

Fall 2018

# ENG 339-001: Practical Journalism

Miriam Ascarelli

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.njit.edu/hum-syllabi>

---

## Recommended Citation

Ascarelli, Miriam, "ENG 339-001: Practical Journalism" (2018). *Humanities Syllabi*. 46.  
<https://digitalcommons.njit.edu/hum-syllabi/46>

This Syllabus is brought to you for free and open access by the NJIT Syllabi at Digital Commons @ NJIT. It has been accepted for inclusion in Humanities Syllabi by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ NJIT. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@njit.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@njit.edu).

“I saw stories everywhere. At dinner parties, I would leave with two or three story ideas. Every phone conversation, every movie or play, every walk down the street or trip on the subway brimmed with possibilities. I wrote down every idea that occurred to me, on scraps of paper that I stuffed into my jacket pockets. When I arrived at the office, I would empty my overflowing pockets and sort through the scraps.”

**Arthur Gelb**, former *New York Times* managing editor  
reflecting on his days as deputy metro editor

## English 339: Practical Journalism

Instructor: Miriam Ascarelli

Email: [miriam.f.ascarelli@njit.edu](mailto:miriam.f.ascarelli@njit.edu)

Office: Cullimore Hall 410

Office hours: 11:30-1 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday or by appointment

### Course description:

This course offers a look into the news eco-system and how journalists practice their craft. Assignments focus on news and feature writing, interviewing, and editing. Students will also learn about how today’s technology is affecting the way news is being delivered and is creating new story-telling techniques. While there is no doubt that journalism is changing, its primary purpose still endures: to provide citizens with the information they need to be self-governing. Learning to find and report stories that are relevant to our local audience is at the heart of this course.

In addition to original reporting, students will be writing weekly news analyses to keep up with current events and to better understand what news is and how stories are told. There will be weekly reading and homework quizzes for the first 4-6 weeks of the course.

**Extra credit opportunity:** students who join the NJIT student paper, *The Vector*, starting in week 4, can earn half a grade in extra credit. To get the extra credit, you must attend meetings on a regular basis and publish at least two stories in the paper that are not part of your classwork.

There may be other extra credit opportunities. Stay tuned!

### Course objectives:

- To deconstruct the work of professional journalists in order to better understand how reporters find stories and verify and collect information;
- To learn how to report and write basic news and feature stories;
- To get an overview of journalism ethics;
- To gain insight into issues facing journalism today, including how the First Amendment impacts today’s media.

### Texts:

- Freedman, Samuel G. *Letters to a Young Journalist* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). New York, NY: Basic Books, 2011. A copy of this book will also be available on the reserve shelf at Van Houten Library.

- Other texts will be posted on Moodle (see class schedule)

## Grading

- In-depth reporting project (500-800 words with three sources, including at least one expert or data): 25 percent
- Beat assignments (#1: 400-500 word story; #2: 500-word story with two sources that builds on first assignment) and accompanying story pitches: 25 percent
- News analyses: 20
- Quizzes: 20 percent
- Beat report, story hunt, 250-word news brief & other short writing assignments: 10 percent

**Final Grades:** A = 90 – 100      B+ = 87 – 89      B = 80 – 86      C+ = 77 – 79      C = 70  
– 76      D = 60 – 69      F = 0 – 59

**Attendance policy:** Attendance is critical to your success in this class. Participation in in-class activities, discussions, and workshops will contribute to your knowledge, ability, and performance. Participation cannot be demonstrated by chronic absences or sickness, similar to the professional world. At a minimum, this means showing up on time, being prepared, and contributing to class discussions. Your level of engagement with the material will subsequently impact how much you get from the class.

Four absences or more will result in the automatic lowering of your grade by one letter grade. Seven or more absences will result in automatic failure in the course. Chronic tardiness will result in the lowering of your grade. (Two lates = 1 absence.)

