



COM300 REPORTING I

Winter 2015

“We cannot make good news out of bad practice.” – Edward R. Murrow

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Class Time & Office Hours:

Class time: Tuesdays/Thursdays, 5-6:50 p.m., in 1-308.

Office hours: Tuesdays, 1:30-2:30; Wednesdays, 3-6 p.m.; and by appointment.

Required Texts:

Rich, C. (2013). *Writing and Reporting News: A Coaching Method* (7th ed.)
A.P. Stylebook (any recent edition)

Course Objectives

This course provides an introductory overview of reporting and the practice of journalism, and serves as a precursor to Reporting II. This course emphasizes news values, the societal role of journalism (and its importance in a functioning democracy), while educating students on the fundamentals of quality news writing including, but not limited to, grammar and organization, news structure, lead writing, and information gathering. Course objectives include:

- Strengthen core writing skills and grammar usage.
- Develop a keen eye for news, with emphasis on news values of timeliness, proximity, prominence, impact, conflict, and novelty.
- Proficiency in the writing and structuring of news, including organization of facts and common news reporting styles such as inverted pyramid.
- Demonstrate the ability to write cogent, informative copy concisely and effectively do so under deadline constraints. (By the end of the course students should feel comfortable writing basic news stories).

- Apply A.P. Style to newswriting, and understand its purpose and uses.
- Demonstrate thoughtful sensitivity to news fairness and accuracy, news ethics, and news diversity.
- Gain confidence in information-gathering techniques; identify relevant sources, lead interviews with those sources; and accurately and fairly attribute sources in news stories.

Expectations

This course is designed as a comprehensive introductory reporting course within your chosen discipline: mass communication. Thus, you should be motivated and intellectually curious. You are expected to make contributions to class discussions and fully participate in in-class activities. (Dead weight in the classroom is frustrating to me as well as your classmates). You are expected to complete all assignments and readings **on time**. All assignments are due at the *start* of class. Some materials from lectures will be provided but these are not comprehensive; it is imperative that you read assignments and supplement lectures and readings with your own notes. **Note:** All written work must be stapled, single-spaced (without tabs and with 1 line of space in between paragraphs), in 11 or 12-point Times New Roman font (unless otherwise specified). All written work must be free of factual errors, grammatical errors, spelling mistakes and typos. All written work must conform to A.P. style.

Technology Policy

Computers are for writing and note taking purposes only; Facebook, texting, gaming, and online shopping will *not* get you very far in the course. Mobile devices must be on silent or remain off. Texting is prohibited; regardless of how discreet you think you are, the behavior is a distraction. If it is an emergency, excuse yourself from the classroom.

A.P. Policy

Although A.P. style may seem arbitrary at times, it is the most commonly used style guide in the communication professions and knowledge of A.P. style will simplify your life, help you write more swiftly, and bring consistency to your writing. It is important that you learn the basics and memorize the *most* often used A.P. style rules. Quizzes will include several questions pertaining to A.P. style but I do not expect you to know everything, as journalists must often consult the A.P. style book on the job. Therefore, in-class writing assignments – including graded assignments – are open book for A.P. style.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is held to the strictest of standards. The work you turn in is yours – and no one else's. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, collusion, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to give an unfair academic advantage to the student (such as submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructors, providing

false or misleading information in an effort to receive a postponement or an extension on an assignment), or the attempt to commit such an act.

Plagiarism is defined as the unacknowledged inclusion of someone else's words, structure, ideas, or data. When a student submits work as his/her own that includes the words, structure, ideas, or data of others, the source of this information must be acknowledged through complete, accurate, and specific references, and, if verbatim statements are included, through quotation marks as well. Failure to identify any source (including interviews, surveys, etc.), published in any medium (including on the internet) or unpublished, from which words, structure, ideas, or data have been taken, constitutes plagiarism. Please see me if you are unsure of what constitutes plagiarism or other examples of academic misconduct.

Journalistic Integrity

The fastest way to kill a career in journalism is by fabricating sources and fabricating quotes. You have a professional, ethical (and often legal) obligation to report news accurately and fairly. Knowingly writing erroneous, falsified, or exaggerated information is grounds for failure of the course. Moreover, negligence and indolence is no excuse for violations in journalism ethics. Always fact-check, clarify, and follow up when necessary. When in doubt, consult me.

Absences and Late Work Policy

I will only excuse absences resulting from family emergency, illness, conference or other engagement I deem beneficial to your career; however, work shifts are no excuse for absences or late work. If a due date extension is necessary, you must request one at least 24 hours **prior** to the class in which the assignment is due. No-shows do not have the luxury of make-up work unless the absence is due to extreme circumstances (e.g. severe medical or family emergency). I reserve the right to require documentation for approved absences and make-up work. *All **unapproved** late work will receive a **zero** and habitual absences will adversely affect your participation grade.*

Classroom Respect

There will undoubtedly be times when your classmates, or I, express views and opinions counter to your own. Every voice and opinion will be heard and respected both within *and* outside of the classroom. Discussions must always remain collegial, respectful, and germane to the topic.

