

Title of Assignment: **“Mom, tell Phineas and Ferb WE’RE making a title sequence.”**
Shooting, editing & mining creativity under deadline.

Phineas and Ferb is an animated musical comedy television series that first appeared on the Disney Channel in 2008. The two main characters have several adventures during their summer vacation. The opening of the program involves a fast-paced series of scenes, from several episodes, which is set to music. The show open, or title sequence, introduces characters and the premise of a program to its audience. In one of the last lines of the theme song, Phineas and Ferb’s sister screams out, “Mom, Phineas and Ferb are making a title sequence!” I introduce this assignment to my students by playing the show open from *Phineas and Ferb*. I tell the students they have roughly 75 minutes to create a title sequence for their own TV program.

Phineas and Ferb is a cartoon, but it is very easy to cue up title sequences from live action programs such as *The Office*, *Friends*, *Psych*, *American Horror Story* and even further back to *The Fall Guy* or *The Dukes of Hazzard*. I have shown students the title sequence for *Magnum P.I.*—someone inevitably asks if they can run out and rent a Ferrari or helicopter for the assignment. (You can easily find these examples on YouTube.)

Title sequences vary in length. They can run from :22 to :59 seconds. Rarely, are they longer than one minute.

I created this assignment for an introductory digital video storytelling course. It is introduced during the fourth week of instruction (in a 15-week semester). By this time in the course students have individually shot and edited at least two assignments. The course involves learning the practical skills of learning to shoot and edit video with best practices for reporting and producing news stories and promotional videos.

For this **Title Sequence Assignment**, students are put into pre-assigned groups of four to five members. The class period is 90 minutes and meets twice a week. The students must conceptualize a TV program and put each of their group members into the fictional cast of characters. The students then shoot and edit the sequence to theme music, finally uploading their assignment to our private YouTube channel. No assignment is accepted late. If the title sequence is not ready to view 10 minutes before the end of the class, zero points are awarded.

This is not a high-stakes assignment relative to other videos that are graded in the course. It is roughly half the value of a typical video project. I make the collaborative learning and deadline of this assignment the most significant parts of the experience. I am adamant that a late video receives no credit, even if it is ready to be viewed one-minute past the deadline. I want to stress the intractability of deadline work and that sometimes one must accept doing the best you can, given the time allotted.

This assignment requires students to engage with one another in a highly creative environment. Group members choose a music track that fits their fictional show. They need to select a specific pace for the video (several shots with fast edits or slower camera work with more deliberate shot changes.) This reinforces the importance of timing edits and using transitions in compelling videography. They learn how a particular style of editing impacts a message. Students incorporate basic graphics to spotlight the show's title and the 'actors' in the show. No formal script is required for the fictional program, but the audience should have a clear idea what the program is about—situation comedy, police drama, news program, etc., based on the content of the video.

During the first half of the class I'm usually alone in the editing lab, waiting for students to return with their footage. For the second half of the class period, the room is wonderfully LOUD. It is filled with laughter, sometimes with students jumping up and down, and shouts of, "Come on! Come on! We have only 4 minutes left! Just LEAVE the shot there!" Students dialogue about shot composition, proper framing, lighting and jump cuts. Sometimes they go tearing out of the room to reshoot something they feel doesn't convey their intended message.

Of all the assignments in the COM 221 Digital Video course, this is BY FAR the favorite. When polled about this particular experience, here's what a few students said in an anonymous survey:

1. *"I had a lot of fun with the title sequence video, especially with the extra adrenaline rush from needing it done within a time limit."*
2. *"I learned how to work in a time crunch, how to be creative and to work in a group."*
3. *"I don't think that there is much that could be changed to make it better. Overall, it was a well-planned and executed assignment that I enjoyed."*
4. *"I thought that the title sequence was very fun because we were not able to pick our groups so it helped working with new people. I also enjoyed the rush by having a deadline and showing how you can record and edit something in a slim time frame."*

Below are two examples of title sequences shot during a single class period.

[Ghost Chasers](#)

[Hunger Games: Student Edition](#)

Thank you for considering this GIFT idea.