New Paltz Cooking Show

Everybody eats. Whether you're a college student, pro home cook, or own a small business, each one of us has a unique relationship with food, cooking, and cuisine. While it may sound like a chore to busy college students, learning to cook allows us to nourish ourselves, practice creativity, and connect with others all while developing this key life skill.

The New Paltz Cooking Show is a YouTube channel aimed at inspiring people to cook more food, featuring myself and peers in the community with a recipe to share. The channel provides ideas for college students and recent graduates feeling bored in the kitchen and shows that cooking can be approachable and fun.

Over the past nine months, I have created, filmed, edited, and directed seven episodes. I've worked to set up effective compositions, fix audio issues, tinker with lighting, direct guests, and understand camera settings to achieve better video experiences. In post production, I developed workflows between Final Cut Pro X and Adobe After Effects to make the editing process more efficient and enjoyable. The brand image is straightforward and bold to help those following instructions, yet equally playful to engage viewers. Let's cook!
THESIS 1 - RESEARCH
Research Conclusions

Research I conducted in Thesis I was fairly consistent with how my project ended up.

I spent weeks studying other cooking shows on YouTube and dissecting what worked, what didn’t work, and how I could put my own creative spin on things.

The main difference between my research and my final project is that I veered away from business episodes. Originally, I intended on reaching out to local businesses / restaurants but soon realized that I wanted to steer my project more in the direction of “people” rather than companies.

Despite my extensive dissection of cooking shows already in existence, I found the best “research” was just jumping in early and trying things for myself...
Beginning Ideation

I created posters to explore different visual identities. The initial branding lacked personality and depth.

I experimented with up close imagery of red cabbage and other fruits and vegetables. While I did not go in this direction, I found it to be a necessary step in the process to figuring out my final branding.
Continued Exploration

Because my project was heavily video based, I intended for the branding to really come through in the motion graphics. I experimented continuously with different looks for titles and background visuals. This was a constant work in progress and is still changing with every video.
I began shooting and editing my first videos during Thesis I, giving myself plenty of time to overcome obstacles that inevitably would present themselves.

My first video took quite literally all day to shoot. Setting up cameras, lighting, audio, and the “set” was a completely foreign experience for me. Issues I ran into centered mostly around framing of shots and technical editing details (music being too loud, motion graphics looking choppy, etc).

The branding was very much still up in the air, but it was incredibly helpful to get one video completed. I immediately saw what I wanted to improve upon and worked to fix that in my next couple videos.
First Guest Video

Filming someone else cook was such a different experience than filming myself. It incorporated an entirely new aspect of film-making, directing.

I initially felt uncomfortable being assertive and directing my guest, mostly because I didn’t know exactly how I wanted the video to turn out, but that changed over time. With each video featuring someone else, I felt more confident in my ability to craft a visual experience.
Video Ideas

I was constantly thinking and jotting down video ideas and organized them all in Notion.

I split the ideas up into different categories and for videos I was more passionate about exploring, wrote notes about what the video could be like within a subpage. Granted, I have more ideas than I could maybe ever execute, but this was a great exercise in brainstorming. The list goes on...
Throughout this whole year, I watched a TON of cooking videos on YouTube. It has gotten to the point, for better or for worse, where I now watch cooking videos to analyze production techniques rather than for the enjoyment...

I read a variety of articles and watched countless TED Talks on effective storytelling as well as visual communication.
Outreach / Feedback

I received consistent feedback and suggestions from my Thesis advisor, Amy Papaelias, as well as many students who made comments on my work. I felt surrounded by people willing to give good suggestions.

I sent emails out to around 10 professionals in the field – people who make cooking videos on YouTube for a living. Two people got back to me and we set up zoom meetings.
I met with Mike Greenfield from the popular YouTube channel, Pro Home Cooks. I prepared for the interview by creating an outline of questions I intended on asking. We talked for an hour on all things cooking, YouTube, and his business. It was incredibles to hear words of advice from someone who's been doing this for over a decade.
My second interview was with Stephen Cusato from Not Another Cooking Show. Again, hearing words of wisdom from someone well versed in the world of cooking videos was invaluable. Stephen has been at it for five years.
Thesis II Midterm Feedback

I received a lot of constructive feedback on the small details of my project. I found everyone’s thoughts to be very helpful when considering things like font, colors, mockup style, etc. It definitely gave me some confidence and clarity regarding moving forward with my designs and videos.

One helpful suggestion was that Emma suggested I include captions for my short videos. I only made one short after this change was implemented but it was the right call. It makes the video more accessible to everyone as well as engages the viewer. I plan on continuing with the captions in the future.
Obstacles

This project has been one huge lesson in creative problem solving. I had absolutely no idea what REALLY went into making a cooking show prior to starting this...

