

ELECTRONIC NEWS GATHERING

ENG reporting is the corner stone of any news show. Recording and reporting events and activities as they happen is what news is all about. The essence of electronic news gathering is “getting the story” and presenting this information to the viewer. Vital to the success of the report, the reporter and videographer need to work together to capture the drama, actions, emotions, and information and convey them to the viewer in an interesting and informative manner.

The following is a set of guidelines to ensure that a quality ENG is produced that enhances the effectiveness of the TSN production.

Vocabulary

ENG. Electronic news gathering. Refers to the process of reporting events and activities that occur outside of the television studio.

lead-in. The first few sentences of script that establish the setting and events of a news story. Introduces the ENG topic to the viewer.

Rule of Threes. During postproduction, the edited clips are grouped by audio and video into segments of three sentences per style or format.

sound bite. A videotaped segment in which the audio and video portions of the tape must remain in sync. Sound bites are usually three to five seconds in length.

stand-up. Refers to an on-camera shot of a reporter as he or she presents information about the topic.

tag. A standard format for the final sentence of script ending an ENG report. Identifies the reporter (by name) and station affiliation.

To avoid potential problems and catastrophes at the scene, a few minutes of consideration and preparation are needed. Some suggestions include the following:

- Always check the camcorder and recording equipment before leaving the studio for taping.
- Turn on the camcorder and record a few seconds of footage. A simple playback will enable you to see whether it is working properly.
- Microphones are essential for ENG reporting. You might need several types: handheld for interviews, lavalier for reporter script, and even a shotgun for obtaining sound bites of distant activities.
- Connect the microphone(s) and mic cords as well. A simple sound check with the camcorder or audio system will ensure they are working.
- Bring several power sources. Besides a few extra (charged) batteries, it is wise to bring an AC power supply and battery charger.
- Don't forget the essentials: videotapes, tripod, and headphones.
- What about lighting? If you think you might need it, bring it.
- A clipboard, notepad, and pen or pencil should be packed as well. Reporter notes and script as well as information, names (spelled correctly), and titles need to be written down for postproduction.

An ENG equipment checklist can be a viable tool to use for ensuring that all the necessary equipment is carefully packed and ready for transport. Reporters and videographers can determine what equipment they will need and then check it off as it is checked and packed. This checklist can also be used when returning to the studio to double-check that all of the equipment has been brought back and is in good work-

Getting the Story

In the school setting, ENG news events are generated by events and activities in which students, teachers, parents, and school athletes or artists are involved. Information about these events can be obtained by reading the school newspaper, talking to club and event sponsors, by listening to school announcements on the intercom or school news broadcast, or by creatively examining national and world events and how they relate to the student population.

Once an ENG topic has been defined, some preliminary research can be done. It is now time to find out the who, what, where, when, how, and why of the event. Researching the topic can take several forms. Telephone calls can be made to event organizers to get essential background information, as well as the times, dates, and locations of events. Face-to-face informal meetings with event organizers can also be arranged if organizers are located at the school or studio facility. Organizers can provide the ENG team with event background information (prior event history, attendance, purpose, schedule) as well as information about the event they would like to relay to the viewers (location, ticket prices, results).

Example

Here's an example of how a typical ENG crew would cover an assignment: A reporter and videographer have been assigned to report on the International Dinner and Dance sponsored by the school's foreign language department. Upon arriving, the reporter should complete the following tasks:

1. Locate a foreign language teacher or organizer connected with the event. Ask about event details: number of students involved, what activities are included, how the profits from the event will be used, and expected outcomes from the event.
2. Talk with several students involved in the project. Find out if they would be willing to talk on camera about the activity. Be sure to have an idea (a list would be great!) about the questions you will ask them. Write down their names (first, last) and how they are spelled, as well as any other information you may want to use in postproduction (e.g., foreign language class in which they are enrolled, grade level).
3. Begin to prepare your script. This should include a lead-in, possibly some narration to use with video images, and some questions you may wish to ask your guests on camera.

While the reporter is involved in his or her preliminary activities, the videographer should be completing the following ENG tasks:

1. Immediately set up and check the camcorder. Load the videotape, set up the tripod, and check the microphones.
2. Start videotaping some of the activities that are going on at the time: students and parents arriving for the dinner and dance, banners and hall decorations, food preparations, social interactions among guests (talking, dancing, laughing).
3. Spend some time with the reporter discussing camera shots and subject matter for the report. Verify shots and locations, as well as times, for the reporter stand-ups and interviews.

