



LESSON PLAN

DOCUMENTING TEXAS HISTORY

Social Studies, Grades 6–8, 9–12

This project invites Texas students to contribute their own unique perspective to the film collection of the Texas Archive of the Moving image.

“Make visible what, without you, might perhaps never have been seen.”

—French filmmaker Robert Bresson

OBJECTIVE

By creating their own short videos based on people, places and things in their communities, students will learn the basic skills of documentary filmmaking. Students will understand the techniques documentary filmmakers use to make effective presentations, use appropriate production techniques to create a media work, and practice the various stages and responsibilities in the production of a documentary.

PROCESS:

Equipment Requirements and Prior Knowledge

The following activity assumes that the teacher will have access to at least one video camera and one computer with digital editing capability (see the Resources section for a link to a review of free video editing software). More cameras and computers, together with tripods and external microphones, are ideal but are not absolutely necessary. Cameras do not have to be sophisticated for this project; many students now have their own video cameras and editing software on their home computers.

The teacher should also have basic knowledge of the use of a video camera, including how to shoot footage, how to upload footage to a computer, and how to perform basic editing.

Other Materials needed:

- handouts for planning: Interviewee Contact List, Storyboard, T Script, Interviewing Strategies, Log Sheet, Peer Feedback, Documentary Rubric (see Worksheets)
- for research: computers with Internet access, and/or access to school or community library

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Lesson

PRE-PRODUCTION PHASE (Planning)

Day 1:

1. Students will watch the film “Spit Farther!” https://texasarchive.org/2006_00020 which highlights the annual Luling Watermelon Festival. After viewing, guide the class in a discussion of the following aspects of the film:
 - Who made this film? Why?
 - Who is the intended audience for this film?
 - What is it about? (**Note:** if students merely say, “the watermelon festival,” the teacher should elicit more answers to encourage students to see that the film is also about the people and the community)
 - Is there a conflict in this film? How is it resolved?
 - Is there an “expert” in the film?
 - Does this film SHOW the festival or TELL ABOUT the festival?
 - What is MISSING from this film? What questions do you have after watching it? How could those questions have been answered in the film? What features could have been included to make the film more engaging?
 - Will this film be interesting to audiences in 50 years? Why?

If time allows, students can also watch the following films from the TAMI archive and answer similar questions:

- i. “Nuclear Family” (about high school football)
https://texasarchive.org/2006_00019
 - ii. “The Carolyn Jackson Collection – no.8: Tour of Pflugerville, Texas”
https://texasarchive.org/2009_02021
 - iii. “Our Home Town” (a tour through historical San Marcos)
https://texasarchive.org/2006_00012
2. Explain to the students that they will be creating their own similar but shorter films based on people, places and things in their communities, which may be included in the TAMI archives. Give students a time limit for their finished films, such as 2-3 minutes. This forces the students to tell a clear, concise story in a short amount of time.
 3. Form class groups of 4-5 students.
 4. Working in groups, have students take out blank sheets of paper and brainstorm topics for their film projects, based on the following guidelines:

Choose an idea that is based on a **local** person, place or thing, such as:

- an interesting local character
- a person who has contributed to or experienced the history of your community

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- a special building (courthouse, store, school, movie theater, house, etc.) or landmark
- an annual event in your town
- a celebration of a local historical event
- artifacts or interesting objects special to your community, especially if they are connected with intriguing people and places

Or students can choose to answer one of the following themes in the form of a film:

- Fifty years ago in my town....
- My town/community/county is known for...

In addition, tell students their documentary ideas should be:

- **fascinating** to them
- potentially **interesting** to other people
- **accessible and practical** (don't choose something you won't be able to shoot because it's too far away, too dangerous, no longer exists or won't allow cameras)
- **personal** (look for something connected to someone in your group, either directly or through a relative, neighbor or friend)

