

Example

Documentary Filmmaking – Principles of Instruction

Instruction:

Documentary filmmaking, specifically content creation, requires knowledge of many subjects and topics within those subjects, but the general production can be taught using a specific set of skills. Thinking visually, interviewing and connecting with people, planning production, using video cameras, framing shots and capturing action, and finally editing footage for a finished product. By mastering these fundamental skills, students can concentrate their efforts on content, and focus on creating professional products. Many times, students are so frozen by the technical skills needed, and cannot progress beyond them. Completion of this supplemental material will allow for more classroom time to focus on content and for hands-on use of the equipment.

Instructional Goal

Upon completion of the modules, students will understand the ideas and practices needed be able to develop an idea for a documentary film, plan the production, shoot the material needed for the production, and edit the material into a final film. Students will start with simple assignments and work their way through more and more complex work, culminating in the ability to finish a short documentary film. Students will have to use analysis and hands-on practice and skill to complete assignments.

Enabling Objectives:

1. Students will be able to identify viable subjects for short documentary films.
2. Students will be able to create shot lists, interview questions, and camera schematics for documentary productions.
3. Students will be able to create storyboards showing scenes of the films they want to make.
4. Students will be able to identify and use Master Scene shot selection, the 180 Degree Rule, and the Rule of Thirds.
5. Students will be able to identify the following terminology:
 - a. White balance
 - b. Gain
 - c. Iris/F-stop
 - d. Depth of Field

6. Students will be able to organize footage in a non-linear editing system.
7. Students will be able to create a rough and final cut of a short documentary film.

Activation

- Students will be asked to identify short documentary, or video work, they've watched in the past and identify the elements in the video that drew their attention or interest. Can students identify the areas of the video that work or don't work?
- Students will watch a short documentary video and be asked to determine what production elements and methods were used in the video.
- Students will be asked to identify the production methods and technical information most important to the video creation process.
- Students will be asked to discuss video topics they find most appealing and why.

Demonstration

- The instructor will demonstrate the components of a short documentary video by breaking down, shot by shot, the short video watched previously in class. The video will be broken down in video editing software and shown in its raw form and layers. This will also involve demonstration in thinking visually by breaking down the previous film and the types of topics that lead to interesting video work.
- The instructor will demonstrate the technical aspects of a camera:
 - Exposure
 - Lens Choice
 - White Balance
 - Gain
 - Shutter
 - Audio controls
 - Tripod Controls
 - Framing Shots
 - Capturing Action
- The instructor will break down the art of interviewing by actively interviewing students in the classroom about various topics.
- The instructor will take the students on a professional video shoot, showing them the camera and audio setup, interview techniques, as well as the acceptable ways of directing subjects in a documentary setting.

- The instructor will demonstrate to students how to string clips together with narration and music to create a video narrative.

Application

- Students will work in groups to identify a potential topic for a short documentary film.
- Students will create a production plan and schedule, as well as interview questions and shooting plans, for completing the short documentary topic.
- Students will work in groups to shoot b-roll and interview footage for the short documentary of their choice.
- Students will work in groups to edit the footage into a 2-3 minute professional short documentary video.

Integration

- Students will reflection each stage of the documentary process, analyzing how their own interests and personalities can help direct the subject matter and final project.
- Students will reflect on both the ideological and technical decisions that had to be made during the process of creating their films. Students will be expected to identify which part of the process they identify most with and what they need to work on going forward.
- Students will compare their short film to professional work on both YouTube and Vimeo. It's important for them to realize that even though they're producing student work, once posted online for all to see, their work will be analyzed next to working professionals and other students.
- Students will be asked to reflect on what went as expected, and what changed during the production process. Did they make the film they intended? Did things go as expected or did they have to change stories or subjects part way through the film?
- Students will be asked to reflect on how these skills can be important or beneficial in other subject areas or classes outside of film and communication.