



MPJO-501-01: REPORTING & NEWS WRITING

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM

Tuesdays, 5:20 p.m. to 7:50 p.m. | Fall 2016

Instructor: Ryan Teague Beckwith
Downtown campus, room C229

- Office hours are by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Journalism at its fundamental level is about the process of reporting and disseminating information. This course teaches students the foundational processes involved in reporting the news. The course helps students master journalistic AP style writing for different formats and genres. It also gives students a complete picture of what it takes to publish a professional text based piece in an evolving journalism environment.

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, you will:

- Produce writing in AP style for various audiences and story formats
- Understand writing for print, broadcast, online, social and mobile platforms
- Identify key news values and demonstrate solid news judgment in story selection and execution
- Show ability to interact with editors and sources through pitches and interviews

REQUIRED READING

Before you can write, you must read. You should regularly read about your beat on local news sites and social media. You should look for story ideas and sources in coverage in such places as the Washington Post, the Washington City Paper, Metro Weekly, the Washingtonian, WAMU, DCist.com, Hill Rag, Prince of Petworth, Roll Call’s features section, Bethesda or Arlington or Reston Now and the Current newspapers. You should set up a Google News alert for keywords on your beat and search Twitter regularly for keywords and hashtags. You should also periodically read local history books or search Google Books and news archives for inspiration.

Required Reading

Title: On Writing Well



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School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

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: 0917360567
Publisher: Basic Books
Year: 2012
Price: \$22.95 (Amazon)

Other readings will be online or will be made available on the class Blackboard site.

EQUIPMENT

If you do not already have a digital audio recorder, you will need to purchase one for class assignments. You will also need a laptop to complete in-class deadline drills and other assignments and should bring it with you to class each week.

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.

ASSIGNMENTS

The class assignments consist of a beat memo, pitches for all stories, eight stories, an enterprise reporting plan and the enterprise assignment.

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 deadlines are what separate journalism from mere writing. Late work will receive an initial grade of zero.



You must talk to multiple sources for all stories, even if your subject is a profile. You must quote or paraphrase a minimum of two credible sources and have other sources that verify or support your choices. (For example: You talked to eight customers of a café who told you the owner will sometimes give them a free coffee just to be nice. You would write that and quote one of the customers, but list the other sources at the end of your story.) Credible sources include people directly involved in a news story, such as activists or owners; government, business or nonprofit officials; eyewitnesses; neighbors; regular customers; longtime friends and associates; rivals, such as the owner of a competing business; and outside experts, such as professors or researchers at think tanks. You should also look for any way to quantify your news, such as crime data or proposed budgets.

All work will be ready to publish. Your story should have a serviceable straight news AP-style headline, a Google News headline (60 characters maximum), a Facebook headline (60 characters maximum), a deck (40- to 50-word story summary), links to any relevant websites or previous news stories, 10 SEO keywords, suggested tweet, a horizontal well-framed or well-cropped photo (can be taken on a smartphone, but must be publishable) and phone numbers or emails of all sources. Your instructor may spot-check any or all of your sources at any time.

Each story will be emailed to the instructor by the assigned deadline with your last name and the title of the assignment in the subject line and document name, for example, “Beckwith Crime Story” or “Beckwith Crime Story Rewrite.”

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 automatically be given a grade reduction of one level (for example, from A to A-).

For every writing assignment, students can choose to do a rewrite 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 reporting plan for the enterprise piece. 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 10 a.m. on the Friday after class. All first drafts of stories will be due a week later, on



the subsequent Friday at 5 p.m. and rewrites one week after that. All stories will be 550 words, with the exception of the final enterprise story, which will be 1,000 words. See details below:

1. A beat memo about the area you cover (No rewrite)
2. An interview transcript (No rewrite)
3. A profile of an interesting individual on your beat
4. An event story
5. A government meeting story
6. A crime story
7. A business story
8. A trend story
9. The enterprise story

Note: *You will need to find and analyze a relevant public record of some sort for the government, crime, business or trend story. A copy of the record will be submitted with the story.*

GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Class participation (including AP quizzes):	15 percent
Beat plan:	5 percent
Reporting plan/outline for enterprise piece:	10 percent
Various stories off beat:	40 percent (5 points each)
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 (202-687-8354; 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>. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out <http://www.plagiarism.org>.



