



MPJO-501-40: REPORTING & NEWS WRITING

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM

Wednesdays, 6 p.m. to 9:20 p.m. | Summer 2015

Instructor: Dina Cappiello
Downtown campus, Room C229

- Office hours are by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Journalism begins with basic reporting. This class focuses on the basics of beat reporting, one of the building blocks of any newsroom and journalism career. The class will also take a closer look at the reporting and writing process, from finding an idea to researching it, pitching it and executing it into a publishable article. Students will strive to become experts on the neighborhood they cover through old-school shoe leather reporting and will keep abreast of spot news while learning how to identify and pursue longer-form enterprise stories.

The class will also have a Twitter handle and Facebook page — DChoods — where students will publish routinely and practice writing for social media and cultivating sources and finding story ideas using these tools. The updates on Twitter and Facebook will not just be news stories, but also tidbits collected during visits to the neighborhood, which should be visited weekly at minimum.

This is a core course of the MPS Journalism program, and students must earn a “B” (83) or higher to pass the course. Please see the Graduate Student Handbook for more details.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of this course, students will:

- Know the basics of news reporting, including finding story ideas and angles
- Have experience managing, monitoring and mapping out a geographic beat
- Know the basics of pre-reporting and pitching story ideas
- Practice writing quickly and concisely, and translating for a general-interest audience
- Understand the differences between writing for print, online and broadcast
- Be familiar with commonly used AP style rules and common grammar mistakes
- Know the basic structure of news and feature stories and be able to recognize the difference
- Know how to identify and develop sources on a beat

REQUIRED READING

Extensive reading is a prerequisite for good writing. There are three required texts for this



course, but students should be reading regularly about their beat on local blogs, social networks and on other media outlets to get ideas to identify sources. Examples include but are not limited to DCist.com, City Paper, Hill Rag, PoPville, Bethesda or Arlington or Reston Now (these are all owned by the same people and are entrepreneurial ventures in the area) and the Current newspapers.

Required Reading

Title: News Reporting and Writing

Author: Melvin Mencher

ISBN: 0073511994

Edition: 12th

Publisher: The McGraw-Hill Companies

Year: 2010

Price: \$81.99 (Amazon)

Title: On Writing Well

Author: William Zinsser

ISBN: 0060891548

Publisher: Harper Paperbacks

Year: 2006

Price: \$9.45 (Amazon)

Title: The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law

Author: Associated Press

ISBN: 978-0465082995

Publisher: Basic Books

Year: 2013

Price: \$13.88 (Amazon)

*Note: The 2014 Stylebook is out of stock, and the 2015 Stylebook will be published on May 27 if you'd like to wait to buy the newest version: <https://www.apstylebook.com/>

Other readings will be made available on the class Blackboard site that are not listed on this syllabus. Students are expected to keep up with those reading assignments and to be prepared to discuss them in class.

EQUIPMENT

If you do not already have a digital audio recorder, it is strongly recommended that you purchase one for use on class assignments. You will also need a laptop to complete in-class deadline drills and other assignments.

ATTENDANCE



As outlined by the university, missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level (for example, an A will be converted to an A-). Absences for classes, beyond the initial two, will result in further reduction of the final grade. If you are absent for more than four classes, you will be in danger of failing this course.

This class relies heavily on attendance and participation. Punctual attendance is critical. If you have to miss a class – family emergency, medical emergency or other act of God – you must let the instructor know in advance and work out a proposal for making up whatever work you will miss. Exceptions will be made only in extraordinary circumstances.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Students should turn off all cell phones, pagers or other communication devices while in class. Class discussions should be respectful and considerate of others' views and opinions.

In the event of a weather emergency (or any other widespread emergency) that would close the Georgetown Downtown building, we will plan to meet virtually through online videoconferencing tools. More information will be provided on how this will work later in the semester.

ASSIGNMENTS

The class assignments consist of a beat memo, an enterprise reporting plan, eight stories (including written pitches for all but one) and regular social media posts.

