

USC ANNENBERG SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM  
**Journalism 203 - Broadcast Newswriting**  
FALL 2007  
Thursday, 10 am - 12:40 pm, GSF 207

**Instructor:** Liz Mitchell

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

The goal of this course is to introduce you to the basic skills needed to write effectively for television and radio news. By the end of the semester, you should have a thorough understanding of the various forms of storytelling involved in broadcast news and be able to write clear, crisp, objective stories, be they 15-second "readers" or complex reporter packages that include visuals, sounds, interviews, and graphics.

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

Be forewarned: it takes specialized skill to convey information with simplicity, clarity and accuracy for an audience that has only one chance to understand what you've said. Learning that skill requires a lot of practice - practice you'll get in this course with weekly in-class and take-home writing assignments. Subjects will include those professional broadcast newswriters encounter every day: breaking news and features about international, national and local events. You'll learn how to tell these varied stories in a compelling manner and how to tell them for a local versus a national audience. We'll also focus on the critical thinking needed to be a good journalist. What makes a story newsworthy? What elements need to be included in a report to make it accurate, objective and balanced? We'll cover those and many other topics crucial to journalists today including ethical issues and writing fairly about the diverse world we live in.

Initially, the emphasis will be on writing copy with simplicity and clarity. We'll move quickly from writing text-only stories to learning how to meld words with visuals, and finally, to effectively weaving portions of interviews into our stories. At that point - just after the middle of the semester - you'll also be getting hands-on production experience by learning how to physically edit segments you've written. Finally, completing assignments under deadline pressure will be a fact of life in this class just as it is in the lives of all broadcast news writers.

In order to accomplish all of the above, I expect you to show up for class on time with all readings done, news watched, and homework assignments printed out and ready to turn in. Your other Core instructor, Larry Pryor, and I will work together to make certain you understand the How and Why of convergence and to make sure we are moving at the right speed. Please feel free to talk to us about the classes at any time during the semester.

Now, the details.

## THE BASICS

- You must be familiar with Microsoft Word and know how to send stories as e-mail attachments.
- All assignments must be written in television broadcast style. That is, the page divided into two columns, copy written in the right column, all caps, and double-spaced. (See pp 124 – 128 in your textbook for samples.)
- Assignments are due on the dates specified whether or not you attend class.
- “The computer lost it ...” is not a valid excuse so please keep a back-up copy of all your work.
- All homework must be submitted in order to get a passing grade.
- Familiarity with current news events is mandatory.

## REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

“**Broadcast News Handbook: Writing, Reporting & Producing in a Converging Media World,**” Third Edition, C.A. Tuggle, Forrest Carr, Suzanne Huffman, McGraw-Hill.

Web site: [www.mhhe.com/tuggle3](http://www.mhhe.com/tuggle3)

“**Course Reader for JOUR 202/203/501,**” USC Bookstore. (Please bring the workbook with its DVD to every class.)

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

## DAILY NEWS PROGRAMS

If you’re serious about a career in journalism or just want to do well in this course, my advice is to become a news junkie. The more attention you pay to what’s going on in the world, the better able you’ll be to write fresh and timely copy, and also to understand (and discuss) journalistic integrity. So, listen to the radio, watch local, network and cable television news broadcasts, check out online news sites, and read as many newspapers as you can. Every day. Seven days a week. You’ll not only sharpen your news judgment skills, you’ll undoubtedly also ace the **current events quizzes** which will kick off most of our classes. (See class schedule)

I recommend watching BBC World News, ABC, CBS and NBC network nightly news (6:30 pm) for television broadcasts, and listening to NPR, KNX, and AP news inserts for radio news. However, I also expect you to check out local television news broadcasts (channels 2, 4, 7, 9, 13), as well as Public Television’s News Hour with Jim Lehrer, CNN, Fox and MSNBC.

