

Learn It, Watch It, Do It: Exploring Video Editing Skills Through Guided Media Critique

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Introduction/Need for Innovation or Idea

Entertainment media has become ingrained in human culture. Stromberg (2011) explained that “entertainment is by now so thoroughly woven into the fabric of our existence [that] ... the culture of entertainment is arguably the most influential ideological system on the planet” (p. 3). With the prevalence of entertainment media, further exploration is needed to understand how it can be used in the classroom with traditional lecturing and typical hands-on experiences to enhance learning. As noted by Cai and Abbott (2013), the use of videos, in conjunction with lectures and demonstrations, led to participants scoring higher on a test than a group without the video intervention. Based on this finding, using visual entertainment media in an experiential video design classroom may assist in exposing students to a unique way to see what professional work looks like. Most importantly, prior research has found that, although not as highly rated as written or visual communication, the ability to edit video footage was rated as moderately important by agricultural communication industry professionals, program graduates, and faculty (Leal et al., 2020). Notably, this study was conducted pre-pandemic and does not factor in the influx of video media creation and use post-pandemic (Einav, 2022; Lee et al., 2022). Thus, students in agricultural communication programs still need to be versed in video editing (Corder & Irlbeck, 2018; Leal et al., 2020), and as students need to continue learning relevant skills for the agriculture, food, and natural resource workforce (AAAE, 2023), educators need to implement innovative strategies to enhance the learning of video editing skills.

How it Works/Methodology/Program Phases/Steps

During the Fall 2025 semester in the video design course at The Ohio State University, students were tasked with developing a story, collecting b-roll, and editing footage into a cohesive video. While students traditionally learned the content from lectures and step-by-step tutorials, the purpose of this innovative idea was to give the students the opportunity to see a completed long-form docuseries video and critique what it did well, what was missing, and what could be improved. To implement this idea, this section of the course was divided into phases.

Phase one continued with traditional lectures on storytelling, video editing techniques (including lighting, color, etc.), and conducting interviews. Following the lectures, for the innovative aspect of phase two, we set aside an entire day, in class, to watch an episode of *The Secrets of the Zoo*. While students watched the episode, they were asked to fill out a critique guide, aligned with the lectures, to help them focus on components that would help them with their own videos. Throughout the episode, the instructor paused the video and had students reflect with the peers near them on what they were noticing, and then had a few students share some key components that were either good, bad, or needed improvement. After the episode, a similar process was conducted, but a longer reflection was done as an entire class to fill in any gaps some students may have missed in their critique guide. Students were then asked to watch a different episode of *The Secrets of the Zoo* at home and complete another critique guide. Phase three used the traditional tutorials from previous semesters of the course. To connect the content, the students’ video project was a feature on part of the Columbus Zoo.

Results to date/Implications

Anecdotally, feedback on the inclusion of watching the docuseries episode and filling out a critique guide was overwhelmingly positive. Many students mentioned how the

docuseries was interesting to watch and helped them visualize the steps required to collect b-roll, interview, and additional footage to create their own video. For example, one student discussed how “The focus on animals also provided inspiration for our own work, such as filming livestock or other subjects in a way that connects with an audience.” Students also mentioned that they simply found the assignment fun, which can be difficult in a more hands-on practical course that some students may find difficult to learn. Many other students also discussed how much they learned from watching the docuseries episode. While short advertisements were shown during the lectures as examples, one student mentioned how showing those short clips helped a little, “but this assignment forced me to find what we learned and shows me how to do it properly.”

Even though students were primed for what to be looking for, it should also be noted that several students provided feedback on how the docuseries turned the lectures into something more tangible and easier to understand. For instance, a student wrote that “Watching a docuseries episode helped me see how storytelling and video editing work together to create an engaging and emotionally resonant experience. It showed me how pacing, music, and visuals can be strategically combined to guide the viewer through a narrative, even when there are multiple storylines happening at once. I noticed how quick cuts and b-roll were used to keep the energy up, while interview segments provided depth and clarity for all techniques I can use in future assignments or professional projects. It also highlighted the importance of clean audio, proper lighting, and thoughtful framing in making content feel polished and professional. These are all elements I now feel more confident looking out for and applying in my own video work.”

While almost the entire class found watching the docuseries episode and the assignment to be enjoyable, some students expressed that they would have liked some other options of videos and/or shorter examples. The docuseries watched in class and at home for the assignment were approximately 45 minutes each. One student also expressed how they would have liked to see a “bad” example. Even though students were able to find areas where the docuseries had places to improve, this was a professional episode edited by National Geographic and could have skewed the perception of how easy or hard it is to edit video footage.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

As expressed by some of the students, we plan to incorporate some different docuseries into this assignment so they have options if they do not want to watch *The Secrets of the Zoo*. The purpose of this innovative idea was to provide an interesting and engaging way to discuss video editing, and we want to make sure students find it useful. Additionally, finding some episodes that are shorter and/or do a poor job with editing skills they were learning could help students understand what we do not want to see from the videos submitted for a grade. We strongly recommend that reflection is done during and after the episode to ensure students understand the purpose of the assignment and there is no confusion. We feel that this assignment was so successful both on its own and in the videos that were submitted later in the semester because of this in- and on-action reflection (Schön, 1983).

Costs/Resources Needed

Depending on the docuseries used, there are no direct costs to this innovative idea. Episodes of *The Secrets of the Zoo* are available for free on YouTube. Other docuseries may require a paid subscription service. However, indirect costs such as in-class time to watch an entire episode, with reflection time, as well as preparing a critique guide, and traditional lectures before the assignment, are a necessity for effectiveness.

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