

Journalism 431
Feature Writing
Spring, 2008

Ed Cray

Monday, 2:00-5:20

ASC 225

This class is intended to develop or enhance your skills as a writer-reporter beyond the basic news story taught in the Core classes. We will begin with the basics – such matters as the multiple types of leads for features and their structure – and proceed to news features and sidebars; to the obituary as a feature; to making “evergreens” fresh; to the personal essay and/or column. Just how far we will be able to go, to the most complex of features, narrative journalism, will depend upon the class itself. (For magazine writing, see Jour-435.)

There will be both *reading and writing assignments each week*. There is *no* textbook per se, but there will be multiple feature stories written by past masters of the form, as well as the instructor’s suggestions about developing a personal voice and style. Some of these will be available on Blackboard, some on handouts distributed in class. Be prepared to discuss the articles and handouts in class.

It is expected that students will attend all classes or will inform the instructor if he/she will not be in class. Grading will be based on the weekly assignments (80 percent) and on class participation (20 percent), both in discussions and reading your stories aloud. There is no final exam.

While there is no textbook, the instructor wishes to credit a number of editors and writing coaches whose analyses and commentary are subsumed in lectures and handouts. They include, among others Bob Baker, formerly of the *Los Angeles Times*; Roy Peter Clark of the Poynter Institute; Lynn and Jon Franklin, most recently ex-*Raleigh News and Observer*, now at the University of Maryland; Jack Hart of *The Portland Oregonian*; and Lillian Ross, a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, whose *Reporting Back* provided a handful of cautionary tales.

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.

Week I (January 14):

The first weeks of the class will be full of exercises to loosen up you (and your writing style). We will begin with a discussion of feature leads and story structure.

Reading for next week: TBA (Blackboard and handouts). Bring to class a clip of a feature story that you found particularly effective attached to a one-page statement explaining why the story worked for you.

Writing to be handed in next week: Three feature stories based on fact-sheets.

Week II (January 28):

Common errors to be avoided. Discussion of clips and your stories.

Reading: TBA (Blackboard and handouts).

Writing: Two features based on fact sheets; rewriting a poorly written feature.

Week III (February 4):

By now I will have a sense of your writing and what we need to work on. Students will read in the class the features written in the past week.

Reading: TBA (Blackboard and handouts).

Writing: Two features based on fact sheets; rewrite a poorly written feature.

Week IV (February 11):

In-class readings, comments by other students and the instructor.

Reading: TBA (Blackboard and handouts).

Writing: A mood piece or feature story based on something new in your neighborhood. Transform a straight wire service story into a feature.

Note: This will be the model for the rest of the semester; you will write, then read your work in class, students will comment, and I grade it, returning your stories the following week. We will not meet on February 18, President's Day, a university holiday, but will pick up on February 25, continuing through March 3, 10 (Spring recess is from March 17-22), March 24 and 31; April 7, 14, 21, and 28.

School of Journalism Academic Integrity Policy

Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own, either deliberately or through carelessness in journalism, this includes appropriating the reporting of another without clear attribution.

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 immediately receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

University of Southern California Policy Relating to Student 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 the professor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday-Friday, 8:30-5:00. The office is in Student Union 301 and the phone number is (213) 740-0776.

#

Ed Cray

Professor, University of Southern California, School of Journalism, Annenberg School for Communication

B.A. 1957, UCLA, anthropology; postgraduate work, UCLA, 1958-1960, in anthropology, folklore and ethnomusicology

At various times since 1959, I have been director of editorial training programs for the *Los Angeles Times*; director of publicity and advertising Los Angeles Philharmonic-Hollywood Bowl Association; director of publications, American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California; assistant editor and business manager for *Frontier* magazine; assistant director of public affairs, KPFK-FM; and a freelance writer.

Author of *Ramblin' Man: The Life and Times of Woody Guthrie* (W.W. Norton, 2004, reprint edition 2006); *Chief Justice* (Simon and Schuster, 1997); *American Datelines* with Jon Kotler and Miles Beller (Facts on File, 1991; reprint edition, University of Illinois Press, 2002); *General of the Army* (W.W. Norton, 1990; reprint editions Touchstone, 1991; Cooper Square, 2000); *Chrome Colossus: General Motors and Its Times* (McGraw Hill, 1981); *Levi's: The History of Levi Strauss & Co.* (Houghton Mifflin, 1979); *Burden of Proof: The Trial of Juan Corona* (Macmillan, 1973); *The Enemy in the Streets* (Doubleday-Anchor, 1972); *In Failing Health* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1971); *The Erotic Muse* (Oak Publications, 1969; 2nd edition, University of Illinois Press, 1992; reprint edition, University of Illinois Press, 1999); *The Big Blue Line* (Coward-McCann, 1967); etc.

Articles and reviews published in the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Newsday*, *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, *San Francisco Examiner*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *Detroit Free Press*, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Daily News (Van Nuys)*, *California History*, *California Lawyer*, *National Law Journal*, *New West*, *The Nation*, *Change*, *Coast*, *Frontier*, *American Journalism Review*, etc.

Scholarly articles and reviews published in *Statesmen Who Were Never President*, Vol. II, edited by Kenneth W. Thompson (Miller Center, University of Virginia, 1996), *Reviews in History*, *Wisconsin Law Review*, *Journal of American Folklore*, *Western Folklore*, *Midwest Folklore*, *Folklore (London)*, etc.

#