## QUIZZES

We’ll have regular quizzes based primarily on the top news stories of the week as presented on network television news programs and in the front section of the Los Angeles Times. Two or three questions will be about the textbook reading for the day. The quiz will generally be given during the first 10 minutes of class and will consist of 10 questions per quiz, with each question worth one point, or a partial point (at my

discretion) for a semester total of 100 points. **Quizzes may not be made up for any reason.**

### **IN-CLASS & HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS**

You'll be writing at least one news story during each class period, to be completed within a specified amount of time. The exception will be in the first few classes when we'll be concentrating on writing clear, concise sentences and compelling Leads. As previously mentioned, the format for all assignments will be television broadcast style. **There will be no make-ups for In-class assignments.**

I'll assign homework at the end of each class. Usually this will involve handouts or material from the Course Reader and its DVD. Homework will be collected at the beginning of each class. 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 them to me via e-mail attachment (by class start-time on Thursday) or put them into my campus mailbox before class.

**Late assignments** will receive no credit since this is the equivalent of your story not making air. However, you are still required to complete the work so I can edit the assignment and provide feedback on your progress. From time to time, I might make an exception to this policy, but the highest grade a late assignment could receive is a "C."

Should you have questions about an assignment or if you're having undue difficulties in writing a story, please feel free to call or e-mail me.

### **GRADING CRITERIA: ASSIGNMENTS, MIDTERMS, FINALS**

All assignments will be graded on a professional basis, as if you were writing for a news broadcast and I was the show's producer. The closer your work resembles material that could be aired on the broadcast "as is," the closer you'll be to getting an A.

Your work will be evaluated on the basis of good news judgment (proper selection and ordering of information), on the quality of your writing (clarity, conciseness, choice of words, completeness, accuracy, balance and objectivity), and on whether you've written the story within the assigned length (i.e., a 30-second story should not run 45-seconds). In keeping with professional standards, your copy also should not contain any errors in spelling, style or grammar. Technical mistakes such as these often end up causing confusion about the story or even errors in accuracy. In case of doubt, consult the Tuggle/Carr/Huffman textbook or a dictionary, and always check your facts. It only takes a minute or two to avoid mistakes.

I'll be using the same grading standards from Day One. That will probably result in a few low grades and a lot of comments on your work during the early weeks of the semester, but please, don't panic. There are few "naturals" in this field. You're here to learn, and though the comments may not disappear, be assured your grades will improve.

Because we're more concerned with your progress, grades on assignments in the first four weeks will be weighted less than (and therefore won't count as much as) those from Week Five on. This policy does not apply to quizzes. Also, don't think you can just fail to do the work. ALL homework assignments must be completed in order to get a passing grade. Final grades will be based on an evaluation of a student's entire performance, i.e., class projects, homework assignments, quizzes, midterm and final exams, learning lab and growth in skills during the semester.

### **Some specifics about the grading:**

#### **A. Each story will have a letter grade** (A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, F).

"A" stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well-written and require only minor editing (i.e., they could be used on air).

"B" stories require more than minor editing, and have a few style or spelling errors or one significant error of omission. Voiceovers include appropriate b-roll. VSVs and packages also include good sound bites and natural sound that add flavor, color, or emotion to the story. Stories are written in appropriate broadcast format and meet time requirements.

"C" stories are stories that need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many spelling, style or omission errors. B-roll and sound bites add little or no color -- only information that could be better told in the reporter's narration.

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

"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 automatic F.

FYI, the following are some circumstances that would warrant an F:

- Plagiarizing a script, portions of a script, or information from any source (i.e., wire copy, feed packages, another student's story script).
- Making one or more serious factual errors in the script, including (but not limited to) inaccurate names of significant people or locations, faulty descriptions of events that occurred, or misquoting people.

#### **B. Plagiarism/Academic Integrity Policy**

Don't even think of a career in this field if you're tempted to use someone else's work and to put your name on it. In today's litigious society, it's not a quality any employer will tolerate, never mind a news operation. Frankly, there's no upside to plagiarism. It's fundamentally dishonest, it violates the standards intrinsic to the profession of journalism, you won't learn anything from it, and most of all, it'll put an immediate halt to your career in journalism.

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 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 THIS POLICY."

**C. Late Assignments**

As previously mentioned, no late assignments will be allowed. However, some rare exceptions due to documented (on USC Student Health Center stationary) medical reasons may be granted.

**D. Rewriting Stories**

Once I've graded a paper, I consider the story has aired, and the grade stands. However, I may allow some stories to be rewritten in order to encourage learning from our mistakes. Such rewrites will be done within a tight time frame, and the two grades will be averaged. This policy does not apply to the midterm or final exam.

