

JOURNALISM 308

Instructor: Brad Hanson

Term: Fall 2007

COURSE BACKGROUND AND GOALS:

This class is designed to introduce the student to newspaper copy editing and layout, and to provide a brief exposure to line editing.

As newspapers continue to struggle in the marketplace through competition for advertising dollars with direct mail, cable TV and other outlets, with many reporting little expansion in staff opportunities, there continues to be a demand for copy editors. Partly this is because copy editors are often able to rise in the editing ranks, giving them the chance for movement. Another is that copy editors often have the skills to segue into other fields. A job without the high profile of reporting, copy editing is not often considered a career track by students until they are exposed to it. Copy editing tends to attract those who treasure the preciseness of language, who thrive on detail and love to read, and, of course, those who find they may like writing but don't enjoy the more bruising aspects of reporting.

The copy editor checks a story for spelling, grammar, punctuation, correct word usage and newspaper style. While the line editor is supposed to be the primary watchdog for problems of content in the story, the copy editor must also be alert to omissions, inaccuracies, clarity, pacing, story structure and possible legal problems. Line editing, or primary editing, is the "first read" given a story when it is turned over by the reporter. While some primary editors come from the reporting ranks, some will come off the copy desks after exhibiting strong news judgment and a sense of what makes a story work.

Critical to copy editing is headline writing. In the case of daily news stories, it will bring home the importance of the lead containing the most critical element, a valuable lesson for all budding writers. In the case of news features, it will affirm the importance of a strong nut graf or section identifying why the story matters.

A field that has mushroomed in importance in the last decade is layout. Growing awareness of the importance of the visual packaging of news has been spurred by increasing competition for the attention of today's readers. Additionally, as newspapers moved into computer page makeup with the elimination of the composing room, the role played by the layout editor, or page designer, became even more dynamic. Students who never thought of themselves as "artistic" will often surprise themselves with how well they do in this area. And for anyone who decides on a career on a copy desk, layout is a must. Most copy desks at small- to medium-size papers, because of tight staffing, expect copy editors to at least be able to pitch in and do fundamental inside page layout.

At the conclusion of this class, it is hoped that students will have enough of a grounding in copy editing that they could qualify for internships or entry-level positions at small newspapers and magazines, and that they will have enough exposure to the fundamentals of newspaper layout that they will be able to quickly assume some of those duties should they move into a position on an editing desk.

It is also hoped that some of the lessons learned in line editing will help make students better reporters and writers, more able to spot the flaws in their own stories.

COURSE TEXTS:

The following are required for Journalism 308:

"The Editorial Eye," Jane T. Harrigan, which includes a separate workbook
"The Newspaper Designer's Handbook," Tim Harrower
The Associated Press Stylebook
Oxford Dictionary of Usage and Style
Dictionary (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 4th edition, is recommended.)

STRUCTURE:

The first section of each class will be a lecture that will draw heavily from sources other than the textbooks, so note-taking is encouraged. The goal is to offer students as wide a range as possible of theories and examples, as well as make instructional information as current as possible. When time allows, the class will then break into a lab session during which students will edit under some deadline pressure, time restrictions that will increase as the class advances. Students must bring dictionaries and stylebooks to every class.

Each week, with the exception of the sessions devoted to layout, homework exercises will be e-mailed to the students or assigned out of the Harrigan workbook. The homework must be printed out as hard copy and turned in on time each week unless the instructor indicates that electronic versions will be accepted.

Students are encouraged to read the Los Angeles Times daily; this will prove critical as we move into news judgment, not only in the line editor's job but also in the placement of stories by the layout editor. Students who have not followed a daily newspaper will fail miserably in the news judgment exercises. Students are also encouraged to read other newspapers when possible, as well as magazines and trade journals, not only for exposure to different types of coverage but for a look at different types of layout.

GRADING:

Fifty percent of the grade will be based on the midterm and final. The remaining 50 percent will be based on homework exercises, in-class assignments, class discussion and quizzes.

Grading will be a reflection of the professional skill level reached. An A received on an assignment indicates editing or layout work that is as close to being professionally acceptable as possible given the relative lack of experience.

INSTRUCTOR BIO:

I am an assistant copy chief on the California desk of the Los Angeles Times. I have worked as a design editor for the National Edition of The Times and as a copy editor for the paper's Valley, Ventura and Orange County editions. Before joining The Times, I was a copy editor at the Daily Breeze in Torrance, Calif. I got my start at the Los Angeles Times/Washington Post News Service as a Dow Jones Newspaper Fund copy editing intern. I have a bachelor's degree in journalism from Cal State Fullerton and a master's degree in management from the University of Redlands.

