

**USC Annenberg School of Journalism Syllabus**  
**Newsriting – PRINT (J-202)**  
**FALL 2007**  
**Mondays, 6:45 – 9:25 p.m.**  
**ASC 329**

**Jack Leonard**  
**Meetings by appointment.**

*“The only qualities essential for real success in journalism are ratlike cunning, a plausible manner, and a little literary ability.”*  
**Nicholas Tomalin (1931 – 73) English journalist**

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

Now is when you begin to master the little literary ability you need for a career in journalism. This is a practical course that will help you prepare for the long road to becoming a working reporter. You will learn how to craft well-written stories – from short news briefs to longer deadline stories to non-deadline features – that emphasize clarity, accuracy and fairness. You will learn how to recognize a news story, how to make your stories simple yet engaging and how to satisfy editors by writing tight and quickly. This course forces students to think on their feet and develop critical thinking skills essential for professional journalists. By the end of the class, you will have a much better understanding about whether or not a journalism career is for you. Whatever you decide, this course will at least give you an appreciation for the work journalists do.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This class treats you as a news reporter and expects you to act professionally. The workload will sometimes appear burdensome but is geared to getting you up to speed so that you can handle any type of story thrown at you. For many professional journalists – including me – writing is the most painful part of the job. But it can also be the most rewarding.

Writing is an intensely personal experience in which you pour a part of yourself onto a page. Fear of failure can leave journalists frozen and unable to begin writing. You will learn how to overcome your fears and how to critique yourself and others constructively. Be prepared to discuss your failures and successes—and those of your colleagues—in class.

The class schedule below outlines objectives for particular weeks. But these can—and most likely will—be changed during the semester to maximize opportunities for learning. In-class exercises and a variety of guest speakers will help hone your writing skills and prepare you for real-world experiences.

## **TEXTBOOKS**

All textbooks are available at the USC Bookstore. Some may be available at [www.barnesandnoble.com](http://www.barnesandnoble.com) or [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com). All textbooks, including the course reader, are also available on reserve at the Annenberg Resource Center and at Leavy Library.

ISBN: 0-07-352614-2

Title: **Inside Reporting/A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism**

Author: Tim Harrower

<http://www.mhhe.com/harrower1>

ISBN: None

Title: **Course Reader for JOUR 202/203/501**

Publisher: USC Bookstore

**BRING YOUR COURSE READER TO EVERY CLASS FOR USE DURING IN-CLASS AND HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS.**

ISBN: 0-465-00489-X

Title: **Associated Press Stylebook** (2007 edition)

Author: Norm Goldstein

**BRING YOUR AP STYLEBOOK TO EVERY CLASS FOR USE DURING IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS, MIDTERMS AND FINALS.**

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

Merriam Webster's online dictionary

[www.m-w.com](http://www.m-w.com)

## **DAILY NEWS READINGS**

Aspiring journalists want to know what's happening in the world around them. Reading newspapers and news Web sites every day, listening to radio news, and watching television newscasts is essential to learning good news judgment and writing skills. Expect to discuss major news developments and how they are covered by the media in class. Weekly news quizzes will be based on the Los Angeles Times coverage and will include 10 questions about the week's major news. Be warned: These will also include major news in sports, business and entertainment. News quizzes will be given at the start of class. They cannot be made up if you are late or miss class.

## **QUIZZES**

In addition to weekly news quizzes, make sure you are prepared for eight weekly tests on AP style. You can find the topics in your course reader. By the time you complete this class, you should have a thorough grasp of the most commonly used style matters and have learned the habit of turning to your stylebook whenever you are in doubt.

## **IN-CLASS AND HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS**

Students will write deadline stories in class nearly every week. Homework assignments will be given at the end of each class. These assignments will use the fact sheets in your Course Reader and will make up 40% of your grade. Don't be discouraged if at first your work earns poor grades. The standards for this class are high. You will be treated as real reporters. Our goal is to eventually produce consistently professional work that could run in a small daily newspaper.

