

Journalism 202 – Print Newswriting Fall 2007

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COURSE OBJECTIVE:

You will learn how to write a short, hard news story on deadline. You will learn how to write a compelling lead. You will learn how to write a complete nut graf, answering the “so what” question for readers and giving them a reason to read your story. You will learn all of the elements of sound story structure.

And one more thing: You’ll figure out whether you really want to pursue a career in journalism.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

We will meet for two hours and 40 minutes every week on our journey to mastering the news story. You will be given all the materials and information needed to write a solid story; this is not a reporting class, so you usually will not be required to track down information on your own. This class will focus on thinking about stories, discussing ways to tell a story, analyzing the parts of a story and writing a story. We will start on the basics: What is a news story? What makes a good lead? What order should information be presented in a news story? How many sources? What is a nut graf? Do all stories need nut graf?

You will find the focus of class to be the news story. It is the most basic, yet the hardest skill to perfect. From it, comes everything else, including narrative feature writing.

We will spend time on what may seem small things—grammar and the Associated Press stylebook. These are crucial rules of communication that will help make your writing clear and understood by readers. And we will have lively class conversations on big things—journalism ethics and diversity. You can’t lie, cheat, steal other people’s work or play games and keep your job in journalism anymore. If you’re inclined toward any of those misdeeds, reform or drop the class immediately.

All of you have the potential to excel in this class, but it will not be easy. News stories are a lot like conversations you might have with a friend. You start with the most important information, and go on to tell what happened, how it happened and why. But unlike an informal chat with a friend, news stories must be precise. You can’t get away with omitting key details or glossing over crucial facts. You must know what you’re going to say, and how you’re going to say it. And unlike a conversation with a friend, the reader of your story cannot interrupt you or ask questions at the end about significant information you may have left out. A news story must be accurate, complete and answer all of the important questions. Each word must be necessary.

Your attendance in class is imperative. Outside class, you will have readings in textbooks and homework assignments. But nothing takes the place of our class discussions. It is in class where you will receive critiques, both from your peers and me. You will be forced to think on your feet and you will become engaged in the learning process. In class, you will have two weekly quizzes -- a current events and an AP style quiz. There also will be in-class writing assignments. The quizzes and in-class assignments will be graded. It will not be possible to make up these assignments if you are absent from class.

By the end of the semester, you will know what information is needed for various types of stories, whether it’s a story about a crime, a news conference or the governor’s budget proposal. You will learn how to piece together information into a cohesive and interesting story.

Learning how to write a news story is a lot like learning how to ride a bike or play a musical instrument. There will be struggles, and we all will celebrate your triumphs, when you finally get it and can write a nearly flawless news piece. Now get to work.

INSTRUCTOR'S BIOGRAPHY:

I've been news editor at L.A. CityBeat since July, handling everything from 800-word stories exposing politician's screwups to 4,000-word investigative pieces. For seven years before that, I was news editor at the L.A. Weekly. I've worked at mainstream newspapers. I was city editor at the Portland (Maine) Press Herald and at the Pasadena Star-News and was an investigative reporter and later an assistant city editor at the San Bernardino County Sun, where I somewhat surprisingly was named Employee of the Year in 1992 even though I was outspoken and questioned many decisions of my Gannett bosses. I lucked into my first journalism job in 1979 when I went home early from my job as a landscaper to shoot pictures of a rare desert snowstorm. I gave them to the editor of the small weekly paper in Desert Hot Springs; the next day, I was hired as a part-time photographer and when the editor was fired a few months later, I took his job. I produced all stories and photos for the 22-page weekly for 18 months until taking my first daily newspaper job at the San Luis Obispo County Telegram-Tribune, where I covered cops, city hall and state politics. When I was 15, I published my first article called "Deschooling Society: The Evils of Compulsory Education," and handed out 1,000 copies at my rural Virginia high school over the protests of my principal, who threatened to suspend me. I'm a graduate of St. John's College in Annapolis, Md. I live in South Pasadena with my wife, Susan Seager, a First Amendment attorney, and our two children.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:

Title: Inside Reporting/A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism
Author: Tim Harrower
ISBN: 0-07-352614-2
<http://www.mhhe.com/harrower1>

Title: Course Reader for Journalism 202/203//501
Publisher: USC Bookstore

Title: Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law, 2007 edition
Author: Norm Goldstein
ISBN: 0-0465-00489-X

Dictionary: Merriam-Webster, www.m-w.com
Use this dictionary for all assignments, midterms and finals

DAILY NEWS READINGS/CURRENT EVENTS QUIZ

You must be interested in the news and staying informed about what is going on in the world. Every day, you need to read the Los Angeles Times and know about the stories that turn up on the covers of every section. You should also read on-line news sources such as CNN. Every Friday, we will have a current events quiz during the first 10 minutes of class.

GRAMMAR/PUNCTUATION/SPELLING/WORD CHOICE

Writing must be free of errors to be effective. We will devote time throughout the semester to grammar and spelling issues—especially the most common mistakes made by journalists in the Western World.

