

JOURNALISM 308

GARY C. FONG, *instructor*

COURSE INFORMATION

The class meets Mondays from 6 to 8:40 p.m. in GFS 207

REQUIRED TEXTS

"The Editorial Eye," Jane T. Harrigan (second edition textbook)

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law

"The Newspaper Designer's Handbook," Tim Harrower (sixth edition)

Webster's New World College Dictionary (fourth edition). This is the recommended dictionary, and takes precedence in class. Online dictionaries also can be used.

"The Oxford Dictionary of Usage and Style," Bryan A. Garner

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXTS

Recommended but not required, especially for students weak in grammar and usage: "Media Writer's Handbook," by George T. Arnold, which is available in the bookstore. Also, enterprising students may want to find "A Dictionary of American Usage and Style," by Roy Copperud. This book, which is out of print, is an excellent grammar reference.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The category is Journalism.

"This large text above stories on a newspaper page helps summarize articles and denote importance."

"What are headlines?"

"Correct."

"This kind of book is concerned with matters regarding appropriate capitalization, abbreviation, punctuation and spelling."

"What is the Associated Press Stylebook?"

"Correct."

"Let's try Countries."

"This tiny country within a country has devout followers."

"What is Vatican City?"

"Correct."

"On that note, let's have a word from our sponsor."

All right, so copy editing isn't really like a game show, although you do encounter elements of "Jeopardy!" at times.

In reality, this class is designed to introduce students to newspaper copy editing and layout, and to provide a brief exposure to line editing.

As newspapers continue to struggle for advertising dollars with the Internet, direct mail, cable TV and other outlets, and 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 reason 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 and 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's 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 graph or section identifying why the story matters. On the Internet, headlines that catch the eye are the lifeblood of a web page.

A field that has mushroomed in importance in the last decade is layout. Growing awareness of the visual packaging of news has been spurred by increasing competition for the attention of today's readers. 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 required. 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.

But now, back to the show, err, class.

CLASS FORMAT

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. This will hopefully 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, the homework exercises will be e-mailed to the students. The homework must be printed out as hard copy and turned in on time each week unless the instructor indicates that he or she will accept electronic versions.

Students are encouraged to read the Los Angeles Times daily; this will prove critical as we start to move into news judgment, not only in the line editor's job but also in the placement of stories by the news editor. Students who have not followed a daily newspaper will fail miserably in the news judgment exercises.

Students also are 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.

The course will follow the accompanying outline but I will make adjustments as needed through the course of the semester.

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

I graduated from the University of Southern California in 1984 with Bachelor of Arts degrees in print journalism and international relations (with an emphasis on U.S. defense and strategic studies). When I was a junior in high school, I decided that I wanted to be a journalist and secured my first job as a reporter at a chain of local weekly newspapers. I worked there until I graduated from USC. The job not only helped pay tuition, but also provided valuable work experience. In 1985, I was hired as a copy editor at the Los Angeles Herald Examiner. Not only did I copy-edit stories, I also worked as a wire editor, religion editor and assistant copy chief. I joined the Los Angeles Times in 1989. During my tenure at The Times, I have worked as a copy editor and news editor in the Calendar section, a copy editor, graphics liaison, news editor and assistant copy chief in the Suburban sections, and copy editor and news editor in the Metro sections. I currently serve as a design editor in the Calendar section and am primarily responsible for the daily Calendar sections. I have won Hearst headline contests at the Herald Examiner. In 2002, I was named the Asian Pacific American Student Services Mentor of the Year. When not grading homework, I play in a basketball league. I am devoted follower of USC football. In addition, I am the commissioner of a fantasy football league that began in 1988.

GRADING

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

Grading will be a reflection of the professional skill level reached. For example, a grade of "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; a mark of "B" would indicate work that could be published with small revisions.

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 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 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 from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. The office is located in the Student Union room 301 and the 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. 27

Anatomy of a copy editor: Levelheaded, iron-willed, brave-hearted.

Introduction to the editing systems and structures at small and large newspapers. A primer on copy-editing symbols and how to read the dictionary.

