

COMM 205 – 23W Reporting Fundamentals I: Writing & Interviewing

Fall 2016

Wednesdays 4:15-6:45 p.m.
School of Communication Room 015

Professor Lee Hood, Ph.D.

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“To be persuasive we must be believable; to be believable we must be credible; to be credible we must be truthful. It is as simple as that.” Edward R. Murrow

◆ Course Goals and Objectives

This course is designed to teach you the fundamentals of journalistic-style reporting and writing, incorporating processes of newsgathering, sourcing, interviewing, language precision and working on deadline. These skills are applicable across multiple journalism platforms, as well as in fields such as public relations. As our textbook notes, “Journalism is fact-based storytelling in any medium.”

As a writing-intensive course, you can expect many writing assignments throughout the semester. Most of these will be fairly short (up to 300-400 words).

An informed public depends on journalists who are up to date on issues and events, both locally and around the world. Therefore, you will be expected to keep up with the news. Read newspapers and credible online news sources. Watch TV news and follow local, national, and international news events. Listen to news on radio and/or podcasts. We will discuss contemporary issues in news, to enhance your critical reflection about professional practices in journalism and related fields.

Covering news inevitably raises issues of ethics and diversity. We will assess the ethical implications of story selection and framing, word choices, “expert” opinions, fairness and balance. Your work also will be evaluated for sensitivity to issues of race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other cultural issues on which news coverage often can improve. This year the School of Communication has adopted a social justice theme on the topic of **gun violence**. Stories on this topic will be particularly valued.

◆ Text(s)

(required) Writing & Reporting for the Media (11th edition) by John R. Bender et al., 2016, Oxford University Press.

Associated Press Stylebook (2016 edition), book or app (additional details in class)

◆ Class Organization

There will be several outside writing assignments, as well as regular in-class writing. Meeting once a week, class periods will include a combination of instruction, discussion, and practicing what you have learned. Expect several quizzes on assigned readings, style, and word usage (grammar, spelling, etc.). These will be given at the beginning of class, so it is important to arrive on time. Quizzes cannot be made up, but at the end of the semester your lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

There will be a **mid-term exam** on style, word usage, and the content of what has been covered up to that point in the semester. In lieu of a final exam will be a final project designed for you to highlight what you have learned throughout the course.

◆ Grading

Grades will be weighted as follows:

Outside assignments	40%
In-class assignments and quizzes	20%
Mid-Term Exam	10%
Final project	20%
Attendance/Punctuality/Professionalism	10%

Grading scale

Assignments will be graded on a point system. At the end of the semester, the cumulative points will be converted into a letter grade based on the following scale:

A 94-100%; A- 90-93%; B+ 87-89%; B 84-86%; B- 80-83%;
C+ 77-79%; C 74-76%; C- 70-73%; D+ 67-69%; D 64-66%

Loyola does not recognize a grade of D-, so a grade below 64% is failing.

- There may be opportunities for extra credit in some categories, but the total you can earn in each category is capped at 100% of the total points for that category.

Other writing and grade considerations:

- Story Subjects: For objectivity and in keeping with standard professional practice, **avoid** doing stories using your own family members, significant others, close friends or roommates as subjects. The best rule of thumb is: Don't build stories around people you are related to or are particularly close to. Likewise, **avoid** doing stories about groups you belong to. Such stories will receive a grade reduction, unless: 1) it is a unique circumstance, 2) the story is *about* your connection to the story subject, *and* 3) the connection is revealed in the story.
- Fact error deduction: Facts are vitally important in journalism, so fact errors in receive an automatic deduction. Take care to spell names correctly and ensure other facts are accurately presented. In the words of the late President Lyndon Johnson, "In the arsenal of truth, there is no greater weapon than fact."

Deadlines: Meeting deadlines is crucial in journalism, as in many professions. Assignments not turned in on time will receive an automatic reduction, the equivalent of one letter grade for every day they are late.

◆ Rules, Responsibilities, and Resources

Academic Integrity

Loyola University and the School of Communication expect academic integrity and have policies regarding academic dishonesty. Specifically for the SOC:

1. Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. Plagiarism in your work will result in a minimum of a failing grade for that assignment. The case may carry further sanctions from the School of Communication or the University, the most serious being permanent expulsion. Avoid turning in work that could be interpreted as plagiarism or academically dishonest (e.g., failing to properly credit a source or using someone else's words or ideas without clarifying that they are not yours). In an academic community, being uninformed or naïve is not an acceptable excuse.

2. It is dishonest to:

- Turn in the same work for two classes;
- Turn in a paper or other assignment you have not done yourself;
- Copy from another student or use a "cheat sheet" during an exam.

And specifically for this course:

- *Do not copy wording from another news source or website. **Always** rewrite.*

Turning in work that is not your own and representing it as yours will result in failure on the assignment and possible dismissal from the class. You can find the university's full policy at www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml.