IN-CLASS AND HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

We will have in-class and homework writing assignments nearly every week. In-class assignments will be on tight deadlines. All writing assignments must be in Microsoft Word, double-spaced, in 12 point Times New Roman font, with this information, on four lines, in the upper left-hand corner:

Your name

Journalism 202 Word count:

Date of Assignment:

HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

Homework assignments will be given at the end of every class period. No late work will be accepted for full credit. Assignments turned in up to a week after they're due will receive a "C" at best. No work will be accepted after a week. You can call me at work, or email me about any problems or questions. Grades will not count for the first four weeks. On the fifth week, homework and in-class writing assignment grades will count. Grades on quizzes and tests will count from Day One. **Special note: During the first four weeks, if you do not turn in an assignment on time, you'll receive an "F" on it..**

GRADING CRITERIA: ASSIGNMENTS, MIDTERMS, FINALS: All assignments will be edited as though they were being turned in to me by a reporter at a regional newspaper. 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 editing marks can appear on the copy you hand in provided they are readable and neat.

Your copy should be free of errors in spelling, style, grammar and facts. There should not be any omissions, either. **Any misspelled proper noun (even if it's a typographical error) will result in an automatic "F" on that assignment. A factual error also will result in an automatic "F" on that assignment.** Accuracy is the first law of journalism. If you fail to spell a name correctly, what else will be wrong with the story? Sloppiness knows no bounds. Professional journalists are expected to get their facts right, to spell and punctuate correctly, and to respect grammar and syntax. Reporters who screw up names get fired.

Don't be surprised or discouraged if your stories receive low grades at the outset. Your work can improve. Reporting and writing are hard work, but the only way to get better is to keep at it, regardless of the difficulties. Grades for the first five weeks will not count, with the exception of any quizzes or tests. If you do not complete the homework assignments during the first four weeks, you will receive a O and will not be eligible to submit rewrites.

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.

All of your assignments will be graded on a scale of 1-100, then translated into traditional grades. For example, here is what every error on an assignment will cost you:

Missed ledes=10 to 25 points

Incomplete nut grafs=10 to 25 points

AP Style, Punctuation, or basic spelling error = Three points.

Clarity, organization = Five to seven points for short stories; seven to 10 points for longer stories.

Completeness/Omissions = Five points.

Spelling of proper names or Factual errors = Automatic "F" on assignment.

And here's how these points will translate into traditional grades:

| | | | | | | | | |
|----|-------|----------|----|-------|---------|----|-------|---------------|
| A | (4.0) | = 95-100 | C+ | (2.3) | = 77-79 | D- | (0.7) | = 50-53 |
| A- | (3.7) | = 90-94 | C | (2.0) | = 74-76 | F | (0) | = 49 or lower |
| B+ | (3.3) | = 87-89 | C- | (1.7) | = 70-73 | | | |
| B | (3.0) | = 84-86 | D+ | (1.3) | = 67-69 | | | |
| B- | (2.7) | = 80-83 | D | (1.0) | = 64-66 | | | |

PLAGIARISM/ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

You cannot steal someone else's work, whether it's been published or not, and pass it off as your own. This includes copying someone's paper during class or ripping off a portion of a story from an on-line site or a newspaper, a textbook or any other source. If you do any of these or similar ethical violations, I will take whatever steps are necessary to mete out the severest punishment, up to and including a life-time ban from stepping foot on the campus of the University of Southern California. If you aren't up to the hard work required of a journalism major, leave the room now.

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."

COURSE GRADES:

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|---|-------------|
| Assignments and leads test: (except first four weeks) | 40 percent |
| Current events and AP style quizzes: | 10 percent |
| Midterm: | 20 percent |
| Final: | 30 percent |
| Total: | 100 percent |

ATTENDANCE POLICY: Come to class prepared and ready to engage in lively discussions about your homework and journalism. Learning how to write a basic news story is a painstaking process. All of the answers aren't in textbooks. Instead, we'll discover many of them during our conversations in class. If you must miss class, please send me an email before class. .

WRITING COACHES

Writing coaches, available to review graded work only, are in ASC 227 during posted times and by appointment. They are, Bob Berger, rberger@usc.edu, and 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. Give me the letter no later than

the second week of class. 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.

ONE-ON-ONE CONFERENCES

Journalism is hard work, and it is not for everyone. All of you have the potential to excel, if you are diligent, passionate and tireless. It is normal to get discouraged or feel you are behind. I am available to talk on the phone, via email or we can meet before or after class. In an emergency, you can reach me immediately by calling my cell phone. We will meet for two conferences during the semester, once after the midterm, and another meeting will be set up three weeks before the final, to give you your progress reports.

COURSE OUTLINE: (Readings are to be done before class on the date shown. The syllabus is subject to change):

Week 1: Course Overview/Syllabus Review

Friday, August 31: Course Overview/What is News?

Review syllabus
What the heck is convergence?
So just how hard can it be to write a news story?
Ethics: Any Jayson Blairs can leave now
Diversity of sources
One-hour Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Examination. If you fail the test, you must retake it during finals week.