Because the course goals focus on the improvement of your work over time, points become more valuable as the semester progresses. For instance, points accumulated in your first week of in-class and homework assignments are multiplied by one, by two the next week, by three the week after and so on. (This is not the case for quizzes.) You can compensate for early mistakes by doing exceptional work later in the semester. But mistakes later in the course can be fatal. The misspelling of a proper noun or a factual error results in an automatic zero on any assignment, even if it is caused by a typo. Successful students get errors or laziness out of their system early in the semester.

For homework reading, I expect you to read the assigned materials each week before class and understand them, even if we do not go over the same ground in class. I understand that you live busy lives and I will only assign reading that will help you reach your goal of becoming a working reporter. If you have any questions about the assignments either before or after finishing them, please do not hesitate to approach me.

## **GRADING**

Each student is graded individually. There is no curve. This, of course, means that all students can earn an A—or an F.

You earn points for including quizzes and assignments. Each assignment is worth 100 points. Points are earned or deducted based on news judgment; clarity; organization; accuracy; fairness/balance; completeness/omissions; AP style, grammar, punctuation and spelling; and the ability to meet deadlines. Assignments that fail to adhere to a given word count will lose points depending on how many words short or long they are. Points are translated into traditional grades, from A to F, for each assignment.

Together, the midterm and final tests amount to half your class grade. They offer the closest thing to writing for a newspaper short of, well, writing for a newspaper. We spend our entire semester working toward these two goals. Each lasts nearly an entire class. You cannot cram for these tests. The only way to do well is to master the painstaking work of writing a news story in our classroom assignments and our homework.

All work must conform to AP style and the format outlined below. Unless otherwise stated, assignments are due at the beginning of the next class following the class in which it was assigned. Assignments that are turned in late will be given an F. There will be very

few exceptions to this rule. Deadlines are a fact of life in the newspaper business. Email or call me with questions or concerns about assignments well in advance of their due date.

I will accept make-up assignments for those who fail to turn in work on time or who receive grade of D or below. For make-up work, students will be docked two grades, so the highest grade such work can earn is a C.

1. “A” stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well-written and require only minor editing (i.e., they are publishable).
2. “B” stories require more than minor editing, and have a few style or spelling errors or one significant error of omission.
3. “C” stories are stories that need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many spelling, style or omission errors.
4. “D” stories require excessive rewriting and have numerous errors, and should not have been submitted.
5. “F” stories have failed to meet the major criteria of the assignment, have numerous errors or both. A story that has a factual error that is material to the story merits an F. There will be no exceptions.

Here’s how the points tally converts into grades:

|              |              |              |                 |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------|
| A = 95 - 100 | B = 84 - 86  | C = 74 - 76  | D = 64 - 66     |
| A- = 90 - 94 | B- = 80 - 83 | C- = 70 - 73 | D- = 50 - 53    |
| B+ = 87 - 89 | C+ = 77 - 79 | D+ = 67 - 69 | F = 49 or lower |

### **ASSIGNMENT FORMAT**

**All assignments must be in 12-point Times New Roman, double-spaced. Unless otherwise stated, assignments should be handed to me at the beginning of class. This means you must arrive at class with your assignment in hand. Do not come to class expecting to print it out. Staple your assignment pages together before you arrive.**

**On the top left-hand corner of the first page, type:**

**Your name**

**Journalism 302**

**Page number**

**Word count:**

**Date assignment is due**

**Title of assignment: e.g. City council story, police story, fire story.**

## **COURSE GRADES**

|                            |            |
|----------------------------|------------|
| Assignments and leads test | 40%        |
| AP stylebook quizzes       | 5%         |
| Current events quizzes     | 5%         |
| Midterm (week 9)           | 20%        |
| Final (week 15)            | <u>30%</u> |
| Total                      | 100%       |

## **ATTENDANCE POLICY**

Students are expected to attend every class. You must get my approval **in advance** if you will miss a class. Students are responsible for getting the class notes from other students in the class. I will not hold separate "catch-up" sessions outside of class. Students cannot make up in-class assignments or quizzes with extra homework assignments. You are responsible for turning up on time. Newspaper reporters do not last long if they show up late to press conferences, court hearings, council meetings or interviews. The same applies to this class. In-class assignments and quizzes can't be made-up.

