

RTNDF's Teacher-to-Teacher Guide

What Is Your Product?

Janet continues:

Once you've identified your audience, your next step is to design a workable product. What will be the focus of your program – news, features, news magazine, local, national? Composing a *focus statement* will help guide future decisions. Some schools subscribe to the Associated Press or other news services and use those downloads to compose their own national newscast. The other end of the spectrum is to do strictly local-origination programming.

The focus statement for my own program is "For locals, by locals, about locals." This helps with our decisionmaking. Stories about the Super Bowl or the situation in Iraq *must* have a local connection. If a focus statement is something like "Only for the teens," this, too, would help with decisionmaking.

What type and length of program will you be able to successfully produce at the beginning? What programming schedule will you follow? Considerations in answering these questions include: the length of your class period and frequency of meeting, the number of students, the experience of the students and your equipment.

A class that meets 90 minutes daily and has 22 students can be expected to produce longer shows and produce shows more frequently than a class that meets 45 minutes daily and has only 7 students. A class that has no experience because it's new needs to be very practical about what it can produce and produce well. Start simple and give room to grow. To me, it's more important to do basic programs very well than to attempt more challenging formats and schedules and show sloppy work.

Daily Shows

The school schedule is crucial as you consider the kinds of shows you will produce, and the frequency of those shows. For example, a daily show requires that you have daily access to your broadcast kids. They have to be with you either during, before or after school each day to crank out a daily newscast. It can be a real grind. If you are going to do a live show, then the student staff must be there at the appointed time each day. If you are on tape, they must work ahead of show time each day. Either way, it's a relentless programming schedule for any teacher to manage.

One disadvantage of daily programming is that you have very little time to actually teach – daily shows can become labs where you are in constant production mode, and often have less time to introduce new concepts. You can do it, but it happens on the fly. Some say it's energizing, others say it's draining.

I must say, however, that the sense of accomplishment when your kids produce successful daily shows is fantastic. "Feeding the beast" every school day allows your kids to keep their fingers on the pulse of the school, and to be timely with their material—something that's very difficult with weekly and monthly broadcasts. A daily broadcast quickly becomes part of the fabric of your school, and is a great tool for internal communication.

Block schedules lend themselves to weekly or monthly programming. You can do daily shows on a block schedule, but you probably will need more than one TV class to make it work. We produced the daily morning announcements for nine years. I had two or three broadcasting classes during that time, so it was possible to divide the workload among them.

As for program format, the beginning teacher has several choices:

- Some schools choose to do a program that is all on tape and comprises stories and anchor segments all taped at different times and then edited together. This requires much planning, but is probably less stressful all than other formats. The opportunity to revise or redo exists with every part of the show. A beginning teacher would probably be more comfortable with this approach.
- Another option is live-to-tape. This means the show is taped but is done as though it were live. For example, a news show that simulates the 6 o'clock local news would have news packages on tape ready before the show is shot in the studio. There would be anchors reading a prepared script from teleprompters, a control room crew with a director executing the shots called for on the script, a character generator operator adding graphics – a whole team following a prepared script without stopping for the whole shoot. This involves all the positions of a normal studio shoot and gives students a perspective about the various duties as well as the concentration and synchronization required.
- A third format is live. Obviously, this is high-stress, but challenges the crew to be skilled and prepared. It demands that they correct mistakes and continue. This could be with a teleprompter or more informally with notes such as studio interviews or informal hosting. Some schools actually are able to go live to their cable provider from either their studio or a community location for special events. This is the ultimate challenge and provides the ultimate high for those students. It's also the biggest risk for the teacher and requires that students establish themselves as competent and trustworthy as they work up to this. Clearly, this is not recommended for

Weekly Shows

Weekly shows are probably the most “manageable” shows to produce. That production cycle allows you some breathing room as a teacher, and also some time to teach.

Shows produced weekly have built-in advantages as well. Students have seven days between broadcasts. They can still highlight school activities and do great previews of school events that are just around the corner (e.g., Homecoming or Open House or the Big Game). Weekly shows can include news or features packages that might be too difficult to produce for a daily program. These shows also become an integral part of the school. Students and teachers look forward to the weekly show and become very loyal viewers. It's almost “appointment television” for the school population. The other advantage of the weekly program is that it works no matter what kind of schedule your school employs.

Monthly Shows

For those who want to do more in-depth, journalistic projects, nothing beats the **monthly newsmagazine format**. It gives teachers more time to present lessons and new material, and gives student journalists unique opportunities to investigate complex issues and topics. It also can provide a challenge for teachers who must constantly keep students on-task, because the production of the monthly show does not necessarily require that students spend each minute in class working on their stories. The monthly brings with it the pressure to produce something polished. Expectations are high for a monthly show. The (usually) unspoken agreement you have with your audience is, “If you only do one show a month, it had better be good.”

The monthly show is a good option for schools with block schedules, and schools where administrators support students digging into sometimes controversial topics. Each segment becomes a mini-research project, and forces students to employ a wide variety of skills and approaches to complete their work.

The way your school schedule is structured will have a big impact on your

beginning teachers or students!

Dave reflects a similar perspective, but adds: the schedule drives the programming.

Schools have all sorts of class schedules these days. When I started the broadcast program at our school, we had six 55-minute classes per day. No block schedule, just the same six classes Monday through Friday. Then we went to an eight-block schedule, with four 90-minute classes every other day, and all eight classes for 45 minutes on Friday. Now we have a different block schedule, but the time in class is about the same each week as it was in the original eight-block.

programming decisions. So will the schedule of the individual teacher. If the broadcast class is one of four or five preps, it can be very difficult for a teacher to oversee *daily* shows. Large classes also have a negative impact on a production schedule, especially if schools do not have enough equipment to keep the students busy.

Scheduling is a complicated issue. In a later segment we will be presenting sample curricula, and will provide a variety of curricula reflecting different scheduling blocks.

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