

**The mobile journalism student:  
Teaching journalism history by distance  
using online tools**

**Presentation to Jeanz conference  
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# What I'll cover

- Experience teaching History of Journalism paper to distance students, using Stream (Moodle)
- Student reaction
- Conclusions



# The paper

- In 2006, Massey introduced Journalism Studies at undergraduate level
- One JS paper is History of Journalism – print journalism in England, US and NZ from 1500s to today
- Taught on campus and by distance (distance students tend to be older, working, families, based throughout NZ and overseas)
- Distance means can study anywhere, even when on the move, but presents own challenges
- In 2013, 27 internal students and 31 distance students



# The paper

- Main assessment for the paper comprises three essays, each of which required students to critically assess historical primary journalism texts
- Initially this was all the assessment, but recently changed, as discussed later





# Original assessment

- Each of the three essay questions focusses on one issue (fact versus fiction, role of journalist, impact of new media), both in past and today, requiring students to select 4-5 historical Readings from 15-20 and find modern print examples to discuss
- First question focusses on 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, selections include newsbooks, English Civil War accounts, Defoe, Boston Massacre, Daily Universal Register. Some short, some long
- Context given, but students encouraged to seek out more
- Students must come to terms with early modern English spelling and typeface
- Textbook, hard-copy Study Guide with Readings and some self-check exercises
- Online used simply to post PowerPoints of internal lectures and answer any questions posted in online forum



# Rationale for questions

- Replicate how historians work “Any good historian goes to the original sources”
- Selection of documents to ensure a good amount of evidence, student choice
- Modern examples to ensure students undertook their own primary-document collection, and to ensure they interpreted issues in modern context too.



# Marking schedule

- Marking schedule, given to students, emphasises need for critical analysis, use of evidence, presentation requirements

## SCOPE OF ESSAY 50%

A reasonably balanced discussion of the issues as reflected in the course study materials. Acceptable interpretation of topic, some explanation, illustration and support is provided from the literature.

## STRUCTURE 30%

Main arguments and conclusions outlined in Introduction. Definitions provided in context, main points discussed in logically sequential paragraphs. Summary in final paragraphs.

## EVIDENCE OF READING 10%

The text of the essay shows that the course materials have been read and acknowledged. An accurate list of references is attached.

## PRESENTATION 10%

Presentation requirements met



# Results

- From the start, some students done well, excellent analysis
- However, many repeated textbook (narrative history, argument by authority), no thesis, vague/meandering essays. Lack of critical thinking (perhaps due to exposure to opinion writing via blogs, Twitter, Facebook, etc.) and little wider reading
- Little use of Readings, esp. longer Readings. Some students complained hard-copy Readings difficult to read. Often, focussed on single, short articles in essays – thin analysis
- Reliance on Wikipedia
- Poor spelling/quoting
- Did not follow instructions (eg, did not include analysis of modern print journalism, ignored presentation requirements)





# Changes made

- Textbook abandoned and Wikipedia banned!
- Study Guide and Readings online (can be magnified). No hard copies.
- More specific advice (such as must focus on Readings, proof work)
- Interactive online tutorials, focussing on issues to be discussed in the essays (using previous self-check exercises plus new tutorials). Students given a week to submit material in discussion group. I then summarise and respond
- 10% of grade is participation in such tutorials (remainder is the three essays). The online tutorials are simply the tutorials used for the internal students, but run via Stream
- Example of online tutorial...



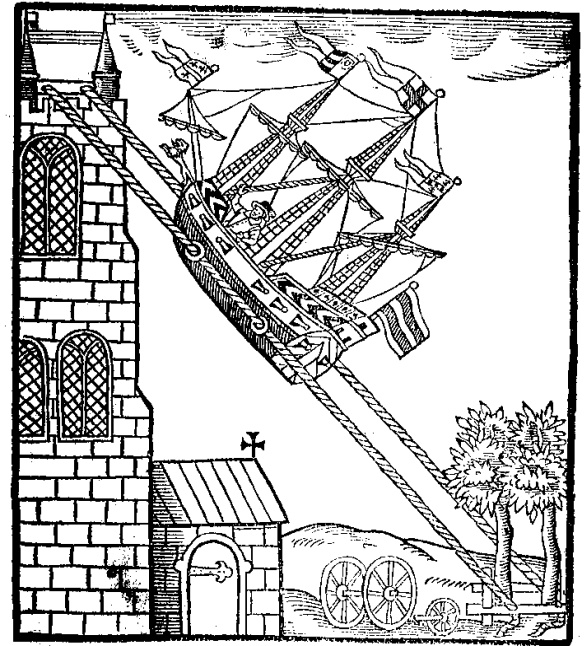




# Tutorial

- In July and August 1607 Englishman William Bush reportedly travelled in a pinnace from Lambourn, a small town in Berkshire, to Custom House Quay in London, a distance of about 100km.
- Bush had built the pinnace himself, but what was remarkable about the journey was that it only travelled part of the way by water, the rest of the time it went by land and, at the start of the journey, by air!
- Boat in fact when up and down a church steeple on ropes
- The newsbook was written by London pamphleteer Anthony Nixon.
- Fun? Attention? Royalties?