I will accept late assignments but they will be treated as made-up assignments and will be reduced by two grades. Therefore, the highest grade a student can receive on a late assignment is a C. Although other instructors for this class follow a similar curriculum, every class is different and students cannot make-up a missed week by attending another instructor's class.

## **Plagiarism/Fabrication**

Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own. The following is the School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity:

"Since its founding, the USC Annenberg 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 this policy."

Plagiarism is stealing. Fabrication is a betrayal of readers and sources. In the newspaper world, professional journalists who are caught fabricating or plagiarizing are deservedly fired.

## **WRITING COACHES**

Writing coaches are available in ASC 227 during posted drop-in times and by appointment. There are terrific resources that can help you improve your writing, regardless of your level. They will only review your work **AFTER** an assignment has

been graded/marked-up by an instructor.

The writing coaches are:

Bob Berger: rberger@usc.edu

Ed Boyer: edjboyer@ca.rr.com

## **DISABILITY SERVICES AND PROGRAMS**

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to me as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in STU 301. Its phone number is 213-740-0776.

## **EXPECTATIONS**

You are expected to be passionate about your work. The assignments given in this class will be challenging, but they should also be exciting and enjoyable. Every effort is made to ensure that you receive assignments that test you to the limits of your abilities. So long as you push yourself to those limits, I am eager to help. This is especially important because there is so much ground to cover and too little time. This is not a class that will fill you with useless facts. Rather it will prepare you for a career in one of the most exciting, challenging, frustrating and rewarding professions.

## **INSTRUCTOR BIO**

Jack Leonard has worked at the Los Angeles Times since finishing a graduate degree in Journalism at USC in 1998. He covered small-town corruption in southeast Los Angeles County before moving to the Times' Orange County edition, where he wrote about criminal justice issues and crime until 2002. He was part of a team of reporters that won the 2004 breaking news Pulitzer Prize for coverage of Southern California's wildfires. In 2005, he and two other reporters wrote an investigative series—Guardians for Profit—that examined abuse by court-appointed conservators who look after the elderly and disabled. The series won numerous awards for investigative reporting and public service and resulted in reform legislation. Last year, he was part another team of reporters that investigated Los Angeles County's jails. Jack currently covers Los Angeles County government.

## **CLASS SCHEDULE**

Each class will start promptly at 6:45 p.m. with a news quiz followed by an AP quiz. I will not wait for late-comers. We have too much to get through and not enough time to do it. You cannot make up missed quizzes.

## **WEEK 1 – AUGUST 27**

**Class Topics:**

Getting started – We get to know each other, complete all of our paperwork and start with the basics – ethics, the importance of convergence, judging news what is news? You will complete a grammar test. Each student must pass the test to remain in the school of journalism. You will have two more chances to pass the test. The first opportunity to retake will be during finals week.

**Homework Assignments:****Writing:**

The grades for these assignments will not count toward your final grade but must be sent to me by email by 6:45 p.m. next week. As with all assignments in this class, they must be written according to AP style.

1. Fact sheet. Write a 300 to 400 word story. Due next week.
2. A 400 word biography of yourself. Due next week.

**Readings:**

1. Read the ethics statement from the Society of Professional Journalists. Be prepared to discuss this next week and throughout the semester.  
[http://www.spj.org/ethics\\_code.asp](http://www.spj.org/ethics_code.asp)
2. Harrower
  - a) Chapter One: The story of Journalism
  - b) Chapter Two: How the Newsroom Works
3. Class handouts

**WEEK 2 – SEPT. 3 - LABOR DAY**

No class.

**Make sure you email me your fact sheet and bio from week 1 by 6:45 p.m.**

**Homework Assignments:**

1. You will have five fact sheets from week 1. Write a lead for each story and turn in next class. Write them on the same page(s) rather than one per page. Make a copy for yourself and be prepared to read aloud in class.

