

JOU 3101: NEWS REPORTING

Spring 2017 (3 credit hours)

Report, don't repeat.

What is this course?

Instructor: Ethan Magoc, emagoc@ufl.edu, 352-294-1525 (office in Weimer Hall Room 2300)

Office hours: Fridays by appointment via e-Learning's Conferences. Because this is a virtual course, I provide this weekly chance to discuss your work and any reporting problems you're facing — face to face.

Course website: <http://lss.at.ufl.edu>

How can you ask questions? Post general course questions on e-Learning so all may learn the answers. Send questions specific to your grades to me by email.

Required textbook: None. Required readings will be made available to you for free. The tradeoff? You must actually READ them. And yes, there will be quizzes.

The university's course description: Instruction and practice reporting and writing basic news stories. Emphasizes style, clarity, accuracy and responsibility in handling news.

Our course description: You'll learn to read the news, find story ideas, talk to strangers, and write a clear and compelling story someone would actually want to read and share.

Prerequisite: JOU 3109C Multimedia Writing

Our purpose: Even if you never plan to work as a reporter, you must know how to write a story or press release that will grab the attention of your audience. To gain that skill, we will spend considerable time in the coming weeks learning how to:

- Articulate who your audience is and what it seeks to know.
- Develop ways of finding ideas your audience cares about.
- Translate your audience's curiosities into reportable questions.
- Compare story pitches for their value to an audience and degree of difficulty.
- Find interesting people and ask thought-provoking questions.
- Conduct research and organize findings into logical pieces to form a narrative.
- Analyze the best way to tell a story.
- Assemble story components in a consistent and cohesive order.
- Experiment with alternative ways of producing stories.
- Describe what the human brain seeks in a story.
- Use language to describe and show, not tell, an audience your reporting insights.
- Analyze metrics that show whether a story found an engaged audience.

This is a professional course: It's unlike many you have taken or will take at the University of Florida. You cannot learn how to report by sitting in front of your computer screen or by reading a book. You must call people on the phone, visit people and places in person, and write what you have learned — often on deadline. Quoting people from others' published articles does not count.

How I teach: There are 15 modules available in e-Learning for you to complete. Inside each module is a lecture and a variety of assignments. All are designed to get you thinking about ways to find and tell stories.

Three ways to survive and thrive:

1. Make frequent use of the e-Learning discussion board, particularly to give us an introduction early on and to follow readings.
2. Show up. This is college. No one is checking to make sure you log in each week, absorb the lectures, and spend time with the readings. Whether you do or do not will be obvious in the quality of work you produce.
3. Be nice. The Internet can be a mean place, but that is not true in this friendly corner of the Internet. We're all here to learn. You will follow rules of common courtesy in email messages, threaded discussions, and chats. In providing peer feedback, you will be tough on the writing, but never the person. Follow the golden rule; be good to each other.

University of Florida policies

On missing assignments: Requirements for completing coursework are consistent with university policies that can be found at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

On accommodating students with disabilities: Students requesting accommodation for disabilities must first register with the Dean of Students Office (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>). The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation. You must submit this documentation prior to submitting assignments or taking the quizzes or exams. Accommodations are not retroactive, therefore, students should contact the office as soon as possible in the term for which they are seeking accommodations.

On academic misconduct (i.e. cheating): Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. This is even more important if you're planning to tell true stories. You should be sure you understand the Honor Code, found at <http://bit.ly/dontcheatUF>.

IF YOU ARE FOUND TO HAVE FABRICATED OR CHEATED ANY PART OF AN ASSIGNMENT, YOU WILL FAIL THIS COURSE. I WILL THEN WORK TO HAVE YOU EXPELLED FROM THE COLLEGE OF JOURNALISM AND MASS COMMUNICATIONS. The end.

Getting help: For issues with technical difficulties for E-learning in e-Learning, please contact the UF Help Desk at: learning-support@ufl.edu or (352) 392-HELP - select option 2 or <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>. Other resources, including the process for you to make a complaint about this course, are available at <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/>.

You matter.

Your well-being is important to the University of Florida. The U Matter, We Care initiative is committed to creating a culture of care on our campus by encouraging members of our community to look out for one another and to reach out for help if a member of our community is in need. If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu so that the U Matter, We Care Team can reach out to the student in distress. A nighttime and weekend crisis counselor is available by phone at 352-392-1575. The U Matter, We Care Team can help connect students to the many other helping resources available including, but not limited to, Victim Advocates, Housing staff, and the Counseling and Wellness Center. Please remember that asking for help is a sign of strength. In case of emergency, call 9-1-1.