**Late work: Homework and news analyses** will be graded on a 4-point scale; late homework and news analyses will be automatically be downgraded to a grade of a 2 or lower. You have until the class period after the original due date to turn it in. Anything later will not be accepted. Late reporting assignments will be automatically downgraded. **Reporting assignments** that are more than one week late will not be accepted.

**Academic integrity:** Academic integrity and honesty are of paramount importance. Any violations will be brought to the immediate attention of the Dean of Students. This includes plagiarism (representing another’s writing as your own.)

**Please keep copies of all assignments (with grades and comments attached, if applicable)**

\* \* \* \* \*

## How to do your weekly news analysis:

Choose two articles that you think reflect two of the biggest stories nationally or in the NY/NJ area during the last seven days from either the *New York Times*, *The Washington Post* or the *The Wall Street Journal*. For each of the articles you find, include the full MLA bibliographic citation (Last name, First name. “Article Title.” *Newspaper Title*. Date Month Year Published) and write at least five sentences that: 1) Summarize the article; 2) tell me why it’s important; 3) identify one way it is an example of good or bad news writing (be specific). **NOTE:** As we move further

into the semester, I will be asking you to answer additional questions about the stories you've found, but the info listed above will always be your baseline.

Be prepared to briefly talk about your stories with the class.

### Rubric for homework and news analyses

Grade of 4	Shows insight and is well written (effective vocabulary, varied sentence structure, strong control of grammar and usage); fulfills assignment requirements; turned in on time.
Grade of 3	Written clearly and logically, but there may be some minor lapses in grammar and logic; fulfills assignment requirements; turned in on time.
Grade of 2	Meets minimum requirements; expresses ideas in a manner that can be understood, but there are problems with grammar and usage.
Grade of 1	Does not meet requirements; confusing or unclear writing.
Grade of 0	Failed to turn in assignment

\* \* \* \*

### Class schedule

*Subject to change*

Week 1: Intro & how to find a story: story scavenger hunt

**Assignment due on Thursday:** Introduce yourself to me + 3 things you learned about the First Amendment (250-500 words) – all in one file, please

**Thursday:** go on campus story hunt in groups of 3-4

Week 2: Journalism in the digital age, how is news different from other types of info + identifying a beat for the semester

**Reading:** Kanigel chapter on covering a campus + Kovach & Rosenstiel (preface & intro, pages x-12, *The Elements of Journalism*), + John Oliver video

**Tuesday:** Group story hunt notes due + discuss beat system;

**Thursday:** short written assignment due at beginning of class

Week 3: Think like a journalist: what is news; the inverted pyramid & nut graphs; how journalists use sources

**Reading:** HW: Freedman (Intro, pages 1-20) + Kanigel chapters on reporting & writing + “The Basic News Story” (*Writing and Reporting News*)

**Tuesday:** News analysis #1 + beat report due

**Thursday:** Quiz #1; in-class work on writing a news brief using the inverted pyramid

Week: 4: Think like a journalist; first news brief due; pitchfest for 1<sup>st</sup> beat story

**Reading:** Freedman (Temperament, pages 20-47 + Reporting, pages 47-86) +

**Tuesday:** News brief due + 2 story ideas for first beat assignment

**Thursday;** Quiz #2

Week 5: Interviewing and start screening *Shattered Glass*

**Reading:** Freedman (Writing, pages 87-132) + Kovach & Rosenstiel “Where did this come from” (*Blur*) + Interviewing handout + Leads and Nut Graphs (*Writing and Reporting News*)