**LEARNING LAB REQUIREMENT**

All core newswriting students must become a staff member of a campus media organization by the end of the third week of class.

- Broadcast majors must fulfill their requirement at ATVN.
- Print and public relations majors can work at the Daily Trojan, Online Journalism Review or at an off-campus internship. A limited number of print/PR majors may also be accepted at Annenberg Radio News. Students must apply and be accepted at all campus news organizations.

Print and P.R. majors: please provide me with any articles you write (link or hard copy). I'll also expect letters from supervisors explaining the kind of work you're doing and how well you're doing it. Letters are due at Midterm and at the end of the semester.

**COURSE GRADES:**

Homework, In-class writing assignments (First 4 weeks will be weighted less)	25%
Quizzes : Current Events & Leads Test (Week 4)	20%
Learning Lab requirement	10%
Midterm (Week 8)	20%
Final	<u>25%</u>
Total	100%

### **ATTENDANCE:**

Students are expected to be in class every week and to be there on time. However, if you can't avoid being absent (due to a solid reason such as a family emergency, a medical problem or a religious holiday), please contact me BEFORE class begins, just as you would contact your employer about missing work. (Call, e-mail, leave a note in my campus mailbox.) It will be up to you to get class notes from another student and to find out what's due next. However, feel free to call me if you have specific questions about the class you missed or if the homework assignment needs clarification.

Let me add this caution: excessive absences and/or repeated tardiness will obviously affect your course grade because assignments will be considered late (and will therefore get an F) if they're not turned in at the beginning of class and because quizzes and in-class assignments **cannot** be made up. Most of all, each class builds on the one before it, which means that catching up -- even after missing only one class -- is extremely difficult.

### **WRITING COACHES**

Writing coaches are available in ASC 227 during posted drop-in times and by appointment. Obviously, writing coaches should be used to review assignments AFTER I've graded and commented on them. The writing coach for the broadcast sequence is **Mike Daniels** and I strongly encourage you to meet with him if outside help is needed. He can be reached at [danielsm@usc.edu](mailto:danielsm@usc.edu).

### **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.

### **INSTRUCTOR BIO**

I began my journalism career writing broadcast news at KNXT (now KCBS) in Los Angeles, but for the past three decades, I've primarily free-lanced as a writer/producer, working on documentaries and magazine segments for local, network and cable programs. Long-form subjects ranged from William Randolph Hearst and Hearst Castle, children of divorce and the state of labor unions to Cholesterol and Hepatitis B. Magazine shows include NBC's "Real People," Lifetime's "Physician's Journal Update" and Discovery's "Storm Warning." Most recently, I co-produced a promotional video for UCLA's AIDS Institute and I'm currently working on a project about this country's space program for a presidential library.

## CLASS SCHEDULE:

*Please Note: All readings are to be done before each class.  
The syllabus is subject to change.*

### WEEK 1 - August 30: Overview

#### **Class Topics/In-Class Writing Assignments:**

Review of syllabus; the Whys of convergence; news judgment; basic elements of broadcast newswriting style; definition of broadcast terms; basic script format.

In-class- News judgment exercise; re-writing print sentences into broadcast style.

**Homework:** Ad-lib a newspaper story into a tape recorder and transcribe it, then re-write into broadcast format. (More on this in class); using the front page of a recent edition of the *Los Angeles Times*, write one sentence that summarizes the main point of each story on the page. (Keep the newspaper -- you'll need it again next week.)

**Readings:** Tuggle, Preface, Chap. 1 (Characteristics of Broadcast News Writing) and Chap. 2 (Selecting Stories and Starting to Write); Course Reader, pp. 172-175 & 178-181.

### WEEK 2 - September 6: Making stories "readable"

#### **Current Affairs Quiz # 1**

#### **Class Topics/In-Class Writing Assignments:**

How Newsrooms work; guidelines on making copy "readable" as well as clear and conversational; using numbers and names; attribution, broadcast-style; how to identify the essential elements of a story including main point leads.

In-class - Attribution exercises; writing a 25-second copy story.

