News, Narrative, & Design I, Fall 2017

Course Description

This is the first course in a three-course sequence that introduces students to journalism, which is a crucial part of our democracy. This Level 1 class will focus on reporting — a bottom-up approach using human-centered design practices where appropriate to identify the informational needs and concerns of the community being served.

Through real, project-based work, students will research, report, and present the news while considering how to best engage their audience and have impact. Students will also be introduced to the complexity and competitiveness of the 21st-century media ecosystem.

You will work hard. You will make mistakes. You will be nervous, sometimes even afraid. You will intensify your sense of curiosity. You will feel the rush of gathering information through your reporting. You will learn how to sift good information from bad, conduct interviews, fact-check, and make sense of data. Most of all, you will learn to embrace the first and most essential element of journalism — the absolute obligation to the truth.

Cooperation and collaboration are integral to this course. Reporters do not work alone. Your coursemates are your partners; you will help to shape each other's work.

Course Requirements/Assignments/Graded Activities

These include reporting assignments, design exercises, stories to read and listen to, and presentations. You will create an email newsletter.

Expect to spend 8-10 hours a week on this class.

Much of our work will be done in class. Your attendance, preparation, and participation are essential.

Your grades will be based on effort and progress. There are no inflated grades. A C is for satisfactory work, a B for good work, and an A for outstanding work.

Students must receive at least a B to advance to News, Narrative & Design II, a required course for Journalism + Design majors.
Final Grade Calculation

Class participation (including attendance): 40%
Assignments: 40%
Email newsletter: 20%

TOTAL 100%

Outline

Schedule is subject to change due to availability of embeds and guests, your interests, and developments in the news.

Week 1


Assignments:

AP Style and the Syllabus

Find at least two violations of AP Style in the syllabus. Mark them in the Google Doc by suggesting edits or leaving comments.

One-Minute Syllabus:

Retell the syllabus in no more than one minute and be prepared to present it in class on Wednesday. Could be video, audio, Google Slides...

Observe Something Every Day

Pick something that you can observe every day and document your observation. It shouldn’t take more than a few minutes, maybe even a few seconds. It should be something you can observe every day — and something that's about the world around you, not just about you.

Observe starting tomorrow. And document each observation as:

- a photograph
- an audio recording
- a video
- a text description
Week 2


Assignments.

Subscribe to Three Email Newsletters

Choose an email newsletter from the New York Times or Washington Post.

Choose one of the email newsletters from this list of newsletters about journalism.

For the other newsletter, choose a news organization that produces original journalism or curates journalism. Try to choose email newsletters that cover topics of interest to you.

NOTE: Daily deal and other marketing email newsletters do NOT count.

Sign up for AP Style Presentation:

You will give a 5-minute presentation about some aspect of style guides this semester. It should cover the following questions:

- How does the AP Stylebook cover this topic?
- What about this topic does AP Style not cover?
- How do other style guides handle this subject?
- What are some style rules that you propose to change?

Here are some ideas for topics. You can use one of the following or choose your own:

- abbreviations
- acronyms
- brand names and trademarks
- business
- celebrity
- commas
- ethnicity
- fashion
- food
- gender and sexuality
- medicine
You can also choose to focus on a subset of one of these topics: e.g. Buddhism, chemistry, mental health... Or pick a topic that interests you.

Find Three Nut Grafs

Read Chip Scanlan, Poynter, The Nut Graf, Part I and The Nut Graf and Breaking News

Find three stories with nut grafs. Copy the nut graf and paste into a Google Doc. Also copy and paste the link.

Propose a Story About an Event

You can choose any event you like as long as

- you attend the event in person
- the event happens beyond The New School

Come to class ready to share your idea.

Some ideas, if you’re not sure what to do:

- attend a community meeting
- go to a protest
- watch a sporting event in person
- go to a musical performance
- etc.

Week 3

Presentation of news in various forms. Research. Observation.