Seven of the eight stories will each follow the same process: pitch, write and optional rewrite. Each of the steps has a corresponding deadline. Late work will not be accepted because in the working world of journalism deadlines are non-negotiable. All late work will receive an initial grade of a zero.

The eighth piece will be a rewrite of one your stories in broadcast style, in the form of a script. For this piece you will have to go back, if possible, to gather sound and other elements for broadcast. You will also have to submit a list of three tweets and one Facebook post that could potentially go along with your story (they don't have to be actually posted).

Each story will be emailed to the professor by the assigned deadline with the title of the assignment in the subject line, for example, "Crime Story" or "Crime Story Rewrite."

Each story must include:

- A headline and graphic suggestions
- A word count
- Photo or Creative Commons-licensed Flickr pic (and proper caption/credit information)



- A list of primary and secondary sources and phone numbers for all primary sources. These sources will on occasion be spot-checked by the instructor, so please inform all subjects that they may receive a call from your instructor.
- Multiple sources (You must quote or paraphrase at least two people in each story. Saying you talked to more people and quoting only one is still a one-source story. One-source stories will receive a zero.)

Stories handed in that exceed the word count by more than 100 words — or are below the word count by 100 words or more — will receive a lower grade.

For every story, the student can choose to rewrite it for a higher grade. The higher grade will replace the grade earned on the first draft of the story. One exception to this rule is the broadcast assignment, which has no rewrite option.

Also, the reporting plan for the enterprise piece will have no rewrite deadline. Instead, it will be updated with an outline and additional questions and sources. The grades for the first version and the updated version will be averaged.

Deadlines separate journalism from mere writing. You must meet them. All late work will receive a grade of a zero, unless you have asked for an extension of the deadline **prior** to the piece being due. Students will only be excused from deadlines due to genuine emergencies, but all reasonable effort must be made to notify the instructor ahead of time.

All formal, written pitches for stories – with the exception of the final enterprise story – will be due at 12 noon on the Sunday after class meets. All first drafts of stories will be due the Friday after the pitch. The only deviations from this deadline pattern is the enterprise piece, which will have every deadline from pitch to reporting plan to draft to final version due on a Monday, except for the final draft, which will be due Friday, August 7, 2015 at 5 p.m.

1. A 500-word story on a topic of your choice from your selected beat. **Pitch due: Sunday, May 31 at noon. Story due: Friday, June 5 at 5 p.m. Rewrite due: TBD.**
2. A 500-word event or press release-driven spot news story. **Pitch due: Sunday, June 7 at noon. Story due: Friday, June 12 at 5 p.m. unless event is after this date. Rewrite due: TBD.**
3. A 500-word story on local politics/government (Students will be required to attend a city council meeting pertinent to their beat or other government meeting for this assignment). **Pitch due: Sunday, June 14 at noon. Story due: Friday, June 19 at 5 p.m. Rewrite due: TBD.**
4. A 500-word story on crime. (Students will be required to do a cop ride as part of this assignment). **Pitch due: Sunday June 28 at noon. Story due: Friday, July 3 at 5 p.m. Rewrite due: TBD.**



5. A 700-word feature **OR** profile story. **Pitch due: Sunday, July 12 at noon. Story due: Friday, July 17 at 5 p.m. Rewrite: TBD.**
6. A 550-word follow up story on one of your previous stories. **Pitch due: Sunday, July 26 at noon. Story due no later than: Friday, July 31 at 5 p.m. Rewrite due: TBD.**
7. A rewrite of one of your previous stories in broadcast style, including incorporating sound and other elements. You will also have to submit a list of three tweets and one Facebook post that could have stemmed from your story. They DO NOT have to be actually posted. There is no rewrite of this story. **Story due: Wednesday, July 29 at 5 p.m.**
8. A 1,000-word enterprise story. This story cannot come from a press release and must reflect a major issue that is unique to your beat. **Ideas due: Monday, June 22 at 5 p.m. Final written pitch due: Monday, July 6 at 5 p.m. Draft reporting plan due: Monday, July 13 at 5 p.m. Final reporting plan and outline due: Monday, July 20 at 5 p.m. First draft due: Monday, July 27 at 5 p.m. Final draft due: Friday, August 7 at 5 p.m.**

