Writing news stories can be like composing a novel on deadline. It is fast-paced, demanding work. You will learn how to do it well in this course. If you apply yourself, you will be a better writer by the end of the semester.

If you wish to pursue a career in any form of mass communications, you need to master the essentials of news writing. No amount of proficiency in social media can compensate for the inability to write clear, concise news stories. Social media is an important tool in journalism, but you are not going to get hired just because you create clever Tweets.

This is a challenging course because of skills required to be a good writer and my standards of grading your writing. I will grade your work closely, and I urge you to pay close attention to comments I make on your stories. Please let me know if you are not clear about something I have written or said. Communication is essential to success in this course.

Never forget this: Never assume.

At the bookstore

"Reporting for the Print Media," by Fred Fedler (10th edition)
Some reporter's notebooks and legal pads.
You must read the online edition of the New York Times every day; The Collegian every day; and other material as assigned.

Attendance

You have to come to class. Period. If you miss, you will fall behind.
You don't want to fall behind in this course, and we do not have time to wait for you to catch up. This means you must also be on time for class. Get used to meeting a deadline. Three late starts to class count as a missed class. If you have five unexcused absences, you will fail the course.

Let me know in advance if you have to miss a class for a non-emergency. You are responsible for finding out whatever assignments or materials were covered in class. I am reasonable about working with extenuating circumstances, if you communicate well. Missing class does not mean you can miss a deadline, unless you are dealing with an emergency such as a serious illness or family crisis. Please keep me informed of such events as best as you can.

Here are some attendance incentives:
• Miss no classes, and I will drop your three lowest writing grades. (This could boost you one letter grade at the end of the term.) Miss one class, and I will drop your two lowest writing grades.
Reading

Read The New York Times. Read The Collegian. We will have quizzes based on reading these news sites. If you miss the quiz, you cannot make it up.

One way to help your news writing is to read good news writing. We will spend time in class discussing and critiquing a wide range of stories.

Writing

Good writing does not come without practice. You will write something in class almost daily. And then you will rewrite it . . . and rewrite it again. . . and rewrite it again.

You will do most every kind of news writing in this course. Some of it will make you want to bite your nails and pull your hair out. Most of it will be more pleasant.

Do not be discouraged by your early efforts. You will improve, if you apply yourself. I am available to coach you by e-mail before all of your assignments, unless I tell you otherwise.

Grades

I do not give you grades - you earn them. Your work will be graded according to professional standards, with more tolerance at the start of the course and less as we go along. In other words, your progress will be a good part of your final grade. If you are doing C or D work early in the semester, I am looking for A or B work at the end. The grades you get toward the last month or so of the semester are good indicators of your final mark. For example, if you start out getting Ds and Cs and head into the homestretch with consistent Bs, you are likely to get a B.

Here are some keys to getting a good grade: paying attention to AP style; writing clearly and accurately; using more than one source in stories; spelling correctly; participating in discussions; coming to class; scoring well on quizzes and tests; showing effort and interest.

Here are some ways to get an automatic F: misspelling a proper name; writing stories with major factual errors; using only one source in your stories; not participating in class; earning poor quiz and test grades; showing little effort or interest; missing a deadline; misspelling the following: accommodate, occurred, a lot, receive and its (as a possessive). Remember, It’s only when it is. Also, you will lose five to 10 points if you use the following words in your stories: really, great, very and awesome. Do not use those words unless they are part of a direct quotation. Ask me why.
Grading key

A -- outstanding work that requires minimal editing before publishing.
B -- above average work that requires minor editing with no major error corrections before publishing.
C -- average work that requires substantial editing and no more than one rewriting effort before publishing.
D -- unacceptable work that contains multiple errors and requires extensive editing and rewriting before possible publication.
F -- see the note above.

