NEWS WRITING AND REPORTING
Jour 201 | Fall 2018 | University of Richmond

Monday and Wednesday, 3-4:15 p.m.
Weinstein Hall, Room 418
Jason Roop, Instructor
jason.roop@richmond.edu

OUR MISSION

JOURNALISM REQUIRES exacting and precise work.

You must be curious about the world around you, understand what makes something newsworthy, adeptly gather relevant information, and convey a clear, compelling, fair and accurate story to your audience.

News Writing and Reporting is a practical, hands-on and how-to course that focuses on good writing and accurate reporting. You will learn the fundamentals of gathering, organizing and writing news stories on deadline according to professional standards.

During our classes over 14 weeks, you will learn:
- What news is.
- How to avoid common usage and grammar problems.
- How to interview.
- How to research story information.
- How to write factual information in a clear, concise, accurate and logical manner — by writing and rewriting often before turning in stories for grades.
- How to avoid bias and libel.
- How various mediums leverage their strengths for effective storytelling.

This course will focus on developing you in three crucial areas:

1. AP Style, Grammar and Usage
2. News Reporting
3. News Writing

Successful students will show proficiency in all three areas. This is a craft, and you will build on what you learn. I’m looking for progress throughout the semester.
COURSE TEXTS

1. We will use the textbook “Writing and Reporting for the Print Media” by Felder, Bender, Davenport and Drager (11th edition), Oxford University Press, New York.

2. Newspapers. You will be expected to read the following and quizzed each week on:
   - The New York Times
   - The Collegian

3. Most recent edition of “The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual,” Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. This is a good investment as an overall reference for your studies here and after graduation. If you prefer to use the online version, we provide one at: http://www.apstylebook.com/richmond_edu/?do=chapter&chapter=A

ATTENDANCE

You are expected to attend all 28 classes scheduled for the semester. Attendance is taken. We are covering new information all the time, and you can get hopelessly behind quickly. Missing in-class assignments will result in zeroes on those assignments.

If you are forced to miss class for illness, a family emergency or other serious reason, it’s your responsibility to find out what the assignment is from a classmate or me and complete it by the deadline.

Notification: If possible, emergencies requiring you to miss class should be discussed with me before the class to be missed. Only in cases in which the nature of the emergency precludes advance notice will an after-the-fact excuse be accepted unless you have an official excuse.

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<td>MONDAY, OCT. 8</td>
<td>WEDNESDAY, OCT. 10</td>
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<td>MONDAY, NOV. 19</td>
<td>THANKSGIVING BREAK</td>
<td>MONDAY, NOV. 26</td>
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<td>MONDAY, DEC. 3</td>
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Bonus: Students with perfect attendance will have their lowest two class work or homework grades dropped during the last critical weeks of class. If you miss only one class, I will drop the lowest grade. This can make a difference in your final grade.
CLASS EXPECTATIONS

Journalism is driven by deadlines, and focus is essential. This course will reflect those qualities. The following guidelines will be in effect for the semester:

1. Cell phones are prohibited in class. They must be turned off and put away — invisible.

2. No late assignments are accepted. Use your time efficiently. Editors are intolerant of writers who fail to meet deadlines. Doing assignments on time and keeping up with readings will fuel your progress and improve your grades.

3. Class will start promptly at 3 p.m. You are expected to be in class on time and ready to start at 3. If you cannot get to class on time, please drop the course now. This is an interactive class and your focused participation is necessary.

4. Class computers must be turned off unless you are asked to write.

5. You are encouraged to ask questions during class, share your perspective during story exercises and seek clarity on what you want to better understand. You will be reading your work aloud to the class from time to time. This is for your development.

   Everyone is learning and critiques of your work should be constructive and welcome.

   In a newsroom environment, your work can be changed, challenged and fine-tuned by a variety of people on your team. I want you to feel comfortable in this environment.

GRADES

Your work will be evaluated according to professional standards regardless of your personality, appearance or experience. Grades are based on performance. They are not given; they are earned. Criteria for grades include: accuracy, clarity, simplicity, completeness, conciseness, precise use of the language, proper use of AP style and the absence of bias, libel and editorial opinion.

Grade Meaning:
A = Publishable as is; meets professional standards
B = Publishable with minor editing
C = Needs substantial editing or contains serious errors
D = Requires extensive rewriting or contains multiple errors
F = Un-publishable or contains misspelled name or factual error.
I realize that you are starting with little or no experience, but I expect you to progress to a level of competence as rapidly as possible. Grading will be more tolerant in the beginning. Once material has been covered, tolerance will fade.

Progress is based on an evaluation of your work during the semester, taking into account your application of principles, meeting deadlines, attendance and class participation. The quality of your work toward the end of the course will be a strong indicator of the course grade you will receive.

For example, if you have pulled yourself out of the doldrums of D-level work and are doing consistent B-level work during the last weeks of the course, you will get a B for the course — unless you bomb the final exam.

With progress in mind, I use these rough percentages to determine your final grade:

- Class work, quizzes and homework assignments = 60 percent
- Midterm = 5 percent
- Final exam = 20 percent
- Style, Grammar and Usage Book = 10 percent
- Progress = 5 percent

**SCHEDULE AND DEADLINES**

1. **News Quizzes - Every Monday**
   Beginning Monday, Sept. 10, you will take a newspaper quiz each week covering current events and news stories that have unfolded since the previous Monday.

2. **AP Quizzes - Every Wednesday**
   Beginning Wednesday, Sept. 12, you will take a quiz on AP style each week.