Assignments:

Write a Story About an Event

Follow AP Style and use the inverted pyramid. Your story should have

- hed and dek
- a straightforward lede
at least one quotation from a person at the event
a nut graf
a chronological narrative
a kicker
The story should be no more than 500 words long.
Take some pictures on your smartphone and use at least one to illustrate your story.

Notice What You Notice

Go to a public place with a notebook and a pen or pencil.

Write down the date, time, and location. Set a timer for 20 minutes. Then put your smartphone and earbuds away.

Make a list of things you see, phrases and sounds you hear, gestures, smells, anything else you notice.

When the alarm sounds, find a place to sit down (if you're not already). Spend five minutes (timer again) drawing a picture of what you saw. Don't worry about how good the picture is. When the alarm sounds, write a caption no longer than 10 words.

One-Minute Cognitive Biases

Read Buster Benson, Cognitive bias cheat sheet, which organizes and visualizes the Wikipedia List of Cognitive Biases.

Choose a cognitive bias from the list or diagram. Prepare to explain it in one minute to the class.

Week 4

Interviewing. Profiles. The Design Process. Start AP Style Presentations (1 per class)

Assignments:

Revise Your Story About an Event

Work on a second draft of your story about an event, taking into account feedback.

Also: at the bottom of your draft, please propose an alternate format for telling the story (could be text, audio, video…)

Ray Suarez on Interviewing

Listen to The Turnaround: Ray Suarez.

Transcribe three quotations that you find interesting. Include timestamps.
Read Profiles, Research a Subject

1. Two profiles to read:
   - Ben Terris, Washington Post, *Ben Carson, or the tale of the disappearing Cabinet secretary*

2. Come prepared to talk about a recently published profile of your choosing.

3. Choose a person to profile. The person should be a stranger to you and should be beyond The New School.

Research your subject, including
   - their website and social media accounts
   - Wikipedia and the references it links to
   - Google, Google News, Google Images…
   - Proquest and Nexis Uni
   - books
   - public records (if relevant)
   - other library resources (ask a librarian if you need guidances)

In a Google Doc:
   - share your research notes
   - explain how you would approach your subject
   - make a list of questions you would ask in an interview

Week 5

Looking for stories in data. Annotation and aggregation. What problem am I trying to solve?

Assignments:

Other Interviewers, Being Interviewed

1. Choose another episode of *The Turnaround* (there are 16) and listen to it. You might want to choose an interviewer you’ve heard of — or someone you know nothing about.

   Write down three quotes from this interview. Include timestamps.

   Who do you think is the better interviewer: Ray Suarez, the person you chose, or Jesse Thorn? Why?

2. Read Paul Ford, *Be Our Guest!*

   Write down three things that you think interviewers — the ones you listened to, your classmates, you — can learn from this article.
Collect Three Examples of Annotation

Find three examples of annotation that you would consider journalism or journalistic commentary.

Examples could be more handmade such as Leah Fessler et al, Quartz, We edited Louis C.K.’s “apology” to make it a real apology or more high-tech a la Genius (but please don’t pick song lyrics)

Write a Story About a Person (a Profile)

Write a profile of the subject you researched. Or choose someone else who is a stranger to you.

Make every effort to interview that person in person (F2F, IRL…) If you can’t get an in-person interview, try telephone, IM, or email. If you can’t arrange an interview, find another subject.

Your draft should be between 500 and 750 words. Write a headline and include a photograph.

Week 6

Wireframes and email newsletter design. Peer review of Profiles. Twitter for journalists

Assignments:

Reverse-Wireframe Three Email Newsletters

Create reverse wireframes showing the structure of the three email newsletters you subscribed to in Week 2.

If you need a refresher on wireframe sketches, try this or this.

Make a Twitter Moment

Tell a story using a sequence of at least 8 tweets.

Ask Five Strangers About the Subway

Write down how you feel about approaching strangers.

Approach a stranger somewhere beyond the New School. Tell them that you are a journalism student working on a story about the subway and want to ask them a few questions.