A  
True Relation of the admirable Voiage and  
Trauell of William Bush Gentleman : who with  
his owne hands without any other mans helpe, made a Py-  
nace, in which he paff by *Aire, Land, and Water*: From Lamborne,  
in *Barkshire*, to the *Customs house* Key in *London*. 1607.



London printed by T.P. for Nathaniel Buter, 1608.





# Tutorial

- The students are given several extracts from the newsbook:
  - The front cover
  - Nixon's two-page introduction
  - A page from Nixon's report, describing the boat's trips up and down the church steeple
- They then answer the following questions...







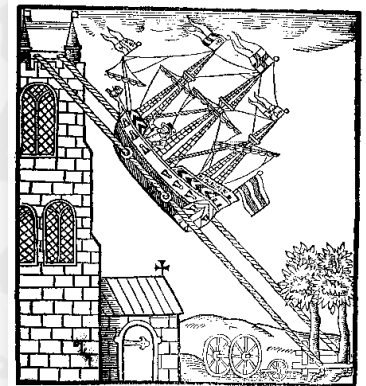
# Tutorial



1. Can you understand the material?
2. There were many fictional stories published in newsbooks around the time this piece appeared. What does Nixon do to persuade his readers the story is true? Are Nixon's claims convincing?
3. Thinking about the subject matter and how it is written:
  - To what extent is the piece similar to modern journalism?
  - To what extent is the piece different from modern journalism?

With each question, give specific textual evidence.

A  
True Relation of the admirable Voyage and  
Travell of William Byss Gentleman : who with  
his owne handes without any other mans helpe, made a  
Pyrrace, in which he putt by *Spain, Land and Waters from Lamborne,*  
*in Bark Borne, to the Chinese Emper King in London. 1607.*



London printed by T.P. for Nathaniel Butcher, xccvii.



# Not there yet

- Most students take part. As a result, in essays far less narrative history – more analysis, students do own research
- But some students still reluctant to cite evidence, make sweeping statements
- Some arguments still vague, in some cases presentation requirements still not met
- Documents taken at face value in tutorials (eg Twain)
- What do students think about online interactivity?...



# Student feedback

Compared with internal, distance students struggle more with course:

- When course first began (2006-), complained hard-copy Readings difficult to read and essays couldn't be submitted online
- “More online interactivity would have been good.”
- Later, when online interaction not compulsory, “I don't use Stream often”, “Students did not post many comments on the forum.”
- “The exercises in the [hard copy] Study Guide – they were great.”





# Student feedback

When graded online tutorials introduced (2012-):

- Students liked tutorials “The tutorial exercises were very good”, “I especially enjoyed the tutorial assignments because of the instant feedback.”
- But want more “More interactive online options: video lectures, quizzes, etc.”, “add audio files from the first radio recordings and television news broadcasts.”



# Student feedback

- And not all enjoy online:
- “I found it very difficult only having an online component. Personally, I like to be able to flick through the manual and highlight important information.”
- “I don’t appreciate having to go through all my paper and ink to print it all.”
- “Online learning is much harder than classroom learning, no matter how accessible it is.”
- Not all students take part, or continue, so don’t get 10%



# Student feedback

- Quantitative data reflects this (low numbers, treat with caution):

## Online environment enhanced learning

- 2011: 62%
- 2012 (interactive tutorials introduced): 78%
- 2013: 72%

## Course promotes critical thinking

- 2011: 62%
- 2012 (interactive tutorials introduced): 80%
- 2013: 78%



# Conclusions

- Students find work challenging, often prefer narrative/summarising to critical thinking and own research
- Compulsory, graded online tutorials adopted to address concerns. Has improved standards and students appreciate the practice
- Not there yet. Students will be required to consider *all* articles in a Reading (a new tutorial will specifically look at this) and told to carefully check have answered all aspects of essay question
- Some students want *more* online resources
- Online no panacea – some students pine for the good old days!



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