

News Writing
Allegheny College
ENG 207, 4 credits, Spring 2011

Day/Time: T/Th 1:30-2:45 p.m.
Classroom: Murray 117

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Office hours: Tue 3-5 p.m., Wed 10 a.m.-1 p.m., Thurs 9:30-10:30 a.m. and by appointment

“Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”
- Thomas Jefferson

Course Outline, Responsibilities and Policies

About this course. This is a beginning level journalism class with an emphasis on writing and gathering news in an objective manner. Work often simulates the intense life of the news reporter, writing under strict deadlines and with intense research requirements. This class also stresses fundamental writing skills, such as developing concise language and learning to copy-edit and rewrite.

Course Objectives. This course will teach you to write clear, concise and accurate stories. Using a lecture and laboratory setting, News Writing will give you the tools necessary to report and write stories in a timely and efficient manner, while understanding the values of what makes something newsworthy. You will learn proper journalism style, ethical conduct and effective news consumption. We will address the following course objectives:

- Utilize AP Style
- Identify the news values of a story
- Write short news stories with accuracy, clarity and completeness
- Evaluate a series of facts, identify the key elements and write a concise summary lede
- Understand the basics of media law and media ethics
- Master the importance of quotes and story sourcing
- Develop an awareness of current events and news literacy
- Experiment with convergence and understand the basic differences of telling a story in print, broadcast and online media

Course Materials. We will be using “Inside Reporting: A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism” by Tim Harrower to augment the work we do in this course. You will also need the “Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law” (2009 or 2010 editions are acceptable,

as are the digital or mobile editions). In addition to these traditional textbooks, you will also need to keep up with “The Campus” every week; cnn.com or bbc.co.uk and “The New York Times” every day and monitor NPR’s “All Things Considered,” CBS’ “60 Minutes” and PBS’ “NewsHour” on a weekly basis. All papers are available in the library (or in dorm racks) and the broadcasts are available online. You should bring your texts to each class. You will also receive periodic handouts in class, through Sakai and via email and you can expect to see this material on your exams and quizzes. You may find it helpful to have a flash drive, reporter’s notepad, a reliable pen and possibly a voice recorder on hand during class and for your out-of-class reporting assignments.

Availability of the Professor. Due to the nature of my appointment at the College, I am usually shuttling between Murray, Vukovich, Odd fellows and the Campus Center on any given day, but I am almost always (somewhere) on campus from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and am easily available with a prior appointment. To make an appointment with me, you may contact me using any of the information above, but the easiest way to reach me is via email as I always have my iPhone with me. I’ll keep Tuesdays from 3 to 5 p.m., Wednesdays from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and Thursdays from 9:30 to 10:30 a.m. open for drop-in office hours. Please feel free to talk to me about any issues relating to the course and don’t hesitate to ask for my assistance. Believe it or not, that’s what they pay me for. I truly care about your learning and I hope that office hours aren’t simply a time to talk about problems, but also a space to brainstorm, develop interests or argue about the merits of the new Mumford & Sons, Kanye or Cee Lo Green albums.

Deadlines. Journalism is a deadline-oriented business. As a professional, if you miss a deadline, you should expect to clear out your desk sooner rather than later. As a student in this course, I will hold you to a similar standard. Meeting deadlines in this course is mandatory. If you don’t turn in an assignment on time (that means not a minute after the deadline listed), you will NOT receive credit. Zero. Nada. Zilch. By meeting this course standard you will inevitably grow not only as a journalist, but also as a person.

Attendance and Lateness. Please come to class on time every scheduled class day. If there is a circumstance that may force you to miss class, please email me or see me so we can discuss your alternatives. If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to get notes from classmates. Please do not contact the instructor for notes or lecture outlines unless you have exhausted other options. I will only allow late papers or makeup work in the case of extenuating circumstances, which can include death of a family member or a significant illness or injury that requires immediate bedrest, immobilization or treatment. All of these circumstances still require documentation for an excused absence. Sorry, headaches don’t count. Students that plan to miss class due to a college-related activity or religious holiday should provide advance notice of the absence and you accept full responsibility for completing any work ahead of time.

Electronic Devices. While this is a technologically focused course, texting during class isn’t the best idea. You will quickly discover that cell phones and unapproved computer use in class are my biggest pet peeves. If I see you fiddling with your phone or on the web while we’re having a class discussion or lecture, I will ask you to leave the classroom. Believe me, I can see you. You will find this course to be infinitely more rewarding if you are present both physically and mentally.

Email. Course materials may be distributed to you via email. You are responsible for checking your Allegheny College email on a daily basis.

Participation and In-Class Conduct. Successful people, especially journalists, know how to ask questions – lots of questions. Those who refuse to be a part of the discussion will see that reflected in a lower final grade. Please note that there is a difference between quality of participation and quantity of participation. All discussions and interactions between class members during class time or team project situations should be respectful, professional and conducted with sensitivity. Any other type of behavior will not be tolerated.

Course Writing Guidelines. Most assignments in this course will be turned in via Google docs. If I ask for a physical copy of an assignment, it must be typed, stapled, double-spaced and physically handed in to me during class on the day it is due. All assignments should conform to AP Style and be free of spelling, grammar or style mistakes. I do not accept late assignments. I do not accept any handwritten work in this course.

