

JOU 3117 Fall 2006
Print News Reporting
Instructor: Elizabeth Hanly

Email: hanlye@fiu.edu

CLASS OBJECTIVE: This course is where you will make a transition to real-world reporting skills. We'll study how to find stories, how to conduct interviews, how to use public records and how to cover a variety of topics and events. Deadline writing, feature writing and news analysis will all be emphasized. Guest speakers, supplemental readings and discussions drawn from current events will enhance our classroom experience.

EXPECTATIONS: The first expectation is that students will think of this class as a newsroom environment. Students should think like journalists in developing their stories. They should also confer with the editor – or instructor – to clarify and plan coverage. Consultations can be done by phone, emails or in-office visits. Students who meet major obstacles in completing their assigned tasks should notify the instructor of their problems. Deadlines must be met. Class participation is also important and students will be required to complete a news quiz at the beginning of each class based on current events.

Students are expected to notify the instructor in advance if they are going to miss a class. Grades will be lowered if more than one class session is missed during this semester.

Office hours Monday 12:30-2:30 p.m., Tuesday 10a.m.-noon and by appointment.

REQUIRED TEXTS: *News Reporting and Writing*, The Missouri Group, Bedford/St. Martin's Press, Copyright 2005.
Also, *Letters To A Young Journalist*, Samuel G. Freedman, Basic Books, Copyright 2006.

Both books are available online through Amazon.com and other retailers.

Additional readings may be distributed and assigned throughout the semester.

GRADING:

News Quizzes: 10 percent. These will be based on current topics in the media. Students are expected to be regular consumers of news, reading publications such as The Miami Herald, The New York Times, and online news sites such as CNN.com.

Grammar Final: 10 percent. Each student will be required to take a language skills final, which will cover basic fundamentals such as grammar, conjugation of verbs and verb/noun agreement.

In-class writing: 10 percent. These are stories that are assigned, and completed, within a class session.

Outside Assignment: 15 percent. Students will be required to attend one event outside the school and write a story on what occurred.

Profile: 25 percent. Each student will produce on magazine-quality profile of a person, community or institution in South Florida. Topics must be approved in advance. Students will be expected to turn in a first draft, submit to peer editing and then produce a final draft for the instructor.

Enterprise: 30 percent. Students will investigate a prominent issue in the news, and deliver an analytical dissection of the subject. Topics should be newsworthy, and students are expected to contact sources with varying points of view for their article.

POLICIES:

Press Releases: Press releases will be used frequently in this class. However, they are to be viewed not as news articles, but rather as one side of a story. Additional reporting may be required if press releases are part of the data base for assignments and your final enterprise project. .

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is an extremely serious breach of ethics. Stealing ideas or copy is wrong and could be grounds for automatic failure. Always properly credit sources. If confused about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me.

Interviews: In some cases you will be required to conduct outside interviews, particularly for your final enterprise projects. When possible, conduct the interviews in person. Phone interviews are also acceptable. E-mail interviews can be used, but are discouraged in that they aren't interactive and don't improve live interviewing skills.

SCHEDULE:

Aug. 28: Introduction to the course, discussion of how to select a profile candidate and outside news event that you will be covering. Students are reminded that profile candidates and outside news events must be approved by the instructor.

Assignment for Sept. 11: Profile candidates and outside news events you'll be covering must be submitted by 5 p.m. Sept. 8. Email or in-office visits are acceptable forms of submission.

Sept. 11: News Reporting and Writing, Chapter 7, page146-159, How to Write Leads. With this section we will begin to build our understanding of how to construct a story. Most of you have had experience at writing inverted pyramid leads. With this week's section, we will begin exploring alternate ways to begin articles.

Letters To A Young Journalist: Pages 87-106, "Writing"

Class Discussion: Profile and news events subjects. We will focus on subjects you've picked, and why. Discussion will encourage input from the class on ways their fellow students might approach their subjects.

GUEST SPEAKER: A seasoned print journalist will be asked to address our class on how to balance the need for speed and accuracy in print news reporting.

Assignment for week of Sept. 11-18: Your proposed questions and coverage strategy for your profile candidate and news event must be submitted to the instructor by 5 p.m. Sept. 13. Your news event must occur by Oct. 8. Your story must be submitted to the instructor no more than 48 hours after the event occurred.

Sept. 18: Event Coverage: A big part of a journalist's life is covering the meetings, speeches and press conferences that relate to his or her beat. How do you prepare properly for these events? How can you take a run-of-the-mill meeting and make it exciting? What kinds of writing skills does it take to make sure you don't bore the reader?

News Reporting and Writing, pages 250-262 "Speeches, News Conferences and Meetings"

Guest Speaker: A beat reporter from a major media outlet in South Florida will discuss how to make the job, and the product, exciting.

SUBMIT YOUR FINAL ENTERPRISE IDEA, COMPLETE WITH COVERAGE PLANS

Sept. 25: Interviewing. Getting the story often means getting your sources to speak. With this section we look at effective ways to put sources at ease or convince them to talk.

News Reporting and Writing: pages 48-53 and 57-65. "Interviewing"

Letters To A Young Journalist, pages 61-70 "Scuffed Shoes"

In-class assignment: Students will be given facts in a case by the instructor, and then will be allowed to ask questions for 10 minutes. Stories must be written and turned in by the end of class.

