

When I learned to drive during my sophomore year, my mom taught me all the rules.

Stop at red lights.

Stay under the speed limit.

Use your signal while changing lanes.

Driving was full of rules keeping me and my 2004 Hyundai Accent safe.

I found this same safety learning rules when creating my first stories for our video staff. I watched hours of broadcast packages and fell in love with the evening news. It was always the same. Each story followed the same set of rules and used the same set of shots. Each show had the same anchors, the same format, the same order of stories.

I noticed my peers didn't always agree.

They didn't watch the evening news, but rather watched fast-paced personalities on YouTube. These shows broke all the rules of traditional broadcast news. They included jump cuts, their hosts had lots of personality and the shows felt like you were talking with a friend, not listening to the news. My traditional broadcast videos met the standard of other high school broadcast programs, but I was challenged to reach my peers where they were by creating content they looked forward to watching.

Even though I learned to follow the rules growing up, I realized this was an instance where I had to become a rule-breaker.

To that point, I created a weekly news show, *The Hood Report*, with the vision of making an innovative show designed for the web, a place our target audience spends their days. I created the show as a side project, in addition to the content I was creating for our staff's traditional broadcast show. The show is short and includes jump cuts to help maintain a lively pace. The style mimics what teens are watching online today. It is anything but traditional high school broadcast journalism -- and our student body loves it.

My rule-breaking vision didn't stop with *The Hood Report*. I stepped up as an editor my sophomore year and moved to be Executive Producer, the top leader of our staff, in my junior year. Our staff was in a transitional period at the beginning of that year. We had lots of new students joining staff, and while we had been consistently producing our traditional broadcast show and packages, our staff was not sold into the format and many were missing deadlines because they lacked the passion for producing.

I decided it was time to break more rules.

We ditched our traditional news show to create a lineup of web-based shows, like mine, featuring relevant stories about our school, community and nation. We developed a graphics department to make animations, learned creative ways to tell stories and built a promotions team to push our content to the school. We became centered around the web and social media, and the staff loved it. We reached our audience in ways we had never experienced, getting more views and interactions than ever before.

Journalism is not as simple as driving my car. If I kept inside my lane and feared taking risks, I wouldn't reach my full potential. If I stayed under the speed limit like other cars around me, I wouldn't move forward in a time when innovation is vital.

In order to become a successful journalist in the 21st century, being a great videographer or a great writer isn't enough to stay competitive in the ever-changing media space. Being able to combine quality photography, videography and writing, with the passion to innovate, will not only make you an invaluable asset to your media organization, but bring readers to important stories that journalism so desperately needs.

In one of my final projects of my senior year, I challenged myself to create a unique news package that combined every skill I learned throughout my time in scholastic journalism.

I stumbled upon the idea of the collateral consequences of incarceration after interviewing staff at Connections to Success, a local charity focused on helping those in poverty or coming out of prison become economically independent. After a quick online search, I was shocked to find out about all the restrictions placed on those with felonies that made it extremely difficult to transition back into society. I knew this was the story I was meant to cover, and I spent the next 10 months working on my multimedia piece, Life After.

The story taught me so much about what it means to be a true journalist. I learned how to conduct interviews on sensitive topics and what it truly means to connect with your interviewee. I learned that there is so much more to people than a label that was placed on them. Finally, I learned that the best way to make an impact as a journalist is to find those who are in need of someone to tell their story.

Being a great and inspiring editor and journalist doesn't just mean being able to produce content. It means that you are able to empathize with people who share perspectives and lives far different from yours. It means balancing the role between boss and peer. It means that earning respect from another means more than simply having a title.

I hope to continue my drive for innovation at the University of Missouri's School of Journalism, where I will be carrying all of the skills and experience I've learned throughout my time in the FHN Media Program.

Journalism as an industry is changing, and I'm excited to be a part of the transition. I believe that in order for viewers to come to journalism, we cannot keep doing things the same way that we always have. While the written stories and nightly news of journalism's past have served as great models throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, journalists have a great opportunity to combine traditional reporting with multimedia and online work to help bring readership back to media outlets.

Breaking the rules has shaped my identity as a journalist. I let my creativity go outside the box to design a vision for myself and those around me. Telling impactful stories is my passion and something I plan to do for the rest of my life.

My mother even encourages me to break the speed limit with my journalism work, just as long as I follow all the rules in my 2004 Hyundai Accent.