

## “Cheapskate Corner” Sitcom Multi-Cam Evaluation

As with previous projects, a group was formed rather early on once the brief had been provided to the class. I was happy to take on the role of director again. Soon after we were met with our first hurdle - which was our lack of understanding of the technology that we were required to use. Our first brief informed us we'd be working with an unfamiliar setup – 3 interlinked cameras and a main terminal to control them – as well as background boards which we could decorate. We'd be given a single day to record our project with the aim of it being some kind of live production – with us recording and editing (by switching camera) at the same time. Our choices were to create a podcast, a talk show, or a sitcom that would average around 20 minutes.

After a lot of deliberation, we decided that - since we were unfamiliar with the equipment - a sitcom would be our best option as this would allow us to add harsh cuts into the end result and film the project in calculated chunks, which on the day ended up causing some minor delays. This also allowed us to ensure the project was filmed (as our eventual actors weren't drama students and struggled with line memorisation). As we were being taught about the use and rules of the equipment and background walls (such as us not being able to paint one of the boards due to it belonging to the drama class) we finalised our group formation. A few members of the group ended up taking on roles they were less accustomed to, and the final decisions for who does which role ended up lasting a couple of weeks as we worked on other projects alongside this one's start.

As we finalised roles, we discovered some new roles to delegate. This would include a set manager who'd take on the role of designing and leading the creation and decoration of our background boards and space in the studio. Another new role was that of the floor manager, who'd be in charge of ensuring that our props and equipment were in place and ready before we started and during filming, whilst also communicating with the people on set to prevent and solve any issues. These roles would work alongside us having a script writer, producer, director of photography, and director. Once the scale of creating a sitcom became more apparent, we would have to give people multiple roles in order for us to be able to efficiently help each other – mainly regarding the creation of pre-recorded footage which I will touch on later.

As we started the idea generation process, we started to get overly concerned for both the writing itself and our ability to get the final product up to the specified duration. To combat our concerns regarding how long the project will be, it was decided that we'd record separate scenes on the days leading up to our one booked day for the multi-cam and edit them in post. This is where we had to split our roles around to lighten the loads on some people, whilst boosting others that had concerns about not having enough to write about in their own evaluations. For this, we decided on adding a cinematographer/camera operator, whilst also having 2 writers and 2 directors of photography, with one focused on operating our multi-cam setup on the day and the other focusing on our pre-recorded scenes.

During this time, we also found heavy difficulties writing the script for the main body of work itself. We had spent a large amount of time as a group discussing the genre, story, characters, and setting – eventually settling on a “failing corner shop run by incompetent workers”. The idea for this came from our own individual experiences, with our group coming together and spending a couple of lessons generating ideas and writing down jokes and scenes that we liked the most. After this, we struggled to tie these scenes together so I took on the role of going through all our notes and placing them in order for a sense of escalation – whilst removing any scenes/jokes that I couldn't find a

natural way to include. While I worked on this, we continued to discuss our ideas as a group and try to work out what styles of comedy we should aim for, general tone, etc. We settled on taking influence from popular comedies that we were personally invested in and enjoyed, as well as what's popular at the time. This meant leaning more into cringe comedy and dry, British humour. We found that this would be easier for us, as we could locate mistakes and then alter the script to lean into the unsuccessful joke rather than replace it – making our pre-production more time efficient. From there I handed over the responsibility to our group's writer. They found some difficulties with the responsibility and challenges of writing a comedy project, but in the end provided us with a more detailed basis for the story, jokes, and flow of events.

