Writing 228: News Writing
Winter 2011
2-3:50 pm Monday and Wednesday
Neuberger Hall 446

Instructor: Christina Cooke
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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday 4-5 p.m. and by appointment
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
During this course, we will learn the basics of reporting and writing for newspapers. We will cover news value, research and interview methods, story structure and AP style. We will also engage in a general discussion of where journalism is heading in the 21st century and talk with a variety of journalism professionals about working in today’s newsroom.

By the end of this course, you should be able to:
• Recognize what makes a good news story and generate your own story ideas.
• Conduct research and develop sources.
• Interview subjects (including strangers) and accurately quote them in articles.
• Construct engaging leads and well-organized stories.
• Write under deadline pressure.
• Produce grammatically clean copy in AP style.
• Develop an understanding of modern journalism and the issues confronting it today.

TEXTS
• News Reporting and Writing, Ninth Edition, 2008, Bedford/St. Martin’s
• The Associated Press Stylebook, 2009
• The Oregonian, nytimes.com, washingtonpost.com and other reliable news sources

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
• Reading. You will be assigned to read a different chapter of your textbook for each class. In addition, because good reporters keep up with current events, please read The Oregonian regularly and keep up with The New York Times, The Washington Post or any other reliable national news source. Also, The Poynter Institute, www.poynter.org, is an excellent resource for journalists.

• Quizzes on grammar and Associated Press style. You will take periodic quizzes on grammar and AP style.

• In-class writing labs. During many class periods, you will complete a writing exercise or produce an article on deadline.

• Take-home assignments. Most weeks, you will have a take-home assignment, which will consist of several exercises or questions to help you engage with course concepts.
• **Outside writing assignments:** Three news briefs, an interview in Q&A form, an article on an event, a trend story and a final article

**OTHER REQUIREMENTS**

• **Attendance.** This class works best when you are here, especially since we will be doing a lot of group work. You are allowed to miss two classes with no questions asked, but after that, your overall grade will drop a fraction of a letter with each miss (from A to A- for the first extra miss, from A- to B+ for the second). If you know that you are going to be gone, please let me know ahead of time. Good communication is essential. I realize that emergencies do happen; these will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. Ask a classmate or check the class calendar online for your assignments and turn them in on your first day back.

• **Punctuality, both to class and with your writing assignments:** Please arrive to class promptly at 2 p.m. Late arrivals are disruptive to everyone and will negatively affect your grade if they occur regularly.

Because news writing revolves around deadlines, it’s important that you learn to meet them. Missed deadlines will lower your grade. Your final story must be handed in on time.

• **Accuracy:** Accuracy is one of the most important elements of journalism. Even the best newspapers goof on occasion, but when they do, they suffer consequences. Incorrect details, misspellings, and punctuation and grammar mistakes will negatively affect your grades.

You are responsible for clean grammar and punctuation, as well as AP style. If you are struggling with any punctuation or grammar issues, we can meet one-on-one to talk about resources you can use to improve. Please write all of your news story with your AP Stylebook at your side.

• **Participation.** This course is at its most effective when it fueled by student participation. You will frequently critique each other’s work and make revisions based on the feedback you receive. Please come to class having completed your reading and homework assignments and prepared to participate in discussion. I also encourage you to come to me with thoughts or questions after class or during my office hours. I like to get to know each student in the class and know how the class is going for everyone.

**POLICIES**

• **Plagiarism and fabricating sources or information:** Journalists are charged with seeking the truth. According to the Code of Ethics of the Society of Professional Journalists, “Public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. Conscientious journalists from all media and specialties strive to serve the public with thoroughness and honesty. Professional integrity is the cornerstone of a journalist’s credibility.” In accordance with this code and Portland State policy, plagiarizing, turning in work that is not your own and/or making up sources or information will result in failure.
• Formatting articles:
  • All stories must be double-spaced and typed in 12-point Times or Times New Roman.
  • In the top left corner of the first page, type your name, the class title (WR 228: News Writing), my name (Prof. Cooke), the date and a word count.
  • Provide the title you have chosen for your article, centered at the top of the page.
  • During in-class writing labs, you will email your story to psunewswriting@gmail.com by the given deadline. On these stories, your grade will drop for every minute you are late.
  • In the subject line of e-mailed stories, include your last name, the name of the assignment and a few words from your title. For example: Cooke – Brief – Grease fire

• Electronic Devices: Turn off or silence your cell phones when you enter class. No ringing, no buzzing, no texting, no exceptions.

