

Reporting and Writing News

COMM 101

Three credits; spring 2025

CRN Number: 31143

Meeting times, days, location: 11:30 a.m.-12:55 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, LI 120

Instructor: Mr. Patrick Schmiedt

Office: VA 305

Office phone: 626-857-4192

Office hours: 8:30-11 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, and by appointment.

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PREREQUISITES

This course has no prerequisites. However, ENGL 101 is strongly recommended.

CITRUS COLLEGE CATALOG DESCRIPTION

An introduction to defining, gathering, and writing the news. Stresses accuracy, objectivity, fairness, and balance. Practice in interviewing techniques, following rules of professional style, and writing basic news story structures for print, broadcast and online publications. Discussion of issues involving press rights and responsibilities, cultural sensitivity, taste, libel, and ethics. Required of all communication and journalism majors.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

Students are expected to become familiar with the conventions of journalistic writing and the elements of journalistic style. To a large degree, journalistic writing is formulaic and follows certain established conventions. This is not a creative writing course. Instead, the goal is to develop a concise writing style that conveys information clearly to readers. The course concentrates on developing writing and reporting techniques for the print media, primarily daily newspapers. We start with the fundamentals of good news writing, building little by little until students are able to craft effective news stories anchored with solid lead paragraphs. Emphasis is placed on developing news stories that present facts logically with clarity, conciseness and coherence.

The writing and newsgathering exercises will primarily apply to print media. Exercises focus on:

- developing familiarity with the style of writing used by the Associated Press and the contents of the Associated Press Stylebook.
- the elements of good writing, including spelling, grammar, diction, syntax, style, precision, clarity, pacing, and transitions.
- various techniques to write the lead-in (first few paragraph of the story) and organize the body and conclusion of the story.
- the nature of news and journalistic storytelling.
- news judgment.
- developing and handling news sources (finding the right news sources and preparing for and conducting interviews).
- handling quotes and attribution.
- special techniques and concepts that journalists employ because of their special relationship to the audience (e.g., objectivity and a detached point of view) and

government (e.g., the adversarial, or watchdog, role of the press).

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to do the following:

- Analyze and evaluate factual information for truthfulness, balance, fairness and accuracy.
- Apply and demonstrate cultural sensitivity, good taste, respect for diversity, and ethics in reporting assignments.
- Examine and consider the impact of news on the individual and on society.
- Demonstrate knowledge of newspaper style, copy editing symbols, and other editing techniques.
- Develop the ability to write simple news stories, general feature stories, and personality profiles under deadline using current word-processing software.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Write a hard news story under deadline with accuracy and attention to detail.
2. Develop a keen sense of ethics with regard to news reporting and be able to demonstrate an ethical viewpoint in news products.
3. Write a soft news story under deadline with accuracy and attention to detail.
4. Demonstrate the subtleties and differences in writing for different media.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- Rich, Carole. Writing and Reporting the News: A Coaching Method (2016, eighth edition).
- Associated Press Stylebook (2024, 57th edition).

COURSE GRADING

Grades for the semester are figured this way:

- | | |
|--|------------|
| ■ Tests | 35 percent |
| ■ In- and out-of-class exercises/assignments | 65 percent |

GRADING SCALE

Grades will be assigned in the following manner:

- A: 90-100 percent
- B: 80-89 percent
- C: 70-79 percent
- D: 60-69 percent
- F: below 60 percent

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

There is not an assignment schedule because the class sessions require great flexibility. The pace of the course depends on how quickly students in class master reporting and newswriting concepts and techniques. Writing assignments will consist of in-class and out-of-class assignments, as well as group and individual assignments.

During the semester, we will write stories related to several traditional news beats: police (e.g., robbery, car accident, fire, etc.), general assignments (advance stories, speeches, obituaries, news

release rewrites), politics, city council/county commissioners, education, courts, business and finance, sports, etc. We will have assignments that touch on broadcasting writing if possible at the end of the course.

Generally, exercises and assignments carry more weight for course grading as we move along in the semester. Students will receive both group and individual feedback from the instructor. Assignments are graded on all the elements that make a story acceptable in a real newsroom: accuracy, fairness, clarity, conciseness, good writing quality, news style, correct grammar and spelling, good story organization and lead-in, reader interest, thoroughness, etc. Grades assigned to stories will reflect the following criteria:

- A—A story that a good publication would print proudly. No major changes required. A story skillfully done by the writer.
- B—A story that would merit publication but needs more than minor, routine editing.
- C—A story that needs a thorough rewrite but has the makings of a story fit for publication.
- D—Unusable story containing major flaws (inaccurate or misleading elements, confusing or unintelligible presentation of facts, etc.)
- F—A story that would do a publication more harm than good. A libelous story, or a story with the facts significantly wrong or distorted.

ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION

Unless otherwise instructed, assignments should be submitted to the instructor via **hard copy only**. Assignments submitted via electronic methods will not be accepted unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor or if an absence prevents the student from submitting an assignment by its due date.

Only typed assignments are accepted. Assignments should be submitted double-spaced with usual margins and fonts.

LATE ASSIGNMENT POLICY

Assignments will be accepted up to 24 hours after a deadline. Any late assignments will be automatically deducted two letter grades (20 percentage points). Assignments will not be accepted more than 24 hours late. In-class assignments will not be accepted late no matter the circumstance. Late assignments may be submitted via email.

ASSIGNMENT REWRITE POLICY

Most (but not all) out-of-class writing assignments given in COMM 101 will be conducted in two parts – a first draft phase and a rewrite phase. Students will receive a copy of their first draft and will attempt to rewrite their assignment. The higher of the two grades will be used as the final grade for the assignment.

READING SCHEDULE

The following reading schedule should be used as a guideline only and is subject to change. More readings may be assigned throughout the semester. Any additions or changes to readings will be announced in class.

*-reading in the “Criminal Justice” section; ^-reading in the “Religion” section

Week 1 (Feb. 20)

Handout: "Fundamentals of Newswriting Style."

Week 2 (Feb. 25-27)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 1, "Changing Concepts of News;" Ch. 2, "The Basic News Story;" Ch. 7, "Leads and Nut Grafts."

AP Stylebook entries: "second reference," "titles."

Week 3 (March 4) NO CLASS March 6, JACC State Convention

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 8, "Story Organization."

Handout: "Attribution Guidelines."

AP Stylebook entries: "attribution," "names," "quotations in the news."

Week 4 (March 11-13)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 18, "Speeches, News Conferences and Meetings;" Ch. 20, "Crime and Punishment."

AP Stylebook entries: "*accused," "*arrest," "*allege," "*burglary/larceny/robbery/theft," "*indict," "speeches."

Week 5 (March 18-20)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 21, "Disasters, Weather and Tragedies."

AP Stylebook entries: "abbreviations and acronyms," "days of the week," "months."

Week 6 (March 25-27)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 9, "Story Forms;" Ch. 17, "Profiles and Obituaries."

Online reading: "The elements of journalism," available at

<https://www.tomrosenstiel.com/essential/the-elements-of-journalism/>

AP Stylebook entries: "composition titles," "dimensions," "directions and regions," "distances," "weights."

Week 7 (April 1-3)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 4, "Sources and Online Research."

AP Stylebook entries: "capitalization," "essential clauses/nonessential clauses," "essential phrases/nonessential phrases."

Week 8 (April 8-10)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 10, "Storytelling and Feature Techniques."

AP Stylebook section: "Punctuation guide."

Week 9 (April 22-24)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 14, "Media Law."

AP Stylebook entries: "academic degrees," "academic departments," "academic titles."

Week 10 (April 29-May 1)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 15, "Media Ethics;" Ch. 16, "Multicultural Sensitivity."

AP Stylebook section: "Statement of News Values and Principles."

Week 11 (May 6-8)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 5, "Interviewing Techniques."

AP Stylebook entries: "fewer, less," "plurals."

Online readings: "Understanding bias," available at

<http://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/bias-objectivity/understanding-bias/>

and "Tools to manage bias," available at <http://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/bias-objectivity/tools-manage-bias/>

Week 12 (May 13-15)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 3, "Social Media."

AP Stylebook entries: “animals,” “anonymous sources,” “collective nouns,” “^religious references,” “state names.”

Week 13 (May 20-22)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 6, “Mobile and Multimedia Skills;” Ch. 12, “Online Journalism.”

AP Stylebook entries: “race-related coverage,” “gender, sex and sexual orientation.”

Week 14 (May 27-29)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 19, “Government and Statistical Stories.”

AP Stylebook entries: “company/companies,” “corporation,” “incorporated.”

Week 15 (June 3-5)

Writing and Reporting News: Ch. 11, “Broadcast News Writing.”

Week 16 (June 9-13) FINALS WEEK

No required readings. Final assignment at 10:30 a.m. Thursday, Dec. 12.

Writing and Reporting News Chapter 13, “Public Relations Writing,” and Chapter 22, “Media Jobs and Internships,” will not be required reading this semester.

TEST SCHEDULE

Tests covering the readings will be given every other Thursday, beginning with Week 3 of the course. Tests will be given in class on Canvas. Tests will be open-book, open-note and open-Internet, but tests will be given with a limited amount of time available. Each test counts equally toward the student’s final grade. Tests will cover only the readings assigned since the previous test. Tests turned in late will not be accepted.