Extra Credit

One of the best things you can do to advance a career in communication is getting involved with student media. Any student who serves on the *Poly Post* staff during winter quarter will receive 20 extra credit points. Students unable to join the staff may still earn up to 20 extra credit points (5 points per story) for publishing a bylined story with the *Poly Post*.

Assignments: (1,000-point scale)

Quizzes (2):	200 pts	20%
Participation:	100 pts	10%
Profile:	100 pts	10%
News critiques (2):	200 pts	20%
News stories (2):	200 pts	20%
Final project:	200 pts	20%

A = 930-1000	A- = 900-929	B+ = 870-899	B = 830-869
B- = 800-829	C+ = 770-799	C = 730-769	C- = 700-729
D+ = 670-699	D = 630-669	D- = 600-629	F = 599 or less

Quizzes

You will be quizzed twice throughout the quarter, with each quiz covering material in the weeks leading up to the assessment. Questions are drawn from assigned readings, course lectures/discussion. Each quiz will also include an A.P. style component and short writing exercises.

Graded News Stories

With the exception of the final project, graded news stories are timed and written in class. Treat these stories as news exams that assess your ability to write compelling, accurate, and concise copy under tight deadlines. Generally you will have 90 minutes to complete and file the story. All writing assignments are open book for A.P. style.

Participation

Participation is a key component of the class. This grade includes your attendance in class, your contributions to class discussions, and completion of various in-class exercises. (This includes completion of non-graded activities).

Final Project

You will pitch and craft an original news story covering a campus event, campus policy or initiative, or any other topic newsworthy to students. You will identify and interview key sources for the story. The aim of the project is to ensure that everyone has one polished piece they can be proud of and retain for their professional portfolio or publish with the *Poly Post*. For those aiming to publish, it is crucial that you develop your topic early and submit a draft to me before submitting it to the *Post*.

Tentative Schedule

Week 1: Journalism & Society

- Tuesday, Jan. 6: Course introduction and class expectations.

- Thursday, Jan. 8: Read Chap. 1, “Changing Concepts of News” (pp. 3-19); SPJ’s “Code of Ethics” (on Blackboard). Discussion on societal importance of news and what makes for ethical and quality journalism.

Week 2: News Values

- Tuesday, Jan. 13: Read Chap. 2, “The Basic News Story” (pp. 23-43). Tips on strengthening core writing and grammar. Introduction to A.P. Style.
- Thursday, Jan. 15: SPSA Conference (**No class**).

Week 3: A.P. Style

- Tuesday, Jan. 20: Overview of A.P. Style. **News critique 1 due.**
- Thursday, Jan. 22: Pub Style A.P. Trivia.

Week 4: Fact-Gathering & Interviews

- Tuesday, Jan. 27: Read Chap. 5, “Sources and Online Research” (pp. 77-93). Discussion on secondary sources and credibility. Lab: Web scavenger hunt.
- Thursday, Jan. 29: Read Chap. 6, “Interviewing Techniques” (pp. 97-117). Quotes & attribution. Lab: practice interviews. **News critique 2 due.**

Week 5: Lead Writing & News Structure

- Tuesday, Feb. 3: Read Chap. 7, “Leads and Nut Graphs” (pp. 121-148). Lab: Lead writing workshop. **Quiz 1.**
- Thursday, Feb. 5: Read Chap. 8, “Story Organization” (pp.153-173). Lab: Lead writing and fact organization.

Week 6: Spot News Stories

- Tuesday, Feb. 10: Read Chap. 9, “Story Forms” (pp. 177-191); Read “Ex-Microsoft CEO Ballmer buys NBA’s LA Clipper for \$2M” (on Blackboard). Lab: Practice spot news story.
- Thursday, Feb. 12: Read “6.0 Quake Rattles Bay Area” and “Celebrating, in Spite of Risk” (both on Blackboard). Lab: Spot news story revisions.

Week 7: Spot News; Events & Attribution

- Tuesday, Feb. 17: Lab: News story I (**graded**).

- Thursday, Feb. 19: Event coverage, attribution and quoting exercises. Lab: in-class editorial meeting. Come with story ideas for final project.

Week 8: Story Development

- Tuesday, Feb. 24: Story development; thinking like news audiences.
- Thursday, Feb. 26: Revisit alternative leads; intro to descriptive writing techniques. Lab: Peer interviews. **Project pitch due.**

Week 9: Intro to Narrative Newswriting Style

- Tuesday, March 3: Read Chap. 17, “Profiles and ~~Obituaries~~” (pp. 341-**356**); “This Psychologist Helps Comedians Keep Laughing” (on Blackboard). Intro to profile writing. Lab: Profile (**graded**).
- Thursday, March 5: Read “Derek Boogard: A Boy Learns to Brawl” (on Blackboard). Lab: descriptive writing techniques. **Quiz 2.**

Week 10: Final Project & Session Wrap-up

- Tuesday, March 10: News story II (**graded**).
- Thursday, March 12: Read Mascia, “Who Gets Shot in America? What I learned Compiling Records of Carnage for the New York Times” (on Blackboard). In-class viewing: “Journalism Today.” Session wrap-up.

Note: Readings and/or assignments subject to change; final project due 3/17.