Contact information:

I will be on campus only on Fridays but can arrange to meet students before or after class.
E-mail: brad.hanson@latimes.com
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PLAGIARISM/ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

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 Annenberg School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity as published in the university catalogue: "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 the school's policy."

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATIONS

Any 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 through Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m. The office is located in the Student Union room 301 and their phone number is (213) 740-0776.

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.

CLASS SCHEDULE:

AUG. 31

Introduction to the editing systems and structures at small and large newspapers.
A primer on copy editing symbols.
In-class editing exercises.

SEPT. 7

Common usage errors involving like-sounding words that haunt even the professionals.
Why a spelling check doesn't mean you'll always get the words write (right).
Copy editing exercise to be completed in class.
Discuss reading assignment.
Review last week's in-class editing assignment.
Reading assignments: "The Editorial Eye," Chapters 1, 2 and 3.
Homework due: Exercises I, II and IV in Chapter 3 of "The Editorial Eye" workbook.

SEPT. 14

The rules of grammar that they taught you in seventh grade and that you haven't studied since then. Predicates and dangling participles and misplaced modifiers; restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses. Mistakes that haunt even the pros: who and whom; which vs. that.
Copy editing exercise to be completed in class.
Discuss reading assignment.
Reading assignments: "The Editorial Eye," Chapters 4 and 5.
Homework due: Exercises VIII, XI, XII and XIV in Chapter 3 of "The Editorial Eye" workbook.

SEPT. 21

Introduction to headline writing. Just what should a headline say?

In-class editing and headline writing exercises.

Discuss reading assignment.

Reading assignments: "The Editorial Eye," Chapter 10.

Homework due: Exercises XVI, XVII, XXII, XXIII in Chapter 3 of "The Editorial Eye" workbook.

SEPT. 28

Refining those copy editing and headline writing skills.

A review of punctuation.

In-class editing and headline-writing exercise.

Homework due: Exercises I, II, III and IV in Chapter 4 of "The Editorial Eye" workbook.

OCT. 5

Developing as a line editor. Seeing the flaws in attribution, clarity, structure, newswiness, buried leads, shallowness, redundancy and misfiring transitions that beset every newspaper.

In-class editing exercise.

Review for midterm.

Reading assignment: "The Editorial Eye," Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

Homework due: Exercises XVI and XVII in Chapter 4 of "The Editorial Eye" workbook.

OCT. 12

Midterm exam

OCT. 19

Midterms returned.

Making headlines more conversational. Introduction to layout.

Reading assignment: "The Newspaper Designer's Handbook," Introduction and Chapter 1.

OCT. 26

Tour of the Los Angeles Times specifically geared toward understanding physical production of a newspaper.

NOV. 2

Fundamentals of modular design that will include discussion of front-page designs from several newspapers. Why layout is a reflection of news judgment.

In-class editing exercise.

Reading assignment: "The Newspaper Designer's Handbook," Chapters 2 and 3.

NOV. 9

In-class news judgment exercise that will help students in determining newsworthiness of stories and how they should be played on the page. The instructor will demonstrate technical aspects (drawing a dummy and sizing pictures) of laying out open news page. How much space to give stories and headlines. Making the page accessible and alluring.

Discuss reading assignments. In-class design exercise.

Reading assignment: "The Newspaper Designer's Handbook," Chapter 4.

Homework: Editing and headline writing assignments to be distributed in class.

NOV. 16

Photo editing. How to make photo selections. How to crop the photos to enhance them.

Also, multiple photo layouts: simple guidelines that can be used for photo spreads in any part of the paper. Discuss reading assignment. In-class layout exercise.

Reading assignment: "The Newspaper Designer's Handbook," Chapter 5.

Homework: Editing and headline writing assignments to be distributed in class.

NOV. 23

Thanksgiving

NOV. 30

Laying out section front for local news section.

Using lessons from Page One and photo spreads in making a hybrid news/feature page work.

In-class layout exercise. Review for final exam.

DEC. 7

Final exam

Please be forewarned that the schedule can be changed either to expand on an area in which the class has a special interest or because the class is having difficulty with a particular part. Expect homework assignments every week in copy editing; this should give you the practice to reach a certain skill level. Where indicated, there will be specific lab exercises tailored to the particular material covered in class that day. There will be several pop quizzes on AP Stylebook issues.

Note: Unless special arrangements are made, late homework assignments will not be accepted.