



Comm 221 Introduction to News Writing

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Office Hours: Tues/Th 2-3 p.m. and by appointment

About this course

This class is designed to help you learn and practice the nuts and bolts of news writing: coming up with news worthy story ideas, doing background research, finding appropriate sources, interviewing and taking accurate notes and, of course, writing news stories, from the basic news briefs to longer features. While the class is designed to teach you the rules of a very specific genre, it is also designed to help you improve writing skills common to ALL genres. By the end of the semester, you should be writing with greater clarity, precision and accuracy, and with greater command of grammar, punctuation and style. You should also have an understanding of the strengths and limitations of different media platforms, and of how to take a story and produce it for a variety of media forms.

For this class, you will be asked early on to come up with your own ideas and venture out into the community to conduct your own research and interviews for your stories. In addition to producing the major news stories, you will be asked to complete other weekly reading, writing and research assignments. These assignments are designed to give you the chance to practice the skills that are essentials to producing a solid news and news-feature story.

Class time will be used in a variety of ways. We may engage in discussions, watch videos, work in groups to come up with and refine story ideas, among other activities. Your participation is crucial to your success and to the success of the class as a whole. Please come prepared each day to think, talk and work.

Course Objectives

By the end of class, you should be able to:

- Identify newsworthy stories in your community
- Develop a strong focus or news angle for each story
- Conduct effective journalistic research
- Identify appropriate sources and conduct productive face-to-face interviews
- Write news and news feature stories
- Adapt a story for a variety of media platforms

Division of Communication Learning Objectives for Communication Majors

This class will help you achieve the Division's objectives for all majors, especially objectives numbers 1 and 5.

1. communicate effectively using appropriate technologies for diverse audiences
2. plan, evaluate and conduct basic (quantitative and qualitative) communication research
3. use communication theories to understand and solve communication problems
4. apply historical communication perspectives to contemporary issues and practices
5. apply principles of ethical decision making in communication contexts

Required Texts

News Reporting and Writing, 11th edition. Melvin Mencher. Available from text rental at the university bookstore.

Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law. Available for purchase from the University bookstore.

New York Times. You will need access to the *New York Times* covering at least the period between Tuesday, September 8 and Tuesday December 8. You may be able to get daily copies of the *Times* in the residence halls, or through a digital subscription. You can purchase a digital subscription to the *NYT* at a deeply discounted rate for college students by visiting the web site listed below and following the instructions. <http://www.nytimes.com/subscriptions/edu/lp1999.html?campaignId=384XR>

Each week, you will be required to keep up with the free web sites listed below. Be sure to browse through them regularly, reading the articles that most interest you.

Vice News: www.vicenews.com

Buzz Feed: www.buzzfeed.com

Columbia Journalism Review: www.cjr.org

Assignments & Grading

Original news stories: 70% final grade

Once you have learned the basic skills of news writing, you will be asked to write a series of news and news feature stories based on your own reporting for possible submission to *The Pointer*, *Stevens Point Journal*, or other local newspapers.

News Journal: 15% final grade

You will be asked to write weekly reflections on your reading of the *New York Times*, *Vice News*, *Buzz Feed*, and *Columbia Journalism Review*. Guidelines will be distributed in class.

Other weekly assignments: 15%

Letter grades will be assigned as follows to all graded assignments and the final grade:

94 – 100 % = A	90-93% = A-	87-89% = B+	84-86% = B
80-83% = B-	77-79% = C+	74-76% = C	70-73% = C-
67-69% = D			

Other policies

Attendance. The success of this course depends on your active participation. Please arrive on time for each class, ready to actively contribute to class discussion and peer editing work. If you **MUST** miss class, please:

- ◆ Notify me in advance (in case of emergency, notify me as soon as possible)
- ◆ Arrange to get notes from a fellow student. Do **NOT** ask me what you missed!
- ◆ Arrange to have any work due that day turned in at the beginning of class.

- ◆ Realize that there will be NO MAKE-UPS for in-class assignments unless you have a documented excuse (note from a doctor, for example) AND it's feasible for the assignment to be made-up out of class.

In-class computer and technology use. PLEASE **turn off your monitors at the beginning of class** and DO NOT use the computers unless you are assigned to do so. The sound of the keyboard during lecture or the sight of students gazing at the monitor instead of the speaker (whether it's me or one of your classmates) can be VERY distracting). You may check your e-mail or do other computer work before class begins – but please turn off your monitor as soon as I walk in to start class. Please turn off your cell phones. No cell phone, tablet, laptops or other technology permitted to be used during class.

E-mail. You may e-mail me with questions, comments and concerns, or to set up an individual conference. I check my e-mail regularly during the week, except when I am out of town. Please leave at least 48-hours for a response.

Deadlines. No late work will be accepted UNLESS arrangements are made well in advance. If you do not turn in an assignment on time, you will receive a grade of “zero” for that assignment.

Accuracy & Ethics. Stories that journalists write MUST BE based on first-hand research and reporting, and on verifiable and accurate facts. Any stories turned in that plagiarize from other sources, that contain falsified or fictional information, or that contain serious fact errors will receive a grade of “F”. More than one violation of the university's code of ethics and the ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists will result in a failing grade for the course.

Note about grading. An “A” in this course is reserved for stories that are good enough to be published without changes. If you could write such a story at the beginning of the course, you wouldn't need to be here. Please don't expect to receive marks of “A” from the start. It has been my experience that almost ALL students leave this class better writers than they were when they entered, and that most students earn higher grades as the course progresses.

Academic honesty. Please be sure that all the work you produce for this class is original and your own. Be sure to give proper credit for ANY work that you use that belongs to others (including items you get on-line). Any student caught plagiarizing will receive a grade of “F” for the course. See the student handbook for University policies regarding plagiarism and other issues of academic honesty.



General Schedule

This schedule includes major reading and writing assignments. **Additional REQUIRED research, writing and presentation assignments will be distributed each week in class.** If you miss a class, please consult a classmate for notes and assignments.

Some class meeting times may be designated “workshops.” This means you will have class time to work on your stories. During these workshop times, we won’t meet formally as a class, but you will have access to the lab, and I will be available for consultation. I will announce workshop days a week in advance.

I reserve the right to revise this schedule to meet the pedagogical needs of the class.

Date	Topic	Readings	Journals Due Each Tuesday	Original Stories Due Thursdays
Sept. 3	Introduction/IceBreaker			
Sept. 8/10	What is News?	Mencher 1, 2, 3, 4		
Sept. 15/17	Writing a lead	Mencher 5	J1	
Sept. 22/24	Writing a lead		J2	
Sept. 29/Oct.1	Inverted Pyramid	Mencher 6	J3	
Oct. 6/8	Inverted Pyramid	Mencher 7, 8	J4	
Oct. 13/15	Generating Ideas		J5	
Oct. 20/22	Research & Interviews	Mencher 11, 12, 13	J6	
Oct. 27/29	Research & Interviews	Mencher 14, 15	J7	Story One Due
Nov. 3/5	Beat Reporting	Mencher 18	J8	
Nov. 10/12	Practice, Practice, Practice	Mencher 19	J9	
Nov. 17/19		Mencher 20	J10	Story Two Due
Nov. 24		Mencher 21	No Journals	
Dec. 1/3		Mencher 22	J11	
Dec.8/10		Mencher 23, 24	J12	
Dec. 15			No Journals	Story Three Due