

**ELIZABETH CHOE:** So hi, I'm Elizabeth Choe. By day, I run the MIT K-12 videos program in the Office of Digital Learning at MIT. And I was the lead instructor/creator 20.219.

**JOSHUA GUNN:** Hi, I'm Joshua Gunn, and I'm the co-founder of Planet Nutshell a Cambridge, Massachusetts, based animation studio. And my role in the course was simply to do a workshop on storyboarding, as well as a little instruction on animation in the context of producing educational media.

**GEORGE ZAIDAN:** My name is George Zaidan I am a freelance science video host and writer and producer. And for 20.219 I did a workshop on writing and hosting.

**CHRIS BOEBEL:** I'm Chris Boebel. I'm media development director for MIT's Office of Digital Learning and for the course I was basically a guest lecturer. I came in for a day or two to talk about visual storytelling.

**ELIZABETH CHOE:** So the way this class stated, I would say, is that George and I were working on Science Out Loud, which is this educational web series that's hosted by MIT students. And it sort of noticed that there was this big need to help students not only know how to articulate themselves on camera-- articulate well on camera-- but just understand digital media in general.

And that's a conversation that Chris and I have had since I was your student in undergrad basically.

**CHRIS BOEBEL:** Not that many years ago.

**ELIZABETH CHOE:** So, actually not really. Yeah, but with Science Out Loud we would do these, like, crash courses on scripting and writing these short videos, but at the end of the day like we would still intervene quite a bit to make the videos good.

And at the end of the day, the priority was on making a great video, and not necessarily on the students' learning experience. So, I mean, this was a space for them to develop these skills sort of lower stakes, and not have to worry about creating something that was going to be on a web series at the end.

**GEORGE ZAIDAN:** The class was supposed to be lower stakes.

**ELIZABETH** Yeah.

**CHOE:**

**GEORGE ZAIDAN:** Because we had-- Science Out Loud was a lot of pressure. We were shooting long days. If they felt like they didn't get to take right, they were nervous.

**ELIZABETH** Or, if the script just wasn't good by the time we had to shoot, we would just fix it.

**CHOE:**

**CHRIS BOEBEL:** And one of things you and I've talked about a ton over the last couple of years is that tension between creating a consistently good product and teaching. Because if you're in a teaching environment, you're going to fail over and over and over again, which does not lead to a particularly, consistently good product, which is what you're going for with Science Out Loud. So this class is kind of a way, I think, to find a space in between where you can actually have a little bit of a chance to experiment and learn by doing and fail, bluntly.

But also not actually impact your show, which needs to be consistently good.

**JOSHUA GUNN:** Was there any desire to sort to create an awareness for students of other sort of creative opportunities outside of the science and math, or their current studies? I mean, I think it's a really interesting way this course is sort of offered to students who are engaged in stuff that's really quite different.

**ELIZABETH** I mean, interesting because MIT has this communication requirement, but it's not really taken seriously by students, because it's like, I need to take a class where I'm required to write 20 pages of paper. And you and I were talking about one at the bioengineering communication fellows, and he said something like, I'm doing this program because I don't see a difference between science and science communication.

**CHOE:**

But I think like that was inadvertently was what this class is about. Because it's not really about how to host a science show, or how to write a five minute script. I don't care if they never make a five minute video again, but hopefully the skills that they learned and picked up were things that they need to have, regardless of what they end up going to.

Just the ability to articulate passionately and clearly some very technical topics is not something you get trained on enough at MIT.

**CHRIS BOEBEL:** I think I think the MIT communication requirement is an interesting situation, too, because it is

all focused on writing, and writing papers, not even just writing scripts, writing papers. And, for instance, the course that I teach that you took, we initially had trouble getting it listed as fulfilling the communication requirement, even though students consistently said, well this is all this course is about, communication.

Because the writing requirement was just a little bit shy of the 20 page, or whatever it is, requirement. So there's a whole other kind of communication, which is, as you say, clear conceptualization, visualization, organization, which is related to writing, and writing kind of traditional papers, but it's in 2015. It's not just writing journal papers, or kind of really more traditional pieces of text.

**ELIZABETH**

**CHOE:**

Actually, before I put the class together, the first thing I did was just survey all of the medial making classes on campus. So anything related to video production or like script production. And there are actually a lot of classes on campus that are about how do you edit, how do you produce video?

But there wasn't one on really hosting, actually. And being on camera, and being comfortable talking in front of people was something that we found to be very important through Science Out Loud and something that most students were the most comfortable with, would you say?

**GEORGE ZAIDAN:** Yeah I mean they didn't even know they were uncomfortable with it. They'd just be like, oh yeah, no problem, I'll just talk, and then they get in front of a camera and it's like Jack Donaghy in that episode of *30 Rock*, where he can't-- you know.

You don't understand why your body doesn't quite work the way you thought it was, or your voice is a little too high and you get nervous, and then you screw up, and then you screw up again. And then if they get and then they realize how hard it actually is to stand in front of a camera and say things. So yeah.

**ELIZABETH**

**CHOE:**

It's not just about standing in front of a camera, though.

**JOSHUA GUNN:** Any audience, right?

**ELIZABETH**

**CHOE:**

I feel like I wanted them to learn to be self aware of who they were as a presenter, you know. Like, we weren't trying to make them become a persona. Like we called it becoming the next Bill Nye, but it really wasn't. That was like the first thing I talked about was that we're not actually turning you into Bill Nye.

That wherever you go, whether it's a job interview, or you're giving a Ted Talk or formal presentation, I mean, you need all these skills and you can't assume some sort of platonic personality When you do these things.

**GEORGE ZAIDAN:** It's not acting, it's just being themselves.

**ELIZABETH** But just a clear, polished, version of yourself.

**CHOE:**

**CHRIS BOEBEL:** Kind of close to what the real thing is, but maybe not entirely there yet.

**JOSHUA GUNN:** Awareness of an audience.