With this outline, our director of photography was able to start working on a shot list that would follow this flow and give himself and I a visual reference for the day. It was his first time working on one, so I helped him create an outline and set out the first few scenes and their text – before stepping back and overseeing the completed list and helping whenever asked. During this time, our set designer took on the role of proof-reading the script and rewriting parts of it to improve dialogue and pacing. This led to disagreements between the writer and proof-reader which needed mediating and ended up delaying the completion of our script. Due to these delays, it was hard to brief any potential actors (even though other things would cause them to be unavailable anyway), but mainly damaged our confidence going into the production stage. We all had less time to fully understand the script and when it came to finalising who would play each character, we were left with even less time to eventually prep them. After a few days of high tensions between the two roles of writer and set designer, we eventually managed to calm things down as the communication gap was bridged – and the purpose of creating a second version became apparent. I learned that encouraging careful explanations on both purpose and motivation can help solve situations like this from escalating in the future.

Once the second copy of the script was finalised, our set designer took to catering his ideas for the potential set with his copy of the script. I would work with him by explaining my initial ideas for shot types and generating AI visuals to provide a better reference to what I was envisioning. By utilising added details that helped make use of the set and providing more detail for its visuals, he was able to finish a basic floorplan and work with the rest of the group to organise a list of props and required items. We decided that we wanted to create a shelf to better replicate the setting of a store (as well as the college not having a small shelf for us to use in filming), and paint the boards to create a freezer, aisle number, etc. Our set designer took to calculating prices for the items that we'd need, with the lighting director and myself providing the funds for these items.

Around this time, official dates were provided for the students to choose from regarding when we'd wish to hire out the studio and the equipment for filming. I took a look as soon as possible as I wanted to ensure we would have our most optimal dates booked before they were taken. I noticed that nobody could book the equipment out on Wednesdays, yet we could still come into the college and the studio on that day – which gave me the idea to choose a Thursday for our filming. This was so that we could come into the studio on the Wednesday (despite not having assigned class on Wednesdays) and use it as a preparation day for assembling and painting the set between other groups doing so themselves. I settled on 2 optimal Thursdays that were nearer the end of the available choices, as I wanted to ensure we were comfortable in preparing all the other elements (which would turn out to be necessary due to a few delays in our readiness such as script progress) and sent through a request to our tutors. Incidentally, we would end up being offered both dates, which caught me by surprise. Due to us then having the equipment and room booked out on these two dates, I decided that we'd use the earlier one as a test day to get ourselves acquainted with the

technology (since using both as filming days would leave 3 other groups to alter the set's paint between the shoots and alter the look of the final product whilst also increasing the workload unnecessarily). On this day, primarily the director of photography and myself were using the equipment so that I could understand its limitations and specialties, whilst he could understand better how to use it. We looked at movements for the cameras, saved angles and focus, transitions, and connecting an external display (which we would use to view the script at the same time as filming the project). Since we didn't need to or intend to use the full day for the booking, I informed members of the class that they were welcome to come along and take a look/have a try at the technology themselves in case they hadn't had the opportunity to book out 2 dates themselves. Overall, we left this preparation day feeling much better informed on the uses for this technology as well as more confident in our ability to use it.

At this point, we were a few weeks into the project and had only a few left to finish it, which highlighted our second delay within this project – the role of producer. I had been acting as the producer for this project up to this point, ensuring that every member knew of their next steps and when we should aim to have it sorted by – including that of our allotted producer. It was mentioned to me around this time that the person in question was not invested in the role, causing severe motivational difficulties. I decided to keep offering my assistance on this role and helping lighten the load wherever possible to help ensure the project's success. I believe this was a flawed plan on my behalf as this would only stretch my attention further, harming the other aspects I had also made myself responsible for. There were difficulties creating schedules due to this and eventually, our project ended up being harmed because of it. I used this as a learning opportunity both for myself in over-burdening my role and ensuring effective and thorough communications within the individuals that take important roles, as well as a chance to discuss a more open line of a communication on behalf of the producer in future projects – to prevent this situation from making past the role delegation stage. The main thing I'd have liked to be sorted by this person by this point was for them to act as a primary source of communication between our potential actors, since I was too busy working on other aspects to take on this task as well. We didn't manage to make enough progress in this area in time, however, leaving us with only one potential actor and multiple roles left uncast (though issues with the script writing would have caused issues anyway). On the day, this one actor would end up being unwell throughout that week and was unable to play the character for us. On the day, we were luckily able to make last minute recruitments of other media students to perform our smaller roles, which helped us out massively. In return I guaranteed that I would help them out with their projects alongside anyone else I would end up helping at the time.