The work

Grading scale: 100-90 A; 89-80 B; 79-70 C; 69-60 D; 59-below E.

(Follows these policies: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>)

| Assignment (how many) | Percentage | Points |
|-------------------------|------------|--------|
| Audience research (1) | 10% | 100 |
| Weekly discussions (10) | 10% | 100 |
| Story pitches (5) | 20% | 100 |
| Quick hits (16) | 20% | 300 |
| Stories (4) | 40% | 400 |

- **Audience research:** To effectively communicate in any job, you must know your audience. You will therefore draft a 300-word memo based on responses from people in your community about who would read the stories you will be pitching and writing. Why would they care about what you want to report?
- **Weekly discussions:** You will find, read, and post one interesting *local or regional news* story by Friday for 5 weeks. Tell us in at least 100 words what's newsworthy about it in the news outlet's community, what about the writing is interesting, and one facet you noticed about the reporting (or, how the author found the information). Choose a different classmate's posting each week and explain in at least 100 words why you did or did not like the story's reporting. To help you get the hang of this, I will join the discussion early and often.
- **Story pitches:** Each week for five weeks, you pitch a story idea to the class discussion board. These story ideas must focus on a local community. Tell us how or where you found the idea, why it's newsworthy and why your audience would want to read it.
- **Quick hits:** A mix of 5-question quizzes and basic journalistic exercises, such as an interview.
- **Stories:** Four stories of at least 300 words — hard news, personality profile, public meeting or speech coverage, and alternate story format such as a Q&A, live tweet, explainer, newsletter, investigative, or other approved format.

The schedule

Module 1 (Jan. 4 to 8)

- Topic: Welcome

- Assignment 1: Post to the discussion board a 100-word introduction of yourself, your writing experience and your future aspirations (due Friday, Jan. 6 at 6 p.m.).
- Assignment 2: Quiz on the syllabus (due Friday, Jan. 6 at 6 p.m.)

Module 2 (Jan. 9 to 15)

- Topic: Audience research
- Readings: [“Questions are the new comments”](#) by Jennifer Brandel and [“Engaged Journalism”](#) by Jeff Andrews.
- Assignment 1: Post local news story to discussion board (due Friday at 6 p.m.) and comment on a classmate’s post (due Sunday at noon).
- Assignment 2: Quiz on readings (due Friday at 6 p.m.).

Module 3 (Jan. 17 to 22)

- Topic: The pitch
- Readings: [“6 questions... before pitching a story”](#) by Tom Huang/Poytner and [“10 Journalism Rules... About Content Marketing”](#) by Adam de Jong.
- Assignment 1: Post local news story to discussion board (due Friday at 6 p.m.) and comment on a classmate’s post (due Sunday at noon).
- Assignment 2: Audience research memo (due Friday at 6 p.m.).
- Assignment 3: Story pitch (due Friday at 6 p.m.). "Like" one classmate's story pitch (due Sunday at noon).

Module 4 (Jan. 23 to 29)

- Topic: What’s news, what’s not news, and how to find a hook
- Reading: [“What Is News”](#) from *The News Manual* by David Ingram.
- Assignment 1: Post local news story to discussion board (due Friday at 6 p.m.) and comment on a classmate’s post (due Sunday at noon).
- Assignment 2: Quiz on the reading (due Friday at 6 p.m.).
- Assignment 3: Story pitch (due Friday at 6 p.m.). "Like" one classmate's story pitch (due Sunday at noon).

Module 5 (Jan. 30 to Feb. 5)

- Topic: Research
- Readings: Browse the [“Reporting & Public Records” section](#) of Berkeley's tutorials and determine how to conduct similar searches in your community.
- Assignment 1: Post local news story to discussion board (due Friday at 6 p.m.) and comment on a classmate’s post (due Sunday at noon).
- Assignment 2: Background a local elected official using public records searches, social media, Internet articles and any other publicly-available information; produce a 200-word memo summarizing the most important information you learned and include a list of links or documents referenced (due Friday at 6 p.m.).
- Assignment 3: Story pitch (due Friday at 6 p.m.). "Like" one classmate's story pitch (due Sunday at noon).