Non-writing assignments:

* Three original tweets, three RTs each week on @DCHoods

GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Class participation (including on Twitter/Facebook accounts):	15 percent
Beat plan:	10 percent
Reporting plan for enterprise piece:	10 percent
Various stories off beat:	35 percent
Final enterprise story:	30 percent
Total:	100 percent

Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C and F. **There are no grades of C+, C- or D.**

A	100-93	B-	82.99-80
A-	92.99-90	C	79.99-70
B+	89.99-88	F	69.99-0
B	87.99-83		

The instructor will provide a warning by mid-semester to any student who appears to be on track for a poor final grade.

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Georgetown offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed on main campus or at the downtown location:



- MPS Writing Resource Program
202-687-4246
<http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>
- Academic Resource Center
202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
<http://ldss.georgetown.edu/>
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services
202-687-6985
<http://caps.georgetown.edu/>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY

Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu; <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm>) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM

All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code. The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

PLAGIARISM

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in journalism, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>.



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If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out <http://www.plagiarism.org>.

SYLLABUS MODIFICATION

The syllabus may change to accommodate discussion of emerging topics. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of our agenda. The instructor will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations.



CLASS SCHEDULE

*Note: Students are expected to come to the first class on May 20 with their top three selections for a neighborhood beat in the D.C. metropolitan area as well as three story ideas for their top choice.

Students should select a neighborhood in D.C., or a city/town in Maryland or Northern Virginia that is incorporated (or has its own government) and is convenient to their home or workplace. Students should spend some time in each of the neighborhoods before selecting them, walking around and getting a feel for the place. They should also pick a neighborhood with issues that interest them.

WEEK 1 (WEDNESDAY, MAY 20) WHAT IS NEWS? WHERE DO YOU FIND IT? BEAT ASSIGNMENTS, BRAINSTORMING AND PITCHING

- Discussion: How does a reporter find news? What makes a piece of information newsworthy? How do you decide which stories are most newsworthy?
- Discussion: What is a beat? How does a reporter find news off a beat? How do you go from idea to pitch?
- Discussion: Review the syllabus
- Workshop: We will assign beats and hold a news meeting to select story ideas.
- Workshop: Class will get a real AP budget and discuss what makes each of the stories news. We will also go over how to file a pitch in AP style, the format we will use in this class.
- Workshop: Class will take a brief stroll around Chinatown to look for story ideas.

Assignments due May 27: Write a beat memo for your new neighborhood and be prepared to hand it in by the beginning of class. The beat memo should include a list of three possible story ideas for the semester. Bring in a recent news release from your beat or come ready to pitch an event.

Reading for May 27:

- Speeches, Meetings and News Conferences in Mencher
- "The Image," Daniel J. Boorstin, Chapter 1: From News Gathering to News Making, pp. 7-44.

WEEK 2 (WEDNESDAY, MAY 27) EXECUTING AN IDEA/THE EVENT OR SPOT STORY

- Discussion: The difference between spot news and enterprise news. How do reporters prepare for speeches, rallies and other planned events? Where do you look for angles that set your story apart? What about breaking news?
- Workshop: Students will write a short event story based on a news release in class.
- Workshop: We will conduct a news meeting where students will pitch their ideas for



spot news stories.

Assignment: Write a story on your topic of choice. Do as much reporting as you can before the next class on your spot/event piece. Students will need to pre-clear the event with the instructor. Bring in your reporting notes.

- Final topic-of-choice story pitch due: Sunday, May 31 at noon.
- Story due: Friday, June 5 at 5 p.m.
- Rewrite due: TBD

Reading for June 3:

- Story Structure in Mencher
- The Lead in Mencher

WEEK 3 (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3) STRUCTURING A NEWS STORY

- Discussion: Now that you have all your reporting done, how do you begin to organize it into a news story? In this class we will go over the basics of story structure working with published pieces of journalism. We will discuss types of ledes, nut grafs, lede quotes and how to sift through your notes to find the nuggets to put into a story.
- Workshop: Outline a piece of journalism from a prominent publication and dissect its structure.
- Workshop: Bring reporting notes in for your spot/event story and work with other students to begin to outline the piece and find holes.

