

Journalism As Literature

A graduate seminar at the University of Florida

Syllabus

JOU 6309 – Fall 2012

[“Reading maketh a full man; conference, a ready man; and writing, an exact man.”](#) — Francis Bacon

“Words are sacred. They deserve respect. If you get the right ones, in the right order, you can nudge the world a little.” — [Tom Stoppard](#)

[Link to Weekly Assignments](#)

Link to this blog: <http://litjournalism.wordpress.com/>

Instructor: Dr. Ronald R. Rodgers, Associate Professor

Email: rrodgers@jou.ufl.edu (But for this class, use the Sakai system only.) I will respond as soon as possible within 24 hours Monday through Friday

Meeting Times: Tuesdays 4:05-7:05 p.m.

Classroom: Weimer 1090

Office: 3058 Weimer Hall **Office phone:** 392-8847

Office Hours: See [Link to my schedule](#)

INTRODUCTION

“The difference between literature and journalism is that journalism is unreadable, and literature is not read.” – [Oscar Wilde \(1891\)](#)

This course lies at the crossroads of journalism and literature. During the next 15 weeks we will explore the journalistic, historical and critical tangents that make up the notion of literary journalism as we read and analyze some of the best reportage ever written. In the process of reading the works of many fine journalists, we will weigh how form and content work together to create great factual literature.

This course will look back as far as the 18th century at some of the literary antecedents to what Tom Wolfe – and others before and after him – have called the “New Journalism.” We will then read and analyze the works of many different literary journalists and commentators on literary journalism from the 19th century to our present day.

If nothing else, I hope this course will disabuse you of Mr. Wilde’s notion that journalism is unreadable. I know from my own experience – even as a former English Lit major – that these days I am more wont to read nonfiction than fiction. In fact, I know of one scholar who has noted that the [New York Review of Books](#) offers three reviews

of nonfiction to every one review of fiction. Certainly, not all of that nonfiction would be classified as literary journalism, but this does show you that fact-based journalism is the 600-pound gorilla of genres.

What we are interested in here is content – namely the writing of nonfiction using the techniques of the fictionists – a radical – and, some would say, an ill-conceived departure from journalistic norms.

This course has a six-pronged approach. It is a smorgasbord of delectables – all, or any one of which, I hope, you will find tasty. We will explore:

1. Literary journalism's historical antecedents – or should we say founders?
2. Literary journalism's future in the age of the connected computer.
3. The criticism literary journalism has received from friend and foe alike.
4. The theory behind this genre.
5. The techniques that comprise and define this genre.
6. Ways of toppling the inverted pyramid in developing our own individual writing styles using the techniques of literary journalism.

Everything we do in this course – the readings, my minimal lecture, your maximal discussion, the analysis and the writing – are intended to give you a historical perspective of journalism in general and its importance in society – especially as an armature for democracy, and especially literary journalism's ability to connect the multiple subjectivities in a multifarious society.

So, how will we do this? The answer is simple, the doing is difficult.

By reading and writing and reading and writing. For more, if you agree to accept this mission, read on.

OFFICE HOURS

I am available to you this semester – and beyond – to talk about this class, to talk about journalism and communications, to talk about your career, or to just talk. My office hours are listed on my schedule:

- [Link to my schedule](#)
- Or just stop by – my door is pretty much always open, and if I am in and I am free, we can talk.
- You should also note that I check my e-mail once in the morning and once in the evening Monday through Friday.

A Note about Office Hours: As much as humanly possible, I will be available during my office hours. If you come by during office hours and I'm not in, look for a note – I'm very likely to be back in 5 minutes or less. If you cannot meet with me during my office hours, please make an appointment. If you make an appointment and then can't keep

it, please call or email me as soon as possible to let me know. I have an answering machine on my office phone, and remember, if the answering machine picks up and you don't leave your telephone number or speak so rapidly that I can't decipher the number, I can't call you back!

EMAIL POLICY

- Use the Sakai e-learning email system **only** to ensure your email does not get lost in the spam folder or among other non-class emails. The email should be as specific as possible.
- You should also note that I check my email **once** in the morning and **once** in the evening Monday through Friday.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND SUPPLIES

Tools

- A laptop computer with a fully charged battery – bring to every class.
- A [WordPress](#) blog for **JOU 6309 Journalism as Literature** class using the [Journalist v1.9](#) theme. Post the url for your blog as a comment to [this post](#). Be sure to activate the link. In settings require all comments to be moderated before they become public. **Deadline:** By end of first class.