**Readings:**

1. Harrower
  - a) Chapter Three: Newswriting Basics, pgs 34 – 41.
2. AP Stylebook. See your Course Reader for the topics that will be tested on quiz 1.
3. Class handouts

**WEEK 3 – SEPT. 10****Class Topics:**

The lead. The beginning is the most important part of your story. Readers decide then and there if they want to stick with you or dump you. We review how to write hard news leads, what information to use in our leads and how to ensure they emphasize the most important elements a breaking news event. We practice leads in class. We also introduce

the inverted pyramid, the most basic story structure, and we go over newspaper newsroom organization.

**Homework Assignments:**

1. You will be assigned five fact sheets. Write a lead for each story and turn in next class. Write them on the same page(s) rather than one per page. Make a copy for yourself and be prepared to read aloud in class.
2. You will be assigned two fact sheets. Write 250 – 300 word stories on each using the inverted pyramid structure. Due next class.
3. Come to class with an example of a simple but well written hard-news lead.

**Readings:**

1. Harrower
  - a) Chapter Three: Newswriting Basics, pgs 42 – 49
  - b) Chapter Four: Reporting Basics, pgs 80 – 83.
2. AP Stylebook. See your Course Reader for the topics that will be tested on quiz 2.
3. Class handouts.

**WEEK 4 - SEPT. 17**

**Class Topics:**

We briefly look at other types of leads, review datelines and examine how to effectively use quotes, attributions [~~DIFFERENT FROM BROADCAST~~] and transitions. We then look at how to organize the rest of our story, the importance of the nut graph and endings, and how to outline stories. More leads in class.

**Homework Assignments:**

1. You will be assigned a long fact sheet from a breaking news event. Write a 350 – 400 word story.
2. You will be assigned three fact sheets for leads. Write a lead on each. Email to me by Friday 5 p.m.
3. Come to class with an example of a simple but well written hard-news lead, a nut graph and an ending.

**Readings:**

1. Harrower
  - a) Chapter Three: Newswriting Basics, pgs 50 – 64
  - b) Chapter Five: Covering the News, pgs 94 – 99.
2. AP Stylebook. See your Course Reader for the topics that will be tested on quiz 3.
3. Class handouts

**WEEK 5 - SEPT. 24**

**Class Topics:**

Your first test. This one is on leads and will last about 1 hour. Afterward, we examine how to cover cops, crime and disasters, usually the first stop for any cub reporter but also essential for any newspaper reporter. What questions need answering and where do you

find the answers? Master this tough and emotionally-draining beat and you are well on your way to a successful career in journalism.

**Homework Assignments:**

1. You will be assigned two long fact sheets from breaking news events. Write a 375 – 425 word story on each. Due next class.

**Readings:**

1. Harrower
  - a) Chapter Five: Covering the News, pgs 90 – 93
2. AP Stylebook. See your Course Reader for the topics that will be tested on quiz 4.
3. Class handouts

**WEEK 6 – OCT. 1**

**Class Topics:**

Obituaries. We examine how to master the simple formula of writing obituaries and tackle the difficult task of summing up a life.

**Homework Assignments:**

1. You will be assigned a fact sheet. Write a 375 – 425 word obituary. Due next class.

**Readings:**

1. Harrower
  - a) Chapter 5: Covering the News, pgs 100 - 101
2. Handouts of Los Angeles Times obituaries from 2006
3. Handouts for court reporting terms
4. AP Stylebook. See your Course Reader for the topics that will be tested on quiz 5.

**WEEK 7 – OCT. 8**

**Class Topics:**

We review how to cover crime and disasters and then look at courts reporting, trial verdicts and writing second-day news stories. More in-class assignments to help with breaking news writing.

**Homework Assignments:**

1. You will be assigned one fact sheet from breaking news events. Write a 375 – 425 word story. Due next class.
2. You will be assigned one fact sheet from a courts verdict. Write a 375 – 425 word story. Due next class.

**Readings:**

1. AP Stylebook. See your Course Reader for the topics that will be tested on quiz 6.

**WEEK 8 – OCT. 15**

**Class Topics:**

We review the elements of stories we've learned by now and follow-up with in-class assignments that emphasize leads, nut graphs and story structure.

