

# LET'S MAKE A FILM!

## CREATIVE EXPRESSION & CONTEXTUAL LEARNING IN THE COMMON CORE

Journalism as a concept is easy to understand – people report and distribute the news, and the public consumes it by reading, watching or listening. Every day, through a variety of public channels, the public can discover what is newsworthy and learn about news events through journalism.

However, if we look deeper at the practice of journalism, we discover there is more to the profession than simply reporting the news. In the Hong Kong University Common Core course, CCHU9076 The Journalist: Comics, Movies, Fiction & Fact, we want to immerse students in the realities of being a journalist while offering them the opportunity for creative expression as well as technical and 'soft' skill-building.

Jennifer S. Deayton, Lecturer  
Tina Villareal, Teaching Assistant  
Journalism & Media Studies Centre  
Hong Kong University



## Introduction

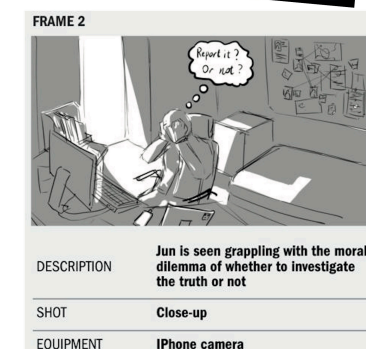
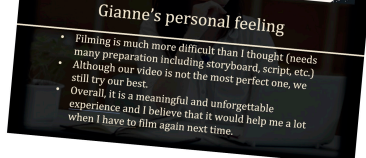
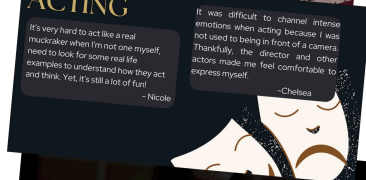
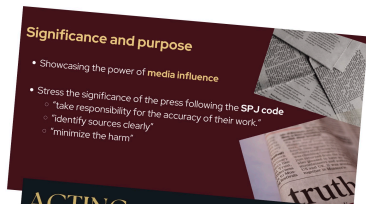
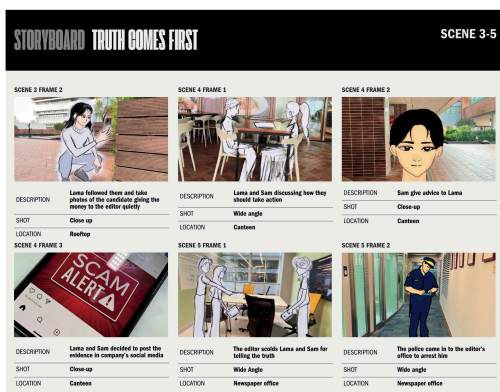
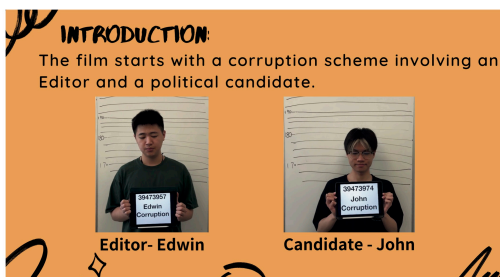
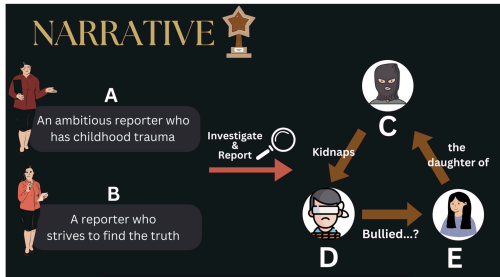
For the final project in CCHU9076, we utilize a group activity with short filmmaking as the medium for assessment. We set the theme for the films as **'ethical challenges in journalism'** so that students can synthesize and share all that they learn – about the profession of journalism, its codes of conduct, and the portrayal of journalists in popular culture – in their own original dramatizations.

At the end of the course, students introduce and screen their films in group presentations. They talk about what inspired their stories, share script pages and storyboards, and reflect on what they've learned, and how they view the filmmaking experience as a whole.

## Challenges & Solutions

To achieve our learning outcomes, we needed our teaching and learning activities to address three key areas – contextual learning, basic filmmaking proficiency, and interpersonal/group dynamics. We approached the project with an understanding that students may have little to no filmmaking experience, even if they are comfortable with the medium of video. Therefore, we placed greater emphasis on a multi-step, learning process as opposed to the final outcome.

- **CONTEXTUAL LEARNING** (an understanding of the journalism profession and its codes of conduct to inform their film narratives) was acquired during lectures and reinforced in tutorial exercises and through a midterm assessment.
- **BASIC FILMMAKING PROFICIENCY** was achieved through skills-based micro-courses and multiple levels of consultation and feedback – at pitching, scriptwriting, storyboarding and film editing (rough cut) stages.
- **GROUP DYNAMICS** proved to be quite a challenge. Tutorial groups varied in size, and, not surprisingly, smaller groups generally worked better than larger ones. We used tutorial time for confirming everyone's roles in their productions, reviewing scripts and rough cuts, and conducting progress checks.



## Student Feedback

Student reflections, presented before each film screening, helped us to gauge the effectiveness of our teaching and learning activities. These reflections clearly showed that students had undertaken a close examination of the personal and ethical challenges of being a journalist, which was a key Learning Outcome.

While there were difficulties with group filmmaking, most students rose to the challenge, and we observed a real sense of accomplishment about their films. This was very gratifying as we think many students don't often get opportunities to be creative. We were also very pleased, and actually a little surprised, to hear how much students enjoyed acting!

## Improvements

After viewing the final films and reflecting on assessment outcomes and student feedback, we identified several areas for improvement, namely: 1. Schedule more in-class time for groups to work on their films; 2. Add an in-class script table-read to the schedule, with immediate tutor feedback to help actors; 3. Run a micro-session on audio recording, to improve the overall audio quality of films; 4. Increase the 'accountability' steps in the process to ensure that workloads are distributed fairly; and 5. Schedule a final practice presentation session for each group.

