to study for homework. Quiz, quiz, quiz. If you need to fill class time with more stuff, show more examples of stories from real news shows as well as good Student News stories. Dissect them and list the good and bad points on the board.

Q. How do we find a good story?

A. Let's face it, these kids will not be covering hard breaking news stories. The stories are generally "evergreen" features. Show them some features in newspapers and magazines and ask them to show some to you. Make sure they know the kind of stories that will be possible for them to submit. Ask them what they might be interesting in learning about. Magazines and Sunday papers are helpful. Plenty of Connecticut towns have annual events that might have some interesting features.

Q. How do we set up the story?

A. I (the teacher) usually make the first phone call to warn the subject that if he agrees to a story, he'll be dealing with teenagers, not news professionals. After that, the student and I go over what needs to be accomplished in his (the student's) initial phone call. It usually comes down to making an appointment and asking what will be going on at the time we are there.

Q. How do we use class time to prepare?

A. We brainstorm. We talk about what we perceive the subject and story will be like. These perceptions are as varied as the students. I tell them horror stories of past events so they know not all will go as planned. We use the board to write down words and phrases we think we might use in our VO. Alliteration, catch phrases, puns, rhymes, etc.

## LET'S DO ONE OF OUR "PRETEND" STORIES

- Brainstorm before we read the fact sheet.
- Look at fact sheet
- Choose SOT and time them
- Close or Bridge? Where? What? Cut the tag out as much as possible. Do not say the photographer's name. That's not how it is in the real world. On a close, do a short wrap up sentence then "In Hartford Joe Schmoe reporting."
- Let's write it
- Let's time the VO
- Let's whittle it down to :50 seconds magic

Q. Do we write down our interview questions?

A. Not necessarily. Some students (you know the ones) need to write them down and read them to the subject.

Other students are capable of conversing.

**Either way, make sure no one goes after YES or NO answer questions.** Role play in class. How to get timid subjects to talk and elaborate.

## AT THE SCENCE

Q. Who goes there?

A. If you're smart, you'll make sure their parents know about the scholarship aspect of the program. I find this helps get parents get involved. If a crowd is not appropriate, only the news team should attend. The teacher can go if you have time or they need transportation –and maybe one parent if they insist. I have found that more hands make things go smoothly. The teacher can hold jackets, papers, batteries, tripods, anything a production assistant might do so that the reporter and photographer can work efficiently.

## SHOOTING GOOD VIDEO

If you have time, shooting exercises help tremendously.

Perspectives.

Three shots for every one shot you think you need (basic sequence)

Look at the viewfinder not through it.

Use the tic, tac, toe grid. (Rule of thirds both horizontal and vertical.

Don't shoot the stage. Get on the stage and shoot.

Always get B-roll of the person you are interviewing. B-roll must not be a head shot. It should be video of them doing something.