

Fall 2023

COM-339 (001): Practical Journalism

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“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

COM 339: Practical Journalism

Instructor: Miriam Ascarelli

Email: miriam.f.ascarelli@njit.edu

Office: Room 410, Cullimore Hall

Office hours: 10:15-11:15 Tuesday, 11:30-12:30 Wednesday, and by appointment

Course description:

There is no question technology has turned the news business upside down. But despite all of these changes, the primary purpose of journalism remains the same. That purpose, as Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel write in their classic book *The Elements of Journalism*, is “to provide citizens with the information they need to be self-governing.”

This course is an introduction to journalism. We’ll begin by learning about the types of stories that journalists produce and analyze the sources behind them. Then we’ll jump in and do our own hands-on reporting on stories about the campus and the surrounding Newark community. Students will be encouraged, but not required, to take advantage of the month-long Newark Arts Festival as a source for story ideas.

It is my hope that by the end of the semester, you will have a greater appreciation for the craft of journalism and the role journalists play in our democracy.

One note: This is a journalism class, and by definition, news is not neat and tidy. It is a process of constant learning and adaptation. Expect surprises and be prepared to roll with them.

Prerequisites:

Prerequisites: ENGL 102 with a grade of C or higher, and one History and Humanities GER 200 level course with a grade of C or higher.

Course objectives:

- Become familiar with media terminology, the characteristics of different types of stories, and how quality news organizations use labels to distinguish opinion pieces from straight reporting.
- Learn how to deconstruct stories in order to better understand what quality journalism looks like.

- Learn how to conceive stories, find and evaluate sources, conduct interviews with people you don't know, and write up your stories in a reader-friendly fashion.
- Gain knowledge of some of the ethical issues impacting journalists.
- Engage with your classmates, the course materials, and your instructor in order to maximize your experience in this class!

Texts:

- Scanlan, Chip. *33 Ways Not to Screw Up Your Journalism*. Networkling Publishing, 2022. (I've chosen this book because it is inexpensive AND it gives you a window into journalistic thinking. It lists for under \$10 on Amazon.)
- *The New York Times*; to get a free subscription using your NJIT ID, go here: <https://researchguides.njit.edu/nytimes>
- Other readings materials will be provided by me and posted on Canvas.

Useful Resources:

- Be inspired by the award-winning college journalism from the [Associated Collegiate Press Clips & Clicks contest](#), the [monthly Hearst Awards](#), the College Media Association [Pinnacles](#) and Associated Collegiate Press [Pacemakers](#).
- Sample college media from around the country, including *The Daily Northwestern*, *The Observer* (Fordham) and our own NJIT *Vector*. by checking out the 383 college news sites hosted on SNOsites.com. You can find them here:
 - <https://snosites.com/college-publishers/>
- Keep up with what is happening in Newark by subscribing to [TapIntoNewark.com](#). TapintoNewark generally produces one story a day, so it's not overwhelming, and it's a good window into the workings of a strong hyperlocal news organization. Subscriptions are free.

Extra Credit:

- Students are encouraged to submit their work to *The Vector* for publication. If your story is published, I will reward you with up to five extra credit points on your final grade.

Grades will be based on the following:

Homework and participation: 15 percent

Midterm on journo basics: 15 percent

In-class practice story: 10 percent

Reporting assignments:

- Q & A profile story:
 - Pitch & background research: 10 percent
 - Q & A audio and transcript: 5 percent
 - Q & A & process reflection: 15 percent
- Multi-source news-feature:
 - Pitch & background research: 10 percent
 - Audio and transcript (Nov. 10): 5 percent
 - Completed story & process reflection: 15 percent

NOTE: Due dates (see tentative schedule below) are subject to change. There is no final exam in this course. Please keep copies of all assignments (with grades and comments attached, if applicable)

Final Grades:

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

Late assignments:

Late work on reporting assignments (pre-reporting background reports and pitches/proposals, audio and transcripts, and stories) will automatically be downgraded to a C. Assignments that are more than a week late will not be accepted. (TBH: We devote a lot of in-class time to getting traction on these assignments, so there is really no reason to turn them in late.)

Late homework: Homework and forum posts are due on Canvas at the start of class. Assignments will be graded on a 4-point scale. Late homework: You will have up until the next class period after the original due date to turn in missed work, but the work will automatically be downgrades to a 2 (grade of C) or lower. After that, late work will not be accepted.

Attendance:

You may miss two classes without penalty. Every subsequent *unexcused absence* will result in a reduction of half of a letter grade on your final course grade. If you are absent for legitimate reasons (family emergency, illness) you **must** submit official and verifiable documentation to the Dean of Students related to the absence within two weeks. More than six *unexcused* absences (three weeks of the course) will result in the automatic failure in the course.

Please note that you are also expected to come to class on time. Chronic tardiness is disrespectful both to me and your fellow students, and it will hurt your grade. (Two lates = one absence).

Per university policy, students who expect to miss class for religious observances must submit to me a written list of dates that will be missed by the end of the second week of classes (Jan. 28, 2021).

How to reach me:

Email is my preferred method of communication. I will respond to your emails within 48 hours. Please remember to maintain an appropriate tone in all school-related correspondence and include a SUBJECT line and your NAME.

Incomplete grades

In accordance with the Provost's directives, an incomplete will only be issued only in rare instances where a student, and for documented (by the Dean of Students) reasons, could not complete parts of the work of the course.