Recording the Story

A good videographer will develop an eye for shots and angles that effectively capture the actions and emotions of an event. While the reporter is concerned with "telling" the story, the videographer must be concerned with recording the story in images and sound. This does not mean that every minute of the event, and hours and hours of videotape, must be recorded. Rather, the videographer should record several minutes of each activity as it occurs. A variety of camera shots and angles can be used so the most effective angle can be edited into the report during postproduction. Note that often the reactions and comments of people watching the activity are more interesting than the activity itself. Camera angles and shots should reflect the atmosphere and mood of the event. Facial expressions and emotions of the people involved can be effectively recorded on tape and conveyed to your viewers. Close-ups and camera angles that bring the viewer into the action (over-the-shoulder shots, point-of-view angles) create interest in your report for the audience. They want to, and should, feel as if "they are there." Sounds of the event are also an important element of every story and can be used effectively during postproduction to re-create the mood of the event. If the videographer consistently records only brief

seconds of tape at a time, starting and stopping the camcorder after a few seconds, the soundtrack will be choppy and practically unusable for postproduction.

“Sound bites,” segments of the recorded tape in which both the audio and video will be used intact (as is) during postproduction, can be used to convey the sights and sounds of the event to your audience. The audience members “see” and “hear” the event as if they were there in person. In postproduction, sound bites can be used to separate the various components of the ENG report. For example, maybe your report begins with the reporter doing a stand-up. Then you can edit a short, two- to three-second sound bite from your clips, then move on to an interview or another reporter narration. Often an effective ENG report will begin with a good sound bite, which captures the viewer’s attention and interest.

Comments from participants and guests are also an important aspect of recording the story. The videographer will be called on quite frequently to record these comments during the course of the activity.

Some guests will be interviewed by the reporter, and both the reporter and guest are seen on camera. One or more questions will be asked by the reporter and answered by the guest. During postproduction, editors can choose to select the whole interview or maybe just a part of it for use in the ENG report.

Some important considerations for recording comments and interviews from the guests include the following:

- Roll tape! Start recording even as the reporter and guests are getting set for the interview or comments on camera. Doing so eliminates color bars and control track problems on the tape, as well as providing adequate editing points for postproduction activities. It also eliminates the common novice mistake of “cutting off” the first few words at the beginning of the interview or comments. Continue to roll tape throughout the interview, even if mistakes are made and the reporter has to start anew. Let the tape roll for at least 15 to 20 seconds after the completion of the interview to eliminate the possibility of lost footage because of camcorder “roll back” or instant review of the interview at the scene.
- Always wear headphones connected to the camcorder when recording interviews, comments, or reporter stand-ups and narration. This enables the videographer to hear the sound volume and quality while taping occurs and during playback
- Choose a good location for your interviews and comments. The background for the interview can enhance, or in other cases distract, from the interview itself. Beware of background lighting. Remember, the subject of the camera shot should be the brightest part of the picture. Avoid shooting into windows or sunlit objects, thereby making your subjects appear dark and shadowed
- Record reporter’s stand-ups and narrations “at the scene” using the same microphone(s) used for the rest of the ENG report. Background noise will convey realism to the report that studio and postproduction narrations do not have.

Telling the Story

It is the reporter’s task to tell the story that surrounds each event. The lead-ins and narratives should be informative, accurate, and brief. Present the information in a professional and unbiased manner. Do not editorialize! The purpose of the report is to present all the information the viewer needs to make his or her own judgments. Remember, every issue has two sides. Opinions do not belong in ENG reporting—well, at least not the reporter’s opinions. If your subject is controversial or has both a pro and a con, use interviews and “talking heads” of guests to convey those opinions, not the reporter’s stand-ups or narrations.

Reporter Lead-Ins

The reporter’s lead-in is essential for informing the viewing audience about the topic. Lead-ins should be limited to two or three sentences that enable the viewer to quickly grasp the content of the report.

Incorrect: “As you can see, everyone here is having a good time. We have students and teachers dancing and eating.”
(*The reporter gives no information about the event.*)

Correct: “The foreign language teachers and students are enjoying their Third Annual International Dinner and Dance. Local ethnic restaurants have donated their time and food to create an international menu fit for any five-star hotel.

