

JOU 3015: Principles of Journalism

Spring 2026

Tue. Period 7 (1:55 p.m. – 2:45 p.m.)

Thur. Periods 7 – 8 (1:55 p.m. – 3:50 p.m.)

Florida Gym 0230

Instructor:

Professor Janet Coats

Managing Director of the Consortium on Trust in Media & Technology

janetcoats@ufl.edu 1200 Weimer Hall, 352-392-0466

Office Hours: 1-3 p.m. on Wednesdays and by appointment
--

Writing Mechanics Module Instructor:

Renee Martin-Kratzer, *adjunct instructor*, reneemk@ufl.edu

Course Description

In this course, students learn about the role and function of journalism in a democratic society, legal and ethical issues in journalism, economic challenges and the changing landscape of the media industry. They will read examples of important pieces of American journalism and articles exploring current issues in journalism. Students will learn about the major principles of journalistic practice, values of journalists and be introduced to techniques used by journalists to cover society.

Course Objectives:

- Explain how and why journalism matters today to a self-governing society
- Explain the core principles of journalism and how they differ from the fields that value advocacy
- Describe enterprise and exclusive content worth paying for
- Explain and compare evolving fields and careers

Course text and readings:

Readings as selected by the instructor will be updated as PDFs on the Canvas learning system throughout the semester. There is no required text to purchase for this course. A list of the readings is available in Canvas in the weeks leading up to each reading quiz and in the syllabus below.

Equipment and Supplies:

Students should be equipped to take notes in each class. Please check to ensure your devices are fully charged for our in-class exams and writing assignments.

Course Communication:

All course correspondence will be sent through Canvas. Make sure you have set up your Canvas preferences to alert you to new activities in your courses to an e-mail you check frequently. If you have questions for your instructors, you may use the Canvas system to e-mail them, or contact us via the addresses above. Your email should

include your name, the course number JOU3015 and be as specific as possible with your query.

Grading

News Quizzes (13 at 10 points each; <i>The lowest three grades will be dropped.</i>)	100 points
Reading Quizzes (five at 30 points each)	150 points
Journalism Today Assignment	150 points
Writing Mechanics Module	100 points
Exams	500 points
Total Possible Points	1,000 points

Assignments

News Quizzes: One of the fundamental parts about being a journalist, communicator and citizen is to know the news. Every class, you will be given a short 10-point news quiz based on current events. Of the 13 news quizzes, you will drop the lowest three. ***You must be present in class to take the quiz.*** If you read/consume news from the major news outlets (New York Times, Wall Street Journal, CNN, Washington Post, USA Today, NPR, etc...), as well as local sources (WUFT, Alligator), you will have success on the news quizzes. We will go over news sources to use in more detail during our first class.

Reading Quizzes: Readings will consist of material about journalism. Each 30-point quiz will be open all day on the Wednesday it is assigned, so you may take it at your convenience. You may use the readings/notes, but not other people.

Quiz dates:

- Jan. 22
- Feb. 5
- March 5
- March 26
- April 16

Journalism Today Assignment: You will select one of the available readings designated for this assignment to analyze through the principles of the course. The writing assignment will be completed in class to simulate deadline writing experience. The Journalism Today assignment is valued at 150 points.

- April 9, IN CLASS

Writing Mechanics Module: To prepare for the rigorous writing of the curriculum (and professions), this module is designed to assess basic writing mechanics (grammar, clarity, precision, style). Follow the directions for the module, which will include small assessments and one writing assignment. Questions about this module should be directed toward Prof. Martin-Kratzer at reneemk@ufl.edu.

Exams: Exams are based on material from **instructor lectures and guest speakers only** (not reading, not news). You take the exams IN CLASS, and you may use your

notes, but not other sources (other people, AI programs). There is no comprehensive final. Each exam will be equally weighted at 125 points.

Exam dates:

- Jan. 30
- Feb. 19
- March 12
- April 21

Makeup exams and quizzes are done in accordance with UF policy. **We will not provide makeup opportunities for the news quiz; those must be done in class.** If you have accommodations for extra time on your exam, see the instructor about arrangements.

Extra Credit Opportunities: Two extra credit opportunities will be offered during the semester and will be discussed in class.