Another complication we received regarding roles was that of our director of photography for the pre-recorded scenes. They had helped us massively in the idea generation and planning stages for these scenes but couldn't end up creating any kind of physical work until last minute if at all. This was due to a mixture of external factors, meaning I had to create my own visual references and references for the people working on the project myself, even going to the point of performing the writing for the initial stages of pre-production for these scenes and eventually writing the dialogue and storyboards also. This would only end up spreading me further and harming the product. Looking back, I should have communicated more with tutors and been less apprehensive about asking for help. I overburdened myself in many ways, which led to me making more mistakes in my own role. I plan to prevent situations like this from happening in the future, creating better products and taking better care of myself moving forward.

Since we'd had our group pitch of the project created around this point, the external struggles regarding our 2<sup>nd</sup> director of photography left nothing added regarding their slides for their roles.

Pairing this with them being absent during this time, meant that we had to alter his segment and perform it as a joke on their behalf to represent the tone of our desired product. Our producer did create the entire pitch layout, creating a second one shortly after that would better visually match our idea, and each member oversaw providing their own segment details, images, and text. We decided to film the pitch after having this option mentioned to us and used this as a chance to edit it and perform the pitch in a more comedic and light-hearted manner – to better match the tones and themes of the project we were pitching. Our primary director of photography performed the editing for the pitch.

Over a period of somewhere just longer than a week, I travelled with the set designer around the local area by car to purchase each of our required props and materials. After buying wood, we organised a space to cut and assemble it within the adjacent “Innovation and Technology” building that’s part of the same college group. We had organised a room to assemble the shelving within as well as organising access to any and all tools that we would need for it. Due to the awkward distance between the store we’d use to buy it and the building we would use to assemble it, we had to use my car to transport the wood, which gave us several issues regarding the procuring of our wood as well as the measurements for it. Not only would the pieces need to fit into my car for transportation, but they’d also need to work alongside the boards that were provided for us. On an extra trip, we looked at some potential wooden boards for precise sizing information and taking measurements which allowed us to solve this issue and find a piece that not only worked but would also fit in my car for transport.

We were lucky enough to receive some assistance in painting the board white to match the others, which meant we could finish the construction of the shelving in a single day. It was only me and the set designer actively building it due to the rest of the group being unavailable – and the first coat of paint having been applied by the set designer and floor manager on a previous day. Luckily, since we booked the filming day to take place after a blank day, it guaranteed the shelf paint was able to dry, the shelving could be assembled, we could paint our boards, and also allow us to carry the shelf over and assemble the set on this day as a test.

Painting the boards and laying out the set helped us monumentally for prepping ourselves to film the following day – providing us with a physical representation of how the set would be organised and the space we’d have to work with. In future, for projects like this, I believe it could be useful to find any period of time where we could create a rough physical layout for the set early on. We were, however, met with a slight issue regarding the planned freezer. We intended to have one included somehow and have it be utilised during a particular scene, yet we couldn’t figure out the most efficient way to sort this up to this point – with only basic ideas to fall back on at this point. Visiting and assembling the set on this day allowed us to solve this issue as we could paint the freezer onto a board and position said board against the others in a way that provided a gap. This played into our initial plans for other scenes and ensured we had a way to film this freezer scene on the day already organised. During other projects, I usually like to visit our filming locations beforehand for this very reason, but due to both the large demand for this set, and the limited number of days we could book out from – it was thought to be too difficult to do so earlier in this production. I have now learned to appreciate how important this step truly is on making things run smoother and more efficiently on the day of filming for any project. Whilst I and the set designer painted sections of the boards according to his dictations (and with the help of a student from another class who is credited in the final edit), I would also use this time to plan out an even more specific idea for camera placements and movements for each story beat – which would end up saving time on the following day as I could more easily understand the desired flow of events.

