



## Comm 221 Introduction to News Writing and Reporting

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Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday 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
- Edit effectively for AP Style, grammar and punctuation

### 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 on electronic reserve.

*New York Times*. You will need access to the *New York Times* covering at least the period between January 30 through May 28. You may be able to get print copies of the *Times* in the residence halls or electronic copies through a digital subscription. You can purchase a digital subscription to the *NYT* at a 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>

In addition to the *New York Times*, you will be required to keep up with free news web sites listed below. Be sure to browse through them regularly, and read the articles that most interest you.

BBC News ([www.bbc.com](http://www.bbc.com)) [REQUIRED]

Buzz Feed ([www.buzzfeed.com](http://www.buzzfeed.com)), Huffington Post ([www.huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com)), Politico ([www.politico.com](http://www.politico.com)), Vice ([www.vice.com](http://www.vice.com)). [Choose one of these for each news journal. You are encouraged to NOT choose the same site each week].

Additional readings may be distributed in class or through electronic reserve.

## 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

Each week, you will be asked to write a two-page critical analysis of several stories that you choose from the *New York Times*, *BBC News*, *Buzz Feed* and *Huffington Post*. Guidelines for this on-going assignment will be distributed in class.

Other weekly assignments: 15%

During the first half of the semester, you will be asked to complete a series of assignments designed to help you develop the research, interviewing, writing and editing skills you need to successfully produce your original news stories, which you will start writing in approximately the second half of the semester.

## Revision Policy

Because one of the goals of this course is for you to improve your writing skills, those who earn less than a "B" (85%) on an original story will be permitted to revise the assignment in order to improve the quality of the story and thus the grade, according to the following policy:

1. No revisions will be allowed for an original story earning an 85 percent or higher.
2. A revision does NOT guarantee a higher grade. You must show significant improvement in order to earn a higher grade.

3. The final grade for the assignment will be an average of the grades you received on the first and second draft.
4. No revisions will be permitted for the final story or the event story.
5. Revisions will be due one week after you receive feedback.

### Late Assignment Policy

Journalists must meet strict deadlines. In keeping with that standard, all work for this course must be turned in on time. Work not handed in AT THE BEGINNING of the class period during which it is due will be considered late. A late assignment will be lowered by a letter grade for each 24-hour period it is late. This policy applies to ALL work produced for this class.

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+	64-66% = D	60-63% = 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 is permitted to be used during class, unless it is a required assistive technology.

**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 work week. Please leave at least 24 hours for a response.

**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. See the student handbook for University policies regarding plagiarism and other issues of academic honesty.

## Course Schedule

This schedule reflects major readings and writing assignments. **Additional writing, reading and research assignments WILL BE REQUIRED throughout the semester.** I may make changes to this schedule as I see fit to meet the needs of the class.

Journals are due MONDAYS and Original Stories are due Wednesdays. During the second half of the semester when you are working on your original news stories, we may not need to meet for every class. When this occurs, I will give you class time to work on your stories and will announce these “workshop” days at the appropriate time.

Week	Topic	Readings Due	Major Assignments (Original Stories Due Thursdays)	Journals (Tuesdays)
Jan. 23/25	Introduction & Ice Breaker			
Jan. 30/Feb. 1	News Values	Mencher 1,2,3		
Feb. 6/8	Writing the Lead	Mencher 5	Summary Lead Exercises	J1
Feb. 13/15	Writing the Lead (continued)		Summary & Soft Lead Exercises	J2
Feb. 20/22	Inverted Pyramid	Mencher 6, 7	Basic News Story Fact Sheets	J3
Feb. 27/Mar 1	Inverted Pyramid Basic Grammar	Mencher 11, 12, 13	Basic News Story Fact Sheets Grammar Exercises	J4
Mar 6/8	Interviewing Skills AP Style	Mencher 14, 15	Basic News Story Fact Sheets AP Style Exercises	J5
Mar 13/15	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK	
Mar 20/22	Introduce Original Story 1 Wednesday: Ideas Due	Mencher 18, 19		
Mar 27/29		Mencher 20		J6
Apr 3/5	Introduce Original Story 2 Wednesday: Ideas Due	Mencher 21	Story 1 Due	J7
Apr 10/12		Mencher 22		J8
Apr 17/19	Introduce Original Story 3 Wednesday: Ideas Due	Mencher 23	Story 2 Due	J9
Apr 24/26		Mencher 24		J10
May 1/3		Mencher 25,26		J11
May 8/10			Story 3 Due	

Story 4: For this assignment, you will be required to attend, report on, and write about an event occurring on campus or in the community beginning the week after Spring Break that is relevant to readers of the *Pointer*. Let me know which event you have chosen to cover. Once I approve it, you may begin work on the story. The event story will be due one week after the event you are covering or no later than May 10, whichever comes first.