What to expect

This is a fast-paced class in which you’ll learn the skills and disciplines of news writing, what makes a story and how to become a better consumer of news. You’ll also learn interviewing, note-taking and research techniques that will benefit you regardless of your ultimate career path. But our focus will be on news, and the class will be run according to standards of accuracy and punctuality demanded in professional newsrooms.

Among the topics we’ll cover:
- what is news
- how to conduct news interviews
- how to research story information
- how to write succinct leads
- how to write (and rewrite) concise and logical news stories
- how to use social media for news
- how to avoid common usage and grammar problems
- how to avoid bias and libel

Texts and media

“The Elements of Style,” by Strunk and White (4th edition)
The Collegian, http://www.thecollegianur.com
Other newspaper reading as directed in class

Attendance

ATTENDANCE IS ESSENTIAL. Journalism is a fast-paced, deadline-driven business. You can fall behind quickly, even if you miss just one class. This also means you must come to class on time. Three late starts count as an absence. Think of this as good practice for those deadline pressures.

Unexcused absences mean zeroes on assignments and quizzes. Let me know in advance if you know you will not be in class. It is your responsibility to find out what you missed and complete the assignments on time.

As added incentive for a perfect attendance record, I will drop two of your lowest quiz grades if you miss no classes. If you miss only one class, I will drop the lowest quiz grade. If you have four unexcused absences, you will fail this class.
Electronic devices in class

The use of all electronic devices is prohibited in this class unless there is a specific arrangement made with the instructor in advance. This includes cell phones and laptops. All written class work will be done on Macs in our classroom, and those computers also may not be used without permission or for any purpose other than class assignments.

Reading

In addition to the required textbooks, you are also expected to read The New York Times every day and keep up with 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, and we’ll discuss at least one story in every class to learn techniques that work. There will be weekly quizzes based on your current events reading and your assigned textbook 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.

Out-of-class expectations

To be successful in this course, you will have to devote an average of 10 to 14 hours each week to preparing for class, participating in class sessions, studying course-related materials and completing course assignments. Try as much as possible to do something related to this class every day – whether it’s working on a writing assignment, pushing yourself to read and analyze a story on a topic with which you are unfamiliar, or comparing how different news organizations may cover the same topic. This professional literacy and discipline is critical to the journalistic writing life.

Formats for assignments

Double-space all copy. On each page, write your name in the upper left-hand corner, the slug (a one-word description of the story), the due date, and the page number. There will be points deducted automatically for missing formats. Your assignments should look like this:

Kapsidelis
Chaos
Date due
Page 1 of 2 (or Page 1 of 3, Page 2 of 3, etc.)

If the story is more than one page, write “more” at the bottom. On the final page, use the symbol # at the end.

Unless I tell you otherwise, your lede-writing assignments will be printed and turned in at the start of class, and your full-length stories will be emailed to me in a Word document.

For any out-of-class story assignment, you need to include a complete source list – including full name, address, phone number and method of interview (in person, phone, email, etc.). Make sure everyone you interview knows that the story is for possible publication.
“F Words”

Certain infractions will guarantee you an automatic “F” on assignments, quizzes and tests. These include misrepresenting yourself or your work, conflicts of interest, a major factual error in a story, using only one source, improper attribution, and missing a deadline without contacting me in advance. You’ll also lose points for misspellings, especially a person’s name, a proper noun or anything that can be easily looked up, and grammar mistakes. I’ve included The Elements of Style for this class so you can master its easy-to-understand rules on usage and composition. You can expect to see questions from the book in quizzes.

Deadlines

Deadlines are 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.

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, libel and editorial opinion. 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 an A student 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 - 50 percent
Final project – 20 percent
Quizzes – 10 percent
Midterm – 10 percent
News tips – 5 percent
Participation, improvement, effort – 5 percent

**News Tips**

To help you learn to think like a reporter, you will turn in a solid campus-related story idea each Sunday by 10 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**

Most weeks there will be an unannounced current events quiz. I will not schedule these because you shouldn’t study for them. If you’re keeping up with current events by doing the required reading each day, these quizzes should be easy.

Quizzes on material from the texts, our classroom discussions and AP style will be scattered throughout the semester. Those will be announced in advance.

**Final project**

Instead of a final exam, you have a final project – a campus-related news story. This needs to be a solid story that could be published in The Collegian or elsewhere. *Always remember to tell people you are writing for possible publication but do not refer to yourself as a Collegian reporter.*

You will need to interview a minimum of six people for your story, as well as demonstrate background research from some combination of libraries, news sites and computer databases. We’ll talk more later about details.

By March 9, you need to turn in a one-page story description, including why you think the story is worth pursuing and how you plan to do it. The final paper will be due on April 25.

**Plagiarism**

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. This is an important topic that has 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. No form of plagiarism will be tolerated.

We will address this topic more thoroughly during the semester. Again, if you have any questions related to plagiarism, 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.
**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 out-of-class assignments or guest speakers. I will keep you posted on these changes.

Week 1 - Chapters 1-3 (basics, news judgment, news writing style)
Week 2 - Chapters 4 (the language of news) and 7 (basic news ledes)
Week 3 - Chapter 7 (more ledes)
Week 4 - Chapters 8 (alternative ledes)
Week 5 - Chapter 9 (body of a news story)
Week 6 - Chapter 10 (quotes and attribution)
Week 7 - Chapter 11 (interviewing) **midterm**
Week 8 - Breaking News (No textbook assignment)
Week 9 - Spring break
Week 10 – Textbook assignment TBA (**final project topics due**)  
Week 11 - Chapter 12 (features and human interest)
Week 12 - Chapter 17 (public affairs)
Week 13 - Chapters 5 and 6 (libel and ethics)
Week 14 - Work on final projects
Week 15 - Work on final projects

**Extra credit**

There will be a variety of extra credit opportunities offered throughout the semester. Attending a department movie night, for example, can earn you 5 quiz points, with a maximum of two movie nights counting as extra credit. You can also earn extra credit for covering an event on campus and writing a Collegian-style story about it. We will talk more in class about the guidelines for those assignments.

**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 attitude, it can also be a lot of fun.