5. Each group will choose their top three ideas to "pitch" to the class in the form of a brief oral presentation. The "pitch" should include a persuasive rationale for each idea and a brief description of what the finished project will look like.
6. During the pitch session, guide the class to give constructive feedback on their classmates' ideas, so that each group is able to choose their best idea for further development.
7. Once each group has chosen their best idea, the teacher will work with each group to:
 - ensure the idea is clear, practical, and workable
 - find a "story" within their topic (Just as in fiction writing, good documentaries tell a story in the form of a hero or heroine who is engaged in a conflict that may or may not be resolved. Even "Spit Farther!" has a minor conflict in the form of the seed spitting contest.)
8. Explain to students the individual responsibilities within a documentary crew:
 - researcher:** identifies potential interview subjects, fact-checks and verifies information; all group members should be active participants in the research, especially in writing interview questions
 - writer:** creates storyboards, writes script and narration
 - interviewer:** asks questions during shooting and LISTENS to make sure questions are answered and followed up; may or may not appear onscreen
 - cameraperson:** shoots video
 - editor:** digitizes video; uses editing program to assemble footage into a story; adds music, graphics, sound effects, etc.
 - narrator:** provides off-screen voice
 - other roles:** music composer and/or editor, graphic designer

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9. Help each group delegate these tasks to individual students, or agree on how responsibilities will be shared among the group.
10. Optional: have each group select a production company name, similar to real-world film production companies. Students can even design logos for their production companies if time allows.

Day 2:

11. Using the Internet and the school or community library, have students conduct research on their topics. They will need to do the following:
 - gain as much background information as possible
 - identify experts and/or interesting characters to interview
 - “Experts” can be found in many places: academic institutions, professional associations, government offices, libraries, businesses, or even the neighborhood coffee shop. Don’t be shy about asking people to be in your documentary. People love to talk about themselves, and you will find that most people will be happy to share with you and will be flattered that you asked.
 - perform fact-checking
 - look for available photos, drawings, maps, etc. to enhance their imagery
12. The teacher should work closely with students to help them identify people they can potentially interview. Have students use the “Interviewee Contact List” (see Worksheets) as they begin to make contact by phone, email or in person to set up interview times and locations. Remind students that it is a good idea, when they contact potential interview subjects, to also ask them who else they might know that the students can talk to about their subject.
13. Have students write lists of interview questions for each person they plan to interview. Review the questions with each group, guiding them to replace “yes/no” questions with wording that will force the person to respond with fuller sentences.
14. If time allows for an additional class period, distribute the handout “Interviewing Strategies” (see Worksheets and perform mock interviews in the classroom to practice using the video equipment and asking follow-up questions.
15. Homework: outside of class, students will need to do some location scouting to see what it actually looks like in the places where they plan to shoot. Students will probably also need to make more contacts for interviews and conduct additional research outside of class.

Day 3:

16. Have students compile their planning into one of the following graphic organizers:
 - **storyboard**: a series of sketches, sort of like a comic book, used in the planning of a film. The drawings outline the order of a film’s shots and also give a rough idea of what those shots will

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look like. Add notes to indicate pace, transitions, music, voiceovers, effects, credits and titles. (see Worksheets)

- **“t-script”**: pages with two columns, one column to describe each video shot and one to describe the corresponding audio (see Worksheets)

17. Have students complete a “Shot List” (see Worksheets) on paper in order to plan the order in which to shoot in different locations. Students should also identify other imagery that could be used in addition to video footage, such as photos, drawings, charts, maps, and other types of graphics.

18. At this point have students make important choices about the following:

- Whether or not the students themselves will appear in the film in some way (Usually, documentary film crews are “invisible,” but some filmmakers such as Michael Moore and Morgan Spurlock have successfully included themselves in their own films).
- If and how voiceover (offscreen) narration will be used, and what the tone and attitude of the narration will be. The narration script is generally written during the Post-Production (editing) phase, but the type of narration can determine how the film is shot. As with any good story, narration should have a point of view. Here are some examples of how narration is typically used in documentaries:
 - **third person**: disinterested, omniscient “voice of God” who never appears onscreen; this style is the easiest but also the least interesting
 - **self-injected narrator who is often also the interviewer**: appears onscreen sometimes, but not part of the plot; typical of news magazine shows like “60 Minutes”
 - **character narration**: person who is directly part of the story sometimes speaks in a voiceover to explain things not apparent onscreen
 - **no narration**: the people being interviewed speak for themselves and tell the whole story with no additional explanation
- Whether or not the audience will hear the voice of the interviewer asking questions (If students decide that the interviewer should not be heard, the people being interviewed will need to be guided to answer the questions so that their answers can be understood without hearing the questions.)
- Where the people being interviewed will look while they speak: either directly at the camera (less common) or slightly off-camera, ostensibly at the interviewer. It is important to be consistent about this throughout a documentary.

