

USC Annenberg School of Journalism
Syllabus
JOURNALISM 202: NEWSWRITING – PRINT
Fall 2007
Room ASC 329
Tuesdays, 7 p.m. to 9:40 p.m.

INSTRUCTOR: **JOHN L. MITCHELL**

COURSE OBJECTIVES

The Society of Professional Journalists believes that “ public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist's credibility.”

The goals of this Newswriting-print class are to sharpen your writing and critical thinking skills, as well as teach you about news values/judgment, ethics, and how to accurately write about our increasingly diverse world.

Come to class on time, prepared (i.e., having done your readings and homework assignments, and followed the news), and ready to discuss various news-related topics.

Expect weekly in-class and take-home writing assignments. Both types of assignments will use fact sheets, which are in your Course Reader. The in-class assignments will be on deadline. The first half of the semester will emphasize the basics of news judgment, and writing news leads and briefs. The second half of the semester will focus on how to cover specific types of news stories that are commonly assigned to beginning reporters. You will complete at least one reporting assignment outside the classroom.

All homework assignments should be turned in to me at the beginning of class the following Tuesday. I will return your edited homework and in-class assignments by the following class. We will discuss the assignments in class using students' work as examples.

Typing skills are essential in this course. You must be able to use a computer, type fast, and use Microsoft Word. When working on a computer, save often, make a back-up copy of your work, and print it out at various stages of the writing process. Always keep a hard copy for yourself. Claims that "the computer lost it" will not be accepted as an excuse.

You must know how to insert accents, tildes and other symbols in Word, or be sure to write them in before turning in assignments. Also, see copyediting/proofreading symbols in AP Stylebook. Do not use a red pen to make any marks. I will be using a red pen to make corrections.

Every student is required to schedule a one-on-one meeting with me sometime during the semester. You're all welcome to meet with me more often, of course.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

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

ISBN: 0-465-00489-X

Title: **Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law**

Author: Norm Goldstein

Publisher: Perseus Publishing

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

ISBN: 0-07-352614-2

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

Author: Tim Harrower

Publisher: McGraw-Hill

Title: **COURSE READER: "Newsriting Workbook," with CD.**

Author: Staff

Publisher: USC Bookstore

BRING YOUR WORKBOOK TO EVERY CLASS FOR IN-CLASS AND HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS.

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

Merriam-Webster: **www.m-w.com**

LEARNING LAB REQUIREMENT

You are required to become a staff member of a campus media organization. Broadcast majors must work for ATVN (Annenberg TV News). Print and Public Relations majors may join the Daily Trojan, Impact, or Online Journalism Review. Your learning lab participation will be counted 10% toward your Broadcast newsriting course grade. Full information on the learning lab requirement will be given at your Broadcast class.

WRITING COACHES

Writing coaches are available in ASC 227 during posted drop-in times and by appointment.

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

Bob Berger, Print: rberger@usc.edu

DAILY NEWS READINGS

Journalists must know what's happening in the world around them. For the aspiring writer/reporter, reading the newspaper and news Web sites thoroughly every day, listening to radio news, and watching television newscasts, are essential and strengthen your writing skills. Read at least one major daily newspaper, as well as weekly newsmagazines. I recommend the Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, Orange County Register, Los Angeles Daily News, Newsweek, Time or U.S. News and World Report. For news Web sites, try msnbc.com or cnn.com

QUIZZES

Print newswriting will cover AP style and assignments will be graded for it. We will have eight (8) weekly AP Style quizzes and weekly current events quizzes. A list of AP topics to memorize is in the Course Reader. Both quizzes will be held during the first 20 minutes of class, and can NOT be made-up FOR ANY REASON. If you miss a quiz it will be recorded as an "F."

GRAMMAR/PUNCTUATION/SPELLING EXAM

The GPSE is not part of your print course grade, but it is a catalog requirement and you must pass it to continue in the School of Journalism. The first GPSE will be given during the first day of class. The second opportunity will be on two different dates in December during Finals week. If you pass the exam in August with at least a 75, you do not need to re-take the exam in December. If you do not pass the December test, you can retake it in February 2008 and again in May 2008. If you do not pass the GPS exam by May, you will be dismissed from the School of Journalism. There is a grammar section in the course reader for review.