Other grading information:
Numerically, this is how I will break down your grades:

A+ = 98-100; A = 92-97; A- = 90-91
B+ = 88-89; B = 82-87; B- = 80-81
C+ = 78-79; C = 72-77; C- = 70-71
D+ = 68-69; D = 62-67; D- = 60-61
F = 59 and below

Pluses and minuses may be added to your grade based on the following: extra effort - or lack thereof; progress - or lack thereof; excellent class participation - or poor participation; completed extra credit work of B or better; tardiness. The plus grade generally recognizes work that is a bit higher than grade level. The minus grade is often for work that is just below grade level, but can also be used to recognize enterprise and achievement. For example, a student with letter grade of C+ who has shown progress, enterprise, etc., could get boosted to a B-. Conversely, a student with A grades who does not participate in class, shows up late, etc., could wind up with an A-.

Making the grade:
60 percent: Writing assignments
15 percent: final project
10 percent: quizzes, news tips
15 percent: progress, participation, effort

We will have quizzes on news events, AP style, the text and other writing-related matters. Some quizzes will be announced in advance.
News tips

To get you used to thinking like reporters, email me two campus-related story ideas every Monday before class. Write these like an editor giving a news tip to a reporter. Include what you think the story is, why it is important, what the angle is and how the information can be obtained. I will turn these in for possible follow-up by The Collegian.

Formats

Assignments are due in hard copy at the start of class unless I tell you otherwise. Double-space all of your stories. On each page, write your name in the upper left corner, the slug (a one-word description of the story) and the page number, like so:

Mullen
Riot
Page 1 of 1 (or Page 1 of 2, Page 2 of 3, and so on)
If you have more to write at the end of a page, write (MORE) at the bottom. Use either the symbol # or -30- at the end.

Final project

Your final project is to write a substantial news enterprise story on the challenges of affordable housing in metro Richmond. This is a community-based learning project inspired by the university’s One Book selection, “Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City.” You will be paired with at least one other student to conduct interviews and original reporting on local residents who are involved in some way with housing from a variety of perspectives.

The story must have at least three “live” sources. You must demonstrate background research from some combination of libraries, news sites and computer databases.

You will need to turn in a one-page description of your story by Oct. 19. Tell me why you think your story is worth pursuing and how you plan to do it. I will get that back to you with my comments within a week. The final version of the story is due by final exam day. You should expect that your story will be published, so your work should be conducted and produced according to professional standards.

Honor pledge: You are expected to do your own work for this class unless I tell you otherwise. Failure to do so is an offense with potentially devastating consequences. Presenting fictional interviews, quotes, etc., as factual is an honor code violation. Plagiarism is grounds for failure in this course and possible university sanction.
Tentative class schedule: This may change as the semester progresses.

From the *Fedler* text:
- Week 1 - Chapters 1-3 (basics)
- Week 2 - Chapters 4, 5 and 8 (news style, news judgment, basic ledes)
- Week 3 - Chapters 8, 12 (more ledes, interviewing)
- Week 4 - Chapters 9, 11 (alternative ledes, quotes and attribution)
- Week 5 - Chapter 10 (body of stories)
- Week 6 - Chapter 10 (body of stories)
- Week 7 - Chapter 15 (speeches and meetings)
- Week 8 - Chapter 15 (speeches and meetings)
- Week 9 - Chapter 16 (brights, roundups, short features)
- Week 10 - Chapter 17 (features and human interest)
- Week 11 - Chapter 14 (social and digital media)
- Week 12 - Chapter 18 (public affairs)
- Week 13 - Chapters 19, 20 (advanced reporting, public relations)
- Week 14 - Chapters 6 and 7 (libel and ethics)
- Week 15 - review, project work, etc.

The kicker

Remember, I will work with you on your stories at every step. On most assignments, I will coach you by e-mail before your work is due. Ask for assistance and you will receive it. Do not wait until the last minute.

I will work with you like an editor on your stories before they are graded. I will work with you like an editor in my grading. I care about good writing and reporting and I want you to do well in this class. If you are eager to help yourself, I am eager to help you.