Assignment: Write an event or spot story. Students will need to pre-clear the event with the instructor.

- Final pitch for spot story piece: Sunday, June 7 at noon
- Story due: Friday, June 12 at 5 p.m.
- Rewrite due: TBD

Reading for June 10:

- Local Government in Mencher
- The Writer's Art in Mencher

WEEK 4 (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10) LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN THE NATION'S CAPITAL

- Discussion: How do you cover a government meeting? Where do you look in an agenda to find the potential story or stories? How can you prepare before a meeting to file a better story quickly afterward? Discussion of recent government/politics stories off your beat and potential follows.
- Workshop: Transcript of recent city council hearing or watch archived video of city council meeting and practice spotting the news in the thicket of bureaucracy.



- Workshop: Students will be given a series of bureaucratic terms and sentences and translate those into plain English.

Assignments:

1. Arrange for your cop ride in your neighborhood during the week of June 15 or June 22.
2. Government/politics story off your beat:
 - Final pitch due for government/politics story: Sunday, June 14 at noon
 - Story due: Friday, June 19 at 5 p.m.
 - Rewrite due: TBD

Reading for June 17:

- Police Reporting in Mencher

WEEK 5 (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17) CRIME REPORTING

- Discussion: How do you cover crime? What makes some crimes newsworthy and others not? What are the legal and ethical concerns when reporting on crime? How do you talk to victims and suspects?
- Guest speaker: AP Justice reporter Eric Tucker
- Workshop: Students will write a crime story on deadline based on information from a charging document.

Assignments:

1. Please file to the instructor three ideas for your enterprise piece in pitch form by Monday, June 22 at 5 p.m.
2. Crime story off your beat:
 - Final crime pitch due: Sunday, June 28 at noon
 - Story due: Friday, July 3 at 5 p.m.
 - Rewrite due: TBD

Reading for June 24:

- Interviewing Principles and Interviewing Practices in Mencher

WEEK 6 (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24) THE INTERVIEW/THE FOLLOW-UP STORY

- Discussion: How does a reporter get a source to open up? What are some common tricks of the trade? What is the difference between friendly and hostile interviews? How do you find an angle?
- Discussion: How do you identify ideas for follow-up stories?
- Deadline drill: Students will go onto the streets of Chinatown and do a 15-minute interview with a subject and come back, discuss it and write a short story based on it.
- Workshop: Backgrounding an individual. Drafting questions for an interview.



- Workshop: Students will be given stories in class that have generated follow-up stories and try to identify where to go next.

Assignment:

1. Come to class ready to briefly present a social media blogger/tweeter, etc. that covers your beat, or one who you like generally and why.

WEEK 7 (WEDNESDAY, JULY 1) MEET THE EDITOR 1

One-on-one sessions with the instructor this week to discuss past assignments, rewrites, ideas for future stories, etc. Prior to this class, I will pass a sign-up sheet around so each student will get an assigned time.

- Assignments:**
1. Bring well-developed ideas for your profile or feature to class next week for a news meeting. Also bring in a favorite profile or feature story to share with the class.
 2. Final written pitch for enterprise story due Monday, July 6 at 5 p.m.

Reading for July 8:

- “The Art and Craft of Feature Writing,” William Blundell, Chapter 4: Planning and Execution, pp. 69-93.
- “Writing for Story,” Jon Franklin, Chapter 4: Stalking the True Short Story, pp. 70-90
- Features, Long Stories and Series in Mencher
- Making Sound Observations in Mencher

WEEK 8 (WEDNESDAY, JULY 8) PROFILE OR FEATURE

- Guest lecturer: Laurie Kellman of AP
- Discussion: How do you structure a profile? How do you make your readers care about a profile subject? Which parts of their life story do you include? What are the telling details that sell the story?
- Discussion: What makes a good feature story? Where do you find ideas for features? How can you use the power of description and observation to make your feature writing stand out?
- Workshop: Students will pair up to interview each other and write the introduction to a short profile of their classmate.
- Workshop (time permitting): Students will have 20 to 30 minutes in Chinatown to capture some telling detail and to write up a short story.

