

Fall 2024

## COM 339-001: Practical Journalism

Miriam Ascarelli

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

**Office:** Room 410, Cullimore Hall

**Office hours:** Tuesday: 11:45 a.m.-12:30 p.m.; Wednesday: 11:45 a.m.-12:45 p.m.; 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*. Networlding 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, click [here](#).
- *The Wall Street Journal*; to get a free subscription using your NJIT ID, click [here](#).
- 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 dozens of college news sites hosted on [SNOsites.com](#).
- 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.

## Grades will be based on the following:

- Attendance and participation: 5 percent
- Homework and in-class work: 15 percent
- Quizzes: 20 percent
- The 5 W's and H photo essay assignment: 10 percent
- Story #1: 20 percent
- Story#2: 30 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 will automatically be downgraded by five points for each day late. Assignments that are more than a week 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 for work not to be turned in on time.)

**Late homework:** Homework is due on Canvas at the start of class. You will have up until the next class period after the original due date to turn in missed homework, but the work will automatically be downgraded to the equivalent of a C. 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. **In other words, even if you are absent for legitimate reasons, it is still possible to fail the course if you have an excessive number of absences.**

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 (Fri., Sept. 13).

### 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](mailto: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. If you want to use AI for any other purpose beyond this one, you will need to seek permission from me prior to its usage and then disclose information about how it was used in whatever work is produced.

What will NOT be permitted is 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. This 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 (Central King Building, Ground Floor, Room G1) is available for 45-minute individual and group appointment with professional writing tutors online. This resource is intended 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. Appointments are scheduled on Navigate. 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.
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## CLASS SCHEDULE

*(This is my best guess for how the semester will unfold, but do note: the schedule is subject to change.) Because of this, please rely on Canvas for up-to-date information about assignments.*

*And, of course, feel free to email me if you have questions!*

**Our class meets at 10 a.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays in room 403 of Faculty Memorial Hall.**

	Wednesday	Friday
Week 1  <b>Crash course</b>	Sept. 4 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Class intros &amp; class overview</li> <li>Make NYT &amp; WSJ accounts</li> <li>Listen to Times Insider piece: <a href="#">Bridging the Uplifting and the Harrowing in San Francisco -- Heather Knight, the San Francisco bureau chief for The New York Times, strives to reflect all sides and perspectives of the city.</a></li> </ul> HW: Student Engagement/verification of presence) Up +upload a selfie & introduce yourself to the class + read "The Journalism Life"	Sept. 6 In-class: Beats & brainstorming  <b>HW #1:</b> Study the "What's it Called" handout, then read <a href="#">2,000 Sea Lions Roamed, Just to Make This Dock Their Home</a> + <a href="#">Meet 'Supergirl,' the World's Strongest Teenager</a> + an article of your choosing from the NYT or the WSJ related to your chosen beat.  In each story, identify the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Headline</li> <li>Byline</li> <li>Lead</li> <li>Quote</li> <li>Attribution</li> <li>List all of sources that were identified in the story</li> </ol>
Week 2 <b>Crash course: journo basics, parts of a story, where do stories come from?</b>	Sept. 11 In-class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What makes journalism different?</li> <li>Launch 5 Ws + H photo assignment</li> </ul> <b>Last day to drop/add course</b>  HW: Prepare for reading quiz #1 on Tues., Sept 18  Quiz will cover: "What's it Called" handout + Scanlan readings: Introduction (pages xi-xiii) + pages 1-25 (Being Inhuman, Bad Attitude, Letting Objectivity Reign, Unforced Errors, Letting Fear Stop You, Distrusting the Process,	Sept. 13  <b>Vector visitors?</b> In-class: Review how to write a caption, including common pitfalls to avoid (passive voice and comma splices)  <b>HW: Finish 5 W's + H assignment due at 11:59 p.m. Wednesday; prepare for Quiz #1</b>

	Stumbling on the Steps of Effective Interviewing).	
<b>Week 3</b> <b>Crash course: Sources, where do stories come from, continued</b>	<b>Sept. 18</b> <b>5 W's &amp; H assignment due</b>  <b>Quiz #1</b>  <b>In-class</b>  1) Discuss: "Where do Stories Come From" and "Finding and Using Sources" in Harrower packet. 2) In-class & HW: Prepare to meet Matt Kadosh, of TapintoNewark; assignment TBA	<b>Sept. 20</b>  Visit with Matt Kadosh, editor of TapintoNewark? Discussion about finding stories and identifying sources + thoughts on journalism in the age of AI  HW: Readings for Quiz #2 (Fri., Oct. 4)  Quiz will cover stories in reading packet (to be posted on Canvas) + Scanlan lessons 15-20 (pages 48-68): Libel Pains, Cut-and-Paste Jobs, Making it Up, Ignoring your Biases, Failing to Listen, Tripping Ethical Landmines
<b>Week 4</b> <b>Crash course: ethics</b>	<b>Sept. 25</b> In-class: Shattered Glass screening	<b>Sept. 27</b> In-class: Shattered Glass screening & post-film discussion  HW: Reading response to articles in reading packet (to be posted on Canvas)
<b>Week 5</b> <b>Crash course: interviewing, writing, revision</b>	<b>Oct. 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-class discussion of articles in packet: how &amp; why they work</li> </ul>	<b>Oct. 4</b> Quiz 2: This will cover ethics & sources  <b>HW: Readings for Quiz 3:</b> Scanlan, lessons 7-13 + #21 (pages 22-45 + 69-71): Iceberg Ahead!, Bloated Quotes, Numbers Don't Add Up, Both Sidesism; Tuning in USUCK FM, Revision Rejection, The Internet Doesn't Knock on Doors + listen to <a href="#">NPR Interview with Dean Nelson</a> "Want To Know How To Ask Questions? Longtime Journalist Shows How It's Done In New Book"
<b>Week 6</b> <b>Crash course – leads, quotes and other nuts and bolts</b>	<b>Oct. 9</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brainstorming story ideas</li> <li>What is a story proposal? What will you need to include in yours?</li> </ul>	<b>Oct. 11</b>  Quiz #3 In-class work on story proposal

Week 7 Story proposal #1	Oct. 16 Story proposal #1 due @ 11:59 p.m.	Oct. 18 Reporting Day
Week 8 Reporting your story	Oct. 23 Reporting Day	Oct. 25 Editing workshop
Week 9 Reporting out your story	Oct. 30 Story #1 due @ 11:59 p.m.	Nov. 1 Begin proposal #2
Week 10 Writing and revision	Nov. 6 In-class work on proposal #2	Nov. 8 Story proposal #2 due @ 11:59 p.m.
Week 11 Story	Nov. 13 Begin reporting your piece	Nov. 15 Reporting Day
Week 12 Story #2	Nov. 20 LAST DAY TO DROP A CLASS Reporting Day	Nov. 22 Reporting/Editing Day
Week 13 Thanksgiving week	Dec. 4	Dec. 6 Thanksgiving!
Week 14 Story #2	Dec. 4 Editing	Dec. 6 Editing Day
Week 15 Story #2	Dec. 11 Last day of class Story #2 is due at 11:59 p.m.	