Books

- **Book 1:** [Hiroshima](#) by John Hersey. (Due Week 4)
- **Book 2:** [In Cold Blood](#) by Truman Capote. (Due Week 8)
- **Book 3:** [The Things They Carried](#) by Tim O'Brien. (Due Week 12)
- [The Art of Fact: A Historical Anthology of Literary Journalism](#), Kevin Kerrane and Ben Yagoda (editors), Simon & Schuster, Touchstone Books, 1998. Abbreviation: **AOF**
- [Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University](#). The country's most prominent journalists and nonfiction authors gather each year at Harvard's Nieman Conference on Narrative Journalism. *Telling True Stories* presents their best advice – covering everything from finding a good topic, to structuring narrative stories, to writing and selling your first book. More than fifty well-known writers offer their most powerful tips
- Other selected readings, to be handed out in class, by web links or through [Sakai](#). If you are unfamiliar with Sakai or have any questions, check out the [e-Learning FAQs](#). If you encounter a problem while using e-Learning, you should immediately contact the Help Desk to get assistance.

Links

- **Here are some links to cheap books:** abebooks <http://www.abebooks.com/> & half.com by ebay <http://www.half.ebay.com/>

Also, as a writer you should familiarize yourself with:

1. 750words.com

2. Nieman Storyboard at www.niemanstoryboard.org
3. Nieman Storyboard's deconstruction of great writing – Why's This So Good? <http://www.niemanstoryboard.org/category/whys-this-so-good/>
4. Notable Narratives at www.niemanstoryboard.org/category/notable-narratives/.
5. Essays on Craft at www.niemanstoryboard.org/category/essays-on-craft/.
6. Narrative at <http://www.narrativemagazine.com/>
7. longform.org – a curated collection of great *longform* pieces formatted for single-click saving into Instapaper (but you can read on browser).
8. SportsFeat: Great sportswriting, handpicked at <http://www.sportsfeat.com/>
9. [Nearly 100 Fantastic Pieces of Journalism](#) This is largely a list of magazine articles, but you could use this to find book-length projects by any one of these writers.

Finally, log in to the **e-Learning Support Services** web site at <http://lss.at.ufl.edu>

HOW THIS COURSE WORKS

This course will be conducted as a reading seminar, one of many you will encounter as a graduate student. We are also going to run this class like a writing workshop. So you must first be here and then also be prepared to participate in the class discussion and writing workshops. Lack of preparation is reflected in your participation, and in my book, lack of preparation is nearly the same as being absent from class and will be graded in the same way. By the end of 15 weeks, I will have a pretty good handle on who participates and who does not. It is essential that you complete all the assigned readings for each class meeting. We may not discuss every reading in class, but you will be responsible for all the readings.

WRITTEN WORK & PRESENTATIONS & PARTICIPATION

1. Analyze This: A weekly question or two or more drawn from assigned readings and previous lectures and/or discussions. I normally allow only 15 minutes for this. You should expect a question or two from the syllabus the second week.

2. Short Writing Assignments: Throughout the course, you will be given several short assignments in and out of class. Post to your blog by deadline (your blog will time stamp the post). If done out of class, bring in hard copies of your writing – enough for each member of class. No first-person work in this class unless instructed to do so. We will briefly [workshop](#) these. **Note:** To understand how your writing will ultimately be graded, review: [General Grading Criteria for Nonfiction](#)

3. Deep-thinking discussion questions: Each member of the class is expected to post each week as comment to a blog post (link below) at least one question derived from the readings assigned for the day. Others can feel free to comment on any of the questions posted. In fact, I encourage that. Make sure you are not posting anonymously.

The question should target a point or points that should deal with the narrative nonfiction assigned for that week. It would also be made better by drawing on the history, theory, or writing readings. These questions are designed to focus your thinking and facilitate class discussion. The questions should be original to you alone and manifest deep, critical thinking on your part. Points off for being either superficial or overly complex and convoluted.

Slug your comment **Question for Week XX** Discussion questions must be **filed by 6 p.m. Sunday** before class.