The schedule exception is Test 1, which will be on Tuesday, March 11.

Test 1: March 11 (Weeks 1-3)

Test 5: May 8 (Weeks 10-11)

Test 2: March 20 (Weeks 4-5)

Test 6: May 22 (Weeks 12-13)

Test 3: April 3 (Weeks 6-7)

Test 7: June 5 (Weeks 14-15)

Test 4: April 24 (Weeks 8-9)

Graded tests can be reviewed up to one week after the completion of the test. After 1 p.m. the following Thursday, the previous test will become unavailable to view on Canvas.

FINAL

The final will be a live writing assignment conducted in class. Students will be given an assignment in class at the assigned final exam time – 10:30 a.m. Thursday, June 12 – and will have until 12:30 p.m. to complete the story as assigned.

ATTENDANCE/TARDINESS POLICY

COMM 101 will be face-to-face this semester. If you are not present in the class to complete an in-class assignment or turn in an out-of-class assignment, you will receive a zero on the assignment unless you provide an acceptable excuse, in writing, prior to class for your absence. If you contact me about absences prior to the absence, you may be allowed to make up missed coursework or to have assignments excused without penalty, depending on the nature of the assignment.

In the case of emergency absences where you cannot contact me prior to class, please let me know via email or in person as soon as it's feasible. Assignment make-up for emergency absences will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

COURSE DROP POLICY

Should you wish to withdraw from the course and receive a "W" on your transcript, it is your responsibility to clear your name from the class list through WingSpan and/or the Office of Admissions and Records. As required by state law, any student who has stopped attending but who has failed to officially withdraw from the course and whose name appears on the final grade sheet will receive a final grade of "F." The **last day to drop without record** is March 2; the **census date** is March 3 (students **MUST** attend class before this date or risk being dropped from the course); and the **last day to drop with a "W" grade** is April 28.

HOW TO REACH YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Outside office hours, email is the most efficient way to reach me. I check my email often Monday through Friday and at least once a day on Saturdays and Sundays. If I do not reply within 24 hours, please resend your email. Make sure you spell my last name right! Better yet, copy and paste: pschmiedt@citruscollege.edu.

ACADEMIC HONESTY STATEMENT

The academic community is operated on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. Students found guilty of academic misconduct are subject to penalties, up to and possibly including failure of the course, suspension and/or expulsion. Student academic misconduct records are maintained by Citrus College.

AMERICAN WITH DISABILITIES ACT STATEMENT

Any students with disabilities or other special needs, or those who need special accommodations in this course, are invited to share these concerns or requests with the instructor and contact Disabled Students Programs and Services at 626-914-8675 for authorization paperwork as soon as possible.

VETERANS STATEMENT

Veterans and student soldiers with special circumstances or who are activated are encouraged to notify the instructor in advance.

SEXUAL ASSAULT, VIOLENCE, MISCONDUCT STATEMENT

Citrus Community College District is committed to providing an educational environment that is safe, friendly, accessible and free of all forms of discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual misconduct, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence and gender-based stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences gender-based violence (intimate partner violence, attempted or completed sexual assault, harassment, coercion, stalking, etc.), know that you are not alone. Please be aware that all Citrus College faculty are responsible employees with reporting responsibilities and obligations. This means that if you tell an instructor about a situation, she or he may have to report the information to the appropriate college administrator. Reports may be made to:

Manager of Human Resources/Staff Diversity & Title IX Coordinator
(626) 914-8830; Campus Safety Supervisor (626) 914-8611; Health Center Nurse
(626) 914-8635; or Glendora Police Department (626) 914-8250.

For more information about sexual misconduct, please visit these Citrus College websites:

Sexual Assault: <http://www.citruscollege.edu/stdntsrv/healthcntr/Pages/SexualAssault.aspx>

Sexual Violence Prevention:

<http://www.citruscollege.edu/stdntsrv/studentdean/ab1088/Pages/default.aspx>

Sexual Harassment:

<http://www.citruscollege.edu/admin/statements/Pages/SexualHarassment.aspx>

Federal and state law contains an exception for disclosure of education/student record for the health and safety of a student or other persons; therefore, neither FERPA nor California Education Code prevent community college instructors from disclosing information as mandated by law, or as reasonably deemed necessary to protect the health and safety of students or others. Instructors are “mandated reporters” required to report reason-able suspicion of child abuse/neglect, suicide, or threats of violence.

EXTRA INFORMATION

If you've made it this far, congratulations! You've shown the kind of attention to detail, motivation and passion that's important for good journalism. Email a photo of a cat doing a biiiiig stretch to pschmiedt@citruscollege.edu BEFORE the start of the first class session of the semester for five bonus points on your first writing assignment of the semester.

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