**Homework:** (From handouts) Re-write sentences in broadcast style; write a 25-second news story for a national news audience; using the same front page of the *Los Angeles Times* that you worked with for last week's "News Judgment" exercise, determine the newsworthy element you would use as a focus for the Lead and then write a broadcast-style lead for each separate story.

**Readings:** Tuggle, Chapter 3 (Writing Great Leads and Other Helpful Hints); Course Reader, pp 182-185.

Since we'll also be discussing journalistic morality throughout the semester, please also read and familiarize yourself with the two important journalistic codes of ethics: 1, the Radio & Television News Directors Association Code of Ethics and 2, the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics. Both can be found online (web addresses, p. 255 of Tuggle).

### WEEK 3 - September 13: Broadcast Leads

#### **Current Events Quiz # 2**

#### **Class Topics/In-Class Writing Assignments:**

Difference between Print and Broadcast leads; Hard vs. soft leads and when to use them; more on determining what makes a story newsworthy; how to 'tell' a broadcast disaster story.

In-class - Writing leads from fact sheets; news story written with hard news lead.

**Homework:** (From handout) Write a variety of different types of leads; **email the assignment to me by 10:00 am, Tuesday September 18<sup>th</sup>**. ALSO, *to prepare for the Leads Quiz*, practice writing broadcast leads using material from the Course Reader.

**Readings:** Tuggle, Chapter 4 (Deadly Copy Sins).

### WEEK 4 - September 20: Leads Test; Making a broadcast story "flow"

**Test:** Leads/News Judgment test (30-minutes)

#### **Class Topics/In-Class Writing Assignments:**

More on the pruning process involved in writing a broadcast "story"; story structure; differences between hard news and features; partial screen graphics.

In-class - Exercise to help weed out essential elements of a story; writing a breaking news story in narrative style.

**Homework:** Write a news story (Course Reader, "Energy Ordinance," p. 438) and explain your selection of information and structure of story.

**Readings:** Tuggle, Chapter 7 (Television News Story Forms - The VO); Course Reader, pp 176-177, 186-191 & 198-203.

### WEEK 5 - September 27: Introducing the Voiceover

*Reminder: grades on In-class and homework assignments start to count in full with this class*

#### **Current Events Quiz # 3**

#### **Class Topics/In-Class Writing Assignment:**

Review of Leads Quiz; adding audio and video elements to broadcast stories; discussion of Lead-ins and tags; basics of writing to visuals; how to select and order visuals; script formats; logging footage.

In-class - Viewing and logging raw footage of "Beach Closing" story (Course Reader, p 267, DVD), and then writing the story with an Anchor Lead-in and no more than 25-seconds of voiceover copy.

**Homework:** Using information and the DVD from the Course Reader, write an Anchor Lead-In, 30-second voiceover and on camera tag for "Pilot Arrest" (p 282-283)

**Readings:** Tuggle, Chapters 6 (Writing Radio News) and 8 (Television Story Forms – The VO/SOT); Course Reader, pp 192-197.

### **WEEK 6 – October 4: Working with Audio and Video**

#### **Current Events Quiz # 4**

#### **Class Topics/In-Class Writing Assignments:**

How video and audio change the way stories are written; defining VO/SOTs and VSVs; more tips on selecting visuals and writing voiceover copy; effective set-ups for soundbites; technical instructions.

In-class: Exercises in selecting soundbites and in writing set-ups for soundbites; writing 35-second VO/SOT of "Obadiah's Rescue" (Course Reader, p 274).

**Homework:** Write a 45-second VSV with Anchor Lead-in, voiceover and soundbite for "Santa Clarita Fire" (Course Reader DVD; pp 339-341). **Email homework to me by start of next Thursday's class.**

**Readings:** Tuggle, Chapter 13 (Why We Fight); Course Reader, pp 208-215.

### **WEEK 7 – October 11:**

#### **Current Affairs Quiz #5**

#### **Class Topics/In-Class Writing Assignments:**

Review for midterm; determining visual sequences; more on technical cues.

In-class – writing a local news story using existing footage and fact sheet.

