

JOUR 101-01
Weinstein 418
Spring 2023
TR 9:00–10:15 a.m.

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What to expect

News Writing is a fun and fast-paced course. You will learn the fundamentals of reporting, organizing and writing news stories. You will learn to do this on deadline the same way you would in a professional setting. This is a challenging class, and if you apply yourself, you will become a better writer.

The skills you learn in this course can help you in many other classes and disciplines here at Richmond as well as a variety of post-college professions. In addition to journalism itself, these skills easily apply to marketing, public relations, advertising, business, law, and numerous others. Employers increasingly put a premium on graduates who can write and communicate clearly.

Among the topics we'll cover: how to write succinct and effective leads, how to write logical and engaging news stories, how to conduct interviews, how to avoid common usage and grammar problems, and how to avoid bias and ethical pitfalls.

Texts and media

“Writing and Reporting for the Print Media,” by Bender, Davenport, et al (12th edition, including workbook)

The Associated Press Stylebook (free, online through the library)

Online edition of The Washington Post (free, online through the library)

The Collegian - <http://www.thecollegianur.com>

Attendance

Journalism is a fast-paced, deadline-driven business. You can fall behind quickly, even if you miss just one class. But if you are sick, make health your priority and don't come to class – we'll work on catching you up.

Communication is critical. Let me know if you're not going to be in class or if you have something preventing you from meeting a deadline. In a professional setting, reporters need to alert editors in advance about any deadline difficulties. Let's treat this professionally. Let me know in advance, or as soon as possible, about any absences or deadline delays. Excellent communication can offset penalties for those problems. We will communicate regularly in this class by email. Please acknowledge and respond to my emails the day they are received whenever possible.

Reading

In addition to the textbook, you are responsible for reading the online edition of The Washington Post daily. This is now available to you for free through the UR library at <https://libguides.richmond.edu/newssources>. On the Post website, you can subscribe to several daily email newsletters, which will help you organize and prioritize your current events readings. **You're responsible for the Evening Edition newsletter, and breaking news alerts for politics, national and international news (these are three separate alert categories). You should also read the Post website at least twice a day and be familiar with top stories there.**

You are also expected to read The Collegian online daily. There will be other assigned current events readings as well. You need to be familiar with what's going on in the world and in your community. Reading also helps make you a better writer. There will be weekly quizzes based on your current events reading.

Writing

Writing is a craft, and news writing is a skill that requires practice. Expect to practice a lot. We will be writing almost every day, and then rewriting, and maybe rewriting again. Do not be discouraged by this, especially in the beginning. It sounds frustrating, but you will improve and you can expect to have some fun along the way. I am available to coach you through email before most major assignments, unless I tell you otherwise.

"F Words"

Certain infractions of the language will guarantee you an automatic "F" on assignments, quizzes and tests. These include misspelling or misusing the following words: accommodate, occurred, a lot, for, receive, its/it's, their/there/they're and your/you're. Other mistakes that guarantee an F: misspelling a person's name or any proper noun, a major factual error in a story, using only one source in a story, missing a deadline, improper attribution, misrepresenting yourself or your work, and failing to stay clear of conflicts of interest. You will also lose points on assignments for misspellings, grammar errors, and the use of such vague qualifiers as great, really, very. I will add to these lists as problems arise during the semester.

Deadlines

Meeting deadlines is an essential component of your grades on assignments. **No late work is accepted without prior approval.** There is zero tolerance for missed deadlines in journalism, so think of this as great practice. Assignments will have widely varying deadlines, so pay attention to those details, which we will discuss in class.

Speaking of grades...

Grades are performance-based and your work will be evaluated according to entry-level professional standards. Criteria include accuracy, clarity, correct use of language and AP style,

thoroughness, conciseness, meeting deadline and the absence of bias, editorial opinion, and libel. You also are expected to participate in class. Grading will be more tolerant at first and become tougher. Your progress is part of your grade. In other words, if you're doing C or D work early in the semester, but consistently making Bs during the second half of the semester and regularly participating in class, you are likely to get a B.

Grading key:

A = Publishable as is; meets entry-level professional standards

B = Publishable with minor editing

C = Needs substantial editing or contains serious errors

D = Requires extensive rewriting or contains multiple errors

F = Unpublishable, incomplete, or contains misspelled name, factual errors or attribution errors

Pluses or minuses will be given if you're close -- or far -- from the letter grade. They also may be added to your grade based on effort, progress, participation, extra credit and attendance. The plus grade generally recognizes work that is above grade level, and the minus grade generally recognizes work that isn't quite up to grade level. However, a minus grade can also represent a boost -- for example, a student who has a C+ but has demonstrated enterprise and made great effort at improvement could earn a B-. That means a student with A's could end up receiving an A- as a result of poor attendance, excessive tardiness, poor effort and participation.