Special Needs

If you have a special circumstance that may impact your course work and for which you may require accommodations, please contact me early in the semester so arrangements can be made with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSWD). We will accommodate your needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of course content and processes (such as the demands of working on tight deadlines). Loyola's policy is that it is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates. Additional information about the services available at Loyola, including eligibility for services, is on the SSWD website: www.luc.edu/sswd/index.shtml.

Writing Help

Because this is a writing-intensive course, you may find you need additional assistance. If your difficulties are with basic English and sentence construction, the Writing Center will be a good resource (see www.luc.edu/writing/). However, because journalism is a distinctive type of writing, your issues may be beyond the center's capabilities. If you need help with *journalistic-style* writing, come see me.

Classroom Conduct

Electronic devices are increasingly ubiquitous, and are often quite distracting. Please turn off cell phones and other electronic devices before class begins. If you use a laptop computer to take notes in class, you will be required to send Professor Hood a copy of the notes at the end of class. Do not use your computer for any activity not directly related to the class. The Internet and social media are tremendous resources, but the convenience of using your computer (or cell phone) in class may be revoked if you abuse the privilege.

◆ Electronic Communication & Information

Sakai: Course information and assignments will be available on Sakai. Please notify me if you have any problems using the class Sakai site.

Email: I will answer email within 24 hours on weekdays but will not always access it on weekends. You may not receive a response to a late Friday email until Monday.

◆ About your professor

This is my eighth year at Loyola, after several years teaching at the University of Colorado. I began my journalism career at age 16, as a staff writer for my hometown newspaper. After working in newspapers for several years, I branched into radio news and eventually television. I spent 18 years in television news, most of it as a newscast producer, though I also have experience in reporting and anchoring (both news and sports), photography and editing. I spent most of my news career in a Top 20 market (Denver), with earlier experience in Huntsville, Alabama and Columbia, Missouri. My newscasts earned regional Emmys and other awards. I hold a Ph.D. in Communication from the University of Colorado. My research interests include several aspects of local news: reporters' use of social media, the audience relationship to news, as well as corporate and consolidation influences and news outsourcing. I have a master's degree from the University of Colorado and a bachelor's degree journalism from the University of Missouri. I am a member of the Chicago regional board of directors for the National Television Academy as well as the Radio-TV-Digital News Association (RTDNA).

Reporting Fundamentals I

Fall 2016 Schedule*

*Note: Reading assignments are to be completed before the start of class on the assigned day.
Also note: Additional assignment due dates will be added throughout the semester.*

Wk 1 **Aug. 31** General introduction: journalism basics; what is news and what makes a story newsworthy? Where do *you* get news? (Survey)

In-class: Classmate interview and short story

Read: Bender Preface, Ch. 1 Journalism Today, Ch. 2 Selecting and Reporting News

Wk 2 **Sept. 7** The Importance of Leads; Story Structure; AP style

Read: Bender Ch. 7 Basic News Leads and Ch. 9 The Body of a News Story

In-class: Assessment Test

Wk 3 **Sept. 14** The “First Five Graphs” principle; clear writing; grammar for journalists

Read: Bender Ch. 3 Newswriting Style, Ch. 4 The Language of News, Appendix B (possessives)

Wk 4 **Sept. 21** Interviewing, Quotes, Attribution

Read: Bender Ch. 10 Quotations and Attribution, Ch. 11 Interviewing

Wk 5 **Sept. 28** Breaking news: Fires, Crimes, Accidents; Law, Libel, and Ethics

Read: Bender Ch. 5 Libel, Privacy and Newsgathering Issues; Ch. 6 Ethics; Ch. 18 Public Affairs Reporting (pp. 365-371)

Wk 6 **Oct. 5** Public Affairs Reporting II: Covering politics, social justice issues

Read: Bender Ch. 18 Public Affairs Reporting (pp. 375-386)

Wk 7 **Oct. 12** Covering meetings, speeches and events

Read: Bender Ch. 15 Speeches and Meetings

Wk 8 **Oct. 19** Other story types and writing styles

Read: Bender Ch. 8 Alternative Leads; Ch. 16 Brights, Follow-ups (etc.)

Mid-term Exam

Wk 9 **Oct. 26** Feature stories

Read: Bender Ch. 17 Feature Stories

Wk 10 **Nov. 2** Blending of styles: Online writing, multi-media

Read: Bender Ch. 13 Digital Media: Online, Mobile and Social Media

Wk 11 **Nov. 9** Online and multi-media continued

In-class: Election reaction stories

Wk 12 **Nov. 16** Public Relations Writing

Read: Bender Ch. 20 Journalism and Public Relations

Wk 13 **Nov. 23** **THANKSGIVING BREAK, NO CLASS**

Wk 14 **Nov. 30** Broadcast Writing and Visual Journalism
Read: Bender Ch. 12 Writing for Radio and TV News, Ch. 14 Visual Journalism

Wk 15 **Dec. 7** Semester wrap-up, Final Project work day

Wk 16

Dec. 14 Final Projects due by 5 p.m.

* We will try to stick to this schedule, but there may be changes if circumstances dictate or special opportunities arise.