**Homework Assignments:**

1. You will be assigned one fact sheet from a breaking news event. Write a 375 – 425 word story. Due next class.

**Readings:**

1. Review Harrower
  - a) Chapter 3: Newswriting Basics
  - b) Chapter 4: Reporting Basics, pgs 80 – 83
  - c) Chapter 5: Covering the News, pgs 92 - 99

**WEEK 9 - OCT. 22****Class Topics:**

MIDTERM

**Homework Assignments:**

1. You will be assigned one fact sheet from a breaking news event. Write a 375 – 425 word story. Due next class.

**Readings:**

1. Harrower
  - a) Chapter 5: Covering the News, pgs 102 – 103
  - b) Chapter 4: Reporting Basics, pgs 66 - 75
2. AP Stylebook for seventh quiz. See your Course Reader for the topics that will be tested on quiz 7.
3. Class handouts

**WEEK 10 – OCT. 29****Class Topics:**

Review Midterms collectively and start meeting with students individually to go over grades so far. We look at how to cover speeches and news conferences. The importance of quoting people accurately. Using tape recorders. What other types of information do you need for your story? Where do you find it?

**Homework Assignments:**

1. You will be assigned one fact sheet from a speech/news conference. Write a 375 – 425 word story. Due next class.

**Readings:**

1. Harrower
  - a) Chapter 5: Covering the News, pages 104 - 107

2. AP Stylebook for eighth quiz. See your Course Reader for the topics that will be tested on quiz 8.

### **WEEK 11 – NOV. 5**

#### **Class Topics:**

Covering local government and city council meetings. Deciphering meeting agendas. How to choose what you cover. What your stories need. How to make them interesting. An in-class assignment on a mock press conference.

#### **Homework Assignments:**

1. You will be assigned two fact sheets from government meetings. Write a 500 – 600 word story on each. Due next class.

#### **Readings:**

1. Harrower
  - a) Chapter 6: Beyond Breaking News, pgs 112 – 125
2. Class handouts

### **WEEK 12 - NOV. 12**

#### **Class Topics:**

We look at more sophisticated story structures and how to use them to organize longer stories, including trend pieces, news features and investigations. We deconstruct some longer stories from the LA Times.

#### **Homework Assignments:**

1. You will be assigned two fact sheets from government meetings. Write a 500 – 600 word story on each. Due next class.
2. You will be assigned two fact sheets from cops/fire events. Write a 250 – 350 word story on each. Due next class.

#### **Readings:**

1. Harrower
  - a) Chapter 4: Reporting Basics, pgs 84 – 85
2. Class handouts

**FRIDAY, NOV. 16: LAST DAY TO DROP A CLASS WITH A MARK OF "W"**

### **WEEK 13 - NOV. 19**

#### **Class Topics:**

Diversity in your stories and its importance to the newsroom. When is race relevant in news stories? Writing with numbers. Updating our stories on the Web, on the wires and in the newspaper.

#### **Homework Assignments:**

1. You will be assigned one fact sheet from a government meeting. Write a 500 – 600 word story. Due next class.
2. You will be assigned one fact sheet from an accident/disaster. Write a 300 word story. Due next class.
3. You will be assigned two more fact sheets that will test your ability to write with sensitivity about race. Write a 100 to 150-word story about the gang shooting and a 300-word story about the university speech. Due next class.

**Readings:**

1. Harrower
  - a) Chapter 7: Law and Ethics

**WEEK 14 - NOV. 26**

**Class Topics:**

Review for final. How far will you go to get the story? The importance of ethics and avoiding libel.

**Homework Assignments:**

None.

**Readings:**

1. Review Harrower
  - a) Chapter 3: Newswriting Basics
  - b) Chapter 5: Covering the News

**WEEK 15 – DEC. 3**

**Class Topic:**

**FINAL EXAM**

**FINALS WEEK – DEC. 12-19**

All J202 students who didn't pass the Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Examination in week 1 must retake the GPSE during finals week in Fall 2007. The exam date, time and location will be e-mailed to all students by Nov. 1.

Do not make any nonrefundable travel plans until you know your complete finals schedule for all of your classes. Note: Your J203/Broadcast Newswriting final will also be during finals week.