For me, learning to become a better cook, graphic designer, and video producer is all just trial and error.

I could have prepared and researched all year about how to make a cooking show, but it got done because I let myself be bad at it, and learned so much in the process. Here were some obstacles I faced.
Filming in my New Paltz apartment, space is tight. For top down shots, I used this C-stand and attached a shopping bag full of bags of flour to counter balance the camera. It was a bit of a hack job... tripods were often precariously placed too.

I had more room when I lugged my equipment home but still had to test things out constantly to get the shot.
Lighting

I purchased a set of studio video lights with money from a grant I received through school, having no idea how to use lighting like this. I got creative and sometimes it worked, other times it didn’t. It was a learning experience and still is.
Audio

Audio is one of the most crucial parts to a successful video. If the audio quality is poor, it is abrasive to our ears and we will likely exit from a video.

It took hours of testing, researching, and getting frustrated with my camera before I achieved audio I was satisfied with.

My two-camera setup included a shotgun mic to get “cooking sounds” and ambient noise, while my lavalier mic was key for capturing voices.
Directing

Directing was one of the most difficult parts of this. I didn’t want to step on peoples’ toes in the kitchen and be controlling behind the camera, but I quickly realized that in order to make a well done video, I did have to lead the charge a bit.

Directing people makes the cooking process a bit clunky, as we’re constantly having to move cameras and lights around, and set up just the right shot.
Entire projects I filmed were sometimes scrapped because they weren’t usable for whatever reason… Occasionally the recipe didn’t come out how I wanted it to, or the idea for the video just wasn’t great.

It’s brutal feeling like time is being wasted, but this is truly just part of the process.

Even with these “failures,” I came away with some realization about how to better proceed with the next project.
In post production, I developed workflows between Final Cut Pro X and Adobe After Effects to make the editing process more efficient and enjoyable.

I used Final Cut Pro for the rough cut and After effects for title sequences and animations.
Organization

With files upon files, one part of my project I totally overlooked at first was organization. There are hundreds of gigabytes and all sorts of different assets that go into a single video, so file organization became key to my productivity and ultimate success.
Blogging every week kept me accountable. I set goals each week that I for the most part adhered to. Even if I didn't achieve my goals 100% of the time, I at least felt like I knew what I HAD to do and could move forward with that in one way or another.
FINAL WORK
NEW PALTZ COOKING SHOW

New episodes on YouTube every other week
Branding

To tie things up, I created a brand image that is straightforward and bold to help those following instructions, yet equally playful to engage viewers.

I used Poppins, a clear and readable font, for videos but employed a more attention-grabbing font, Humane Bold, in posters. To keep my designs more lighthearted, I included posterized foods in the background.
From Sketch To Screen

While not every video was meticulously planned out, most of my motion graphics started as thumbnail drawings in my sketchbook. It was so important that I draw my ideas out before taking it into After Effects, as it is far more time consuming creating compositions in the program than it is to cross something out and sketch a new one.
Website

I created a subpage on my portfolio website completely dedicated to my cooking show. It includes all the videos with the recipe instructions / breakdowns.

https://www.ezrapeterman.com/np-cooking-show
I thought the show was a success. I have never felt this much support at a school event. So many people I’d never event met came up to me showing genuine intrigue and interest – what a great feeling!

Overall, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. I felt like all my hard work this past year was put on display, and many people who knew I was doing a cooking show were taken aback when talking with them about everything that went into making it happen.
I almost bit off more than I could chew for the show day. I decided to bake off two loaves of sourdough bread the morning of, and was running around like a madman trying to make everything work in order to have fresh bread at the event.

In addition, I made stickers and recipe cards to add to my display table.
Reflection

Throughout my entire project, I’ve really embraced the fact that I’m kind of still a beginner at all of this. Every time I finish filming, editing, or just cooking in general, I come away knowing there is still so much to learn and improve at.

What worked best was spending the majority of my time MAKING the thing I set out to make. For the bulk of this year, I put creation first, and it allowed me to iterate and improve. Looking back, I would have spent more time experimenting with the brand identity. Things came together very late and didn’t translate into the videos too well.

I feel incredibly lucky to have done my thesis project on something I’m truly excited about and eager to keep improving at. This has been such an enriching experience for me. There have been so many people that have lifted me up and supported me throughout this whole process. A huge thank you to Amy, my family, my roommates and close friends, the school for supplying me with grants, and anyone who has watched a video. Thank you!!!