19. Don’t allow students to begin shooting until you approve their storyboard and/or T-script and give them the “green light.”

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PRODUCTION PHASE (Filmming - outside of class)

20. Students will film, in most cases, outside of class.

21. Make sure students have all of the following before they leave to film:

- camera
- tape(s)
- extra charged batteries
- tripod
- external microphone
- headphones
- interview questions
- storyboard or t-script
- interview contact information
- notebook for keeping a shooting log (list of all video that is shot)
(<http://www.texasarchive.org/lessonplans/dthlogsheet.pdf>)

22. Most of the filmming will consist of these types of shots:

- **establishing shots:** wide views providing context for where the film is taking place; films often start each scene in a new location with an establishing shot to let the audience know where they are
- **interviews:** typically head and shoulder shots (medium close-ups) OR closer to the face (tight close-ups) when a person is speaking with passion
- **b-roll:** the main footage, or “a-roll,” is the interviews. You cut away to “b-roll” footage while the person is talking in order to illustrate what they are talking about. Without b-roll, interviewees can become boring “talking heads.” Not only does b-roll make interviews more interesting, it makes it easier to edit interviews by disguising “jump cuts” that can occur when part of the footage is removed.
- **action shots:** people doing things (separate from the interviews and b-roll), depending on the topic; for example in “Spit Farther!” there is lots of footage of the various activities that are part of the watermelon festival
 - **long shots** include people’s entire bodies and are good for showing action in the context of surroundings
 - **medium shots** can still show action, but also get us closer to people’s faces
 - shooting from as many angles as possible gives more editing options and helps energize the pace of the film

23. Guidelines for students to keep in mind while shooting:

- Use a tripod during interviews if you can

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- If you don't have an external microphone, make sure the camera is positioned close to the subject so the microphone can pick up their voice without also getting background noises
- Always film more than you think you will need
- Get some "pre roll" and "post roll": a few extra seconds at the beginning and ending of each shot
- Be careful about zooming too much; it is one of the hallmarks of an amateur. Not only is zooming distracting when done for no reason, it can make editing difficult later on. There are really only three good reasons to zoom:
 - To set up your shot BEFORE you start to record;
 - While recording, ZOOM IN to show a detail of something or show intense emotion; and
 - While recording, ZOOM OUT to reveal something previously outside the frame.

- Getting good b-roll:

For every interview you film, make sure you also get some b-roll showing the subject doing something that relates to the reason they are in your film. For example, if you interview a farmer, get video of them working on their farm, driving their truck, walking on their property. If you interview a dancer, get video of them warming up and practicing their moves on stage. If you interview a restaurant owner, get video of them interacting with their customers and working in the kitchen. This footage will add interest while they are talking, and give you more options in the editing stage.

24. In the classroom, assist the students in collecting any still images they want to add to their films. Especially for historical topics, photos, maps, letters, and drawings can add visual interest when video footage isn't available. Have students search the public library and investigate any other local archives that might have visual materials on their topics.
25. If you have access to a scanner, help students to scan images as .JPGs at the highest possible resolution and size. This will allow them to zoom into and pan across the photos in the editing program. Legendary documentarian Ken Burns (producer of *The Civil War* series, among many others) uses the technique of zooming and panning still images so much that the effect is sometimes called the "Ken Burns effect." The JPG files will be imported into the editing program later. If you don't have access to a scanner, you can still shoot the images with either a video or still camera.