Grading Policies

This course follows standard UF grading policies. If applicable, grade total is rounded to nearest point. <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

1,000 to 930	A	799 to 760	C+
929 to 900	A-	759 to 730	C
899 to 860	B+	729 to 700	C-
859 to 830	B	699 to 660	D+
829 to 800	B-	660 to 600	D
		Below 599	E

Attendance at all class meetings is strongly suggested. Absences due to illness, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements, etc., will be handled in accordance with UF policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>

We'll move quickly in class, and there won't be time to zone out. Stay engaged. Keep multitasking to a minimum. Join the conversation. Participate fully in group and class work.

Course Schedule

Date	Session	Assignments Due
Week 1	Introduction and the Role of Journalism in a Democratic Society	

	<p>Journalism does more than keep us informed — journalism enables us as citizens to have our voices heard in the chambers of power and allows us to monitor and moderate the sources of power that shape our lives. In the past few decades this responsibility of the journalist in a free society has been made more vital and more difficult by the revolution in communications technology and the economic organization of journalism it has spawned. –Pew Research Center</p>	
Week 2	<p>Forms & Function of Journalism and The Rules of Engagement</p> <p>Journalism does not just include one form. This week will explore the various kinds of journalism—ranging from news stories to investigative pieces to narrative storytelling, all done in a variety of platforms (audio, video, written, etc...). What is the function of each form and how do they relate to audience?</p> <p>What are the main principles that journalists abide by? Accuracy, truth, fairness will be explored as principles and as shown in practice. How have they changed and how has the notion of bias, objectivity and neutrality evolved? News values—how news items are decided and prioritized—will be covered.</p>	Reading Quiz 1
Week 3	<p>Journalism Trust & Credibility</p> <p>Trust of journalism is at an all-time low, and the industry is wrestling with how to deal with it. In a democracy, where journalism is needed as a watchdog, what happens to that role when part of the population does not believe in the product? How did this happen and what is the industry doing to combat it?</p>	Exam 1
Week 4	<p>Case Study: Covering Breaking News</p> <p>News organizations covering breaking news face many of the challenges we discuss in this class: Accuracy, transparency, working on deadline, use of violent images, social media and AI-generated misinformation. We discuss these issues and your experience of breaking news coverage.</p>	Reading Quiz 2
Week 5	<p>Ethics</p> <p>What do we mean by ethical behavior in journalism? What are the core principles that endure across time and subject matter? How do changing media, methods and audience expectations affect the ways we think about ethics?</p>	
Week 6	<p>Comprehensive News Coverage: Representing All Communities</p>	Exam 2

	Comprehensive news coverage ensures full representation across all aspects of journalism. What does that look like? What is it important for trust, engagement and business strategy?	
Week 7	How Reporters Work: Practices and Tools This week covers the tactics and tools that reporters use to gather information and produce stories. We'll look at public records, documents, interviewing practices, as well as other techniques, such as observational reporting. We will also look at the structure of news organizations—from idea to reporter to editor to publication/airing.	
Week 8	Local and Community News Local news remains the most trusted form of journalism, but it has faced economic challenges throughout this century that have decimated newsrooms. Does local news have a future? What could that future look like?	Reading Quiz 3
Week 9	Specialty Reporting The principles and practices of journalism apply no matter the subject. But different topics can require adjustments in approach and present special challenges. This week, we'll explore specialty subjects such as sports, environmental reporting and other topical approaches.	
Week 10	Spring Break	
Week 11	The First Amendment and Legal Issues An overview of the most important legal issues that reporters need to know, including libel, defamation, copyright, consent on recording, public meetings. We'll also discuss how reporters cover First Amendment issues.	Exam 3
Week 12	Economics and Disrupting Models of Journalism We will discuss contemporary influences and forces acting on the journalism industry, conducting journalism and other issues facing journalists. We'll advance journalism thinking beyond the traditional methods and explore what journalism skills can open for future careers.	Reading Quiz 4
Week 13	In Class Writing Assignment: Story Analysis During this class period, you'll write your story analysis essay. You'll choose from a list of options that you can	

	review well in advance. You can prepare an outline for your essay in advance, but writing will occur in class.	
Week 14	AI and Journalism AI's impact on journalism practices and the ways audiences consume information is no longer theoretical. We'll talk about how AI is being used in journalism, ways it is impacting how consumers find news and the threats it presents for trust.	Reading Quiz 5
Week 15	What's Next for You A look ahead into career opportunities for young journalists.	Exam 4

If there is a conflict in dates for topics, assignments, exams or quizzes between this document and Canvas, consider Canvas the most up-to-date.

