



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

MPJO-701-01: FEATURE REPORTING

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM

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

Instructor: Tanya Ballard Brown

Downtown campus, room C231

- Office hours: by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Feature reporting takes you beyond and behind the news to engage the interest of your audience. Feature stories inspire, educate, illuminate. They are less dispassionate and more creative than news stories. Feature stories, like news, must be built on facts and be grounded in time and place. But in features, these facts are illustrated by characters, and woven into scenes and vignettes that show rather than simply tell the information you want to convey. This is done through deep reporting and the use of techniques borrowed from fiction and cinema, including scene, dialogue and character development.

Class assignments include several storytelling exercises as well as in-class exercises and peer critiques of stories. We'll also hear from print, radio and video journalists who will share their tips and insights on the feature storytelling craft.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students will:

- Analyze examples of feature reporting to find best practices
- Examine various news organization's strategies for storytelling
- Develop strong story ideas from conception to dissemination
- Produce various feature pieces for distribution on multiple platforms

REQUIRED READING

There are two texts for this course, but I will assign other readings each week that you should be prepared to discuss.

1. Title: *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*

Author: Roy Peter Clark

ISBN: 0316014990

Publisher: Little, Brown & Company

Year: 2008



Title: *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law 2016*

Author: The Associated Press

Publisher: Basic Books

Year: 2016

ISBN: 9780917360633

(Also available online through Lauringer Library)

[7 Ways to Improve Your Video Storytelling](#) by Vicki Krueger, Poynter (Aug. 3, 2016)

[How audio brings a story to life](#) by Vicki Krueger, Poynter (Aug. 2, 2016)

[How Audio Stories Begin](#) by Alison MacAdam, NPR (July 26, 2016)

[6 questions journalists should be able to answer before pitching a story](#) by Tom Huang (Aug. 22, 2012)

Articles and video/radio reports for journals as assigned by lecturer.

ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION AND CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Class attendance is critical. If you miss two classes, your final grade will be reduced by one level (e.g., an A to an A-). Further absences will result in further grade reductions. If you are absent for more than four classes, you will fail this course.

If you have an emergency and need to miss class, please let me know as soon as possible.

I strongly encourage you to talk, debate, argue and engage with the material, the guest speakers, and me every week. Please be respectful and considerate of others' views and opinions. Please turn off your cell phone while in class.

OTHER CLASS POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- Written work: Typed and double-spaced
- Audio and video work: Transcripts must accompany assignments
- Assignments: Email assignments to the instructor and post to Canvas

ASSIGNMENTS

Specific guidelines will be provided for each assignment.

- Journal: Analyze examples of feature reporting to point out core techniques.
- Target media organization analysis: Choose a media outlet (i.e. *The Washington Post*, *NPR*, *Vanity Fair*, *National Geographic*) and examine its style, demographics and use of social media. Oral presentation.
- Short feature 500 words/2 minutes
- News feature 800 words/6 minutes



- Story pitch
- Profile: Report and write or record (audio/video) a profile

Please submit all assignments to me via email by 5 p.m. on the due date. Late assignments will be reduced by one grade level (e.g., an A to an A-) per day.

GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Journal entries:	15%
Target Media Presentation:	10%
Feature 1:	10%
Feature 2:	15%
Story Pitch:	10%
Profile:	20%
Attendance and class participation:	20%
Total:	100%

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		

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/>



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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://dss.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>.

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. **There will be additional, weekly reading and journal assignments that are not on this syllabus.**



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CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Sept. 1) OVERVIEW: What makes feature stories different? We will discuss how journalists approach reporting and telling feature stories compared to straight news stories. In-class writing exercise.

Assignment for next class: *Writing Tools* Part One. Read/watch/listen to assigned piece and post first journal entry.

Week 2 (Sept. 8) THE BIG IDEA: Hunting for good feature ideas – where to look and what to look for. Guest speaker. In-class exercise. Target media organization presentation.

Assignment for next class: Short feature proposal. *Writing Tools* Part Two. Read/watch/listen to assigned piece and post second entry.

Week 3 (Sept. 15) BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS: How to get off to a good start with a lively lede and end on a strong note with a sharp kicker. Review of story proposals. In-class exercise. Target media organization presentation.

Assignment for next class: Lede/kicker analysis. *Writing Tools* Part Three. Read/watch/listen to assigned piece and post third entry.

Week 4 (Sept. 22) PORTRAIT PAINTING: The art of description and using all five senses to create vivid scenes. Guest speaker. In-class exercise. Target media organization presentation.

Assignment for next class: Short feature article or video/audio story.

Week 5 (Sept. 29) BACKGROUNDING: Mining research and recent studies to develop compelling features. In-class exercise will focus on identifying a news or research development that can service as the basis for developing a feature angle or approach. Target media organization presentation.

Assignment for next class: Read/watch/listen to your peers' short feature stories to prepare for class review. Write up proposal and reporting plan for news feature. Finish *Writing Tools*. Read/watch/listen to assigned piece and post fourth entry.

Week 6 (Oct. 6) FEEDBACK: Peer review of first feature stories. Discussion of news feature proposals.

Assignment for next class: Work on news feature piece. Read/watch/listen to assigned piece and post fifth entry.

Week 7 (Oct. 13) GOING NUTS! The importance of a nut graf in features. In-class exercise. Guest speaker. Target media organization presentation.

Assignment for next class: News feature. Initial ideas for profiles.



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Week 8 (Oct. 20) PROFILES: What you need to know to report and write a successful profile. Discussion of profile ideas.

Assignment for next class: Profile proposal and reporting plan. Read/watch/listen to assigned journal piece and post fifth entry. Read/watch/listen to your peers news features to prepare for class review.

Week 9 (Oct. 27) FEEDBACK: Critiques of news feature articles.

Assignment for next class: Profile outline and source list.

Week 10 (Nov. 3) THAT'S WHAT SHE SAID: How to use quotes and the art of interviewing for feature stories -- sometimes known as how to peel an onion. In-class exercise. Target media organization presentation.

Assignment for next class: Profile due.

Week 11 (Nov. 10) SOCIAL MEDIA PROMOTION: Strategies for how to expand and promote your stories on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, The Li.st App, Instagram, Snapchat. Guest speaker. In-class exercise. Guest speaker(s). Target media organization presentation.

Assignment for next class: Read/listen/watch and critique Group 1 profiles. Story pitch.

Week 12 (Nov. 17) WORKSHOP: Peer critiques of Group 1 profiles.

Assignment for next class: Read/listen/watch and critique Group 2 Profiles. Group 1: Revisions due

~~~ NO CLASS THURSDAY, NOV. 24 -- THANKSGIVING BREAK ~~~

**Week 13 (Dec. 1) WORKSHOP:** Peer critiques of Group 2 profiles.

**Assignment for next class:** Read/watch/listen and critique Group 3 profiles. Group 2: Revisions due

**Week 14 (Dec. 8) WORKSHOP:** Peer critiques of Group 3 profiles.

**Assignment for next class:** Group 3: revisions

**Week 15 (Dec. 15) FINAL PROJECTS PRESENTATIONS**

\*Syllabus subject to change