In-class editing exercise

Reading assignments: "The Editorial Eye," Chapters 1, 2 and 3

Homework: Exercises I, II and IV in Chapter 3 of "The Editorial Eye" workbook to be distributed in class.

Quiz note: There will be an AP Stylebook quiz on capitalization and abbreviations at the start of the Sept. 10 class.

SEPT. 3

University holiday. Wherever you go, take the AP Stylebook with you.

SEPT. 10

Word up: Common word-usage errors involving like-sounding words that haunt even the professionals. Why a spell check doesn't mean you'll always get the words write (right).

AP Stylebook quiz on capitalization and abbreviations

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 4 and 5

Homework: Exercises VIII, XI, XII and XIV in Chapter 3 of "The Editorial Eye" workbook

Quiz note: There will be an AP Stylebook quiz on misused words at the start of the Sept. 17 class.

SEPT. 17

The right stuff: The rules of grammar 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; like vs. as.

AP Stylebook quiz on misused words

Copy-editing exercise to be completed in class. A refresher course on grammar.

Discuss reading assignments

Reading assignments: "The Editorial Eye," Chapter 10

Homework: Exercises XVI, XVII, XXII and XXIII in Chapter 3 of "The Editorial Eye" workbook to be distributed in class.

Quiz note: There will be an AP Stylebook quiz on numbers at the start of the Sept. 24 class.

SEPT. 24

This Just in: What should a headline say? An introduction to headline writing. Learning to count headlines.

AP Stylebook quiz on numbers

In-class headline-writing exercises

Discuss reading assignment

Homework: Exercises I, II, III and IV in Chapter 4 of "The Editorial Eye" workbook to be distributed in class.

OCT. 1

The messenger: Refining copy-editing and headline-writing skills. A review of punctuation, with a focus on commas.

In-class editing and headline-writing exercise

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

Homework: Exercises XVI and XVII in Chapter 4 of "The Editorial Eye" workbook to be distributed in class.

Extra credit: Critique two bad headlines in the Los Angeles Times, Daily Trojan or other local newspaper, and bring them to class for discussion.

Review for the midterm

OCT. 8

Word of mouth: Making headlines more conversational.

Word association games

In-class headline-writing exercise

In-class editing assignment.

Homework: Editing assignment to be distributed in class

OCT. 15

MIDTERM: 6 to 8:40 p.m.

OCT. 22

Reading between the lines: Trimming fat from stories and eliminating redundancies that can lead to flabby writing. Developing as a line editor.

Seeing the flaws in attribution, clarity, structure, newswiness, buried leads, shallowness, redundancy and misfiring transitions that beset every newspaper. Learning from the mistakes made on the airwaves and in print.

In-class editing exercise

Midterms returned

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

OCT. 29

The front page: Fundamentals of modular design. Introduction and discussion of designs from several newspapers.

In-class editing exercise

Discuss reading assignment

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

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

NOV. 5

Top of the news: Why layout is a reflection of news judgment.

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.

Critiques of good and bad page designs

Discuss reading assignments

In-class design exercise (bring a ruler)

Reading assignments: "The Newspapers Designer's Handbook," Chapter 4

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

NOV. 12

The big picture: Photo editing.

How to make photo selections. How to crop the photos to enhance them. Multiple photo layouts: simple guidelines that can be used for photo spreads in any part of the newspaper.

In-class layout exercise

Discuss reading assignment

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

Homework: A design project to be distributed in class

NOV. 19

The total package: Laying out the front page of the Local News section.

Using lessons from Page 1 and photo spreads in making this hybrid news/feature page work.

In-class layout exercise

Homework: Final design project to be distributed in class

NOV. 26

Road trip: A tour of Los Angeles Times specifically geared toward understanding physical production of a newspaper.

The impact of technology on newspapers, desktop publishing, on-line services and other media.

Final design project due

Review for the final

DEC. 3

FINAL: 6 to 8:40 p.m.

Please be forewarned that the schedule can be changed or adapted 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. Otherwise, the lab session will be devoted to copy editing exercises. There will be several pop quizzes on AP Stylebook issues. Some extra credit work will be offered during the semester.