IN-CLASS/HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

We will be doing weekly in-class assignments on deadline. Students should print out assignments and keep a back-up. **NO MAKE-UPS FOR IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS.**

There will be homework assignments every week. If you are having problems with your homework you should contact me immediately by phone or e-mail.

ATTENDANCE

Students are expected to be in class every week. If you must miss class please call or e-mail me as soon as possible for excused absences. If you miss class you must send me your assignments via e-mail by 6 p.m. Tuesday. Students are responsible for getting the class notes from other students in the class.

Although the syllabi are similar, every core class is different and students can't make-up a class by going to another core class in the same sequence. For example, if you miss this print class, you can't go to a Monday or Wednesday print class.

GRADING CRITERIA: ASSIGNMENTS, MIDTERMS, FINALS

All assignments will be edited on a professional basis. Each story will be returned with written comments and explanations of any editing that is more than routine. Our style guide will be "The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual."

Your copy should not contain any errors in spelling, style, grammar and facts. Assignments will be graded down accordingly. There should not be any omissions, either. **In fact, after the first week, any misspelled proper noun (even if it's due to a typographical error) or any inaccuracy, may 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. In case of doubt, check your facts, consult the AP Stylebook or a dictionary. It only takes a minute or two to avoid mistakes.

Please don't be discouraged if your writing receives low grades at the beginning of the semester. Your grades will improve. Newswriting is hard work, but the only way to get better is to keep writing, regardless of the difficulties. I'm more concerned with how you do in the final weeks of the course than how you do in the first weeks of the course. Grades on assignments in the first four weeks will be weighted less for the final grade for the course. This policy does not apply to quizzes.

Your final exam will be given Dec. 4, 2007, the last week of scheduled classes.

Your course grades will be determined as follows:

PRINT

Quizzes	
(Current events, AP Stylebook, readings)	10%
Assignments/Leads test (Week 4)	40%
Midterm - Week 8	20%
Final	<u>30%</u>
Total	100%

Traditional grades and grade point averages are assigned as follows:

"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 minor spelling errors or an error of omission.

"C" stories are stories that need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many minor spelling and style errors.

"D" stories require excessive rewriting; have numerous minor spelling and style errors, and should not have been submitted.

"F" stories have at least one proper name misspelled, and/or one factual error. A misspelled name would be an example. A wrong intersection in a traffic story would be another.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

No late assignments will be accepted. Assignments turned in late will be assigned an "F." You must turn in assignments on the day they are due even if you know you will miss class and have contacted me beforehand. Send it to me via e-mail attachment. The story must arrive by the beginning of that day's class session (3 p.m. Tuesdays).

REWRITING STORIES

Students may rewrite assignments that received an F or a D grade (including late assignments). The highest grade rewritten assignments can get is a "C." Such rewrites must be completed by the next class session.

PLAGIARISM:

Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own. Plagiarism is a serious violation of the School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity, and a student found guilty of plagiarism is subject to dismissal from the journalism major.

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."

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 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 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 the USC Student Counseling Services office at 213-740-7711. The service is confidential, and there is no charge.

ASSIGNMENT FORMAT

The following information should be in the upper left hand corner of each page:

Your Name

Instructor Name

SLUG – a slug is a 1-2 word description of the story

Word Count – in Microsoft Word, highlight the story, then click Tools/Word Count.

Date – put the date the assignment is due

Start your story about one-half of the way down the first page to allow space for your grade and the instructor's notes. Be sure to double-space all stories. Use 12-point type—preferable Times, Times New Roman or Ariel font—and 1.25-inch margins. Do not use italics, underline or bold.

Indent the first line of each paragraph five spaces or half-inch. Use a left justification, leaving a ragged right margin. Do not break words at the end of lines. Put two spaces after the period of each sentence.

If you make last-minute fixes, do so with a black or blue pen or pencil using standard symbols (see Copyediting and Proofreading Symbols in your AP Stylebook).