Numerically, the grades will be broken down like this:

A+ = 98-100; A = 93-97; A- = 90-92

B+ = 88-89; B = 83-87; B- = 80-82

C+ = 78-79; C = 73-77; C- = 70-72

D+ = 68-69; D = 63-67; D- = 60-62

F = 59 and below

Weight of grades:

Writing assignments – 40 percent

Final project – 10 percent

Final exam – 20 percent

Quizzes – 10 percent

Midterm – 10 percent

Participation, improvement, effort, news tips, homework – 10 percent

Out-of-class expectations

Please note: To be successful in this course, you will need to devote an average of 10 to 14 hours each week to preparing for class and for your participation in class sessions, studying course-related materials and completing course assignments.

News Tips

To help you learn to think like a reporter, you will turn in a solid campus-related story idea each Thursday by 5 p.m. These should be emailed to me, with the tip written in the body of the email, and “news tip” written in the subject line. Write the story idea as if you are proposing it to your editor, including:

- *a complete description of the story idea
- *why it’s important
- *the angle
- *a list of as many sources as possible

The best ideas each week will be turned over to The Collegian for follow-up.

Quizzes

Each week there will be a quiz based mostly on current events in the Post, The Collegian and other assigned news stories. If you’re keeping up with current events and doing your required reading each day, these quizzes should be easy. Most are unannounced. **You can also expect AP style and/or textbook quizzes, which will be announced in advance.**

Note: current events quizzes generally can’t be made up. If you miss one or two quizzes over the course of a semester, you’re fine. If you miss more, we need to talk.

Plagiarism and fabricated material

It is illegal and unethical to take someone else’s work without permission. It is also an honor code violation. You may use material from other sources as long as you give credit. The information must be properly attributed. If you are involved in plagiarism, you automatically will fail this course and you could face possible university sanction. ***The same applies to presenting fabricated interviews or quotes or situations, etc., as factual.*** These are important topics that have taken on new significance in recent years with the ease of obtaining information from the Internet. If you have any questions or doubt, check with me before you turn in any assignment for this class. I am always happy to discuss these issues before an assignment is submitted and the damage is done. **No form of plagiarism or submitting fabricated content will be tolerated.**

We will address these topics more thoroughly during the semester. Again, if you have any questions, just ask.

Honor pledge: You are expected to do your own work in this class unless otherwise directed. Failure to do so is a serious offense with serious consequences.

No Recordings

Among the hallmarks of a University of Richmond education are small classes where faculty and students engage in robust discussions. The goal is always to encourage students with varied perspectives to be heard respectfully. In the Journalism Department, we frequently discuss and debate the latest events and issues in the news, which affect all of our lives in the current moment. Recognizing all of this, journalism professors will not be recording our classroom sessions. Students are prohibited from capturing, copying, sharing, publishing, and/or posting on social media any recordings (audio or audio/video) in whole or in part or captured images of the class during any in-person or Zoom session. Any violations of this policy will be referred to the Westhampton and Richmond College deans with the possibility of sanctions, including suspension or expulsion.

Class guidelines

Arrive on time. Keep your phone in your pocket or bag during class. We will be using a computer to write during class, but I ask that you keep it closed until required.

Class schedule

Here is a tentative schedule of the topics we will cover. This schedule may change as the semester progresses, depending on breaking news events and other factors, such as opportunities for guest speakers and live exercises. I will keep you posted on these changes.

Week 1, Jan. 10-12: Chapters 1-3: Welcome to news writing

Week 2, Jan. 17-19: Chapters 4,7: The language of news and basic news leads

Week 3, Jan. 24-26: Writing news leads

Week 4, Jan. 31-Feb. 2: Chapter 8: Alternative lead approaches

Week 5, Feb. 7-9: Chapter 9: Beyond the lead and into the body of a story

Week 6, Feb. 14-16: Bringing together the complete story; prepare for midterm

Week 7, Feb. 21-23: Midterm review and exam

Week 8, Feb. 28-March 2: TBA

Week 9, SPRING BREAK

Week 10, March 14-16: Chapter 10: Quotes and attribution

Week 11, March 21-23: Chapter 11: Interviewing essentials

Week 12, March 28-30: Chapters 5-6: Ethics and libel

Week 13, April 4-6: Begin group projects

Week 14, April 11-13: Continue group projects

Week 15, April 18-20: Wrapup, review for final

Office Hours

Please let me know if you have questions or concerns about anything. The best way to reach me is through email; text if urgent or more convenient in the moment. If you're having difficulty with any of the material, please don't delay. Get in touch right away. My regular office hours will be from 3 to 5 p.m. on Tuesday and Thursday, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Monday, and by appointment on Friday. I'm generally flexible and can meet at other times to better suit your schedule.

Kicker

Think of me as your editor. I am available to work with you on most assignments before they are due. Whether you pursue a career in journalism or not, this course is a valuable tool in developing your communications skills. With the right approach, it can also be a lot of fun.