Homework: 1. Diagnostic writing assignment: You'll be given a fact sheet. Write a 300-400-word story and e-mail to me within 24 hours (by Saturday, Sept. 1, 8 a.m.)
2. You will be given two fact sheets. Write a lead for each one and bring to class Friday.

Readings: The Society of Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi Code of Ethics. You can find it at www.spj.org/ethics_code.asp
Harrower, Chapters 1 (The story of journalism) and 2 (How newsrooms work)
AP Stylebook. You'll get a list of items to memorize.

Week 2: Living and breathing leads

Friday, Sept. 7: Writing leads

News quiz/AP quiz
Ethics: Rules to live and die by
Practice writing leads from fact sheets, news stories handed out in class.

Homework: You will receive five fact sheets. Write a lead for each one.

Readings: Harrower, Chapter 3, Newswriting basics
List of AP Stylebook items to memorize.

Week 3: Thinking about a story

Friday, Sept. 14: How to figure out what you need for a story

News quiz/AP quiz
Hypothetical stories
Covering spot news

Homework: You will be given a fact sheet of a spot news story all the information in a jumbled mess. Fix it, and bring a 400-word flawless version to class Friday.

Readings: Harrower, Chapter 4 (Reporting basics)
AP style list to memorize.

Week 4: Fretting Over the Rest of the Story

Friday, September 21: Organizing the beast

News quiz/AP quiz
Writing an outline for a news story
Addressing all the key points

Homework: You will be given a fact sheet. Write an outline and a 250-300 word story, due Friday.

Readings: Harrower, Chapter 5 (Covering the news)
AP style list to memorize

Week 5: Writing Spot News Stories

(All homework and in-class writing assignment grades count now.)

Friday, Sept. 28: Making sense of mayhem

News quiz/AP quiz
Leads/News Judgment Test (1 hour)
Covering cop news
What are the questions you need answered?
Who do you ask?

Homework: You will be given a fact sheet. Write an outline and a 400 word-story, due Friday.

Readings: Harrower, Chapter 6, (Beyond breaking news)
AP style list to memorize

Week 6: Writing Obituaries

Friday, Oct. 5: Summing up a life

News quiz/AP quiz
Review homework
Writing about the dead
Finding the lead for an obituary

Homework: You will be given a fact sheet. Write an outline and a 250-300 word story, due Friday.

Readings: Harrower, Chapter 7, (Law and ethics)
AP style list to memorize

Week 7: Review for Midterm

Friday, Oct. 12: Anybody learned anything?

News quiz/AP quiz
Review leads, nut grafs, story structure
In-class story-writing exercise
Homework: You will be given a fact sheet. Write an outline and a 400 word story, due Friday.

Readings: TBA
AP style list to memorize

Week 8: Midterm

Friday, Oct. 19: The midterm will be a 150-200-word brief and a 250-300-word accident story

Homework: You will be given a fact sheet. Write an outline and a 400-word story, due Friday.

Readings: Hand-outs on covering speeches, with examples.

Week 9: Moving On: News Conferences and Meetings

Friday, Oct. 26: Witnessing the glacial pace of history

News quiz/AP Quiz (the last one)
Finding the lead in the mad rush
In-class news conference

Homework: You will be given a fact sheet. Write an outline and a 250-300 word story, due Friday.

Readings: A collection of news stories about the Phil Spector murder trial.

Week 9: Covering a City Council meeting

Friday, Oct. 26: Translating agendas

We will meet at L.A. City Hall and attend the City Council meeting. Details to come..

Homework: A 400-word story from the meeting.

Readings: A collection of City Council stories.

Week 10: Covering local government and speeches

Friday, Nov. 2: Developing human sources

Supervisors
public meeting

News quiz
How to find news in a boring six-hour meeting
Review real agendas from L.A. City Council and county Board of
Meeting follow-up: Don't expect the story to be handed to you during a

Homework: You'll be given a fact sheet. Write an outline and a 400-word story, due Friday

Readings:

Week 11: Writing Longer News Stories

(Nov. 10 is the last day to drop a class and receive a mark of 'W.')

Friday, Nov. 9: Thinking, planning, writing

News quiz

Review homework

Deconstruct longer news features from L.A. Times and other papers.

Examples to be distributed in class.

Homework: You will be given a fact sheet. Write an outline and a 400-word story, due Friday.

Readings:

Week 12: Review for Finals

Friday, Nov. 16: How to put it all together when it really counts

(Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W.")

News quiz

Review homework

Review elements of story structure

In-class writing exercise

Homework:. You'll be given a fact sheet. Write a 400-word story, due Friday.

Week 13: Nov. 23: No Class/Thanksgiving/University holiday

Week 14: Review for Finals

Friday, Nov. 30: Putting it all together

Elements of a perfect story

Week 15: Final

Friday, Dec. 7: The final will be a 250-300 word accident story and a 500-600 word local government story

Finals Week – December 12-19

All J202 students who didn't pass the Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Examination in Week One must retake the exam during finals week. The exam date, time and location will be emailed to you by Nov. 1.

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