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POST-PRODUCTION (Editing)

Day 1

26. Have students watch all of the footage they have shot and take notes. At the very least, they should identify useful quotes and outline the content of the interviews. If time allows, they should fully transcribe the interviews; this may seem like busy work, but it actually makes the editing faster and more efficient.
27. Guide students through the process of uploading (also known as capturing) their video footage from the camera to the computer. The exact process will depend on which editing program is used, but here are some general guidelines:
 - Video takes up a great deal of hard drive space. Make students be economical by capturing only what they are going to use.
 - Stay organized! Each group should create a folder for their project on the computer which includes their project files, video files, scripts, images, and music.
 - Make students resist the temptation to capture all their video footage as one file. It seems easier to do this at the beginning, but it makes editing a nightmare later on. They should capture each separate shot as a separate file.
 - Guide the students to name their files as descriptively as possible. A good system is to include the name of the person, the type of shot, and a word or two pertaining to what they are talking about, *e.g.*, “Miller_MCU_horseraces.”
28. Before putting the shots together in the editing program, have students take stock of all their footage in light of their original planning. Will the footage tell a story? What order is the most compelling? What parts should be left out? What’s missing? The original storyboard or script can be revised to fit what was actually filmed.

Day 2

29. The next step in editing is for students to create a “rough cut” by putting the clips in order on the timeline of the editing program. (If students are having a hard time deciding in what order to arrange their shots, have them write down each shot on a post-it or note card, and then arrange and re-arrange the post-its so they make sense and tell a good story. The order of shots can then be duplicated in the editing program.)
30. Narration can “fill in the blanks” by explaining facts missing from the footage. If narration is going to be added, students should now write the narration script and choose whose voice will be used. They can save time by having one or two students write the narration script while other students are assembling the rough cut.
 - The point of view, tone and style of the narration should be consistent throughout the film. Students sometimes make the mistake of writing narration like an English

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paper, making it too formal and unnatural. Help them write their narration in an active, conversational voice.

Day 3

31. Help students to record their narration in a quiet place. Special audio equipment is not necessary. Audio can be recorded using the video camera and captured in the same way video footage is captured. (Some editing programs even allow narration to be recorded directly to the program with either a built-in microphone or one attached externally to the computer.)
32. Add narration and additional visuals (b-roll, photos, etc.) to the rough cut.
33. Add a title at the beginning and credits at the end. Additional graphics identifying interview subjects on the lower part of the screen (“lower thirds”) are also usually added to documentaries. These graphics begin just after a person starts to talk, and remain on the screen for just a few seconds. Each person only needs to be identified the first time they appear on screen.
34. Music can add energy to a film and help establish mood and setting, but students must carefully choose music to make sure it is consistent with the feeling they want to convey. Most important, it is crucial that students are aware that most music has copyright restrictions which prevent it from being used in a project such as this one. Here are some suggestions for obtaining music without copyright problems:
 - Learn about Creative Commons, an alternative licensing system that allows for legal use of certain music. (see Resources)
 - Create music from loops on programs such as Audition, GarageBand and Soundtrack.
 - Use original music by students or local bands.
 - Ask your school library if they have purchased a music library for use in school projects.

Day 4

35. The teacher and the rest of the class should now review each rough cut. The attached “Peer Feedback” (see Worksheets) form can be used for assessment. This is an important step in editing because the success of a documentary depends on how an audience responds to it.
36. Each group now will make revisions and corrections to their rough cut based on the feedback they received, creating the “final cut” of their project.

Assessment

The attached “Documentary Rubric” (see Worksheets) can be used for assessment of the finished projects.

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Instructions for Submitting Student Films to TAMI:

Make sure files are saved in .avi format. We would prefer that student films be saved on a data DVD, which you can drop off or mail to us at:

Texas Archive of the Moving Image
501 N. IH 35, Ste. 204
Austin, TX 78702

Resources

TAMI

Video Library Main Page

<http://www.texasarchive.org/videos>

“Spit Farther!”

https://texasarchive.org/2006_00020

“Nuclear Family” (about high school football)

https://texasarchive.org/2006_00019

“The Carolyn Jackson Collection – no.8: Tour of Pflugerville, Texas”

https://texasarchive.org/2009_02021

“Our Home Town” (a tour through historical San Marcos)

https://texasarchive.org/2006_00012

Examples of documentaries similar to this project

Feature-length documentaries:

Ken Burns’ definitive Civil War documentary

<http://www.pbs.org/civilwar/>

Student-produced documentaries:

Minneapolis Television Network

<http://www.mtn.org/productions/samples>

Music Soundtrack:

