

Loyola University Chicago

COMM 205

Reporting and Writing Across Platforms

Wednesday, 7 – 9:30 p.m.

School of Communication, Room 015

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Course description

Welcome to Reporting and Writing! This course will introduce you to the skills necessary to function in a professional newsroom. You will attend simulated press conferences, write on deadline and learn to create stories for print, broadcast and the Internet. Students will be expected to read the assigned materials and provide a brief summary of each reading at the beginning of the next class. Lectures will describe how those readings apply to the real world of professional journalism. You will learn the fundamentals of interviewing, fact checking and choosing the best descriptive material for a story. You will also learn the importance of ethics and the laws concerning libel and slander, and how to avoid those mistakes. Students will be required to meet strict deadlines, keep informed on the past week's news and use proper spelling, grammar and punctuation in every assignment. Students are advised to closely read the section on plagiarism in this syllabus. There will be no tolerance for plagiarism. **This course is writing intensive. Students will write in a computer lab and will also have outside writing assignments. But no assignment will be longer than 400 words.**

Required materials:

Inside Reporting by Tim Harrower, third edition.

Associated Press Stylebook.

Additional materials:

A Flip, Kodak Zi8 or comparable video camera. These items are available for free checkout in the School of Communication and the Information Commons.

Grading:

At least one quiz will be given weekly (a minimum of 10) covering readings and/or news coverage in the *Chicago Tribune* or *Chicago Sun-Times*. The quizzes will assess your dedication to the readings and will serve as a measure of your attendance.

Students are expected to act in a professional way as if this were a job. That means attending class regularly, arriving on time, being prepared for class and participating in lectures. Surfing the web or checking your email and Facebook accounts won't get you very far in this class. Tardiness is a factor in determining your final grade. If you expect to be absent or late, please call or email me – just like you would your editor.

The grading criteria for written work:

A: Publishable work with no spelling, grammatical, punctuation or AP Style errors. The work must be well organized and display the “five Ws” of news writing. Multiple sources and proper attribution are important.

B: Minimal spelling, grammatical, punctuation and AP Style errors. Minimal missing information and source information. Minimal problems with the ‘lede’ (the first paragraph) and organization.

C: Notable number of the above errors.

D: Significant problems with the story.

F: Misspelled proper names. Other major spelling, grammatical, punctuation and AP Style errors. An almost total lack of information and sources; severe problems with the lede and organization.

The criteria for video work:

A: Clearly focused video, proper framing, lively content, understandable audio, 1-3 minutes in length, properly posted.

B-F: Depends on how many of those elements are missing.

Total possible points for the semester: 1,000

Outside assignments:

- Brief summaries of six readings from *Inside Reporting*, maximum of 20 points per assignment: 120 points
- Five ledes: 100 points (week two)
- Man on the Street story: 100 points (week three)
- Event story: 100 points (week six)
- Broadcast news story: 100 points (week 11)
- Public relations release: 100 points (week 13)
- Final project: 200 points

Format:

Please submit hard copies of assignments and homework in Times New Roman, 12 point, double spaced in paragraph form with name, date, name of assignment and word count in the top right corner.

Deadlines:

Late assignments will drop one letter grade each day they are filed past deadline. Assignments can only be submitted via email with approval from the instructor. No in-class work may be completed out of class due to an absence unless the absence is excused by the instructor.

Rewrites:

If a student receives a grade of 73 or less, she or he may rewrite the following outside assignments: Man on the Street story; event story; broadcast news story. You will have one week to submit the rewrite. The average of the two scores from the original and the rewrite will be used to calculate the final grade for the assignment.

Grade scale:

A: 100-94

A-: 93-90

B+: 89-88

B: 87-83

B-: 82-80

C+: 79-78

C: 77-73

C-: 72-70

D+: 69-68

D: 67-63

D-: 62-60

F: 59-0

WRITING HELP:

For additional help, please visit the writing center: <http://www.luc.edu/writing/home/> if needed. Be aware that journalism is a distinctive type of writing, so some of your issues may not be addressed by the writing center, which can help you with basic English and sentence construction. See me after class if you have a particular question about structuring a news story.

Academic dishonesty policy:

Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. Cheating includes, but is not limited to:

- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled exam without the consent of the teacher.
- Providing information to another student during an exam.
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an exam.
- Using any material or equipment during an exam without the consent of the instructor, or in a manner that is not authorized by the instructor.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the stealing of ideas, language, work or intellectual property of another, either by intent or negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express thoughts. Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of **specific** words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources. One example: lifting an entire passage from Wikipedia and using it as one's own.

Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is both an act of personal, professional courtesy and of intellectual honesty. Any failure to do so, whether by intent or neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism. A more detailed description is found at <http://luc.edu/english/writing.shtml#source>.

In addition, a student may not submit the same paper or other work for credit in two or more classes, even in different semesters.

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor assigning an F to the assignment or exam. The instructor may impose a more severe penalty such as a grade of F for the course. All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the appropriate area head and to the office of the Dean of the School of Communication. A complete description of the School of Communication's academic integrity policy is at <http://www.luc.edu/soc/Policy.shtml>

The Class Schedule (subject to change):

WEEK 1, JAN. 14: Course overview; what does a journalist do? What is news and what is the structure of a news story? In-class exercises. HOMEWORK: Read IR chapters 1, 2 and 3. Prepare a 75-word summary of the readings. Just give me the thing you found most interesting from the readings, succinctly. This doesn't have to read like a news story. Due before class on WEEK 2. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.