Accuracy and Integrity. Please refer to your Honor Code pledge and behave accordingly in this class. Plagiarism in any form -- including not properly attributing information or quotes -- will not be tolerated and will result in a failing grade in the course. In an attempt to encourage accuracy and an attention to detail, any factual error, including misspelling of names of any kind, will result in an automatic failing grade on the assignment, exam or quiz.

Disabilities. Students with disabilities who believe they may need accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact Disability Services at (814) 332-2898. Disability Services is part of the Learning Commons and is located in Pelletier Library. Please do this as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

Course Grading

Grades: Your course grade is calculated out of 500 total points and will be decided as follows:
200 pts Reported stories
150 pts Two exams
100 pts Ten quizzes
50 pts Participation

Reported stories: This will be the graded writing you do in the course (you'll do a lot of writing for practice, especially at the start of the semester, that won't be graded). The grade is comprised of seven stories in different formats and styles, as follows:

Obituary (20 pts): This will be a write-up of your professor's made-up death. It will be written in inverted pyramid style and will be based on a class interview/press conference. It will be between 400 and 800 words.

Campus story #1-3 (25 pts each): These will be stories of your choice, reported and written for *The Campus*. They may be assigned by an editor at the

paper or you can pitch an idea. Each story will be between 600 and 900 words.

Profile feature story (30 pts): This will be a profile or feature style news story written for either *The Campus* or *The Meadville Tribune* (it is not required to pitch this story). It will be between 800 and 1,500 words.

Online story (30 pts): This will be a story reported, designed and packaged for online consumption at www.allegheycampus.com. The text will be between 400 and 800 words and the package will be drawn up either by hand or digitally using at least three additional online elements. You will also turn in a short (1- to 2-page) essay that justifies and supports your choices in this story.

Broadcast story (45 pts): This will be a TV news package reported, written, shot and edited for ACTV. It will be between 30 seconds and 2 minutes long and will be produced according to correct broadcast style. This will be a group project and you will receive a group grade and an individual grade that will be averaged for your final score.

Exams: You will have two exams -- a midterm and a final -- in this class and each will be worth 75 points. These will be made up of multiple choice, true/false, short answer, long answer and practical application (writing a story). You will have a full class period for each exam and you may always have your AP Stylebook open for any exam, quiz or activity.

Quizzes: You will have 10 quizzes in this course that will cover 1) the lecture from the day before, 2) any reading due that day, and 3) current events from the *The Campus*, *CNN.com* and *The New York Times*. To do well on these quizzes, you should keep up with the assigned course reading as outlined in the syllabus, anything posted to Sakai and any handouts. If you arrive late to class, please do not expect me to repeat quiz questions – it is your responsibility to be on time.

Participation: This grade is based on your class participation and your engagement with your assignments, professor and classmates. (Please note that you cannot participate if you're not in class.)

Grading scale.

A 100-93 *You should be writing for The New York Times, now.*

A- 92-90 *Outstanding work of publishable quality.*

B+ 89-87

B 86-83 *With some editing changes, your work could run somewhere.*

B- 82-80

C+ 79-77

C 76-73 *After a ton of work from the editor, your work is just ok.*

C- 72-70

D 69-60 *Fundamental issues with the work.*

F 59 or less *Lacks basic skills or wasn't submitted on deadline.*

Course Schedule *

WEEK	DAY	TOPIC	DUE
1: Intro	1/20	Syllabus review; What is news?; AP Style	
2: The story of journalism	1/25	Quiz 1; History of journalism; AP Style	Harrower Ch. 1
	1/27	News literacy and consumption; AP Style	
3: How newsrooms work	2/1	Quiz 2; The newsroom	Harrower Ch. 2
	2/3	News values	
4: Newswriting basics	2/8	Quiz 3; Inverted pyramid and ledes	Harrower Ch. 3
	2/10	Story structure	
5: Newswriting basics	2/15	Quiz 4; Style	
	2/17	Obits	Harrower p. 96-97 (re: obituaries)
6: Reporting basics	2/22	Quiz 5; Research and story ideas	Obituary due; Harrower Ch. 4
	2/24	Sourcing and interviewing	Campus story #1 due
7: Covering the news	3/1	Quiz 6; Beats	Harrower Ch. 5
	3/3	From accidents to sports	
8: Law and ethics	3/8	Quiz 7; Law and ethics	Harrower Ch. 7
	3/10	Law and ethics	Campus story #2 due
9: Law and ethics	3/15	Law and ethics	
	3/17	Midterm exam	
10:		Spring Break: NO CLASS	
11: Beyond breaking news	3/29	Features	Harrower Ch. 6
	3/31	Profiles	Campus story #3 due

12: Beyond breaking news	4/5	Quiz 8; Enterprise and investigative projects	
	4/7	Editorials, columns and reviews	Profile feature story due
13: Online reporting	4/12	Quiz 9; Print to Web	Harrower Ch. 8
	4/14	Convergence and multimedia reporting	
14: Broadcast journalism	4/19	Quiz 10; Writing for broadcast	Online story due; Harrower Ch. 9
	4/21	Writing for broadcast	
15: Broadcast journalism	4/26	Writing for TV	
	4/28	Writing for radio	
16: Wrapping up	5/3	Critique and screening	Broadcast story due
	5/10	Final exam 2-4 p.m.	

* This schedule may change over the course of the semester. All changes will be announced well in advance.