**Homework:** Practice for the Midterm by writing two stories -- one V/O and one VSV. (Source material – TBA)

### **WEEK 8 – October 18**

#### **MIDTERM** (two hours)

**Sign-up** for individual meeting with me regarding your midterm status

**Homework Assignment:** Listen to a variety of radio news programs; and then write a one-minute to one-and-a-half minute report (in broadcast style) on the differences in styles. Back up your opinions with specifics, listing stations, types of subjects covered, length of stories, and any differences in formats.

**Readings:** Tuggle, appendix B (Legal and Privacy FAQs)

### **WEEK 9 - October 25: Getting Technical**

*Please Note: Meet in regular classroom first; we'll then go over to the Digital Lab for our editing lesson.*

#### **Class Topics:**

Review of midterm.

**Avid editing session, Digital Lab - 2 hours**

#### **Homework Assignments:**

**Re-write** one of the midterm stories (TBA) and **edit it on the Avid.**

**Readings:** Course Reader, pp 204-207 and 216-223.

### **WEEK 10 - November 1: Soundbites, Sequences & Transitions**

#### **Current Events Quiz # 6**

#### **Class Topics/In-Class Writing Assignments:**

Full-screen graphics; ordering multiple soundbites, writing effective bridges.

In-class - Working on transitions and making stories with multiple soundbites flow smoothly.

**Homework:** Write a VSV of the Metrolink Crash (Course Reader, pp 285-288, and DVD). Complete assignment should include a lead-in, VSV with at least two soundbites, all technical directions, and a tag.

**Readings:** Tuggle, Chapter 9 (Television News Story Forms - The Package); Course Reader, pp. 224-229.

### **WEEK 11 - November 8: The Reporter Package**

#### **Current Events Quiz # 7**

#### **Class Topics/In-Class Writing Assignments:**

Elements of reporter packages - standups, natural sound, multiple soundbites; script formats for packages (editor's script vs producer's script).

In-class - Viewing and discussing reporter packages; writing a 1:00 reporter package on "Noxious Fumes" for a local Los Angeles station (source material to be provided).

**Homework Assignments:** Using the Course Reader & its DVD, write the "Hillside Falls" story (pp 272-273). Assume you are a reporter and have been assigned to cover this story. Write your voiceover and, if desired, a stand-up bridge. Hand in one script that includes narration, selected soundbites and all technical information for the visuals you want to use, and a second script with suggested Lead-in and Tag for the Anchor

along with appropriate technical instructions. Story should be no longer than 1:20.

**Readings:** Tuggle, Chapter 10 (Writing Sports Copy).

### **WEEK 12 - November 15: Frameworks for Packages**

*Reminder: Friday, Nov. 16: last day to drop a class with a mark of "w"*

**Current Events Quiz # 8**

#### **Class Topics/In-Class Writing Assignments:**

Covering Sports and other specialized areas; time continuity and diamond frameworks for writing packages; follow-up stories.

In-class - writing follow-up to sports story.

**Homework:** Using handout material, write a reporter package on a major hard news story, "Fatal Nursing Home Fire." (Story is in the Course Reader, pp 332-334, but there is no video. Read the material and determine what footage you have to work with.) Write a package that runs between 1:10 - 1:20, for a total story time of no more than 1:35 (with lead-in and tag). Be sure to include a standup, multiple soundbites, natural sound and CG information.

### **WEEK 13 - November 22 - THANKSGIVING**

**\*\*UNIVERSITY HOLIDAY\*\***

### **WEEK 14 - November 29: Packages with Multiple Stories**

**Current Events Quiz #9**

#### **Class Topics/In-Class Writing Assignment:**

How to weave stories into a package with a "theme"; package cut-downs.

In-class: Writing both a 35-second voiceover and a 1:10 reporter package on the same story ("Holiday Road Safety," Course Reader, pp 291-296 & DVD).

**Reading Assignment:** Tuggle, Chapter 14 (The Brave New World of Multimedia Convergence)

### **WEEK 15 - December 6: Review for Final**

**Current Events Quiz # 10**

**Class Topics:** Review of Top Tips for writing for broadcast.

In-Class - Writing exercises and working on leads.

**FINAL - Thursday, DECEMBER 13**

(2) :45 VO/SOT/VOs

Time: 10 AM - 12:40

Location: TBA

*Note: The Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling Examination will also be during Finals Week.*