• Computer Etiquette: Use classroom computers ONLY to complete in-class assignments. Do not check e-mail or Facebook or surf the web during class. Those who do will be asked to leave and counted absent.

• Incompletes: Incompletes will only be given in the rarest of instances for extreme medical emergencies or other such extreme emergencies. In order to receive an incomplete you must be receiving a C- or better and have been sufficiently keeping up with the work.

• Learning Disabilities: Let me know sometime during the first week of class if you have any documented disabilities (including learning disabilities) for which you need special provisions. I will work with you and the Disability Resource Center so that you can participate in the class. The DRC’s website is http://www.pdx.edu/uasc/drc.html.

COURSE SCHEDULE
Here is a rough outline of our schedule. I may adjust subject matter or add assignments and quizzes. Check the class’s calendar for the most up-to-date information.

Week 1
M, January 3: Introduction, the elements of news

W, January 5: News value, finding stories
  Due:
  - Writing Diagnostic
  - Read Chapter 1, “The Nature of News,” 2-16

Week 2
M, January 10: The inverted pyramid
  Due:
  - Take-Home #1: Determining newsworthiness
  - Read Chapter 7, “The Inverted Pyramid,” 132-159
  - Study for quiz on AP Punctuation
W, January 12: Writing leads
Due today:
- Take-Home #2: Inverted Pyramid
- Read Chapter 11, “Finding the News in News Releases,” 228-243

Week 3
M, January 17: Holiday—No Class

W, January 19: Reporting tools (gathering and verifying information)
Due:
- 3 briefs, at the beginning of class
- Read Chapter 5, “Gathering and Verifying Information,” 91-111

Week 4
M, January 24: Reporting continued
Due:
- Take-Home #3
- Read Chapter 13, “Other Basic Types of Stories,” 262—297, and Chapter 18, “Investigative Reporting,” 380-396

W, January 26: Interviewing basics
Due:
- Take-Home #4: Reporting Practice
- Read Chapter 3, “Interviewing,” 43-61

Week 5
M, January 31: Integrating sources
Due:
- Have your interview conducted by today (transcribing and editing takes longer than you think!)
- Turn in a 1-2 paragraph explanation of who you chose to interview and why
- Read Chapter 4, “In their own words,” 62-88

W, February 2: Covering speeches, meetings and events
Due:
- Interview Q&A due (edited Q&A + full transcript + your list of questions)
- Read Chapter 12, “Speeches, News Conferences and Meetings,” 247-261

Week 6
M, February 7: Writing to be read
Due:
- Pitch for event coverage story
- Take-home #5: Incorporating sources
- Read Chapter 8, “Writing to be Read,” 160-185
- Quiz on AP Style

W, February 9: Peer review day
Due:
- Event coverage story due (bring 4 copies)

Week 7:
M, February 14: Working with Numbers
Due:
- Event coverage revision due
- Read Chapter 6: “Reporting with Numbers,” 112-130

W, February 16: Alternate Story Forms
- Trend pitch due
- Take-Home #6: Working with Numbers
- Read Chapter 9, “Alternatives to the Inverted Pyramid,” 186-209
- Bring in a news or news feature whose lead you like. Be prepared to explain why it appeals to you to the class, pointing out specific features.

Week 8
M, February 21: Group story coverage
- Trend story due
- Have an idea for your final article and turn in a brief overview, including what you think your angle will be.

W, February 23: Individual conferences
Due:
- Bring 3 questions for me about your trend story or news writing in general

Week 9
M, February 28: Newsroom visit?
Due:
- Trend rewrite due

W, March 2: Pitching stories to editors
Due:
- Final proposal due
- Other homework TBA

Week 10:
M, March 7: Wrap up
Due:
- Final article draft

W, March 9: Individual conferences

** By noon on Wednesday, March 16, email your final article rewrites, pitches and reflective letters to psunewswriting@gmail.com. Do not be late!