Oct. 2: Ethics. What does off the record mean? How about the use of anonymous sources? What, exactly, is plagiarism?

News Reporting And Writing: 506-521 "Solving Ethical Dilemmas"

Letters To A Young Journalist, 78-85 "On Anonymous Sources"

Guest: A local expert on media law will discuss ethical and legal issues facing journalists.
PROFILE ROUGH DRAFTS MUST BE TURNED AT THE BEGINNING OF THIS CLASS.

News event assignments must occur no later than Oct. 8, and the article must be submitted no later than 48 hours after the event occurred.

Oct. 9. The Power of Words. Which words you choose, and how you use them, will greatly influence how the reader reacts to your stories. How do select the right words? At what point does lively writing lose its objectivity?

News Reporting and Writing, pages 164-182. "Writing To Be Read"

Letters To A Young Journalist, pages 91-117 "The Stages of Writing"

In-class assignment: Peer Review. Your rough draft will be exchanged with someone else's in the class. Then, each of you will read them, and make positive, constructive suggestions to the other about the drafts.

Oct. 16: Investigations. This section of the class will look at how you begin, and execute, the investigative process when writing profiles or covering news events. How to find and

develop sources, use of public records and the strengths and weaknesses of computer-assisted reporting will all be covered.

News Reporting and Writing, 388-401, "Investigative Reporting"

Letters To A Young Journalist, pages 47-61 "Reporting"

GUEST SPEAKER: A seasoned investigative writer will discuss with the class how to get the story no matter what obstacles are put up to thwart you.

An update of your progress on your final enterprise project must be submitted. You may submit a rough draft for review by the instructor if you wish.

FINAL DRAFTS OF PROFILES ARE DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS OCT. 23.

Oct. 23: PROFILES ARE DUE.

For Class: special topics in business writing. The financial press and trade publications are among the largest sectors of the print media, yet many reporters are wary about writing for business publications.

This section will look at how business journalism is similar to, and differs from, traditional forms of reporting. What kinds of math skills does it require? Where do the numbers we read about in the paper come from? How can you get the story if the company won't talk?

Guest Speaker: An experienced business writer will address the class on the challenges and rewards of being a financial writer.

News Reporting and Writing, pages 333-355, "Business And Consumer News"

In-class assignment: We will do a workshop on how to find, and translate, financial statements and other documents companies are required to disclose.

Oct. 30: The Beat

How does beat reporting differ from feature writing? How do you maintain your objectivity when you are forced to cover the same people every day? Is there a danger of becoming too friendly with your sources? What can bring special value to your beat reporting?

In-class assignment: We will study the case of Judith Miller of the New York Times and her reporting about Saddam Hussein prior the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Readings will be handed out in the Oct. 23 class session.

Also: News Reporting and Writing, pages 302-327 "Covering A Beat"

Guest speaker: A longtime beat reporter will discuss how to keep stories fresh even after you've written about the subject many times before.

Nov. 6: Social Studies

Many times your reporter's duties will include looking at a community or political issue that is divisive and of great interest to your readers.

In this section we will look at how you need to build sources on every side of an issue, even among people whose views you may personally object to. You will learn how to delineate the differences between legal, ethical and socially responsible questions regarding such issues.

News Reporting and Writing, pages 325-337, "Covering religion, the environment, science and medicine"

Letters To A Young Journalist: pages 70-78, “Tacking”

Also: Readings will be distributed at the end of the Oct. 30 session on the issue of stem-cell research. We will use this subject as a category for discussion.

In-class assignment: Two of you will play spokesmen of political groups with very different views on an important issue. The spokesmen will give a prepared statement and accept questions for 10 minutes. For the rest of you, your articles must be submitted at the end of class.

Nov. 13: Crime

Perhaps no assignment is as challenging as the police beat, but crime stories produce some of the richest narratives in American journalism.

Crime is a concern of all Americans, of course. But beyond fears of physical harm, there’s a widespread curiosity about the motivations and methods of criminals.

How can you write about grisly subjects for a general audience? What kinds of reporting methods will work best when you may have to interview grieving family members?

Where are the lines of sensitivity and taste?

Assignment: Bring in an example of a crime story you have read, and be prepared to discuss why you liked it – or why you didn’t.

Reading: News Reporting and Writing, pages 268-298.

Guest speaker: A police officer will discuss how cops can help reporters, and how they can’t, in crime reporting.

ROUGH DRAFT OF FINAL ENTERPRISE IS TO BE HANDED IN. THEY WILL BE RETURNED IN THE NOV. 20 SESSION.

NOV. 20: STATISTICS

In this section we will look at the various data banks that are more readily available to you than any previous generations of journalists ever dreamed of. We will look at Census data, private economic research organizations, state and local data and then discuss how to analyze it all – often in a hurry – to improve your stories.

Guest: A statistician with media experience will show us shortcuts and other tips for gathering the right data and assembling it for your stories.

Nov. 27: WRAP IT UP

In this class we will work on our final enterprise stories and consult with the editor on writing. Be prepared to ask questions about your project in front of the class. Teams will be formed and members encouraged to describe to one another problems – and solutions – to various challenges in the writing process.

Dec. 4: PRESENTATIONS

Each of you will be asked to give a presentation of five to 10 minutes in length describing the story you wrote, the sources you used and how the story was developed. The final enterprise project will be turned in at the end of your presentation.