Post as comment to this blog post: <http://litjournalism.wordpress.com/2012/04/18/deep-thinking-discussion-questions/>

4. Discussion Leaders: Each of you will be assigned times to lead the discussion of the week's reading. You will prepare a short no-more-than 10-minute presentation (I will cut you off at 10) about the readings and authors, then direct questions, and lead the discussion for that class. I am part of the class, so expect I will jump in, too.

5. Blog Essays based on my questions about the week's readings. See assignment list. Again, points off for being either superficial or overly complex and convoluted. Sometimes you will need to do some research to respond fully on these essays. Here is a link to [library resources](#). **File by 6 p.m. Mondays.**

6. Your participation in class. This includes participation in class, attendance, conduct in class, the [Workshopping](#) of the writing efforts of others, **following instructions**, the quality of your cookies, etc.

7. Final Non-Fiction Story – Due Sunday, Nov. 25, at noon in email attachment. [Here is a summary of how to write a proposal.](#) (NOTE: I want no first-person work in this class unless you can make an argument for why it would be relevant.) Using the many principles and techniques of literary journalism you have learned through your readings, writing, discussions and analysis ([see, for example](#)), you will write an at least 3,000-word story. To make sure there is enough meat on the bone, I must approve all story ideas. For an objective-as-possible explanation of grading criteria see the Grading Guidelines link: [General Grading Criteria for Nonfiction](#)

- Though there are no limitations on the kind of story you write, you are required to have a minimum of four 'people' sources and three research sources.
- HOWEVER, I do not want to see a story with any kind of contaminated access. For example, you write a story about your mother the lawyer who defends child molesters and often wins. But it shows such a salacious side of the law you would not publish it if you could because it would be too embarrassing.
- Given the constraints of time and place, this needs to be a local topic.
- Double-space the story at 12 point Times Roman.
- At the end of the story, submit a source list, which should include complete contact information (phone and e-mail) for the people you interviewed, as well as bibliographic material for written sources used.
- **Story Proposal due before class Week 4 as a post to your blog.** Bring in a copy and be prepared to give a class presentation on your idea on Week 4.

- **The final story is Due Sunday, Nov. 25, at noon_in email attachment.**

OR

7.1 Scholarly Conference-Ready Paper: This assignment is for doctoral students in class – or for any master’s student who is committed to proceeding into a doctoral program. If this is you, we will talk together about this.

8. Magazine Query Letter. Now that you have written the story you want to send it off to a magazine. Write a Query Letter and attach it to your story when you submit it. One good explainer for such a letter is [How to Write a Successful Query](#). There are many others online.

9. Magazine Query Letter Presentation. At our final class, you will spend no more than 10 minutes (I will cut you off) presenting your letter to the class. With this include a summary of your story and some relevant passages from the story. **Be creative!**

OR

9.1 Poster Presentation at end of semester of your conference paper.

THE SEMINAR DISCUSSION

You are expected to participate in this class. That means you submit your questions each week, offer your ideas about the subject, allow other people to express their views, respect others’ opinions and exchange ideas that will make us better readers and writers. Seminar discussions require a fine balance. On the one hand, you do not want to take over the conversation. On the other, you do not want to let others do all the talking. If you go on and on (and I am often guilty of this, too, as my passion for a subject will over-ride my self-editor), I will politely cut you off.

Grading

Your final grade for the course will be determined as follows:

Activity	Maximum Points
Analyze This	100 (average of all)
Class Participation	100
Blog Essays	100 (average of all)
Short Writing Assignments	100 (average of all)
Discussion Questions	100
Discussion Leadership	100
Non-Fiction Story Proposal	100
Final Non-Fiction Story	200
Magazine Query Letter	50

Query Letter Presentation	50
Total points possible	1,000

I will be using minus grades so that students whose work is superior are recognized for their higher performance.

Final grades will be based on these standard break-points:

Grades (1,000 points = score of 100%)

A	93.6%+	C	73.6-77%
A-	90-93.5%	C-	70-73.5%
B+	87.1%-89.9%	D+	67.1%-69.9%
B	83.6-87%	D	63.6-67%
B-	80-83.5%	D-	60-63.5%
C+	77.1%-79.9%	E	59.9% or lower

It is unlikely that the grades will be curved.

