



## EDUCATOR'S COLUMN

### Student Broadcasts in the YouTube Age

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Most everyone who has worked in media has a story about a foul-up that occurred during a live student broadcast. Mine happened when I was anchoring Update News at UW-Eau Claire. The Chroma Key wasn't set up quite right, and my eyebrows mysteriously began to key out. I tried to maintain my composure while hearing hoots of laughter coming from the control room. The handful of students who may have been watching on the dormitory closed-circuit system probably also got a good laugh. My disappearing eyebrows were also worth a few chuckles on the year-end blooper reel, but then my moment of embarrassment faded away.

Today's students aren't quite so lucky. It just takes one not-so-nice classmate to Tweet about it, then upload that goof up to YouTube or Facebook or their personal blog, where it will live on indefinitely. For a painful example, just watch the unfortunate kid from Ball State struggle with his first on-air TV experience on the YouTube clip "Boom Goes the Dynamite." Chances are you've already seen it. The clip has nearly 5 million views.

A former colleague of mine, Bill Weir, just became a co-anchor on ABC's "Nightline." We worked together years ago at WLUK-TV in Green Bay. While preparing for this article I asked him if he had any advice for students looking to get into broadcasting. He said, "Anchoring and reporting is just like piano or volleyball. A gifted few are instantly comfortable, and the rest get there through sweat and reps." He also said he feels fortunate that he had the luxury of rising through the ranks when people still had to find a pen and buy a stamp if they wanted to fire off an angry message. "I can't imagine trying to build self-confidence with Facebook/Twitter/message boards highlighting your every flaw," he said. "It takes a few years to realize that 95 percent of your audience likes you just fine, but you are destined to hear from the minority, and you are destined to fixate on them."

Everyone has to start somewhere. I believe college is still a time to make rookie mistakes without lasting consequences. TelePrompters can be tricky. Knowing what camera to look at is hard. Having a good hair day plus a good outfit can be a challenge. I tell my students that messing up goes with the territory and making mistakes is how they learn. What feels like supreme failure could end up being the most important thing they learn all semester. And who knows, if it is a colossal flub, they may end up as a viral video star.