GET IT RIGHT

TELLING THE NEWS ON TV

TV reporter Olivia Siong says producing news stories is like doing a jigsaw puzzle. Every piece matters.

You may have seen Olivia Siong on television. The reporter with Channel NewsAsia’s Singapore Desk regularly appears on shows like Singapore Connect@6 and Singapore Tonight at 10pm to report on what happens around the city as well as local issues. She shares with us how the news is made for broadcast to your television screen.

Q: How is a broadcast news piece produced?
A: Producing a broadcast news piece is like putting a jigsaw puzzle together. Research and keeping up with what has been going on in the news are key.

While we’re out “gathering our news” with our camera crew, we film what is needed for the crux of the story, and we speak to different people to give the story its context and texture.

These could be eyewitnesses at the scene of a traffic accident, a university professor for his expert opinion, office workers on how they feel about taking the MRT during peak hour or a hawker on his thoughts of his trade becoming extinct. Once we get back to the newsroom, we view the pictures shot, then script the report, and edit the video footage to produce what you see on television.

Q: You must shoot a lot of video footage, so how do you decide what to use?
A: News reports are typically only one to two minutes in duration. Unless it is gripping material, the editors will not allow anything longer. So we have to be concise, clear and accurate in getting the main message across.

During the Committee of Inquiry into the December 2011 MRT breakdowns, the focus on one of the days was on inspection checks done by maintenance officers.

A lot of the court proceedings were focussed on technical issues like the type of checks that were done in the tunnels, but most viewers would not be able to relate to such details. So the final report on this issue was just a one-minute story that summarised the main points.

Q: Video is an integral part of broadcast news, but what happens when it is not engaging?
A: Not having good video footage for a news piece is always a big challenge, so we think of creative ways to tell the story visually.

When the Lucky Plaza management installed automated flood barriers at its building, viewers would want to see how the flood barriers (each weighing 700kg), flipped up along a 150-metre stretch. Although the floods at Lucky Plaza happened two to three years ago, we showed archived footage of tenants scooping water out of their stores in my story because it was a sight to see and it could help explain why these barriers are being installed.

Q: How do you handle interviewees who speak a lot or very little in front of the camera?
A: We often chat with our interviewees even before the camera starts rolling to give them an idea of the kind of questions that I’ll be asking.

Sometimes our interviewees give detailed examples of how things works, such as a new medical procedure using a special laser to help doctors operate on cataract patients better. It is a complicated procedure but I had to explain it simply so viewers could understand.

Instead of showing the doctor explaining these details, I summarised it in my voice-over script and got the doctor to say why the procedure was more beneficial instead. Having the doctor give a statement like that also gives more weight to such a claim, since he is the expert in this field.

LEARNING FROM OLIVIA SIONG

Why do you collect any information? Usually, it is not to lock it up inside your head. You gather information so that you can share it later. You could be aiming to write an essay that others will read. Maybe, it is for a presentation you will make to your class or even a video that you are producing with your friends.

Before you even start searching for information, think about how you are going to share it. Doing this can help you decide what to look for. This is a lesson you can learn from TV reporter Olivia Siong.

□ If your final product is a short presentation or a poster, not everything you find in your research will be able to fit. Miss Siong, who has to tell a story in just one or two minutes, knows she has to be “concise, clear and accurate”.

□ Nowadays, we have many ways to share what we know – not only in words, but also photos, video and sound. Like Miss Siong, you can look for visual information to share, along with the words.

□ Even in a short presentation, you can include different points of view. Notice how Miss Siong brings together experts as well as ordinary people in her stories. Often, we have too much information, not too little. Thinking ahead to how you will use the information is a good way to select the right bits. Knowing how to do this is part of your information literacy.

Quiz

Answer three simple questions and you may win a $10 POPULAR voucher. If you win, your whole class gets token gifts as well! Submit your entry at http://www.whatsapp.sg (go to “GET IT RIGHT”), Open to all students below 18 years of age.

Congratulations to last month’s winners:
- Primary: Shakti d/o Sivakumar, Pri 3, Woodlands Primary
- Secondary: Tan Jia Xin, Sec 1, Nan Chiau High

Vocabulary

crux (say “krux”; noun) = most important point.