Module 6 (Feb. 6 to 12)

- Topic: Sourcing and interviewing
- Readings: [“NPR’s On-Air Source Diversity”](#) and [“The Art of the Interview”](#) by Ann Friedman/Columbia Journalism Review.
- Assignment 1: Quiz on the readings (due Friday at 6 p.m.).
- Assignment 2: Find someone interesting in your community who’s willing to be interviewed either about their life story or an important issue (due Friday at 6 p.m.).
- Assignment 3: Story pitch (due Friday at 6 p.m.). "Like" one classmate's story pitch (due Sunday at noon).

Module 7 (Feb. 13 to 19)

- Topic: Sourcing and interviewing
- Reading: [“Terry Gross and the Art of Opening Up”](#) by Susan Burton/The New York Times.
- Assignment 1: Complete quiz on the reading (due Friday at 6 p.m.).
- Assignment 2: Interview someone interesting in your community who’s willing to be interviewed about their life story or an important issue. Record and submit at least five minutes of audio (due Friday at 6 p.m.).
- Assignment 3: Story pitch (due Friday at 6 p.m.). "Like" one classmate's story pitch (due Sunday at noon).

Module 8 (Feb. 20 to 26)

- Topic: Writing a lede and a nutgraf
- Readings: [Chapter 3 of “Inside Reporting”](#) by Tim Harrower.
- Assignment 1: Post local news story to discussion board (due Friday at 6 p.m.) and comment on a classmate’s post (due Sunday at noon).
- Assignment 2: Complete quiz on the reading (due Friday at 6 p.m.).

Module 9 (Feb. 27 to March 3)

- Topic: Structuring and styling your story
- Readings: [“The Elements of Style”](#) Chapters 8 through 18 by Strunk and White.
- Assignment 1: Post local news story to discussion board (due Friday at 6 p.m.). No comment required.
- Assignment 2: Complete practice breaking news story exercise (due Friday at 6 p.m.).

Module 10 (March 13 to 19)

- Topic: Alternative story forms Part 1 (Q&A’s and live tweeting)
- Readings: [“NPR’s Interview with President Obama.”](#) [“Suggestions \(but not standards\) for live tweeting”](#) by Steve Buttry, and an ethically-questionable bonus reading: [“Man live tweets couple’s dramatic break up at Burger King.”](#)
- Assignment 1: Post local news story to discussion board (due Friday at 6 p.m.) and comment on a classmate’s post (due Sunday at noon).
- Assignment 2: Submit hard news story (due Friday at 6 p.m.).

Module 11 (March 20 to 26)

- Topic: Storytelling and our brains
- Readings: [“The Science of Storytelling”](#) by Leo Widrich/LifeHacker and [“Why and how to use it in your marketing”](#) by Brianne Carlon Rush/The Guardian.
- Assignment 1: Post local news story to discussion board (due Friday at 6 p.m.) and comment on a classmate’s post (due Sunday at noon).
- Assignment 2: Complete quiz on the readings (due Friday at 6 p.m.).

Module 12 (March 27 to April 2)

- Topic: Alternative story forms Part 2 (explainers and investigations)
- Readings: Choose and [read one of BuzzFeed’s 9 best 2015 investigations](#), choose and [read a Vox explainer](#), and read [WUFT’s investigation into medical marijuana growers’ claims](#).
- Assignment 1: Post local news story to discussion board (due Friday at 6 p.m.) and comment on a classmate’s post (due Sunday at noon).
- Assignment 2: Submit personality profile (due Friday at 6 p.m.).

Module 13 (April 3 to 9)

- Topic: Sharing your story and analytics
- Readings: [“Building an analytics culture in a newsroom”](#) by Nieman Lab.
- Assignment 1: Post local news story to discussion board (due Friday at 6 p.m.) and comment on a classmate’s post (due Sunday at noon).
- Assignment 2: Answer five questions using a news website’s analytics. (due Friday at 6 p.m.)
- Assignment 3: Submit public meeting or speech coverage story (due Friday at 6 p.m.).

Module 14 (April 10 to 16)

- Topic: Editing
- Assignment 1: Submit alternative format story (due Friday at 6 p.m.).
- Assignment 2: Edit the practice stories on e-Learning using our 3-part fact-checking method (due Friday at 6 p.m.).

Module 15 (April 17 to 23)

- Topic: How to get a job telling stories
- Assignment 1: Create or update your resume (due Wednesday at 6 p.m.).
- Assignment 2: Complete suggested revisions of your four submitted stories and re-submit them using e-Learning (due Wednesday at 6 p.m.).

One more thing

Disclaimer: This syllabus represents our current plans and objectives. As we go through the semester, those plans may need to change to enhance the class learning opportunity. Such changes — communicated clearly — are not unusual and should be expected.