WEEK 2, JAN. 21: Using the *Associated Press Stylebook*. IN CLASS-EXERCISE: AP writing practice and writing ledes, due at the end of class. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20. HOMEWORK: Read *Associated Press Stylebook*, A-D. Buy a *Chicago Tribune* or *Chicago Sun-Times*, read the stories in the front news section and circle examples of AP style and examples of how the newspaper's style varied from AP. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20. HOMEWORK 2: Watch a few TV news broadcasts, take notes and write five ledes. POSSIBLE POINTS: 80.

WEEK 3, JAN. 28: The first 5 'grafs': going into detail about the structure of a news story, with an in-class exercise due at the end of the class. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20. HOMEWORK: Read *Associated Press Stylebook*, E-M.

WEEK 4, FEB. 4: Interviews: how to. IN-CLASS EXERCISE: You will write 'briefs' and write an interview story, both due at end of class. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20. HOMEWORK 1: read IR chapters 4 and 5. Prepare a 75-word summary of the reading. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20. HOMEWORK 2: **Man on the Street** story. POSSIBLE POINTS: 100.

WEEK 5, FEB. 11: Covering fires, crimes and accidents. IN-CLASS EXERCISE: You will write a fire story and a crime story, both due at the end of class. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20. HOMEWORK 1: read IR chapter 6. Prepare a 75-word summary. Also, read *Associated Press Stylebook T-Z*. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20. HOMEWORK 2: **Event news story**. POSSIBLE POINTS: 100.

WEEK 6, FEB. 18: Chicago Sun-Times field trip. A look at how a daily newspaper works as deadline approaches. SUBJECT TO CHANGE DEPENDING ON SCHEDULES

WEEK 7, FEB. 25: Beyond breaking news: what are the different types of stories in journalism? How does a profile story work? IN-CLASS EXERCISE: dissect a profile story. IN-CLASS EXERCISE: what makes a person newsworthy? Opinion and sports coverage. IN-CLASS EXERCISE: find facts to support an opinion or review. IN-CLASS EXERCISE: write a sports story, due at the end of class. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20. HOMEWORK: Read IR Chapter 7 and prepare a 75-word summary. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20. Due at beginning of class after spring break.

MARCH 4, SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS.

WEEK 8, MARCH 11: Law and ethics: don't get sued, fired or both. EXERCISE: ethics survey. Discussion – libel. HOMEWORK: read IR chapter 8 and prepare a 75-word summary. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.

WEEK 9, MARCH 19: Investigative reporting: How to use documents in a story. We will learn how to use the federal court's PACER document system and how to navigate the system for documents useful in telling a story. IN-CLASS EXERCISE: finding and reading the criminal complaint and telling a story from it. HOMEWORK: Go to the federal courthouse at Adams and Dearborn in Chicago, go through security, locate the clerk's office, and use the PACER system to find your assigned case. Read the complaint and learn whether there is a disposition in the case such as a sentence or a not-guilty verdict. Take notes and write a 400-word story based on the information. Remember the courthouse closes at 5. POSSIBLE POINTS: 100. HOMEWORK: read IR chapters 9 and 10 and prepare a 75-word summary. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20.

WEEK 10, MARCH 18: Broadcast journalism. Radio and TV news; reporting news for broadcast. IN-CLASS EXERCISE: write a broadcast script based on a news event. POSSIBLE POINTS: 20. HOMEWORK: create a **broadcast story**. POSSIBLE POINTS: 100.

WEEK 11, APRIL 1: Press releases. What is public relations? We'll review real-life examples of press releases and media kits. IN-CLASS EXERCISE: write a story from a press release. POSSIBLE POINTS: 10.

WEEK 12, APRIL 8: Guest speaker from a local news outlet TBD. Write a 150-word story on the speech, including descriptive information about the speaker and using at least two quotes. POSSIBLE POINTS: 40. Discussion of final project. HOMEWORK: clip three stories from the *Chicago Tribune* or *Chicago Sun-Times* and rewrite the first three grafs of each using the facts in the story. POSSIBLE POINTS: 30.

WEEK 13, APRIL 15: Final project – a profile of a neighborhood. We'll look at a neighborhood map and select a neighborhood for each student to profile. We want to avoid overlap. This project will entail at least one walking tour through a neighborhood to gain descriptions and conduct man on street interviews to learn about the conditions in the neighborhood. We'll discuss the types of sources to interview and sources to learn about the changing history and demographics of the neighborhood such as crime, population and ethnicity. HOMEWORK: Begin your reporting; keep a progress sheet documenting your progress and your goals; keep a source list with names and phone numbers. Conduct at least one of your neighborhood interviews on a video camera.

WEEK 14, APRIL 22: Final project. Continue to work in class on the neighborhood story.

WEEK 15, APRIL 29: Final project due, 400 words w/ multimedia presentation. POSSIBLE GRADE: 200 points. Prepare to deliver a brief 3-4 minute oral report on your work, including your findings and what you went through to get the story.

**** EXTRA CREDIT: Read “Boss” by Mike Royko or “All the President’s Men” by Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein.** Give me a 200-word essay on how your reaction to the book. Examples of the kinds of things you might explore: Does the book inspire you in some way? Do you agree with the way these journalists portrayed their subjects? What is the role for journalism like this that goes into the ugly side of politics? Has the pendulum swung too far toward “gotcha” journalism these days. Etc. Maximum 40 points credit. Note: I have two paperback copies of “Boss” that I can lend to you. You will have to check out “All the President’s Men” in the library or buy it.