Just before the assembling of the shelving, I took to making some minor adjustments to a personal copy of the script myself. This was in order to specify which camera I would like to use and from what angle, any movements, and cut timings to allow the crew to prepare for the next segment. After visiting the set and working on it to prepare for filming the following day, I revisited this file in the evening and made some more specific alterations. Once filming started the following day, I would have this file open with me and use it alongside the director of photography (who was operating the multi-camera system) to allow them to better understand what to do in each scene. This ended up saving a large amount of time regarding explanations. During filming I would even end up helping the director of photography further by segmenting our focuses on the terminal and splitting up the workload for button presses and timing during our more dynamic scenes. These scenes ended up taking more time than others to record as not only could an issue on set affect the take, but also the operating of the cameras, meaning my assistance was imperative in ensuring we recorded all the necessary scenes in time.

As the actors being used on the day of filming weren't practiced in memorising lines, the idea to add cuts for line memorisation was instrumental in securing any completed footage. In multiple places, we also had to make light alterations on the day to make lines easier on the individual – allowing them to also improv a few lines so long as the general meaning was kept, and the following lines were not impeded. We were also able to implement a new technique during this project (with the help of another member of the class who is also credited in the final edit) whereas we would hold up large pieces of paper with lines or word reminders for the cast during particular scenes, sifting through each piece as necessary.

Near the end of the day's filming, despite some delays in getting the equipment set up and working, we were well on track to record all of our necessary footage from the set and equipment – leaving only some pre-recorded scene filming to go – before someone accidentally walked into and knocked over one of the cameras for the multi-cam setup. This may have shaken up parts of the inside for a moment, which left it unable to focus. I went to immediately inform tutors that this had happened, and the camera was shortly fixed – as it, thankfully, hadn't taken any major damage. The primary cause for this incident was a faulty tripod which, despite having the camera-holding plate locked in, had not been able to hold onto the camera – effectively leaving it balancing on the tripod this entire time. We were honestly lucky it didn't fall sooner, as well as that it didn't take any permanent damage and was able to be used again shortly. However, tensions were high in a few people before this, myself included, due to the immense pressure this project put on us and how much pressure some of us would put on ourselves - and the camera falling sadly provided too much of a shock for one of the main actors, leaving them unable to calm themselves down enough to record our remaining scenes before we'd ran out of time on our booked period.

I felt negative toward myself by this point, constantly thinking of ways to bind all these happenings to my own actions or inactions, as opposed to some bad luck – though I was able to get out of this headspace shortly after. I had planned to speak with the tutors regarding a possibility to film the remaining 4 scenes on another date, whilst feeling a constant, crushing feeling of everything that could go wrong before that point – such as having another group paint over the set before we could get any opportunity to, or us being unable to have the opportunity to finish it in the first place. Amazingly, it was the following day after our allotted filming date that other members of the group had informed the tutors about what had happened after they fixed the camera, and we were told that the next group to book the equipment and studio would not be using it until mid-afternoon. This left us with a short few hours to set everything back up and record the final scenes. Whilst setting up, everyone from the group had arrived promptly in time for our originally scheduled lesson and

switched over priorities to getting this project fully recorded within the time limit. Sadly, one of the original actors wouldn't be planning to attend college on this day and on a short turnaround would only arrive with 20 minutes of time remaining to finish the shoot. I made a quick decision on the spot to replace the actor with another person who was happy to help, and we quickly got to filming these scenes. In the end, we finished the recording with 6 minutes left on our last-minute booking and every member of the group felt a massive weight removed from them as all the shots were recorded and we could move on to post-production. The plan was to implement the replacement of this actor somehow in a comedic manner within our personal edits.