● What do you think are the main issues with the subway?
● Have you ever had a dangerous experience on the subway?
● What is the most inconvenient part of your subway experience?
● What kind of Metrocard do you buy? How do you pay for it (i.e. cash or credit)?
● Has there ever been a time that you've ridden without paying? If so, what happened?
● What would a fare increase mean for you?

Get their full names and a way to contact them (email, phone, social handle) in case you have additional questions. Also, ask to take a picture.

Repeat until you have successfully spoken with five strangers.

Write down how it felt to talk to strangers: what went well, what went differently than you expected, and what if anything you'd do differently next time.

Revise Your Profile

Week 7

Audiences: Mass vs. Niche; Global vs. Local; Casual vs. Fanatical

Propose an Email Newsletter

Come up with an idea for an email newsletter you would edit.

Write a proposal of up to 200 words explaining the idea, and answering the questions:
● Why this? Why now?
● Who is your target audience?
● Is there anything else like it? (Do some research!) If so, what will make yours stand out?

The Black Press

Listen to Baltimore: The Rise of Charm City, Eddie — AFRO! (29 minutes)

Find out about a black or other ethnic newspaper published in or near your hometown. (If you are not from the United States or can’t find one, choose New York or another city that you feel an affinity with.) Figure out when it was founded, how big its peak circulation is, if it still exists, who owns it now, how big its circulation is now, whether its archives are online. Write up to 200 words

The Players’ Tribune

Read Amos Barshad, The New York Times, What Happens When Athletes Do the Sportswriting?
Choose a recent story from The Players' Tribune. In less than 200 words, summarize the story, answer the question “Is it journalism?” and describe how the story would be different in a publication not run by athletes.

Week 8

Audio

One-Minute Audio Story

Download Anchor.

Tell a news story in one minute. It could be original reporting, or an interview, or narrative and explanatory.

Listen to On the Media

Subscribe to the On the Media podcast.

There are usually two episodes each week: a 50-minute weekly magazine and a shorter one on a single topic. Listen to the weekly show, which drops on Friday evenings.

Then either

- Tweet about something that caught your attention
- Write three sentences (up to 100 words) about what you heard
- Write three sentences about what you wish they had covered this week

Prototype Your Email Newsletter

Now that you’ve chosen a topic for your newsletter and sketched out a wireframe:

- Create a TinyLetter account.
- Add me as a subscriber to your TinyLetter. Add yourself too.
- Compose a prototype of your newsletter.
- Hit “Send Now.”

If you have questions about how TinyLetter works, try their help FAQ.

Week 9

Video.
Las Vegas Anniversary

In follow-up coverage of the Las Vegas shooting, identify someone who you’d want to read about on the first anniversary of the shooting.

Write a letter or email query asking that person for an interview.

Mapping the Las Vegas Massacre

Watch Malachy Browne et al., New York Times, *10 Minutes. 12 Gunfire Bursts. 30 Videos. Mapping the Las Vegas Massacre*


Make a list of all the different kinds of source material used to put together this video.

Storyboard a One-Minute Video

Find a news story that you want to tell. It could be about the subway, or something happening at The New School, or another issue that you’ve noticed or are interested in.

Using a template (horizontal or vertical), create a storyboard for the video story you want to tell.

You will need to do some preliminary reporting (research, interviewing, and/or observation) to generate a storyboard. If it helps, try using your smartphone camera to think in images.

As with earlier sketching exercises, don't worry about making beautiful or realistic images. Get the idea across.

Week 9

Data and visualization. GIFs. Mid-semester check-in.

One-Minute Video Story

Shoot and edit a one-minute video news story based on your storyboard. Or if you realized through the storyboard exercise that you could not shoot your video, find another news story and tell that.

GIFs and Copyright Law

Read

- Fordham IP Law Journal, [ANIMATED GIFS AND COPYRIGHT LAW](https://example.com)
- Nieman Lab, Fair use or copyright infringement? [Deadspin and SB Nation get tossed off Twitter for NFL GIFs](https://example.com)
- Fortune, [The Copyright Law Behind a $600M Startup and Millennials' Favorite Form of Expression](https://example.com)
Week 10

Infographics. More on email newsletters. One-question interviews.