Funds from this event will be used to pay for field trips and guest speakers for foreign language classes this school year.”

(The reporter gives good information, including the number of years the event has taken place and details about who participated in it and how the proceeds will be used.)

Not all ENG reports begin with a shot of the reporter, standing with mic in hand doing a lead-in. Although this is a common practice, there are several creative ways to begin your ENG report:

- Use a sound bite to begin your report. In this case, maybe a two- to three-second shot of someone serving a delicious plate of food and offering a “Bon Appetite” to a guest seated at a table.
- Start your ENG report with a POV (point of view) shot, such as a guest walking into a ball- room filled with music, dancing, and dining.
- Begin the report with a sequence of shots and use the reporter’s lead-in as a narration.

Interviews and Comments

One of the best ways to get and convey information is from the actual people involved in the event. Viewers, especially in a school setting, also like to see and hear about events from the people involved because they know them. It creates more interest in your report and gives credible information as well.

During an interview, the reporter may ask several questions of the guest. The questions should be open-ended (that is, questions that cannot be answered in just one or two words). Limit yourself to two or three questions.

Incorrect: “Did you help with the decorations?” (*Answer: Yes*)

Correct: “What were some of the items you and other students had to prepare for the Dinner and Dance?”

Be sure to go over the questions with your guests before recording them on camera. This solves two problems. One, it eliminates taking the time to record people on camera who have little or nothing to say. Two, it also eliminates the problem of the guest suddenly being “stumped” and not having an answer to one of the questions. Although the reporter may ask several questions of each guest, during the editing phase the interview will probably be narrowed down to one question.

Make sure you write down (and correctly spell!) everyone’s name and title for later use in postproduction. It is very common to superimpose graphics over the images of guests as they are speaking on camera.

Post Production Tips

- Complexity is essential for maintaining viewer interest and attention. Edit camera angles and shots that portray the drama associated with the event. Avoid long camera pans and long, wide-angle shots that leave out detail. A series of two- to three-second shots is much more effective and informative.

- Use graphics superimposed over video to identify the reporter, students, teachers, or other guests that appear on camera. A simple graphic that identifies the individual’s name and title is effective. Graphics do not need to be left on the screen for the entire time the person is talking. They should be on long enough to read completely, say, three to five seconds. Examples:

Ryan Charles NLPK Reporter Becky

Beal Teacher

- Use as much of the live sound as possible for background narration and sound bites. Inserting a “dubbed” track from a favorite CD usually changes the character and mood of the video.
- Critically watch the completed video in its entirety. Don’t be afraid to make changes to sections of the video that do not meet your expectations.
- ENG reports are not documentaries, and their length should be approximately 120 seconds in total time. Avoiding longer segments and running times will help to keep your viewer interested.

ENG Project Outline

This video is based on the narration of the creator. It is NOT just a collection of B Roll and Interviews. The majority of the video will have voice overs with the B Roll and Interviews supporting the Narration. Be prepared to write a script for your narration. This will be handed in before the video is shot.

Topic/Activity: _____

Reporter: _____

Videographer: _____

List of Equipment Used

Camera

Tripod

Microphone/Boom

Headphones

Lead-in Statement (A two- to three-sentence describing the topic, event, or problem involved in the report.)

(This statement will determine the “slant” you take on your topic. It should have a bit of your opinion in it and give the viewer a bit of a heads up about what they are about to see.)

List of Open Ended Questions (See reverse for examples)

1.

2.

3.

People Being interviewed (Identify the “talking heads”)

1.

2.

3.

B Roll (Footage)

ENG EQUIPMENT CHECKLIST

Videographer _____

Reporter _____

Event/Location _____

Date _____

| Item | Needed? | Checked Out | Returned |
|----------------------|---------|-------------|----------|
| Camcorder | | | |
| Batteries | | | |
| AC Power/Charge | | | |
| Videotapes | | | |
| Tripod | | | |
| Microphone—handheld | | | |
| Microphone—lavaliere | | | |
| Microphone—shotgun | | | |
| Microphone—other | | | |
| Headphones | | | |
| Lighting | | | |
| Clipboard/Paper/Pen | | | |
| Other | | | |

Fig. 5.3. An ENG equipment checklist.