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

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

WEEK 1 (TUESDAY, September 6)

THE AUDIENCE

- Discussion: Who is the audience? How does a news outlet's audience determine its values? How does the medium influence the audience? How do you frame a story to appeal to your outlet's audience?
- Workshop: We will look at different news outlets and discuss their audience. We'll take a current topic in the news and brainstorm how different outlets would cover it. We'll rank story pitches on a news budget.
- Assignment: We will decide as a group on an area of Washington, D.C., to focus on for the semester. The area should be newsy (i.e. not entirely residential) and at least somewhat undercovered (e.g. not Dupont Circle).
- Readings: [How the Media Would Have Covered the Birth of Jesus](#); [How the Media Would Have Covered Columbus's Discovery of the New World](#); [How the Media Would Have Covered the Gettysburg Address](#); [Social and demographic differences in news habits and attitudes](#); [The Impact of Next-Generation Data on the Practice of Journalism](#); [The Slate Pitch Twitter Meme](#); [Slate media kit](#); [McClatchy media kit](#); [NBC media kit](#).

WEEK 2 (TUESDAY, September 13) THE BEAT

- Discussion: How do you work a beat? How do you develop official and unofficial sources? How do you find the story behind the news? How do you refine an idea to make it more interesting to your audience?
- Workshop: We will take a walking tour of Chinatown and brainstorm story ideas and sources of information. We'll talk about how history influences the area. We'll talk about lifehacks for finding story ideas on a beat.
- Assignment: You will write a beat memo for your new neighborhood to hand in by the beginning of class. The beat memo should include a list of possible story ideas for the semester and sources for your interview assignment.
- Readings: [Beat Reporting: What Does it Take To Be The Best?](#); [Beat Guide: Your First Beat](#); selection from "The Kingdom and the Power" on Blackboard; selection from "News is a Verb" on Blackboard.

WEEK 3 (TUESDAY, September 20) THE INTERVIEW

- Discussion: How do you interview effectively? What are the differences between informational, broadcast and hostile interviews? How do you prepare for an interview? How do you allow an interview to unfold organically?



- Workshop: We will prepare mock questions for an interviewee making national news. We will ask questions of a student volunteer. We will discuss our interviewees for the next assignment and game out possible questions.
- Assignment: You will conduct an in-depth interview a source on the class beat and type up the entire transcript—every single word. You will annotate the transcript using footnotes to point out where you got an interesting response and where you failed to follow up.
- Readings: Selection from “Conducting Interviews” on Blackboard; [Four Principles of Interviewing](#); [BBC Academy: Interviewing](#); [How journalists can become better interviewers](#); [The art of the interview](#).

WEEK 4 (TUESDAY, September 27) THE PROFILE

- Discussion: How do you write an interesting profile? How do you determine which information to leave in and leave out? How do you find interesting sources and telling anecdotes? How do you structure a profile?
- Workshop: We will discuss your profile subject—preferably the person you interviewed in the previous assignment—and debate how best to frame their life story. We will go over some famous profile stories.
- Assignment: You will write a well-developed profile of a person on your beat who has a compelling job, life story or experience. You will include telling anecdotes, insightful comments from friends or peers and a solid structure.
- Readings: [How to Write a Profile Feature Article](#); [Hearts and Guts: Writing the Personal Profile](#); [Frank Sinatra Has a Cold](#); [The Art of the Profile with David Remnick of ‘The New Yorker’](#)

WEEK 5 (TUESDAY, October 4) SEARCH ENGINES AND SOCIAL MEDIA

- Discussion: How do you use social media to report, write and promote your stories? How do you build and use source lists online? How do you use other reporters social media posts to inform your own stories? How do you build your own following and promote your stories?
- Workshop: We will discuss the evolution of online journalism. We will learn how to fill out relevant fields for social media and search-engine optimization in journalism and practice filling out those fields in class.
- Readings: [Twitter tips for journalists](#); [Advanced Twitter techniques for journalists](#); [What every young journalist should know about using Twitter](#); [How Google News Works](#)

WEEK 6 (TUESDAY, October 11) THE EVENT

- Discussion: How do you cover an event? How do you prepare for an event story? How do you find an angle once an event starts? What do you do if your initial idea falls through? How do you avoid the pitfalls of the pseudo-event?



- Workshop: We will look at some upcoming events and brainstorm how to cover them in interesting ways. We will game out how to respond to various examples of events and pseudo-events.
- Assignment: You will write about an event or pseudo-event on your beat. You will have an interesting angle or approach to the story other than just to write up what happened. You will do some pre- or post-reporting to flesh out your story.
- Readings: Selection from “The Image” by Daniel J. Boorstin on Blackboard; [“Politics and the English Language”](#) by George Orwell.