The following website provides a chart showing UF's policy regarding the grade points earned for each letter grade designation: <https://gradschool.ufl.edu/catalog/current-catalog/catalog-general-regulations.html#grades> Click on the Grades link

LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY

No assignment can be late under any circumstances. Work turned in late will not be accepted unless you have a legitimate and documented excuse. **THIS IS NOT NEGOTIABLE, SO PLEASE PLAN AHEAD!**

ATTENDANCE

Class attendance is required. More than one unexcused absence will result in a minimum deduction of one letter grade from your attendance and participation grade. More than two will result in the same deduction from your overall grade. Hey, this class only meets once a week. Arriving or leaving early will be considered an absence. Excused absences include documented medical excuses and religious observances (with advanced notice). Please contact me before class. University-approved absences must be documented (in advance, if for an approved university activity) according to official university policy. Obtaining written verification for an excused absence is your responsibility, as is arranging to complete any missed work.

Common courtesy: For heaven's sake, turn off your cell phone! And close your laptops if we are not using them for class! Professionals treat each other with courtesy and mutual respect. You can demonstrate those qualities

by putting cell phones away during class and not signing on to Facebook or any other such social media venues. In other words, turn off all communicative devices and stow them away. Use of same during class will be noted in the participation section of the grade book.

BE GOOD

And I have to say this as part of our contract: You need to conduct yourself in a courteous manner both in and out of class when it comes to dealing with fellow students or your instructor. That means any rude, obstructive or aggressive behavior will not be tolerated, and manifestations of same will mean your ouster from the class. I have a zero-tolerance policy on this. Here is a link to the UF Counseling and Wellness

Center: <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/default.aspx> The Center is located at 3190 Radio Road and the phone number for Appointments & After-Hour Assistance is (352) 392-1575.

ACCOMMODATIONS

Please let me know immediately if you have any kind of problem or disability that would hinder your work in this course. I will do my best to help you. Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the [Disability Resource Center](#) as early in the semester as possible. The center will provide documentation so appropriate accommodations can be made. The center is in Reid Hall, 392-8565.

ACADEMIC CONDUCT

Commit yourself to honesty and integrity if you haven't already. If you engage in any form of academic misconduct, including, but not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, and aiding and abetting, the penalties could be severe, including dismissal from this class.

A NOTE ON PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC HONESTY

Begin by listening to this: [Who Makes Stuff Up, And Why They Do It](#)

You are required to read both the UF [Academic Honesty](#) policy and the Journalism Department's [Academic Honesty](#) document, which was written by Prof. Dave Carlson. I will work under the assumption that you have done so.

For the communications professional, there hardly exists a graver crime than plagiarizing another writer's work. In short, it is YOUR responsibility to make certain you understand what constitutes plagiarism and to ensure that you give proper credit any time you draw on someone else's writing.

- **Do not rely on what you think you've learned before.** Prof. Mindy McAdam has put together an excellent guide: <http://www.macloo.com/cheat/index.htm>.
- If you're still not certain you understand what's acceptable and what isn't, check out this oft-cited website: <http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/plagiarism.shtml>

- **If you have questions, ASK ME!** There's no penalty for asking questions, but the penalties for plagiarism are severe, including **dismissal from the program**.
- **Treat Internet sources like any other book, journal article or other print source.** Make CERTAIN you copy down citation information when you copy material from a website, EVEN if you're paraphrasing.
- **Upload ALL papers to the e-learning site and know that I will submit them to Turnitin.com to check for plagiarism.** I'll also want hard copies of all your papers.
- **DO NOT turn in to me ANY work you previously have submitted to another instructor or that you plan to submit for any other class at UF or any other institution.** If you want to write on a topic you've worked on before, that may be acceptable IF you discuss it with me and get permission IN ADVANCE.

Please see the UF Office of Student Judicial Affairs website for definitions of academic dishonesty

(<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/honorcodes/honorcode.php>). The violations most likely to be potential problems for students in this class include plagiarism, misrepresentation and fabrication. It is YOUR responsibility to understand what kinds of actions are prohibited. If a situation ever arises in which you think something you're contemplating MIGHT constitute one of these types of academic dishonesty, ASK BEFORE YOU DO IT. Apologies after the fact are extremely unlikely to resolve the problem for anyone.

CAVEAT

Sometimes a class such as this will deal with controversial topics, so be warned that words that may be considered offensive or ideological may be spoken in the context of the subjects we are discussing. As a teacher, I have no political or social agenda, so do not try to answer in a way you believe might comport with what I want to hear or read. Feel free to advocate any position as long as you remain respectful of others' opinions, and always be able to defend your point of view.