Creative Commons “Legal Music for Videos”

<https://creativecommons.org/about/program-areas/arts-culture/arts-culture-resources/legalmusicforvideos>

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Technology

- Typically, MACs and PCs come preloaded with video editing software and if you are having trouble locating these program files on the computer you are using, they can be downloaded from the company website at no charge. (PC: MovieMaker and Sound Recorder; MAC: iMovie, iLife and GarageBand)
- ArcSoft Video Impressions2 and ArcSoft Photo Impressions 6.5
<http://www.arcsoft.com/>
- Audacity, a free program sound recording and editing, can be downloaded for both MACs and PCs at: <https://www.audacityteam.org/>

Worksheets

Interviewee Contact List

<https://texasarchive.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/WorksheetIntervieweeContactList.pdf>

Storyboard

<https://texasarchive.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/WorksheetStoryboard.pdf>

T Script

<https://texasarchive.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/WorksheetTScript.pdf>

Interviewing Strategies

<https://texasarchive.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/WorksheetInterviewingStrategies.pdf>

Shot List

<https://texasarchive.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/WorksheetShotList.pdf>

Log Sheet

<https://texasarchive.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/WorksheetLogSheet.pdf>

Peer Feedback

<https://texasarchive.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/WorksheetPeerFeedbackForm.pdf>

Grading Rubric

<https://texasarchive.org/sites/default/files/2020-02/WorksheetRubric.pdf>

TEKS

Social Studies Grade 7

21A - Differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about Texas

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21B - Analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions

21C - Organize and interpret information from outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps

21D - Identify points of view from the historical context surrounding an event and the frame of reference that influenced the participants

21E - Support a point of view on a social studies issue or event

Social Studies Grade 8

29A - Differentiate between, locate, and use valid primary and secondary sources such as computer software, databases, media and news services, biographies, interviews, and artifacts to acquire information about the United States;

29B - Analyze information by sequencing, categorizing, identifying cause-and-effect relationships, comparing, contrasting, finding the main idea, summarizing, making generalizations and predictions, and drawing inferences and conclusions;

29C - Organize and interpret information from outlines, reports, databases, and visuals, including graphs, charts, timelines, and maps;

29D - Identify points of view from the historical context surrounding an event and the frame of reference which influenced the participants;

29E - Support a point of view on a social studies issue or event;

30D - Create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information.

US History Studies Since Reconstruction

29A - Use a variety of both primary and secondary valid sources to acquire information and to analyze and answer historical questions

29C - Understand how historians interpret the past (historiography) and how their interpretations of history may change over time;

29D - Use the process of historical inquiry to research, interpret, and use multiple types of sources of evidence;

29H - Use appropriate skills to analyze and interpret social studies information such as maps, graphs, presentations, speeches, lectures, and political cartoons.

30A - Create written, oral, and visual presentations of social studies information;

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30C - Use different forms of media to convey information, including written to visual and statistical to written or visual, using available computer software as appropriate.

English Language Arts and Reading, English I, II, III, IV

15D - Produce a multimedia presentation (e.g., documentary, class newspaper, docudrama, infomercial, visual or textual parodies, theatrical production) with graphics, images, and sound that conveys a distinctive point of view and appeals to a specific audience.

Principle of Arts, Audio/Video Technology, and Communications

1A - Demonstrate use of content, technical concepts, and vocabulary

1B - Correct grammar, punctuation, and terminology to write and edit documents

1D - Compose and edit copy for a variety of written documents

1E - Evaluate oral and written information

1F - Research topics for the preparation of oral and written communication

2A - Adapt language for audience, purpose, situation, and intent such as structure and style

2B - Organize oral and written information

2C - Interpret and communicate information, data, and observations

2E - Apply active listening skills to obtain and clarify information

2F - Develop and interpret tables, charts, and figures to support written and oral communications

2G - Listen to and speak with diverse individuals

3 - The student understands and examines problem-solving methods. The student is expected to employ critical-thinking and interpersonal skills independently and in teams to solve problems

4 - The student applies information technology applications when completing Arts, Audio/Video Technology, and Communications cluster projects. The student is expected to use personal information management, email, Internet, writing and publishing, presentation, and spreadsheet or database applications

7 - The student develops leadership characteristics. The student is expected to participate in student leadership and professional development activities.