WEEK 7 (TUESDAY, October 18) THE MEETING

- Discussion: How do you write about a government meeting in an interesting way? How do you keep meeting stories from being dry recaps? How do you report ahead of time to give your meeting story more heft?
- Workshop: We will look at some examples of city council agendas and discuss what stories we can find in them. We will look at transcripts of government meetings and political speeches to discuss how to find the key moments.
- Assignment: You will find an upcoming government meeting on your beat, attend it and file a story based on information presented at the meeting. This could be a well-written meeting story, a profile or a news story related to the meeting.

WEEK 8 (TUESDAY, October 28) THE CRIME STORY

- 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?
- Workshop: We will look at some charging documents and police reports and discuss how to spot the relevant details. We will write some breaking news crime stories based on information given in class.
- Assignment: You will do a ride-along with a police officer on your beat or a nearby beat and write a short memo about what you learned from the experience. If possible, you will write a story based on an idea or observation from your ride-along.
- Readings: [A Guide for Journalists Who Report On Crime And Crime Victims](#); selection from “The Good Times” on Blackboard.

WEEK 9 (TUESDAY, November 1) THE BUSINESS STORY

- Discussion: How do you write about business at the local level? What are some common types of stories about local business? How do you get business sources to open up? How do you avoid writing stories that are too technical or too promotional?



- Workshop: We will discuss some of the basics of small-business economics so that we have a better understanding of the kinds of questions to ask. We will go over students' ideas for businesses to profile on the beat.
- Assignment: You will profile a business on your beat. Your story will include comments from customers, the owner and a rival or neighboring business, as well as information on how well it does, its particular niche and why it's succeeding or failing.

WEEK 10 (TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8) THE TREND STORY

(Note: This class will be rescheduled due to Election Day.)

- Discussion: How do you identify a trend on your beat? How do you gather enough information to prove that it's genuine? How do you gather different types of sources to make the trend story come alive?
- Workshop: You will look at some examples of recent trend stories and discuss whether the author has provided enough information to know if this is a genuine trend. You will debate how to improve these stories and whether you would have run them.
- Assignment: Identify a trend on your beat. Find persuasive sources who can testify to the trend. Look for a data set, telling anecdotes, experts and eyewitnesses who can explain the phenomenon and prove that it's genuine.
- Readings: [Weasel-Words Rip My Flesh!](#); [A Midsummer Harvest of Bogus Trend Stories](#); [How Slate's Jack Shafer Calls Out Bogus Trend Stories](#); [How to Destroy a Perfectly Good Fake Trend Story](#); [2012: The Best and Worst 'Trend' Stories](#); [Crime Blotter Has a Regular: Yankees Caps](#); [A Timeline of Moral Panics in the Last Decade](#); [Trend Stories](#).

WEEK 11 (TUESDAY, November 15) MEET THE EDITOR SESSION 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.

WEEK 12 (TUESDAY, November 22) THE BROADCAST STORY

- Discussion: How do radio, television, podcasts and online audiovisual stories differ from print? How does live broadcast differ from prerecorded? How do you capture ambient sound and b-roll? How do you record a voiceover?
- Workshop: You will write a one-minute radio hit based on information from one of your previous stories in class. You will take turns practicing reading the story into a microphone before the class and critiquing each others' delivery.
- Assignment:
- Readings: Selection from "Sound Reporting: The NPR Guide to Audio Journalism and Production" by Jonathan Kern on Blackboard; [What Does That Mean? A Glossary of NPR Lingo](#); [NPR Next Generation Radio](#); [BBC Academy](#).



WEEK 13 (TUESDAY, November 29) THE ENTERPRISE STORY

- Discussion: How do you write an enterprise story that tells readers something new? How do you go deep in your reporting to find an untold story or retell a familiar story in a fresh way? How do you find real people and data that will turn an everyday story into something new?
- Workshop: You will analyze some examples of excellent enterprise pieces and dissect the different elements in them, with a particular focus on story ideas and structure. You will discuss the progress on your enterprise pitch.
- Readings: Selection from “The Art and Craft of Feature Writing by” William Blundell on Blackboard; selection from “Writing for Story” by Jon Franklin on Blackboard.

WEEK 14 (TUESDAY, December 6) PEER REVIEW

Students will be paired to critique each other’s enterprise piece.

TUESDAY — NO CLASS DURING STUDY DAYS

WEEK 15 (TUESDAY, December 13) MEET THE EDITOR SESSION 2

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