Assignments:

1. Feature or profile piece off of your beat:
 - Final feature/profile pitch due: Sunday, July 12 at noon
 - Story due: Friday, July 17 at 5 p.m.
 - Rewrite: TBD
2. Continue working on enterprise story: Compose a reporting plan for your enterprise



piece. The plan should include list of sources to be interviewed/should be interviewed. It should list critical questions that need to be answered and critical pieces of evidence that are needed. It should also include the central question that the piece is trying to answer. Due: Monday, July 13 at 5 p.m. Rewrite of reporting plan with additional questions and preliminary outline of piece. Due: Monday, July 20 at 5 p.m. (The grades for the initial reporting plan and the update will be averaged.)

Reading for July 15:

- Hunches, Feelings and Stereotypes in Mencher
- Finding, Cultivating and Using Sources in Mencher

WEEK 9 (WEDNESDAY, JULY 15) ENTERPRISE REPORTING

- Discussion: How to go deep on a story. Weaving in statistics, data. Introduction to investigative tools. How to find real people to help tell your story. Interview techniques that result in more than just sound bites.
- Workshop: Students will analyze some examples of excellent enterprise pieces and dissect the different elements in them.
- Workshop: Pitch enterprise ideas in class and critique.
- Guest speaker: TBD

Assignment: 1. Redo of enterprise reporting plan and outline is due on Monday, July 20 at 5 p.m.

2. Follow-up story off your beat:
 - Final follow-up story pitch due: Sunday, July 26 at noon
 - Story due: Friday, July 31 at 5 p.m.
 - Rewrite due: TBD

Reading for July 22:

- Broadcast Newswriting in Mencher
- "Sound Reporting: The NPR Guide to Audio Journalism and Production," Jonathan Kern, 2008. Chapter 3: Writing for Broadcast, pp. 25-38.
- TBD on TV reporting/producing

WEEK 10 (WEDNESDAY, JULY 22) WRITING FOR BROADCAST AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- Discussion: What are the elements of a radio story or TV story? How do you capture ambient sound, write a voice-over and prepare for a live interview?
- Discussion: How do you write for online/social media? How do you figure out which social media site is best for your story? What are the tips and techniques that draw and sustain an audience? How do tone, length and content differ from traditional media?
- Guest speaker: Alison MacAdam of NPR



- Workshop: Students will rewrite a newspaper article into a one-minute radio spot, including an introduction from the host.
- Workshop: Students will rewrite the top of the same story for a TV report.
- Workshop: Review some tweets and Facebook posts from the class to date. What worked? What didn't?
- Workshop: Students present their favorite neighborhood social media reporter.

Assignments:

1. Rework one of your print stories in broadcast style, including sound and times. Include three ideas for tweets and one Facebook post based on your story. The tweets and Facebook post DO NOT need to be published. Due: Wednesday, July 29 at 5 p.m. **There is no rewrite for this story.**
2. Continue working on enterprise stories and any outstanding rewrites. First draft of enterprise story at 5 p.m. on Monday, July 27. Final enterprise story due at 5 p.m. Friday, August 7.

WEEK 11 (WEDNESDAY, JULY 29) PEER REVIEW

- Students will be paired together to critique each other's enterprise drafts.

Assignment: Finish work on enterprise piece.

WEEK 12 (WEDNESDAY, AUG. 5) MEET THE EDITOR

Your last chance to discuss rewrites, your enterprise piece and other issues with the professor. A sign-up sheet will be handed out on April 22.

Assignment: Final enterprise story due at 5 p.m. Friday, August 7. No exceptions.