Due to the time constraints during both filming days, from our slow initial startup to the minimal time on the second day, I couldn't secure enough time for someone to use a clapperboard before each take. This would mean that we had to synchronise our audio manually and with much more difficulty. Despite this, I feel I made the right decision, as I don't believe we would have recorded all of our shots had we taken the time to do this before every take – though I have left this project with a much greater appreciation for its use in future projects and I'd like to work closer with a producer to organise timings for allowing this to be much more confirmed.

In the week before and a few weeks after the multi-cam footage was completed, we were working as a group to record the pre-recorded scenes. This would include 2 adverts, a comedic morning routine, a "smoke" break, a short throwaway flashback, and some greenscreen footage for a title sequence. Our set designer enjoys visual effects and wants a future career related to it – making him eager to take on the role of editor for the opening (which he used as an opportunity to create a rig some 3D models), as well as a consultant for the use of the greenscreen for this same sequence. Regarding the other 5 videos, I would end up having to create almost all forms of pre-production for them and then acting as director for each one. The crew size and specifics would change regularly between each project, meaning that I would sometimes have to also perform in a scene or use the camera. This was mainly due to people's availability, though we were still able to film each of these scenes with the lessened group size due to their smaller scale.

When recording the greenscreen footage, we had a scare that the SD card was removed too closely to the stopping of recording. This combined with an awkward file format due to using the Blackmagic cameras led to the files being inconsistently stored on the folders within the SD card. As we couldn't easily find the footage, we believed it to be lost and had to prepare to start that recording session again from scratch. Luckily, we also happened to have a slight scare with the multi-cam footage also once that was completed, as the file type was not anything we were used to and so it was stored in a folder that we didn't think to check – causing a brief moment of panic amongst the group. We were able to find all the footage after a deep dive through all the folders contained within the SD card, and this prompted me to take another look once this greenscreen issue had occurred. I managed to locate the files after they'd moved themselves into a nonsensical folder within the SD card, a couple of days after believing it lost. This of course ended up causing a minor delay to our project, though not as much as having to book the equipment and a room again. I believe the issue stemmed from another group having altered the settings of the Blackmagic camera when it was being used before we booked it out, teaching me to ensure that we always double check all of the important settings before we start recording with them – including the file type, quality and other settings that relate to lighting, etc (a lesson I learned from a separate, previous project).

Regarding the pre-recorded scenes, another 2 weeks' worth of delays would end up putting several halts on the production. During this period of delays, I would be in charge of editing the pre-recorded scenes for everyone in the group (whenever we'd filmed all the footage for any given scene), editing my version of the multi-cam footage, and writing up my evaluation. The primary causes for delays

would be unexpected absences regarding actors, horrendous weather for outdoor scenes or general, unexpected, and last-minute plan changes – such as work experience schedule conflicts. This ended up pushing us behind schedule, whereas we had barely managed to avoid this during the rest of the project, and once we'd finally managed to finish the recording stage, we had every member of the group reach varying stages of burnout. After experiencing so many difficulties, delays, time constraint-related stresses, and complications, the collective relief of knowing we had all the footage secured ended up exhausting us as a group. Oddly enough, compared to the other groups, we were still somehow ahead of many of them regarding completion – despite being physically unable to meet the original deadline. I worked as hard as possible to try and meet this deadline, but after realising how the stresses I placed on myself kept mounting, I decided to talk to tutors about it before it had any major, negative impact. I was relieved to hear that, due to most people being unable to meet this deadline also, the official due date would be moved to after the Winter Break. I decided to use this break to mentally recover so that I could create a better overall product and feel more relaxed, refreshed, and motivated moving forward. If these extensions were not asked for and provided, I believe there would be no chance of it being completed on time. There is a lot to learn about this particular aspect of the project, and I don't claim to have finished understanding all the slight changes to both mindset and practical work in pre- to post- production that could help. I will likely think back on this part of the project a few more times in the future and continue to learn from it. From smaller things such as scheduling specific scenes in some of our shoots, to bigger things like checking weather forecasts, and travelling out to scout other locations and comparing them over the best choice visually – time has been an important learning factor throughout this project from before it had even started.

