

A Note to the Instructor

To be successful in teaching the mechanics of television production, the TV teacher, in addition to introducing the student to the conceptual theory and philosophy of creating television, must also familiarize the student with the tangible workings of actually producing and directing a television program. In teaching TV production, as is the case with most other technical education curricula, the reality has always been that hands-on learning is fundamental to comprehension. Copious, recurrent, and progressively more challenging hands-on real-world exercises reinforce learning. Hands-on classroom projects also facilitate comprehension, thus helping the new learner of television production methodologies to retain, apply, and ultimately synthesize the knowledge they've been introduced to in the presentation or lecture phase of the TV curriculum. Making television leads to learning television. Thus, in the case of the subject matter of television production, simply stated, the preeminent way to teach how to make "real" television is to have students produce "real" television. But, making "real" television isn't easy. Making "real" television is, in fact, extremely hard to do. Consequently, coming up with hands on exercises that mimic making real word television is also exceedingly hard. For starters, to make "real" television you need "real" scripts.

Sadly, sources of easy to produce TV scripts that could serve as the core element of a valuable learning resource for a hands-on unit of study in television production are nonexistent. This is not the case, for example, for the drama teacher who must also rely on scripts to teach.

The novice student stage director, student actor, and student stage hand under the tutelage of a Drama teacher gets hands on experience producing plays by performing professionally written play scripts that are, literally, a mouse click away. Only in the rarest of circumstances is the drama teacher to be expected to write those scripts. The drama teacher, instead, obtains the scripts the student needs merely by seeking out a commercial play publisher and ordering them. In the case of the television production teacher, however, even though the student television director, student talent, and student television crew member needs TV scripts in order to participate in classroom television production exercises, he/she has no television script outlet to go to. Unlike the drama teacher, the television production teacher does not have access to commercial play publishing resources such as Samuel French or Dramatist's Play Service. This creates an impossible situation for the TV production teacher to surmount because the drama teacher's truism, "If it ain't on the page it ain't on the stage", applies equally to the television production teacher. "If it ain't on the teleprompter it ain't on the program monitor," is, in reality, an apt TV paraphrase of that stage axiom. Consequently, in order to teach TV production effectively, using a real world scenario, the TV production teacher, like his or her drama colleague, needs to find a source of scripts for classroom use.

It's always possible, of course, that an ambitious TV production teacher, given enough time, desire, energy, and resources might write a single script for classroom use. But one script is hardly adequate as a classroom tool. TV production students need to learn in stages over the course of multiple real world drills. They need to crawl through the easy situations; to learn; to hone, and, finally; to master "the basic" skills before they can run. Real world classroom

exercises should grow slowly in complexity over time allowing the student's knowledge and abilities to grow in synchronization. Learning should be systematically choreographed through multiple practice sessions and not crammed into the head all in a single sitting. The simple fact, also, is that a single script produced over-and-over again would more than likely bore rather than inspire a classroom (or studio) full of students eager to learn. As a result, the TV production teacher who has decided to write his/her own script would need to write not a single script but, instead, many scripts. Practically speaking, the rigors and reality of teaching make that necessity unattainable. The certainty is that even the most dedicated and well intentioned TV production teacher would find it impossible to allot the time and energy needed to write a single script let alone the requisite multiple scripts needed for the undertaking of providing effective student learning through hands on practice. Add to the mix that script writing is a painstaking and stressful undertaking and the feasibility of one teacher being able to create a sufficient number of scripts for constructive classroom use is completely obliterated. For those that do try, more often than not, the best intentioned teacher turned script writer quickly becomes discouraged and bleary-eyed within days, if not hours, of the first attempt. The most dedicated of teachers quickly learns that he/she is unable to single-handedly produce the volume of scripts needed to present a worthwhile, ongoing, hands-on unit of scripted classroom exercises.

Furthermore, the possession of a sufficient number of practice scripts is only the proverbial "tip of the iceberg". Television is, after all, a visual medium. Practice scripts that are intended to be used as real world examples must also have associated with them a video

component. In any real world television exercise, and especially in the case of producing a television newscast which is, without doubt, one of the hardest productions to master (thus, making it an ideal choice as a practice exercise), it is essential that students are able to call up and transition between a bevy of videos. The TV production teacher looking to create his or her own series of classroom practice scripts must, therefore, also plan to shoot and edit sufficient amounts of video to accompany each of those scripts. Once again, the time constraints and demands of teaching make finding the time to do this successfully highly improbable.

