

BE TU110 2012/2 Group Project Assignment

The group project is to make a short documentary movie. Although the purpose of a documentary is to educate the audience, the secret to making a great documentary is to find a story that weaves the facts together to make a movie that is both interesting and informative. The intended audience for this project is the non-Thai, English speaking population of the world, so assume your audience is not familiar with Thailand or Thai culture.

1. The class must form itself into seven groups of about equal numbers of people with no more than one exchange student per group. (There are 86 students enrolled in the class.) Each group should select an executive producer (EP).
2. Topics: The theme for this semester is Thai Cuisine. Each group must select a different type of food that is representative of Thailand and Thai culture. Your documentary should, at a minimum, explain what the food is, how it is made, how it originated, and most importantly, how it is important to Thai people and representative of Thai culture.
3. As a class, turn in by email the Group Topics and Members List: one (1) Microsoft Word file that lists the group topics selected, the members of each group (please include I.D. numbers, full names, and nicknames), and the EP for each group The list is due on **January 28**.
4. Read this assignment in its entirety. Watch movies made by previous TU110 classes and read my reviews of them. Ask questions about anything you do not understand.
5. Make a written plan for your project. The plan should have a timetable for each element of the project and briefly describe what each member is going to do to support the project. Print the plan and hand it in on **February 4**.
6. As a group, research your topic thoroughly, keeping track of your sources as you go. This step is extremely important. Although the completed project will be in the form of a movie, the majority of your effort should go into finding interesting content for the movie. Use a wide variety of reputable sources. As you are researching, think of creative ways to present the information in the documentary. Meet as a group and brainstorm ways to make your movie original and interesting. Continue researching and brainstorming until the screenplay is complete.
7. Make a short practice movie which introduces your group members. Add subtitles to the movie. Name the movie file appropriately, upload the movie to YouTube, and email the link to me. The group-introduction movie is due on **February 18**.
8. Read this assignment again. Ask questions. Consider whether you will need special permission to film in certain locations, and if so, consult the appropriate authorities.

9. Write the screenplay for your movie. A screenplay is written plan for the movie including settings, action, and dialog. As in the essay assignment, the screenplay must be completely original; do not copy from your sources. The screenplay must be double-spaced and in Times New Roman, 12 point font. Include footnotes and citations for factual information. Print the plan and hand it in on **March 11**. (The purpose of turning the screenplay in is to ensure that your group completes this step in a timely fashion. Do not assume that I will correct problems in the screenplay. If you have questions, please ask.)
10. Film the movie. Be creative. Rehearse. Film multiple takes to get it right. Shoot more than enough video so that your editors have enough material to work with. Keep in mind that you need to finish filming early enough to allow sufficient time to edit the movie, write the transcript, and add subtitles.
11. Edit the movie. The editor is a storyteller. The movie should flow from scene to scene following a common thread. Every moment of the movie should be educational, interesting, or otherwise contribute to the effectiveness of the movie. Cut out any bits that do not make the movie more interesting or informative, especially needless parts of interviews. Pay careful attention to the sound. Go easy on the transitions and special effects.
12. Write the transcript of the movie. The transcript is a word-for-word copy of the dialog in the movie. (The screenplay was the plan for what would be said, the transcript has what was actually said in the final version of the movie.) The transcript must have footnotes and citations just like the essay assignment. The transcript must also include all of the locations where filming took place, the name of whoever is speaking, and the names of any people interviewed (except for *vox-populi*). Attach a cover sheet to the transcript with: a) the project's topic and title, b) total duration, substance, and face-time of the movie, c) make and model of audio and video equipment used, d) programs used for editing and subtitles, and a list of all members and a short description of each member's contribution to the project.
13. Add subtitles to the entire movie. Be forewarned, this is a tedious and time-consuming job.
14. Convert your movie file into a high-quality format which will play on the class computer. Test the file on a number of different computers to make sure it is playable and looks the way you want it to look. Name the file appropriately, such as "BE-*topic*.mp4", and turn it in on an appropriately labeled CD or DVD.

Project Parameters

- The substance of your movie must be 12-15 minutes in duration. Opening credits, closing credits, “music video” segments, and outtakes do not count as substance of the movie.
- Except for interviews, all of the dialog in the movie must be spoken by group members. At least half of the movie should be “face time” with a group member on-screen.
- Like the essay assignment, the tone of the movie should be mature and dignified.
- If you have funny outtakes, you can put them at the end of the movie, but the entire movie from start to finish must be no longer than 20 minutes.
- Unlike the essay assignment, the movie should be unbiased. The goal is to educate the viewer, not persuade the viewer to agree with your point of view.
- Do not fawn over your subject. Let the facts speak for themselves.
- Not all group members need to appear on camera. It is acceptable to have the best English speaker(s) in the group represent the group on-screen; there are plenty of ways for the other members of the group to contribute.
- Dramatizations in which students pretend to be people other than themselves are strictly forbidden.
- Using video clips from movies, YouTube, or other outside sources is strictly forbidden.
- It is acceptable for the movie to have an element of humor, but it should not be silly. If you don’t know the difference, don’t try to be funny.
- The movie must be in English. Some small bits in Thai may be acceptable, but almost all of the movie must be in English.
- All narration in the movie must be done by group members. Do not use non-group members or computers for narration.
- Short interviews may be used, but only if they add great value to the movie.
- The entire movie should be original material. Do not copy from your sources. Any copying will significantly impact the group’s score.
- Students often like to include popular music in their movies. I don’t have a problem with this, but be forewarned that YouTube will reject your movie if it recognizes copyrighted music in the soundtrack.
- You are encouraged to get helpful advice from wherever you can find it, but you must make the movie entirely by yourselves.

