

JOU 4313 SPORTS REPORTING

Adj. Prof. Zach Abolverdi

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 1-3 PM. Please call/text (352) 283-3253.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

This course drills down on interview and writing techniques, with an emphasis on writing quickly and vibrantly across multiple media platforms. Includes game and press conference coverage, interviewing techniques and content creation. This course is designed to broaden and deepen a student's understanding of effective sports reporting and to sharpen and develop the student's writing, reporting and other skills required in today's industry.

COURSE GOALS

- To expose you to multiple forms of sports reporting and improve your skill set.
- To learn techniques used by sports reporters and apply them to your career.
- To produce original content of professional quality across various genres.

COURSE TOPICS

Techniques

Understanding audiences
Reporting/developing sources
Asking questions, getting quotes
Developing your voice, style
Creating story ideas, content plans
Working on deadline

Genres

Game coverage (previews, recaps, sidebars)
New coverages (original vs. aggregation)
Commentary and analysis
Writing features, profiles
Multimedia: Video, podcasts
Alternative story types

READING

- The Associated Press StyleBook; recommended
- Assigned stories for class discussions. Stay on top of the news, especially UF athletics.

GRADING

You will be graded on a 1,500-point scale:

A: 93-100%	(1,395–1,500)	C: 73-76.9%	(1,095–1,154)
A-: 90-92.9%	(1,350–1,394)	C-: 70-72.9%	(1,050–1,094)
B+: 87-89.9%	(1,305–1,349)	D+: 67-69.9%	(1,005–1,049)
B: 83-86.9%	(1,245–1,304)	D: 63-66.9%	(945-1,004)
B-: 80-82.9%	(1,200–1,244)	D-: 60-62.9%	(900-944)
C+: 77-79.9%	(1,155-1,199)	F: 59.9%	(Below 899)

NOTE: Lectures and assignment details will be posted on Tuesday of each week.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Jan. 13) – Introduction: Overview of the course and syllabus.

Week 2 (Jan. 20) – Understanding audience; What makes a good sports story?; Leads to stories. AP Style guidelines.

Week 3 (Jan. 27) – Game coverage; Gamers for today's readers; Traditional stories (recaps/sidebars), Social media (live), multimedia (video/audio). (*CLASS ASSIGNMENT 1*)

Week 4 (Feb. 3) – Breaking news, deadline writing and building sources; Aggregation and attribution. (*CLASS ASSIGNMENT 2*)

Week 5 (Feb. 10) – Beat coverage: Developing ideas, prioritizing stories and content planning. (*CLASS GUEST*)

Week 6 (Feb. 17) – Before the game (previews, analysis); Sports betting coverage and impact. (*LIVE ASSIGNMENT 1*)

Week 7 (Feb. 24) – Social media: Live tweeting, Reaching audiences and developing your own brand (*LIVE ASSIGNMENT 2*)

Week 8 (March 3) – Covering a press conference; Q&A techniques; Getting (and using) quotes; What's a good quote? (*CLASS ASSIGNMENT 3*)

Week 9 (March 10) – Reported storytelling: short features, profiles, longform; working with editors. Pitching stories. (*CLASS GUEST*)

Week 10 (March 17) – Spring Break

Week 11 (March 24) – Sports commentary/analysis. Column writing and opinion pieces. (*CLASS ASSIGNMENT 4*)

Week 12 (March 31) – Alternative story examples: listicles, trend and explanatory pieces.

Week 13 (April 7) – Podcasts and sports talk radio. (*CLASS GUEST*)

Week 14 (April 14) – Reporting on serious issues (injuries, concussions, legal and ethics); FOIA requests and contract releases. (*CLASS ASSIGNMENT 5*)

Week 15 (April 21) – No Lecture ... Reviewing your assignments and final project individually. (*FINAL DUE MAY 1*)

ASSIGNMENT BREAKDOWN (1,500 points)

600 points: Live Assignments

500 points: Class Assignments

300 points: Final Project

100 points: Participation/Attendance/Professionalism

4 Live Assignments (600 points)

Live Assignment 1: Game preview with sports betting slant (Week 6)

Live Assignment 2: Live tweeting a game (Week 7)

Live Assignment 3: Live game coverage (200 points)

Live Assignment 4: Live game coverage (200 points)

NOTE: There will be times that you are assigned to cover games or media availability on varying days and at night.

5 Class Assignments (500 points)

We will have five in-class assignments designed to sharpen a skill for sports reporting, including AP Style, proper writing practices/techniques, sports knowledge, breaking news and commentary/analysis. One assignment will involve covering a press conference from class, transcribing the audio as a group and writing on deadline. Details will be provided before each assignment.

