

**USC Annenberg School of Journalism**  
**Syllabus**  
**REPORTING (Journalism-302 Print)**  
**Spring 2008**  
**Wednesdays, 7 p.m. – 9:40 p.m.**  
**ASC 330**

**INSTRUCTOR:** Mariel Garza

**Office Hours:** by appointment only

**COURSE OBJECTIVE:** By the end of this course you should be able to report and write a well-researched news story of at least 1,000 words on deadline in a clear, concise, accurate and fair manner. You should also be able to incorporate basic computer-assisted reporting concepts in your stories.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OUTCOMES:** Journalism 302 (Reporting) is really an extension of Newswriting. That means it is as much about writing as it is about reporting. The two are inseparable. However, most of your time will likely be spent on the reporting of stories, that is, the gathering of information. By the end of the semester, you will know what kind of information is needed for various types of stories, where to track down that information, how to hone your interviewing skills, how to find good sources, and how to turn the information you collect into a cohesive and interesting story. You will learn how to think on your feet, develop your critical thinking skills and overcome your fears.

There will **not** be an official mid-term test or project. You will be told what your grade is for the class so far after Week 8. The final project will be a 1,200 to 1,500-word news story about a topic of your choice. The topics for the final – and for as many other weekly writing assignments as possible -- must be approved by me beforehand. You will get story approval by submitting a budget line.

I expect you to come to class on time, prepared (i.e., having done your readings and homework assignments, and followed the news), and ready to discuss news-related issues.

Typing skills are essential in this course. You must be able to write on a personal computer. When working on a computer, save often, make a back-up copy of your work on a floppy, and print it out at various stages of the writing process. Always keep a hard copy for yourself. **Claims that “the computer lost it” or “the computer crashed” will not be accepted as an excuse.** Every student is required to schedule at least one meeting with me sometime around the semester’s mid-point.

**PROFESSIONAL DRESS CODE:** For the purposes of this class, you are a bona fide member of the working press. You should expect to be treated with all of the normal courtesies and privileges afforded to the press. In return, you are expected to represent the profession in a dignified and appropriate manner. If you do not take yourself seriously, no one else will. While conducting interviews and field

research for this class you are expected to dress in proper business attire. That means when you conduct interviews do not dress like you are going to a nightclub or to the beach. You don't have to wear business suits, but dress appropriately.

**E-MAIL:** You should use your USC e-mail address rather than a personal e-mail address, which is usually not that professional, when corresponding with sources via the Internet.

## **TEXTS/READINGS:**

### **Required:**

1. "Associated Press Stylebook," Norm Goldstein, Editor, ISBN: 0465004881
2. "Inside Reporting," Tim Harrower, ISBN: 0073526142
3. "Creative Interviewing," 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Ken Metzler, ISBN: 0205262589, Allyn & Bacon

**Dictionary:** The following online dictionary will be the official reference for in-class assignments, homework assignments, midterms and finals:

Merriam-Webster Dictionary, [www.m-w.com](http://www.m-w.com)

**WRITING COACHES:** Writing coaches are available in ASC 227 during posted times and by appointment. They will review graded papers only, not help you write assigned stories. They are:

Bob Berger (print): [rberger@usc.edu](mailto:rberger@usc.edu)

Ed Boyer (print) [edboyer@ca.rr.com](mailto:edboyer@ca.rr.com)

Brad Hanson (print) [brad.hanson@latimes.com](mailto:brad.hanson@latimes.com)

Mike Daniels (broadcast): [danielsm@usc.edu](mailto:danielsm@usc.edu)

**QUIZZES:** There will be weekly quizzes throughout the semester on current events and lectures and related reading assignments. Reporters must know what is happening in the world around them. For the aspiring reporter, reading the newspaper thoroughly every day and watching television newscasts are essential and strengthen your writing skills. If you find this to be a chore, you'll never be a journalist.

Read at least one major daily newspaper, as well as magazines. I recommend The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal, Newsweek, Time, or U.S. News and World Report. For news Web sites, try Google news or CNN.com.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** There will be few in-class assignments. Much of your time for this class will be spent outside the classroom. If you do not have a car, become friends with someone who does, or learn the bus schedule between USC and West Hollywood. Class time will be reserved for lectures and discussion of current events and assignments. Class participation is important. Reporters cannot be shy about asking questions or expressing opinions.

With each assignment, you must provide a list of your sources so I can spot fact-check your stories for accuracy. This includes people, web sites, articles or reference books. A sample form for your source list is attached. **Stories without source lists will receive an automatic “F” grade.**

**As you know, fabricating quotes or sources is unacceptable and will result in an "F" for the course and possibly expulsion from the Annenberg School of Journalism and the University.**

### **GRADES:**

**Assignments:** All assignments will be edited on a professional basis. Each story will be returned with a grade and written comments and explanations of any editing that is more than routine. Our style guide is “The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual.” You may copy edit your assignments by hand prior to turning them in provided it is readable and neat. **Do not use red ink.**

Grades will be based on overall contents and construction of the story. Did you get the lead correctly? Is it well written? Your copy should not contain any errors in spelling, style, grammar and facts. There should not be any omissions, either. **In fact, after the first week, any misspelled proper word (even if it’s due to a typographical error) will drop the grade one-half grade on that assignment. A factual error will result in an automatic “F” on that assignment.** Accuracy is the first law of journalism. Professional journalists are expected to get their facts right, to spell and punctuate correctly, and to respect grammar and syntax.

Please don’t be discouraged if your stories receive low grades at the outset. Your work will improve. Reporting and writing are hard work, but the only way to get better is to keep at it, regardless of the difficulties.

**Course:** Your course grade will be determined as follows:

Weekly Writing Assignments	50 percent
Quizzes and class participation	15 percent
Final	35 percent

Generally speaking,

“A” stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well written and require only minor editing (i.e., they are publishable).

“B” stories require more than minor editing, and have a few style or spelling errors or one significant error of omission.

“C” stories are stories that need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have spelling, style or omission errors.

“D” stories require excessive rewriting and have numerous errors, and should not have been submitted.

“F” stories have one proper name misspelled or a factual error.

All of your assignments will be graded on a scale of 1-100, then translated into traditional grades. For example, here is what every error on an assignment will cost you:

**Missed ledes**=10 to 25 points

**Incomplete nut grafs**=10 to 25 points

**AP Style, Punctuation, or basic spelling error** = Three points.

**Clarity, organization** = Five to seven points for short stories; seven to 10 points for longer stories.

**Completeness/Omissions** = Five points.

**Spelling of proper names or Factual errors** = Automatic “F” on assignment.

And here’s how these points will translate into traditional grades:

A	(4.0)	= 95-100	C+	(2.3)	= 77-79	D-	(0.7)	= 50-53
A-	(3.7)	= 90-94	C	(2.0)	= 74-76	F	(0)	= 49 or lower
B+	(3.3)	= 87-89	C-	(1.7)	= 70-73			
B	(3.0)	= 84-86	D+	(1.3)	= 67-69			
B-	(2.7)	= 80-83	D	(1.0)	= 64-66			

**You must repeat this course if you earn a grade of C- or lower. And you must maintain an overall GPA of 3.0 (B) in your major.**

**ATTENDANCE:** Attendance is required for all classes, particularly since we will have two fewer classes because of school holidays. If you expect to miss class due to a family emergency, a medical problem, or a religious holiday, you should contact me beforehand by sending me an e-mail or giving me a call. Tardiness is unacceptable. It reflects on your credibility, not only with me but with your sources. Students are responsible for getting class notes from other students in the class. Students can **not** make up in-class assignments or quizzes with extra credit assignments.

**LATE ASSIGNMENTS:** Assignments are due **Wednesdays at 7 p.m. in class.** You also must turn in assignments on the day they are due even if you know you will miss class and have contacted me beforehand. You can either give it to another student to hand in for you, leave it in my mailbox with a time stamp from Student Services, or send it to me via e-mail attachment.

**NOTE:** Late assignments will not be accepted and an “F” will be given to any missed assignments.

**REWRITING ASSIGNMENTS:** You may rewrite any homework assignment that received a “C” or lower grade to achieve a higher grade. Such rewrites must be completed by 5 p.m. Friday of the week graded stories are returned. The old grade and the new grade will be averaged for the recorded grade for that assignment. Rewritten stories should be sent via e-mail. This policy does not apply to the final story.

**PLAGIARISM:** Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one’s own. In journalism, this includes appropriating the reporting of another without clear attribution. The following is the School of Journalism’s policy on academic integrity as published in the University

catalog: *“Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions to this policy.”*

**ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS:** The following is the University’s policy regarding students with disabilities:

*“Students requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed.”*

Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in the Student Union room 301 and is open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The phone number for DSP is 213-740-0776.

**STRESS AND ANGST:** I realize that today’s students are under a lot of pressure. If you start to feel overwhelmed, it is important that you reach out for help. A good place to start is USC Student Counseling Services at 213-740-7711. The service is confidential, and there is no charge.

**INTERNSHIPS:** The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course who undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to one percent of the total available semester points for this course.

### **COURSE SCHEDULE:**

The syllabus will be flexible and is subject to change consistent with the class’s progress or the availability of speakers or extenuating circumstances.

#### **Week 1 (Jan. 16): Course Overview/Syllabus Review**

**What is reporting?**  
**What is a beat?**  
**Developing story ideas**  
**Building a complete Rolodex**  
**Student reporter rights**  
**Shoe leather/telephones vs. e-mail**  
**Professional dress, conduct, safety**  
**Tape recorder requirements**  
**Fact-checking**

**Writing budget lines, story proposals**

**Homework:** Getting to know your beat assignment  
U.S. Census/American FactFinder beat city assignment.  
“Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 1, 2.

**Week 2 (Jan. 23): Developing a beat**

**Interviewing skills**

**Diversity/inclusion**

**Hard news vs. soft news and where the nutgraph comes in**

**Finding helpful sources; newsworthy people**

**Homework:** 1. Write a 500-word story; due next week.  
2. “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 3, 4.  
3. “Inside Reporting” pp. 136-147  
4. Find, read and bring to next class a copy of the California Brown Act.

**Week 3 (Jan.30): Covering city politics**

**Forms of local government**

**Role of the press in government and your rights**

**Usual suspects and non-traditional sources**

**Digging for stories**

**Agencies, committees, commissions and departments**

**Homework:** 1. Write a 500-word story.  
2. “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 5, 6.

**Week 4 (Feb. 6): Covering a multicultural community**

**Race, gender, geography, class and age in stories**

**Homework:** 1. Write a 500-word story.  
2. Find and obtain a copy of the agenda for the next regular West Hollywood City Council meeting  
3. “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 7, 8.

**Week 5 (Feb. 13): Covering City Council Meetings, Part I**

**Discussion of what a city council does**

**Why it matters**

**Making dull material interesting**

**Homework:** 1. Story on a City Council item from meeting. 500 words.  
2. “Inside reporting,” pp. 230-233

**Week 6 (Feb. 20): Covering Local Government, Part II**

**Beyond agenda items  
Analysis and interpretation**

- Homework:** 1. Write an analysis/interpretation or follow-up story on Council action. 500 to 1,000 words.  
2. “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 9, 10.

**Week 7 (Feb. 27): Covering Law Enforcement, Part I**

**Relationship between journalists and police; police and public  
Accessing public crime records – LAPD, Sheriff, CHP  
Preparing for crime stories (misdemeanors and felonies)**

- Homework:** 1. Visit the West Hollywood L.A. Sheriff’s substation and write a crime story from a police report or from interviewing a police officer. Write a 300 to 500-word story; due next week.  
2. “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 11, 12.

**Week 8 (March 5): Covering Law Enforcement, Part II**

**Daily vs. second-day, trend crime stories  
Analysis and interpretation**

- Homework:** 1. Write a crime trend story or follow-up story. 500 words.  
2. “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 13, 14  
3. “Inside reporting,” p.223

**Week 9 (March 12): Covering Education Part I**

**School governance structures  
How schools, school districts are managed at local and state levels  
Current education issues  
Covering school board meetings**

- Homework:** 1. Cover a LAUSD board of education meeting and write a 500-word story about an action item taken by the board.  
2. “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 15, 16

**Week 10 (March 19): SPRING BREAK. NO CLASS**

**Homework:** “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 17, 18.

**Week 11 (March 26): Covering Education Part II**

**Analysis/interpretation of education issues**

- Homework:**
1. Write an analysis/interpretation education story. 700 words.
  2. “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 19, 20.
  3. “Inside reporting” pp. 228-229

**Week 12 (April 2): Courts**

**Discuss proposals for finals—a 1,500-word hard news story, with a minimum of six quoted sources. Proposals due April 16.**

**Criminal procedure; judicial system**

**Criminal vs. civil courts**

**Preparing to cover a trial**

**Homework:** Cover a trial. Write a 600-word story.

**Week 13 (April 9): Covering Speeches and News Conferences**

**Covering speeches and news conferences**

**Determining what the story is**

**How to write non-chronological stories**

**Homework:** Cover a speech or news conference in West Hollywood. If you can't find one, cover a speech or news conference at USC. Write a 500-word story.

**Week 14 (April 16): Writing the long story; Feature and Specialty Reporting**

**Organization and approach to writing the long story**

**Why the nutgraph is essential in news features and longer stories**

**Specialty reporting**

**Using multiple sources, data, color**

**Homework:** Work on final project

**Week 15 (April 23): The investigative feature story**

**Investigating techniques for any story**

**Homework:** Work on final project

**Week 16 (April 30): Review for final**

**Review story structure and research methods**

**Week 17 ( May 7) – Finals due: via e-mail by 7 p.m.**

**Story may be turned in sooner if completed earlier.**

## **BIOGRAPHY**

Now, a little about your instructor. I am an editorial writer, columnist and blogger for the Los Angeles Daily News, where I have worked for more than six years. Before joining the opinion pages of the Daily News, I was a reporter covering L.A. City Hall. I am a graduate of the undergraduate journalism department of San Francisco State University (class of 1990). In the 17 years since graduation, I have written for California newspapers both large and small, from the tiny Point Reyes Light to the Los Angeles Times' San Gabriel Valley section and from dot-coms to both consumer and trade magazines. I currently also teach journalism classes at California State University, Northridge.

**1-1-1-1-1**  
**SOURCELIST**  
**J-302**

**Name**  
**Date**

**INTERVIEWS**

Name	Title	Telephone Number	E-mail Address
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**WEB SITES**

URLs

**BACKGROUND MATERIAL**

Name and date of publication; story headline; byline.