This, then, is why this Workbook exists. It was created to address the problem of the TV production teacher not having a sufficient number of professionally written practice scripts and video clips for hands-on classroom use. It contains 12 ready-to-produce practice newscast scripts written, not only by a former over-the-air TV newscast producer, but also by a former TV production teacher. Each of the practice newscasts included within comes with a program script and a show rundown for each exercise, and all of the necessary B-roll video and packages needed to produce that particular script. They were written in a style and manner that faithfully and intently mimics real world newscasts. Why newscast scripts? Because newscast scripts, unlike the majority of other scripted television programs, offer a diverse and fast-paced set of real world learning challenges in a single compact package. Practice newscasts can also be made progressively more difficult with each script iteration.

The practice newscast scripts included in this workbook are purposely short in order to allow them to be performed multiple times in a single classroom period. Each newscast

exercise either introduces new elements, methods, and techniques or it reinforces the methods and techniques learned previously in an earlier exercise.

Over the course of producing the 12 practice newscasts the student is introduced to increasingly more difficult real world television production techniques that need to be mastered. As the saying goes, "Practice makes perfect". A dozen scripts, clearly, gives students lots of opportunities to practice their television production skills. As a consequence, as students' skills grow, so will their confidence. Accordingly, as their self-assurance develops it is more likely that the objectives of the lessons will be met, and possibly exceeded.

In addition to the included scripts and videos, this workbook also contains the following supplementary student handouts: How to Read a Rundown; Newscast Terminology; How to Write an Industry Standard 2-Column Audio/Visual Script, and; How to Create a Simple Newscast Package.

One of the many goals of this workbook is to encourage creativity through familiarity. As students grow to be more self-assured in their ability to produce a newscast they will also be more likely to become progressively more aggressive and assertive with shot selections and camera manipulations. The instructor should encourage students to put their own "mark" on each newscast. For instance, ambitious and/or advanced students, once they've mastered the basics, can definitely be coaxed into adding a green screen weather block to their newscast exercise complete with full screen graphics they've created for that purpose. Likewise, it wouldn't be too difficult for the instructor to persuade sports minded students to include a

sports block that they write and gather video for in one or more of their exercises once they've become more certain of their abilities. Any such student generated initiative should be encouraged, embraced, and nurtured.

Former Federal Communications Commission Chairman Newton Minow, in an address to the National Association of Broadcasters in 1961, said,

"[Television] possesses the most powerful voice in America. It has an inescapable duty to make that voice ring with intelligence and with leadership. In a few years, this exciting industry has grown from a novelty to an instrument of overwhelming impact on the American people. It should be making ready for the kind of leadership that newspapers and magazines assumed years ago, to make our people aware of their world."

Indisputably, a necessary and fundamental element of the "making ready" to which Mr. Minow alludes is "making ready" a pool of skilled artisans who are intimately familiar with the workings of television technology. These talented technicians will be expected to use their knowledge of television production methodologies to employ the mechanical tools of television necessary to produce impactful visual stories that people will want to watch.

Perhaps the greatest single moment in television history came when more than 600 million viewers around the world watched live on television as Astronaut Neil Armstrong took his first, "... one small step for man", on the Moon. Philo T. Farnsworth, the inventor of electronic television, said of that earth-shattering happening, "This has made it all worthwhile". The reason that more than one-half billion people were able to witness history in the making

was because there were hundreds of educated and skilled technicians behind the scenes who knew how to use television technology, and ultimately, because someone, sitting in front of a television switcher, knew which button to push.

The ultimate objective of this unit of study, therefore, is to familiarize the student through hands on real world exercises with the technical requirements and production methodologies necessary to produce impactful visual stories. Measuring the success of achieving that objective is accomplished through a progression of increasingly more difficult real world newscast exercises. In other words, the objective of this unit of study is to make sure that in the near future, when the public needs to see it, there is a team of capable technicians who know how to use the tools in their arsenal of television technologies, and that, at its most basic level, there is someone sitting at the television switcher who knows which button to push.