Class Assignment 1: Proper writing practices/techniques (Week 3)

Class Assignment 2: Breaking news on deadline (Week 4)

Class Assignment 3: Covering a mock press conference (Week 8)

Class Assignment 4: Writing a column or analysis (Week 11)

Class Assignment 5: FOIA requests and contract releases (Week 14)

Final Project (300 points)

An in-depth feature/profile or enterprise story. Minimum 1,000 words. You must have a minimum of two sources you *personally* interviewed. Attributed quotes do not count. You are allowed to use quotes and interviews from the two games you cover. Final due May 1.

Participation/Professionalism (100 points)

You are expected to read, watch and complete all of the course content. Points will be deducted at the instructor's discretion for chronic lateness, being disengaged online and failure to participate in class discussions.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- Directly email me your final project and two live game stories, which students will complete at different times. Everything else will be submitted via Canvas.

DEDUCTIONS

Journalism is a deadline business. This course is designed to mirror the expected behavior of a professional newsroom. They're called deadlines for a reason.

Failure to meet assignment deadlines will result in a 20-point deduction in the first 24-hour period it's late. Late assignments beyond 24 hours may not be accepted, and could be graded as a zero, unless an emergency can be documented. If an illness or a personal emergency prevents you from completing an assignment on time, advance notice and written documentation will be required. If advance notice is not possible because of a true emergency, written documentation will be required ASAP.

Fact errors – misspelled names, incorrect stats, wrong titles, inaccurate information – will result in a significant deduction at instructor's discretion, depending on the scope of the error(s) and assignment. At a minimum, any fact error is at least a 15-point deduction. Check the names in your story. Then double check them.

COURSE GUESTS

The class will include guest speakers. In the interest of honest and frank discussions, my lectures and comments of guest speakers are strictly off-the-record. This means that they may not be published in any format, either in a print publication or on a web site, personal blog or social media.

A NOTE ABOUT AI

Does AI belong in journalism? In this class, it does not. You are here to learn, improve and get more reps, so my No. 1 expectation for you is to simply do your own work. Don't take the easy way out.

In the real world, you would be fired (or be forced to resign) if you turned in a piece of work to your editors with your name on it that was written or had significant elements generated by AI. Major companies have been embarrassed by using AI and passing it off as human work. And jobs have been eliminated across the industry.

In this class, I will randomly pick certain stories over the course of the semester and run them through multiple AI checkers. If assignments are flagged as generated by AI by each detector (over a percentage determined by your instructor), the assignment will not be accepted.. You may receive a 0 for assignment plus a half-letter grade deduction from your final grade. Using AI is akin to plagiarism. And that is one of the biggest sins in journalism. Do your own work. If you have any degree of uncertainty, please ask.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY/HONOR CODE

Additionally, academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Violations of the honor code include plagiarizing material from other sources, fabricating material or using any work done by another person for a class assignment. See the Department of Journalism website, as well as UF guidelines, for specific outline of honor code violations.

UF Student Honor Code: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

Any violations of this code will be reported to the Dean of Students. Failure to comply with this commitment will result in disciplinary action compliant with the UF Student Honor Code Procedures.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

This is a workshop-style class in which we will all contribute ideas and critiques of others' work and ideas. Please use professional courtesy. Turn cell phones off. No texting (or checking your phone) in class. If you need to use your phone, please leave the room to do so. Bring laptops to class.

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, respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.ua.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.

CLASSROOM NEEDS

Students requesting special classroom needs must first register with the Dean of Students Office, which will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide the documentation to the instructor.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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 that must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this process as early as possible in the semester. Course Evaluations Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on a minimum of 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last three weeks of the semester, but announcements will be made giving specific times when they are open. Summary results of these evaluations are available to students at the evaluations website URL above. Course Grading Students will be graded in accordance with UF policies for assigning grade points as articulated in the link that follows. <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

U MATTER, WE CARE

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 INSTRUCTOR

Zach Abolverdi is the *Gators Online* Senior Writer for On3.com and Sports Reporting Adjunct Professor at the University of Florida. Orlando born but Gainesville raised, he grew up on college football during the Steve Spurrier era and started his sports journalism career in 2010 prior to Urban Meyer's final season with the Gators. Zach has won an APSE Award and a Hearst Award. He graduated from University of Florida's College of Journalism in 2014 and spent a total of seven years at the Gainesville Sun (2010-15, 2021), along with stops at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the Lake City Reporter and Rivals. Zach enjoys spending time with family and kayaking. SEC football, March Madness and NBA hoops provide his sports fix.