Course Reading Assignments: All Assignments Will Be in Canvas in PDF format

Reading Quiz	Readings
Reading Quiz 1 – Jan. 22	Elements of Journalism overview - Rosenstiel et al. "A Free People Need A Free Press" – A.G. Sulzberger, The New York Times "Is Objectivity Still Worth Pursuing?" – Julie Gerstein and Margaret Sullivan, Columbia Journalism Review
Reading Quiz 2 – Feb. 5	"To Rebuild Trust in Local News, Start With Civic Habits, Not Political Labels" – Patrick Johnson, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel "Choose Your News with Confidence" – The Trust Project "Storm Forecasts Have Never Been More Accurate. Meteorologists Say They've Never Faced So Much Pushback" – Evan Bush and Randi Richardson, NBC News
Reading Quiz 3 – March 5	"Americans' Changing Relationship With Local News" – Pew Research Center "How Do Audiences Really Engage With News?" – Jacob Nelson, Columbia Journalism Review "Can The Washington Post TikTok Guy Make It Without The Post?" – Benjamin Mullin, The New York Times

Reading Quiz 4 – March 26	<p>“How they did it: Washington Post reporters reveal FEMA failures, denial of disaster aid to Black families in the South” – Denise-Marie Ordway, The Journalist’s Resource</p> <p>“Cheat Sheet: Climate Solutions Reporting Guide” – Covering Climate Now</p> <p>“How Local Reporters Manage the Dangers of Covering Extremism” – Liam Scott, Columbia Journalism Review</p>
Reading Quiz 5 – April 16	<p>“The Rise of AI Local News” – Roberto Ferdman, Columbia Journalism Review</p> <p>“The End of Publishing As We Know It” – Alex Reisner, The Atlantic</p> <p>“How Much Do Podcasters Really Earn?” – Jessica Testa, The New York Times</p>

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluations: Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluer.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>

Academic Integrity

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, *“We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code.”* On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: *“On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”* The Honor Code (<https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor.

Using an AI-content generator such as ChatGPT or other large language model tool to complete assignment without proper attribution violates academic integrity. By submitting assignments in this class, you pledge to affirm that they are your own work and you attribute use of any tools and sources.

Course Etiquette

All members of the class are expected to follow rules of common courtesy in all email messages, threaded discussions and chats.

In-class recording: Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

Campus Resources

For issues with technical difficulties for Canvas, please contact the UF Help Desk at:
<http://helpdesk.ufl.edu>
(352) 392-HELP (4357)
Walk-in: HUB 132

Any requests for make-ups due to technical issues must be accompanied by the ticket number received from the Help Desk when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You must e-mail your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-up.

Other resources are available at <http://www.distance.ufl.edu/getting-help> for:

- ☐ Counseling and Wellness resources
- ☐ Disability resources
- ☐ Resources for handling student concerns and complaints
- ☐ Library Help Desk support

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352 392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to the student.

Counseling and Wellness Center: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>, 392-1575; and the University
Police Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies.

Sexual Assault Recovery Services: Student Health Care Center, 392-1161.

University Police Department: 392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
<http://www.police.ufl.edu/>

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support, 352-392-4357 (select option 2) or e-mail to Learningsupport@ufl.edu. <https://lss.at.ufl.edu/help.shtml>

Career Connections Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601. Career assistance and counseling. <https://career.ufl.edu/>

Library Support, <http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask>. Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center, Broward Hall, 392-2010 or 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring. <http://teachingcenter.ufl.edu/>

Writing Studio, 302 Tigert Hall, 846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers. <http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

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.*

About the Instructor

Janet Coats

Coats has been at the forefront of the seismic shifts in journalism and information culture over the last 30 years. She's led large multimedia news organizations, done groundbreaking work in civic engagement and reader outreach, and built her own consulting company focused on engagement and sustainability strategies for non-profit and entrepreneurial news organizations. She's held leadership positions at several news organizations, including the Sarasota Herald-Tribune, the Tampa Tribune and WFLA-News Channel 8 in Tampa. She was dean of faculty at The Poynter Institute. She's served on the Pulitzer Prize jury five times. She is now the managing director of the Consortium on Trust in Media and Technology at the College of Journalism and Communications.