8C - Examine the liabilities, copyright laws, fair use, and duplication of materials associated with productions and performances

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10 -The student applies technical skills for efficiency. The student is expected to employ planning and time-management skills to complete work tasks.

11F - Use appropriate interpersonal communication strategies in professional and social contexts

11G - Communicate effectively in groups in professional and social contexts

Audio/Video Production

1A - Apply English language arts knowledge and skills by demonstrating use of content, technical concepts, and vocabulary; using correct grammar, punctuation, and terminology to write and edit documents; and composing and editing copy for a variety of written documents such as scripts, captions, schedules, reports, and manuals

2A - Adapt language for audience, purpose, situation, and intent such as structure and style

2B - Organize oral and written information

2C - Interpret and communicate information, data, and observations

2F - Listen to and speak with diverse individuals

2G - Exhibit public relations skills

3 - The student understands and examines problem-solving methods. The student is expected to employ critical-thinking and interpersonal skills independently and in teams to solve problems

4 - The student applies information technology applications. The student is expected to use personal information management, email, Internet, writing and publishing, presentation, and spreadsheet or database applications for audio/video production projects

7A - Employ leadership skills

7B - Employ teamwork and conflict-management skills

7C - Conduct and participate in meetings

8B - Discuss and apply copyright laws in relation to fair use and acquisition

9B - Identify and demonstrate positive work behaviors and personal qualities needed to be employable

10 - The student applies technical skills for efficiency. The student is expected to employ planning and time-management skills to complete work tasks.

11C - Employ knowledge regarding use of video

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- 11D - Demonstrate various cinematography techniques
- 12B - Use technology applications to facilitate pre-production
- 12C - Analyze the script and storyboard development processes for a successful production
- 12D - Identify and participate in the team roles required for completion of a production
- 12E - Identify equipment, crew, and cast requirements for a scripted production
- 13A - Understand the coherent sequence of events to successfully produce a script
- 13C - Understand audio techniques, including microphone variances and sound mixing
- 14A - Demonstrate appropriate use of hardware components, software programs, and their connections
- 14D - Use a variety of strategies to acquire information from online resources
- 14G - Format digital information for effective communication with a defined audience

Advanced Audio/Video Production

- 1A - English language arts knowledge and skills by demonstrating use of content, technical concepts, and vocabulary; using correct grammar, punctuation, and terminology to write and edit documents; and composing and editing copy for a variety of written documents such as scripts, captions, schedules, reports, and manuals
- 2A - Adapt language for audience, purpose, situation, and intent such as structure and style
- 2B - Organize oral and written information
- 2C - Interpret and communicate information, data, and observations
- 2E - Apply active listening skills to obtain and clarify information
- 2F - Listen to and speak with diverse individuals
- 3 - The student understands and examines problem-solving methods. The student is expected to employ critical-thinking and interpersonal skills independently and in teams to solve problems.
- 4 - The student applies information technology applications. The student is expected to use personal information management, email, Internet, writing and publishing, presentation, and spreadsheet or database applications for audio and video production projects.
- 7A - Employ leadership skills to accomplish goals and objectives by analyzing the various roles of leaders within organizations, exhibiting problem-solving and management traits, describing

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effective leadership styles, and participating in civic and community leadership and teamwork opportunities to enhance skills

7B - Employ teamwork and conflict-management skills to achieve collective goals

8B - Apply copyright laws

8D –Demonstrate proper etiquette and knowledge of acceptable use policies

10 - The student applies technical skills for efficiency. The student is expected to employ planning and time-management skills to complete work tasks.

11B- Employ knowledge regarding use of recording equipment by

12A - Apply critical elements in the pre-production stage

12B - Use advanced technology applications to facilitate pre-production

13A - Apply the coherent sequence of events to successfully produce a script

13C - Execute production of the script

13D - Employ knowledge of digital editing

13E - Employ knowledge of recording equipment

14A - Knowledge and appropriate use of hardware components, software programs, and their connections

14B - Acquire electronic information in a variety of formats

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