

# Student-Generated Newspapers in an American Culture Course

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There are many reasons for having students make class newspapers. In the case of my course in American culture for Japanese students, the purpose was threefold:

1. to give my students a chance to summarize what they had studied in class
2. to inform other students of what each of my students had learned about American culture
3. to introduce my students to computers and give them a realistic and purposeful experience using them.

As additional benefits, by making class newspapers, my students would be able to practice the skills they had developed in their basic writing course the year before. At the same time, they could improve their editing skills, and using the computer would make this editing process easier.

## The Course

The prerequisite for this course in American culture was a passing grade in a required writing course for college sophomores in the English department at Kagoshima Women's College. This writing course focused on building students' skills at the sentence and single paragraph level.

The American culture course, an elective for upperclassmen, ran for 30 weeks,

divided into two semesters. The class met once a week for 90 minutes.

## The Newspaper

Four newspapers were scheduled for the first semester and six for the second semester. Once the class got going, every three weeks one group was in charge of publishing a newspaper.

Each newspaper had five sections:

1. **interview**—preferably with an English-speaking foreigner
2. **class news**—summaries of topics discussed in class
3. **music**—an introduction to an English-language song and an interpretation of the song
4. **movie review**—a summary of the plot of an American movie as well as the reviewer's opinion about it
5. **book review**—a summary of a book about some aspect of American culture

## "Staff" Assignments

The fourteen students in the course were divided into two groups. A rotating assignment chart ensured that each student in each group would write for each of the five sections at least once. The two students assigned to sections one and three were the general editors of that issue of the

newspaper. These editors were in charge of the newspaper cover, layout, copying and distribution.

### Procedure

On the first day of class, I introduced the idea of class newspapers. The students were given a handout explaining the parts of a newspaper, guidelines for the articles, and the responsibilities of the editors.

Then the students received another handout explaining, in considerable detail, how to operate the computer since some of the students had little experience using one. (We used Twinstar, the English and Japanese version of Wordstar, on NEC9801 computers.) We went to the computer lab and followed the handout step by step. All the students had a chance to try using the computer.

The students were given four weeks to practice using the computer—composing, typing, and editing their articles. The editors of the first issue had to spend extra time learning how to format the paper. For the second issue, the first editors taught the new editors how to format the newspaper and print it out.

When finished, the newspapers were distributed to all members of the American culture class, freshman English majors, the English-teaching faculty, and several other interested teachers.

### Beneficial Outcomes

The most important benefit of these classroom newspapers was attitudinal. In

the course of the publishing experience, the students' attitude changed from "learning English because they were English majors" to "producing a good newspaper." They were happy to see themselves in print and proud of their newspaper.

Another major benefit involved students' editing skills. After an issue had been distributed, fifteen to twenty minutes of the next class period was spent reading the newspaper and making suggestions for improvement. At this time, the students had another chance to check their articles although the newspaper had already been printed.

In addition, most students thought that making newspapers was very satisfying because they could see the tangible results of their hard work. Some students were also able to use their creative, artistic talent--designing the newspaper cover and layout.

Finally, the students learned how to work, cooperate and help each other. The use of the computer for newspaper layout and editing encouraged this cooperation. In the process, students learned the basics for using Twinstar, and several of them now do other homework on the computer.

### About the Author

*Sophia Shang received her M.A. in TESL in 1984 from the University of Illinois. Currently, she is a lecturer at Kagoshima Women's College in Japan. She is especially interested in using video in the classroom.*