Syllabus - NYU Documentary Storytelling for Radio and Podcasts

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Through this course students will learn to produce documentary-style audio stories, as heard on Serial, This American Life, 99% Invisible, Planet Money, The Heart, Love and Radio, and Invisibilia. You will be encouraged to develop your own personal voice and style, while also learning practical skills necessary for finding work in both radio and podcasting.

After a quick introduction to audio equipment, you'll create two broadcast-worthy audio features as if you were working for an actual show. You'll learn to identify what makes for good radio story subjects and sources, and how to pitch your idea to an outlet. You'll produce your stories through the edit process used by most shows, and fine-tune your audio sensibilities by workshopping each others’ stories. We'll cover how to best write for the ear, and you'll receive coaching to record narration in the NYU studio. There will also be an introduction to using music and sound design.

Students will be broken up into Group 1 and Group 2 to allow for more in-depth editing during the two large assignments.

Every day of class is crucial to this course, any absences must approved in advance. Plagiarism and dishonest or unethical reporting will not be tolerated.

All grades are final.

NECESSARY MATERIALS:

Laptop to edit audio on and bring to class

Reaper audio editing software- download the free unlimited trial on your personal laptop

Students will need to provide their own AA batteries and SD card for the recorders. Headphones will be needed for every class, so if they don’t want to have to check out an entire kit each class they'll need to bring their own.

Resources:
Transom on the Zoom H4N
NYU on the Zoom H4N (some of these settings are incorrect for our purposes, but it's a good start)
ASSIGNMENTS

- Vox pops with intro and outro
  "This will serve as an exercise to familiarize you with using your equipment and editing software, and a crash course in audio interviewing. Vox pops will include an intro and outro voiced by the student, and run exactly 90 seconds in length."

- Profile feature
  "These will be audio features that profile an individual of your choice. These features can also include other people who offer us further insight into your source. The lens you focus on your source’s life can be as broad or as narrow as you’d like. Profiles will run five minutes max."

- Reported feature
  "This is the assignment where you get a chance to make whatever kind of audio story you would like to hear. It can be another profile piece, a non-narrated documentary, a storytelling-rich take on current events, a retelling of a forgotten history, a personal story, or an investigation into what your neighbor really does all day- the only constraint is that you will need to pitch your story with a particular outlet in mind. Stories will run seven minutes max."

COURSE SCHEDULE

Reaper Workshops (weekend before Class 1)
How to use Reaper audio editing software

Class 1 (bring recording kit)
- Listening
- Introduction to course
- Orient to recording equipment
- Practice interviewing classmates
- Discuss vox pop assignment, how to choose a relevant question, listen to a couple of examples
- Begin vox pop assignment

Homework:
  - If you did not get enough answers on the class day, continue the vox pop assignment.
    Aim to talk to at least ten people, and have at least six good responses.
  - Prepare for class 2 with your favorite short answer cued up on ProTools.

ProTools Workshop (bring vox pop tape)
More on how to use ProTools audio editing software
During this workshop you’ll have a chance to work on your vox pop tape

**Class 2** (bring vox pop tape)
- Listening
- Students can play their best or most frustrating clips
- Refresher on audio editing - edit provided sample vox pop all together
- Crash course in writing for radio, in order to write vox pop intros and outros
- Write vox pop intros and outros

*Homework:*
- *Create a 90 second vox pop segment, with an intro and outro voiced by you.*

**Class 3** (bring rendered/bounced vox pop assignment)
- Play vox pops for the class
- Discuss the profile assignment, listen to two example profiles
- See example script
- Discuss how to pitch a radio story, what a good pitch looks like
- Discuss ethics with using people’s stories

*Homework:*
- *Schedule an interview with your profile subject for some time between Class 4 and Class 5*
- *Pitch your profile. Grab my attention, tell me why this is relevant now, what the story is, and (quickly) outline how the story will sound.*

**Class 4** (bring your profile pitch)
- Listening
- Workshop pitches
- Brainstorm interview questions
- Discuss transcription and logging tape

*Homework:*
- *Conduct your profile interview/s and transcribe your tape.*
- *Cue a few favorite clips.*

**Class 5** (bring interview tape)
- Longer listening
- Discuss how the interviews went
Write your profile story host intros (story ledes) in class and then break into two groups to workshop them.
Re-consider focus and scenes; think about your first quote and how story opens.
Work on scripts and get one-one help from instructor.

**Homework:**
- Write (and pull the quote clips for) first draft of profile. Group 1 will share their drafts with all of the class.
- Edit all Group 1 member's work by start of class 6

**Class 6** (bring edits for all Group 1 members)
- Listening
- Workshop Group 1’s first draft scripts (instructor will email her edits to all students after workshop)
- Special guest

**Homework:**
- Write (and pull the quotes for) second draft of profile. Submit before Class 7. Group 1 will share their drafts will all of the class.
- Edit all Group 2 member's work by start of class 7

**Class 7** (bring edits for all Group 2 members)
- Listening
- Workshop Group 2’s second draft scripts (instructor will email edits to all students after workshop)
- Intro to the final assignment
- Pair off to go over your sessions

**Homework:**
- Edit your script again, then create a rough mix of your story- record your narration at home, and mix it in with your selected quotes. This doesn't need to be perfect, it will just give us a sense of roughly how your story will sound.
- Choose a show where your final assignment might air, and write a pitch.

**Class 8** (bring rough mix of profile, pitch for final story)
- Workshop Group 1’s rough mixes (instructor will email edits to all students after workshop)
- Break into two groups to workshop final story pitches (instructor will email edits to all students after class) and brainstorm interview questions and possible scenes for their story.

**Homework:**
• Make your final edits, record your narration at the NYU studio, and mix your profile piece.
• Arrange interviews/recordings for your final story to occur between Class 9 and Class 10

Class 9 (bring final version of profile story)
- 1.5 hours to finalize edits on your profile piece, with option for one-on-one help from instructor
- Listen to everyone's profile pieces.
- Special guest

Homework:
• Conduct your interviews and record your scenes for your final assignment.
• Transcribe/log interviews.

Class 10 (bring icued up clips from your interviews)
- Listening
- Special guest
- Discuss how stories are shaping up with special guest.

Homework:
• Draft 1 of your final story due before Class 11. Group 1 will share their drafts will all of the class.
• Edit all Group 2 member's work by start of Class 11

Class 11 (bring edits for Group 2)
- Workshop Group 2’s first draft scripts (instructor will email edits to all students after workshop)
- Work on scripts and get one-one help from instructor

Homework:
• Write (and pull the quotes for) second draft of final story. Submit before class 12. Group 1 will share their drafts will all of the class.
• Edit all Group 1 member's work by start of class 12.

Class 12 (bring edits for Group 1)
- Listening
- Workshop Group 1’s second draft scripts (instructor will email edits to all students after workshop)
- Work on scripts/edits and get one-one help from instructor

Homework:
- Edit your script again, then create a rough mix of your story - record your narration at home, and mix it in with your selected quotes. Again, this doesn't need to be perfect, it will just give us a sense of roughly how your story will sound.

**Class 13** (bring rough mix)
- Workshop Group 2's rough mixes (instructor will email edits to all students after workshop)
- Work on scripts/edits and get one-one help from instructor

**Homework:**
- **Make your final edits, record (if any) narration at the NYU studio, and mix your final piece, adding music and sound design if desired.**

**Class 14** (bring rendered/bounced final story)
- Listen to everyone's final story
- Discuss possible work in radio and podcasting

**Following last class- Public listening night**