

Lancaster, Kurt. *Video Journalism for the Web: A practical introduction to documentary storytelling*. New York: Routledge, 2013. ISBN: 978-0-415-89267-4

By Peter H. Martyn

Kurt Lancaster's *Video Journalism for the Web* is one of the most useful books I've encountered in five years of teaching practical Multimedia Journalism.

Using a series of case studies of actual web video stories, Lancaster advances his thesis that documentary video news is radically different from TV broadcast news in style and content.

Rather than the (TV) reporter telling the story to the audience — an essentially paternalistic, if not downright patronizing, style of news that focuses on the teller as much as the story — Lancaster proposes that the accomplished video journalist focuses on a character or characters, from who the audience members learn the story.

The video journalist rarely (if ever) appears on camera, he says, and if the journalist's words are heard at all, they are only as unobtrusive scene-setting narration; the characters themselves develop the action. It is a thoroughly engaging, web-friendly kind of storytelling.

This is a hands-on, how-to book, suitable for anyone striving to do good journalism: student, print reporter, still photographer or videographer.

We live in a rapidly changing online environment, which Lancaster alludes to, but he notes that the fundamentals of good storytelling date back to Aristotle, whom the author references in a readable, non-threatening manner. He provides useful visual cues in the form of charts (with photos) outlining the classical stages of the engaging story: hook, exposition, conflict, climax and resolution.

Rarely have I seen the how-to of good storytelling, in any medium, laid out so clearly.

Of course there are a few blunders. Lancaster's definition of "backpack journalist" is wide of the mark. The term is usually considered synonymous with "mojo" (mobile journalist: <http://bit.ly/THBhOY>) rather than referring to someone making a mini-documentary with the luxury to "spend weeks with" their subject, as Lancaster suggests.

And there are copy-editing slips such as a young artist making bread from "flower, baking soda, yeast." Nor do "fast lenses, with the iris wide open ... provide a nice depth of field" (the opposite is true: a small aperture, with the lens's iris stopped down to f16 or lower, gives far more depth of field — that is, not just the subject but objects nearer and farther from the camera are in focus — than one with the iris at maximum opening. [Try it here](#)).

But these are quibbles, that will presumably be corrected in future editions. *Video Journalism for the Web* is an otherwise masterful work that should be in every aspiring multimedia journalist's rucksack.

Peter Martyn is an instructor in journalism at Humber College and the University of Guelph-Humber, in Toronto, Canada. He holds a Master's in Journalism Studies from Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada.