

USC Annenberg School of Journalism
Syllabus
REPORTING (Journalism-302 Print)

Spring 2008

Thursdays, 7 p.m. to 9:40 p.m.
Room AHF 259, Studio C

INSTRUCTOR: JOHN L. MITCHELL

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.

The course will focus on learning by doing. Your weekly assignments will usually revolve around coverage of the city of Carson. I will act as City Editor and you will be Metro reporters. The idea is to become an expert on the city of Carson by covering its government, crime and schools, and features, among other things. You will be expected to file a weekly beat note explaining what you did on the beat for the week.

With each assignment, you will be asked to provide a source list so I can spot fact-check your stories for accuracy. A sample form for your source list is attached.

There will **not** be an official mid-term test or project. You will be told what your grade is for the class after Week 8. The final project will be a 1,200 to 1,500-word hard 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-13: 978-0-07-352614-0

Optional:

1. **“Creative Interviewing,”** 3rd Edition, Ken Metzler, ISBN: 0205262589, Allyn & Bacon
2. **“The Courts and the News Media,”** 7th Edition, California Judges Assn.

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**

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:

Frank Sotomayor, Print: fsotomayor@usc.edu

Bob Berger, Print: rberger@usc.edu

Ed Boyer, Print: edjboyer@ca.rr.com

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 MSNBC.com or CNN.com For radio, listen to KNX (1070 AM) or KFWB (980 AM).

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 Carson. 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.

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	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.

ATTENDANCE: Attendance is required for all class. 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 **Thursday at 7 p.m. in class or via e-mail as a Word attachment**. 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.

Late assignments will not be accepted and an "F" will be given to any missed assignments.

REWRITING ASSIGNMENTS: You may rewrite a homework assignment, especially those that received an “F” for factual errors, 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:

(Readings are to be done prior to the class on the indicated date. **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. 17): Course Overview/Syllabus Review

What is reporting? (How it differs from Newswriting last semester)

What is a beat? (How we'll use beats this semester)

Explain incorporated city; unincorporated area; communities within a city).

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 (You will be asked to submit a budget line/story proposal for each week's assigned story to me by Thursday. However, this is required for the Final. I must approve the story idea before you complete the assignment).

Homework: Find demographics and ten story ideas for Carson.

Readings: (OPTIONAL) "Creative Interviewing," Chapters 1, 2.

Homework/Diagnostic writing assignment: E-mail the story to me by Thursday, Jan. 24, 5 p.m.)

Week 2 (Jan. 24)

Homework: E-mail demographics and story ideas for Carson. (DUE Thursday 1/31 5 p.m.)

Week 3 (Jan. 31): Covering Press Conferences, Part I/US. Census

Covering speeches and news conferences

Determining what the story is

How to write non-chronological stories

Researching U.S. Census Information

Readings: (OPTIONAL) “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 3, 4.

Homework: Watch “Meet the Press,” “Face the Nation” or another weekend news interview television show and write a story about one of the issues discussed on the program.

Week 4 (Feb. 7): Developing a Beat

Interviewing Skills (basic techniques, attribution)

Hard news vs. soft news (deciding when to use a hard or soft lead).

Finding helpful sources; newsworthy people

Using tape recorders

Homework: Interview a newsworthy resident or business owner on your beat. Tape the interview if possible. Note: You cannot interview someone you know or are related to. Write a 500-word story.

Readings: (OPTIONAL) “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 5,6.

Week 5 (Feb. 14): Covering a multicultural community

How do race, gender, geography, class and age affect how stories are written and how they are perceived by society?

Homework: Write a 500-word story regarding diversity in Carson.

Week 6 (Feb. 21): Covering City Council Meetings, Part 1

Discussion of City Council

Local politics

Making dull material interesting

Homework: Story on a City Council item from meeting. 500 words.

Readings: (OPTIONAL) “Creative Interviewing,” Chapters 7, 8.

Week 7 (Feb. 28)

Homework: Turn in City Council story by Thursday March 6

Week 8 (Mar. 6): Covering Local Government, Part II

Expanding beyond agenda items.

Analysis and Interpretation

Homework: Write an analysis/interpretation or follow-up story on Council action. 500 to 1,000 words.

Readings: (OPTIONAL) "Creative Interviewing," Chapters 9, 10.

Week 9 (March 13): 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: Visit the Carson Police Station 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.

Readings: (OPTIONAL) "Creative Interviewing," Chapters 11, 12.

Story proposal, outline, rough draft of 1,500-word story about an issue in Carson, due next week.

Week 10 (March 17-21): SPRING BREAK

Week 11 (March 27): Covering Law Enforcement, Part II

Daily vs. second-day, trend crime stories

Analysis and interpretation

Homework: Write a crime trend story or follow-up story. 500 words.

Readings: "Creative Interviewing," Chapters 13, 14

Week 12 (April 3): Covering Education Part 1

How is the Board of Education similar/different than the City Council?

Homework: Cover a Carson board of education meeting and write a story about an action item taken by the board.

Readings: (OPTIONAL) "Creative Interviewing," Chapters 15, 16

Week 13 (April 10): Covering Education Part 2

Analysis/interpretation of education issues

Homework: Write an analysis/interpretation education story. 500 words.

Readings: (OPTIONAL) "Creative Interviewing," Chapters 17, 18

FRIDAY APRIL 11 IS THE LAST DAY TO DROP A CLASS WITH A MARK OF A "W."

Week 14 (April 17): Courts

Criminal procedure; judicial system

Criminal vs. civil courts

Preparing to cover a trial

Homework: Cover a trial from your beat. Write a 500-word story.

Week 15 (April 24): Covering Speeches and News Conferences, part II

Covering speeches and news conferences

Determining what the story is

How to write non-chronological stories

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

Week 16 (May 1): Writing the long story; Feature and Specialty Reporting

Organization and approach to writing the long story.

Entertainment, sports, consumer affairs are all specialty reporting.

How are they different from hard news stories?

Homework: Work on Final project

FINAL (Wednesday May 7) -- Turn in your Final story via e-mail by 1 p.m.

Story may be turned in sooner if completed earlier.

Instructor's Biography: John Louis Mitchell is the bureau chief for the Los Angeles Times south county region. He covers politics, government, crime, courts and entertainment. In addition to writing, he has worked as a deputy state editor, assigning and editing stories from Northern California to the Mexican border. In 1993, he was a member of the team of Times reporters who won the Pulitzer Prize, awarded for coverage of the second day of the Los Angeles Riots. He teaches an introductory journalism course at Whittier College. And he is a writing coach and workshop instructor for students on the staff of UCLA Daily Bruin. He is a founding board member of the Black Journalist Association of Southern California and a member of the National Assn. of Black Journalists. Before coming to the Times in 1979, he worked as a reporter for the New York Post. He is a graduate of City University of New York.