Propose a Story About a Problem

Drawing on the topics that came up in our one-question interviews (What’s the biggest problem that New York City needs to solve?), propose a story about a problem in New York City.

Go beyond identifying a topic. Think about how you’d tell the story.

Iterate on Your Email Newsletter Prototype

Now that you’ve made a prototype of your newsletter and gotten some feedback, make another installment of your newsletter. It could be a revised version of your first one, or new content.

Find a way to express your ideas within the constraints of TinyLetter.

Also, make sure you:

- Think about the title and subject line
- Design your subscribe page (tinyletter.com/{yourname})
- Complete your profile and other necessary text
- Test the subscription flow
- Preview your newsletter on your computer and your phone

Week 11

Algorithmic news.

Make a Twitter IFTTT Applet

Sign up for IFTTT (short for IF This Then That). Create an Applet about something you’re interested in that involves Twitter.

You can either create

- an Applet that reads Twitter (e.g., Archive tweets you like to a Google spreadsheet)
- an Applet that writes to Twitter (e.g. Tweet your Instagrams as native photos on Twitter)

You might look at this collection of Applets for inspiration.
Make a Twitter Bot

Use Cheap Bots Done Quick! Once you’re in, there’s a visual editor and an interactive tutorial for Tracery, a way to write these bots. If you’re feeling ambitious, check out these collections of interesting words and other stuff. You may need to create a new Twitter account for this.

Write a Story About a Problem

Write a story, based on your pitch for a story about a problem and the feedback you got in class.

Choose a form that makes sense for your story. If this is a text narrative, 500-750 words.

Week 12

Typography. BuzzFeed Style Guide.

Assignments:

Make Another Issue of Your Newsletter

Practical Typography, Personal Typography

Read Matthew Butterick, the Why Typography Matters section (including subsections), and Why There’s No E-Book or PDF. Follow links to other sections that interest you or where you have questions.

Find a font for body copy that expresses your personality or writing voice. You can look in Butterick’s Font Recommendations, Typekit, or Google Fonts. Using that font, explain why you think it is a good fit for you.

Week 13

Distribution: Display Copy, Newsletters, Social Media.

Week 14

Collaboration and the newsroom. Ethics.

Assignments:
Anonymous Sources

Read the Anonymous Sources section of the AP Stylebook. Read Read Margaret Sullivan, New York Times, The Disconnect on Anonymous Sources

Find a story published in the New York Times, Washington Post, or another publication in the past seven days that has an anonymous source.

Explain in 100 words or less why the source was anonymous and whether you think that is fair.

Week 15

Newsletter workshop. Guest Speaker. Course evaluations

Learning Outcomes

By the successful completion of this course, you will:

- learn about fundamental journalistic values and principles: distinguishing fact and fiction, verifying assertions, identifying sources, and journalism’s role in democratic society
- demonstrate competence in deep listening and community engagement
- gain experience with research, observation, and interviewing
- develop competence in basic ideas of brainstorming and synthesizing
- learn to distinguish between a story and an idea
- develop competence in writing ledes and headlines, collecting quotations
- explore the contemporary news ecosystem: how news gets made, distributed, and consumed
- begin to think about the reader experience
- get exposed to the basics of what makes a good data story, where to find data, elementary use of spreadsheets
Course Materials

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law 2017. You can buy it at
• Barnes & Noble Union Square ($21.99)
• Amazon ($13.63 as of this writing; free same-day delivery for Prime customers)
• digital version ($26 per year; 30-day free trial)
Whatever version you choose, buy the current 2017 edition.
Digital subscriptions to the New York Times ($1/week for students) and The Washington Post (free subscriptions with .edu addresses) and the apps for both newspapers.
Articles, podcasts, videos, and other materials will be assigned over the course of the semester.