Staple multiple pages in the upper left-hand corner.

Type or write "-30-" or "# # #" at the bottom of the last page.

CLASS SCHEDULE

The schedule is subject to change. Readings should be done before class on the date shown.

WEEK 1 – AUG. 28 Review Syllabus/What is Convergence? What is News?

Introduction, review syllabus, copy preparation, using the AP Stylebook
What is convergence? What is News?

In-class writing assignment: (This will not be graded. It is a diagnostic tool to evaluate your writing).

Homework: Read ethics statement from the Society of Professional Journalists website (http://www.spj.org/ethics_code.asp) Be prepared to discuss next week.

Quiz: GPS Exam

Homework: TBA

WEEK 2 – SEPT. 4 Newsrooms, Story Structure, Leads

Basic newsroom structure; leads, datelines, quotes and attribution, and how to use them

Readings: Harrower, Chapters 1 (The Story of Journalism), 2 (How Newsrooms Work), 3 (Newswriting Basics), and 8 (Online Reporting/media convergence)
AP Stylebook: Topics 1

Quiz: AP Stylebook #1
Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 3 - SEPT. 11 The News Lead

Lots of leads in class, for homework.

Readings: Harrower, Chapters 3 (Newswriting Basics) and 4 (Reporting Basics).
AP Stylebook: Topics 2

Quiz: AP Stylebook #2
Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 4 - SEPT. 18 Leads Test

Leads/News Judgment Test [this test will take 1 hour]

Readings: Harrower Chapter 3 (News writing Basics)
AP Stylebook: Topics 3

Quiz: AP Stylebook #3
Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 5 - SEPT. 25 Story Structure, Briefs, Short Stories

How to organize a basic news brief, short story.

Readings: Harrower, Chapter 3 (Newsriting Basics)
AP Stylebook: Topics 4

Quiz: AP Stylebook #4
Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 6 – OCT. 2 Story Structure, Briefs, Short Stories

Readings: Harrower: Chapter 3 (Newsriting Basics)
AP Stylebook: Topics 5

Quiz: AP Stylebook #5
Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 7 - OCT. 9 Obits

How to write a basic obituary.
Review for midterm

Readings: Harrower: Chapter 5 (Covering the News/writing obituaries)
AP Stylebook: Topics 6

Quiz: AP Stylebook #6
Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 8 - OCT. 16 MIDTERM: three stories

Homework: TBA

WEEK 9 - OCT. 23 Speeches and News Conferences

How to cover speeches and news conferences.
(mock press conference)

Readings: Harrower: Chapter 5 (Covering the News/covering speeches)
AP Stylebook: Topics 7

Quiz: AP Stylebook #7
Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 10 - OCT. 30 Covering Meetings

How to cover City Council and other public meetings

Readings: Harrower: Chapter 5 (covering the News/covering meetings)
AP Stylebook: Topics 8

Quiz: AP Stylebook #8
Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 11 – Nov. 6 Fires. Accidents and Disasters

Readings: Harrower: Chapter 5 (Covering the News/covering accidents, disasters and fires)

Quiz: AP Stylebook #8
Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 12 – NOV. 13 Crimes and Courts

NOVEMBER 16: LAST DAY TO DROP A CLASS WITH A MARK OF “W”

Readings: Harrower: Chapter 5 (Covering the News/covering crimes and courts)

Quiz: Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 13 - NOV. 20 Getting the Whole Story/Features

Why is diversity/inclusiveness valuable in stories? How are feature stories different from news stories

Readings: Harrower: Chapter 6 (Beyond Breaking News)
Course Reader: Diversity section

Quiz: Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 14 - NOV. 27 Online Reporting/Law and Ethics

Writing for Online media/journalistic ethics

Readings: Harrower: Chapter 8 (Online Reporting) and 7 (Law and Ethics)

Quiz: Current Events

Homework: TBA

WEEK 15 – DEC. 4

FINAL: two stories

Instructor's Biography: John Louis Mitchell is a staff writer for the Los Angeles Times, covering 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.