**Tuesday:** News analysis #2 due + brainstorming questions for your story

**Thursday:** Begin screening *Shattered Glass*

Week 6: Ethics How to “find” news & verify information

**Reading:** AP Statement on News Values

**Tuesday:** First beat story due w/2 story ideas for story #2 + finish *Shattered Glass*

**Thursday:** quiz #3

Week 7: Background research and verification

**Reading:** + “How to Find out What Really Matters” (*Blur*, Kovach & Rosenstiel)

**Tuesday:** News Analysis #3 due

**Thursday:** Quiz #4

Week 8: How’d they do it? Learning from others: Deconstructing stories

**Reading:** stories provided by the professor + “Story Organization” and “Story Forms” (*Writing and Reporting News*)

**Tuesday:** News analysis #4 due + deconstruct stories: how’d they do it?

**Thursday:** Second beat story due + brainstorm final project ideas; deconstruct stories: how they’d do it?

Week 9: How to work with numbers

**Tuesday:** news analysis #5 due

**Thursday:** One-page pitch for final story due

Week 10: Work on final projects: conferences

Week 11: Work on final projects; conferences

Week 12: Peer review of stories; Thanksgiving

Week 13: TBA

Week 14: Stories due

\* \* \* \*

## A Student Journalist's Code of Ethics

*Note: This document, from the San Francisco State Dept. of Journalism, is an excellent summary of do's and don'ts that are applicable to any journalism student anywhere in the country.*

### What to do:

- **Be professional.** Always represent yourself as a [New Jersey Institute of Technology] journalism student, particularly before an interview. This can be tricky in social situations where conversation is casual. There have been instances when people have revealed things not realizing they were speaking to a journalist. If such a situation occurs and what's revealed to you may be important for a story, tell the person who you are and that you want to use the information in a story, and make sure that person has agreed to an interview. Remember you are representing not only yourself, but also the department. Make us look good.
- **Dress appropriately when on assignment.** A guide to use is dress as your interviewee will dress -- business attire if you're interviewing a business person or public official, more casual clothing in a less formal setting.
- **Always strive for accuracy and fairness.** It is difficult to be completely unbiased, but your safeguard against bias is checking with a variety of sources. Get outside of your circle and make sure you talk to people other than the usually cited experts or sources. Look for the shades of gray, for those are usually the most interesting places to dig into a subject. Go out of your way to check, then check again, then check one more time.
- **Ask, don't assume.** Don't be afraid to ask what may seem to be an "obvious") question.
- Journalists can sometimes get into trouble because they assume rather than ask. Better to ask than to print or produce the wrong information.
- **Correct your errors.** We all make mistakes, but the best journalists admit to them and correct them publicly. Check with your professor to find out how best to proceed.
- **Expose injustice, and give voice to those who rarely have one.** This is the motto of some of the best journalists in the profession.
- **Be careful about pitching the same story** to multiple publications or classes unless it's clear such a practice is allowed. When in doubt, ask your professor or editor.

### What not to do:

- **Do not fabricate anything.** If you do, ultimately you will be caught and the fall will be mighty and great. If you are caught, you will receive an F on the assignment. But worse than that, such behavior will call suspicion on all of your work and you will be tainted as a liar and a fake. Usually people get themselves in these situations because they are unprepared and deadline pressure weighs on them. Don't corner yourself.
  - **Prepare for interviews ahead of time.** Do your research ahead of time. Locate sources ahead of time. If you have trouble with any of these things, faculty are ready and happy to help.
  - **Do not plagiarize.** This is another self -destructive path because you will get caught. Assignments found to have copied work without citation of the source will receive an F. But again, if you are caught, you have made an unattractive reputation for yourself. People get themselves in this situation for a variety of reasons. Sometimes students) think it's OK to copy and paste from the Internet if it's common knowledge. The best practice to follow: Whenever in doubt, cite the source and if you want some guidance, ask your professor.
  - **Do not cheat.** We expect academic honesty. Check with [me] about what exercises and assignments are for your eyes only.
  - **Avoid conflicts of interest.** These conflicts include but are not limited to preparing journalism assignments on subjects or institutions in which the student has a financial, family, or personal involvement, or a personal stake in the outcome. Do not become part of the story. In some cases the appearance of a conflict is just as problematic as an actual conflict of interest. When in doubt, ask your professor. Disclose all potential conflicts to your professor or editor before you begin your assignment.
  - **Do not engage in conduct unbecoming** of the department during class, while online or while on assignment. Such misconduct includes but is not limited to disruptive behavior, physical or verbal abuse, property damage, theft, lewd or obscene behavior, and discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation or place of origin.
- 
-