3. **Story Ideas - Every Friday**
   Beginning Friday, Sept. 7, you will submit one campus-related story idea to help you learn to think like a reporter. Write the idea using this three-step format:
   - My story idea this week is ...
   - It is important because ...
   - Sources for this story are the following ...
   Send your email by noon each Friday to Mrs. Hollister at jhollist@richmond.edu. We will review sample story ideas in class.
4. Midterm Exam: Wednesday, Oct. 10

5. Style, Grammar and Usage Book: Due Monday, Nov. 19

During the semester, you will put together your own style, grammar and usage book. It will contain specific information that we will develop in class. Make a “Style, Grammar and Usage Book” heading on your computer and store this information there alphabetically as you receive it. I will ask for a printout of these Monday, Nov. 19. They will be graded on neatness, clarity of explanation and example, accuracy, enterprise and thoroughness.

This book will come in handy to you long after you leave college in whatever job you take that involves writing. You are urged to insert any other bits of information (I call this enterprise) into the book that will help your writing. Enterprise will be rewarded when I grade these. This is an easy way to get an A. You can start work on this at any time. You don’t have to wait for me to cover it in class.

6. Final Exam Project

Story Ideas Due: Wednesday, Oct. 10
Three-Page Story Draft Due: Wednesday, Nov. 14
Final Story for Grading Due: By 5 p.m. Friday, Dec. 14

You won’t take an in-class, written exam. Your final exam will be a campus-related story. I prefer that you write a story that has national implications, but which you will localize to the University of Richmond campus. The story must be suitable for publication. Remember to mention to interviewees that you’re writing for publication.

You may start working on the final at any time. I will request a typed description, at least one page each, of two possible final story ideas on Wednesday, Oct. 10. In this, you should tell me what your stories are, why you think they will be of interest to campus readers and what approach you plan to take.

Once selected, the story must have at least eight campus interview sources — but more will be looked on with much favor. It must show evidence of library background research, newspapers and magazines, computer databases, the Internet, or all of these.

On Wednesday, Nov. 14, I must see a three-page, well-written draft of your story. If you fail to meet this deadline, it will cost you 10 points on your final exam project. The final story is due by noon Friday, Dec. 14.
**READING, WRITING AND F-WORDS**

Writing is a craft. Learning to write and report well is like learning to play a sport or a musical instrument well. With instruction and practice you will get better. To help you develop your skill, I will grade your work closely and provide feedback. These evaluations are aimed at helping you.

Reading other reporters’ work is essential in understanding news, storytelling and developing your voice. Read the New York Times daily, and the Collegian each week. I also encourage you to find other work to follow, such as the Wall Street Journal and Washington Post. Publications such as the Richmond Times-Dispatch and Style Weekly are good sources for local perspectives and story ideas.

Misspellings can be fatal in this course. For every misspelling in any assignment, you lose 10 points. Papers that misspell a name will receive an F. Take heart also: If you write well, you will earn plus points.

F-Words: These involve misspellings and usage errors that will bring you an automatic F on papers during the semester. The five F-words for this course are spelled correctly here. Learn them now or they will haunt you! They are: accommodate, occurred, a lot, receive and its/it’s (its is possessive; it’s only means it is).

You will lose 10 points every time you use such ambiguous qualifiers as great, really, very and awesome. Consider these banned for the semester and for life except in direct quotations. Why? They weaken your writing.

**PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism is illegal, unethical and an honor code violation, and will result in you flunking the course automatically.

Please know that it is fine to use material — narrative, quotes, ideas and indirect quotes — as long as you provide sources for each so that is clear to the reader where the information comes from. Attribution is a requirement.

As you know, we follow the University of Richmond honor code. Please sign your work: I have not given or received help on this work. Then sign your name.
NUTS, BOLTS AND A FINAL WORD

Copy preparation: Please double-space all copy (stories) you turn in. Indent the first line of each paragraph 0.5 inches using your paragraph formatting. Use Times New Roman, 12-point font. On each page, write your name in the upper left corner of the page, followed by the slug word (one word) for the story and the page number, like this:

Smith
Smuggle
Page 1

Write “more” at the bottom of each continuing page. Use the symbol # at the end.
I will be available for email coaching on your homework (details will be shared in class).

Tentative Class Schedule

| Week 1: Media, Newsworthiness, Leads | Week 9: Communications Law (Chapter 5) |
| Week 2: Leads (Chapter 7) | Week 10: Ethics (Chapter 6) |
| Week 3: Leads (Chapter 8) | Week 11: Features (Chapter 17) |
| Week 4: Body of a News Story (Chapter 9) | Week 12: Specialized Types of Stories |
| Week 5: Quotes and Attribution (Chapter 10) | (Chapters 16, 18, 19) |
| Week 6: Interviewing (Chapter 11) | Week 13: Broadcast, Print and Digital Media |
| Week 7: Interviewing | (Chapters 12, 13) |
| Week 8: Speeches and Meetings (Chapter 15) | Week 14: Review |

You will quickly learn that I will go out of my way to help those who show that they want to help themselves. Proficiency at journalism skills and high grades are earned by thought and work. If you stay in journalism, or go into any work that involves writing or clear communication, you will quickly realize the value of this course.

I will be available by email to help you. Please take the initiative to ask questions or to talk about anything you’re unsure of: jason.roop@richmond.edu.

Speaking of attribution and credit, this syllabus is the result of the longtime work and teaching from University of Richmond journalism professor Mike Spear. He wrote this course and most of this syllabus, and taught it to me when I was a student at UR.

I consider it an honor to share this knowledge with you and help introduce you to the craft of journalism. I look forward to a challenging, thought-provoking and fun semester together, and I thank you for choosing this course.

Jason Roop, Instructor