As the break commenced, I would juggle personal rest with my work on the project – with a primary focus on the editing aspects. I managed to finish editing the final pre-recorded scenes and get them sent over to the group, as well as making a great start on my own edit for the final product. As college recommenced, I placed an even larger focus on making progress on it. The absence of a renewed, official deadline for the project did leave me feeling a mixture of anxiety and lowered motivation, alongside new projects being introduced that I was enjoying much more at the time. I'm already taking lessons learned from my time on this project onto the new ones and finding myself not only enjoying them much more, but also feeling much better psychologically and physically whilst working on them.

As I edited the project, I noticed issues that stemmed from our time constraints – such as issues with lighting differences between cuts and general audio quality. I decided to fix these issues as much as possible in post-production, spending countless hours cutting out as much background noise as possible (including echo, reverberation, and individual button presses wherever dialogue wasn't being affected) and making alterations to colour and lighting. The latter would be much more difficult than expected as the idea to use high-visibility jackets on the characters would make colour alterations stand out massively – especially when compared to the background and skin. I have come to accept where I couldn't make perfect fixes and worked on these elements as much as possible to boost the quality (whilst not eating up too much time before this new deadline).

I also used the editing stage as an opportunity to teach myself new techniques and effects that could be used in future projects. This included studying how to create flashback effects and transitions, new ways of capturing ADR (Automated Dialogue Replacement) within the editing software itself, and exporting/rendering specific sequences out of the whole project.

For the opening and ending sequences, I wanted to try my hand at generating music through AI. This was on one hand due to us not having the time to commission any work from people inside or

outside of the college music circle, and on the other to teach myself on some new technology that was mentioned to us by our tutors in a recent lesson. I had studied and worked with AI before during my pre-production on several projects to date as it helped massively to better share visual concepts, and this recent technology provided me another opportunity to study and learn about new possibilities. Moving forward, I'd rather not use it where possible in final projects – instead, using it as an auditory reference for asking others about custom music – though I find that it fits well within the tone of the project, as well as our time constraints. We had a piece created through AI already paired with the opening that our set designer had created, though I wished to practice myself and see if I could create something that better matched the tone of the project I'd envisioned.

As the project came to a close, I found opportunities to help other groups with their work during the last few weeks. I would help other students from the other media levels, years, and classes with their separate projects, whilst also lending a hand to people within my class wherever possible. I enjoy working on a set, and taking every opportunity to learn more about the role of director and that of the other roles that the director must instruct – especially in different contexts such as with the multi-cam. I would take on a visual role, operating the multi-cam terminal and consulting with that group's Harrison Hewitt and Alfie Bull to better understand what they wanted visually. This kind of help always benefits me, giving me a new perspective on my desired role, and on the creation of the visual nature of any product. I would also take on acting roles for Alfie Kettleborough, William McDonald, and Oliver Kan's project as well as that of Millie Jane-Wilmot, Niamh Lang, and Emily Underwood's group. I helped on any miscellaneous tasks whenever necessary, and gained an opportunity to study how other groups performed their roles and worked as a team whenever I wasn't in front of the camera. These new perspectives, I found, were endlessly fascinating and helpful for comparing to my own processes, techniques, and team. I plan to continue helping other groups moving forward to learn more about what I could improve on, alter, and gaining better understanding of the other roles required to make a media product – providing more confidence and understanding when asking tasks of these roles in my future directing endeavours.

Overall, I'm not all too happy with the outcome of this project – but I find that, yet again, I learn the most from challenges and difficulties. This has by far become one of the most educational experiences I have ever had in the media field, and I hope to take these lessons learned moving forward to create better, smoother, and more effective productions – whilst still learning from the inevitable difficulties I've yet to face. I love learning about media, as well as practicing it and I look forward to what the future holds.