Tying up loose ends at the end of the semester

All required work must be submitted prior to the date established for the uploading of final grades. In other words, when the course is over, the course is over. You cannot turn in outstanding work after the semester has ended for a post-semester grade adjustment.

Academic Integrity

Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: <http://www5.njit.edu/policies/sites/policies/files/academic-integrity-code.pdf>.

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. **Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university.** If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu.

All assignments submitted shall be considered "graded work" and all aspects of your coursework are covered by the Code on Academic Integrity. All projects and homework assignments are to be completed individually unless otherwise specified.

AI and ChatGPT:

We will be using AI transcription services as a labor-saving device to transcribe interviews.

Beyond that, however, the use of any artificial intelligence program (such as ChatGPT, or any related application) to write all, or some, of an assigned piece of writing constitutes an act of plagiarism (turning in work that is not the product of your own thinking, drafting, and revising). When detected, any stories that contain passages imported from an A.I. program will be subject to a failing grade and will be reported to the Dean of Students.

Special Needs

Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students with disabilities. If you are a student with a documented disability, please see me as early in the semester as possible to discuss the necessary accommodations, and/or contact Student Disability Services at 973-596-3420.

The Writing Center

The Writing Center (115 Cullimore Hall) is available for 45-minute individual and group appointment with professional writing tutors online. This resource is indented to help you improve your communication and writing skills. Tutors and help with planning assignments,

improving your writing, refining an essay or multimedia project, or other communication-based needs. For more information, please visit <https://www5.njit.edu/writingcenter/>.



NEED HELP?

KNOW WHO TO CALL

Please note following important numbers that will come in handy in case of emergency:

EXTERNAL RESOURCES	AVAILABILITY	CONTACT NUMBER
Suicide Prevention	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 623-2323 (University Hospital-Newark)
Drug/ Alcohol Addiction	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(877) 630-8262
Crime Victim Compensation Office	Monday – Friday 8 AM – 8 PM	(877) 658-2221
Rape Care Center	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(877) 733-2273 (Essex County)
Sexual Assault Hotline	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(800) 656-HOPE (National)
Psychiatric Emergency	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 924-7416 (Newark Beth Israel Hospital)
NJIT RESOURCES	AVAILABILITY	CONTACT NUMBER
NJIT Public Safety	24 hrs/ 7 days a week	(973) 596-3111 (Emergency) (973) 596-3120 (Non-Emergency)
Dean of Students (TITLE IX – Sexual Misconduct Report/Response)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM	(973) 596-3466
Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 5 PM	(973) 596-3414
Student Health Services (SHS)	Monday – Friday 8:30 AM - 4:30 PM	(973) 596-3621

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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.
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WEEK	DAY 1	DAY 2
Week 1 Day 1: Sept. 5 Day 2: Sept. 7	In-class course overview & class intros HW: Why am I in this class + read "The Journalism Life" Spotlight trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=918acvj7L1Y Washington Post editor Marty Baron on "reporting with a soul and a spine": https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/national/how-to-be-a-journalist/marty-baron-on-reporting-with-a-soul-and-a-spine-how-to-be-a-journalist/2021/02/26/632ed78f-1e27-4d1e-b604-c89079b718ce_video.html	Topic: What makes a good photo + how to write captions & cutlines
Week 2 Day 1: Sept. 12 Day 2: Sept. 14 Reading packet: plagiarism & fabrication + Scanlan, pages 1-31	In-class: Work with a partner to gather four photos & write captions for each using the method we reviewed in class	Vector visitors HW #1: Photos due at start of class Topic: Journalistic genres, news worthiness & finding story ideas
Week 3 Day 1: Sept. 19 Day 2: Sept. 21 Reading packet: anonymous sources +	HW #2 due Topic: Story structures, sources & identifying who to interview	

Scanlan, pages 31-68		
Week 4 Day 1: Sept. 26 Day 2: Sept. 29 NPR Interview with Dean Nelson + Scanlan, 69-120	HW #3 due Topic: Conducting an interview & writing a 350-500-word story	
Week 5 Day 1: Oct. 3 Day 2: Oct. 5	HW #4 due Topic: Quotes & attribution	Practice story due
Week 6 Day 1: Oct. 10 Day 2: Oct. 12	Midterm on journo basics: captions, quotes and attribution, sources	Intro story #1: Overview of Newark Arts Festival
Week 7 Day 1: Oct. 17 Day 2: Oct. 19	Research Day	Research Day
Week 8 Day 1: Oct. 24 Day 2: Oct. 26	Pitch due	Reporting workshop
Week 9 Day 1: Oct. 31 Day 2: Nov. 2	Reporting workshop	Reporting workshop
Week 10 Day 1: Nov, 7 Day 2: Nov. 9	Editing workshop	Story #1 due
Week 11 Day 1: Nov. 14 Day 2: Nov, 16	Begin story #2	
Day 1: Nov. 21 Day 2: THANKSGIVING	Round II – pitch due	THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS!
Week 13 Day 1: Nov. 28	Workshop	Workshop

Day 2: Nov. 30		
Week 14 Day 1: Dec. 5 Day 2: Dec. 7	Workshop	Workshop
Week 15	Story #2 due at 11:59 p.m. Friday Day 1: Dec. 12 – LAST DAY OF CLASS!	