TIPS

- Get started right away. You will learn how to make a movie while doing this project. If you start early, you will have time to correct your mistakes with the skills that you pick up on the way. If you do the project at the last minute, you will not be able to reap the benefits of those hard-earned skills.
- Get your filmmaking equipment (video camera, tripod, sound recorder, editing software) right away and learn how to use it. A good camera makes a big difference.
- Do the research. It is impossible to make an informative, interesting movie about a subject with which you only have superficial knowledge. A lot of effort should go into researching the topic before starting the screenplay.
- Find the story that is going to tie everything together. What is the theme (or thesis statement) of the documentary? Don't start writing until you know.
- It is impossible to make a good movie without a good screenplay. A great deal of effort should go into writing a detailed screenplay, it is your plan and vision for the movie. Find a good balance between informative material and an engaging presentation; the viewers will not learn anything if they are bored.
- Know your audience. Remember that you are to assume your audience is not familiar with Thai culture. As you write the screenplay, ask yourself if you are assuming that your audience knows things that they actually do not know. For example, non-Thai's are not familiar with Bangkok, Thai history, Thai culture, Thai language, or Thai religion. If the movie mentions elements like these, they need to be properly introduced.
- Practice acting out the screenplay to see how long the movie will be before you start filming.
- Cinematography is an art, but the basics can be mastered easily with a little practice. Think about your shots early in the planning stage, use a tripod, and frame the subject matter in a way that is easy on the eyes (do not place heads in the center of the frame). Please see the "camera techniques" section of *The Grammar of TV and Film* (available in the Xtras page of the TU110 web site) for more information about cinematography.
- Good sound quality is a hallmark of the projects that get the best grades. Sound is one of the hardest things to get right. Practice with the equipment. Do not film in noisy environments unless you have equipment that can handle it. Do not dub the movie to make up for poor sound quality. Dubbing will make your movie look amateurish and silly.
- If you use background music, make sure it is still easy to hear the dialog. Make the background music fade out when dialog begins.
- Find students that completed this project in the past and ask for their advice.

Group Dynamics: Getting the job done despite the presence of many different personalities, ideas, opinions, skills, and effort levels is part of the assignment; you are expected to overcome these difficulties. However, after completion of the project group members will provide feedback on the participation of the individual members within their group; this may affect individual scores.

APRIL 8 is MOVIE DAY

The group projects are due promptly at the official beginning of class on Movie Day. At that time, your group must hand in the movie and a printed copy of the transcript with the cover sheet. Projects that are turned in late or delay our schedule will receive a lower grade than they would otherwise. Make sure the movie file is properly named with your topic and the cd/dvd is properly labeled.

We will be watching all of the movies in class on Movie Day. Your behavior on Movie Day may affect your score on the project -- be respectful (no food or talking). Each movie will be followed by a Q&A session with representatives of the group. Asking questions is a good way to show that you were paying attention and that you found the movie interesting.

After Movie Day, your group has one week to do three things to complete the project:

1. Convert the transcript to PDF format, name the file appropriately (BE-*topic*-transcript.pdf), and email it to me. (Do not make changes to the transcript after printing it. This file should look exactly like the transcript you handed in on movie day.)
2. Make your movie available on YouTube and email the URL to me.
3. All group members must complete the group project feedback survey at SurveyMonkey.com. (This also counts as a class participation activity.)

Projects will be graded on a scale of 0-100. Please be informed that good grades are harder to get with each semester that I assign this topic. You are expected to learn from the mistakes of your predecessors and to not repeat them. Grading will be based on the following criteria:

- Was the screenplay original and well-researched?
- Was the movie interesting and informative?
- Was the cinematography competent and utilize a variety of techniques?
- Could the dialog in the movie be heard and understood?
- Was the editing competent and did it avoid attracting attention to itself?
- Was the transcript accurate and complete?
- Were a wide variety of reputable sources cited in the transcript?
- Were the subtitles accurate and easy to read, without being an eyesore?
- Were the assignment instructions followed and deadlines met?
- Did the project reflect a good effort by all of the group members?
- Note: Exceptionally strong (or poor) individual efforts may be rewarded with scores better (or worse) than the rest of the group.