

MEDPL 201 Reporting and Writing 1

Spring 2020

Hunter North Building 503

Wednesdays, 7:00 - 9:40

Shared Syllabus: tinyurl.com/BrooksReportingandWriting

Course website available on Blackboard coming soon!

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Course Description

[Expected Learning Outcomes](#)

[Methods of Evaluation](#)

[Reporting & Writing Assignments: 40 percent](#)

[In-Class Work, Homework & News Quizzes: 25 percent](#)

[Final Deadline Writing Exam: 10 percent](#)

[Portfolio and Social Media: 5 percent](#)

[Midterm Exam: 5 percent](#)

[Class Participation: 15 percent](#)

[Deadlines & Filing Standards](#)

[Required Texts/Subscriptions/Equipment](#)

[Events](#)

[Instagram & Twitter](#)

[Academic Integrity](#)

Resources

[Hunter College Student Success Center:](#)

[Counseling and Wellness Services:](#)

[Accessibility:](#)

[Hunter College Policy on Sexual Misconduct:](#)

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

[Week 1 \(January 29\)](#)

[Week 2 \(February 5\)](#)

[Week 3 \(February 19\)](#)

[Week 4 \(February 26\)](#)

[Week 5 \(March 4\)](#)

[Week 6 \(March 11\)](#)

[Week 7 \(March 18\)](#)

[Week 8 \(March 25\)](#)

[Week 9 \(April 1\)](#)

[Week 10 \(April 7 come to class on Tuesday\)](#)

[Week 11 \(April 22\)](#)

[Week 12 \(April 29\)](#)

[Week 13 \(May 6\)](#)

[Week 14 \(May 13\)](#)

[Week 15 \(May 20\)](#)

Course Description

This course is an intensive writing workshop designed to teach the basic elements of news writing and reporting. You will learn specific skills, including reporting and interviewing, hard news and feature writing, as well as writing on deadline and using social media and other digital platforms to research and report stories, reach a wider audience and promote your work. You will critique each other's work and learn through the process of writing and rewriting. You will also gain insight into the verification process and fact-checking challenges confronting today's journalists, as well as the ethical and First Amendment considerations underpinning our work.

Each of you will develop your own online portfolio website and set up or build on social media accounts to establish a digital identity and a personal online infrastructure where you will publish your work. By expanding your portfolio website and social media identity, you will be preparing yourself for digital citizenship and learning about the best practices for digital publication. We will have our own Twitter and Instagram hashtags that will help turn this course into an open, networked community.

Expected Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester, students will be able to:

1. Write a hard news lede and an inverted pyramid story on deadline.
2. Use AP Style in all written assignments.
3. Incorporate basic news writing conventions in all stories.
4. Identify the differences between hard news stories and features.
5. Conduct interviews using best journalistic practices and professionalism.
6. Demonstrate news judgment in pitching, reporting and writing stories.
7. Develop your personal portfolio website and use digital media to research, report, publish and promote stories.
8. Apply critical news verification techniques while researching and reporting stories.

Methods of Evaluation

Your grade will consist of seven parts and will reflect all the expected learning outcomes, course requirements and material covered. All assignments must be published on your website with multimedia elements and submitted on the designated due date at the beginning of class

even if you are absent. Accuracy is the Holy Grail of journalism. All of your writing will be judged for factual accuracy as well as correctness in numbers and math, spelling, grammar, punctuation, word usage and AP style. Your grade will reflect your command of these basics and the belief that accuracy is the cornerstone of good journalism and that such errors cannot be tolerated. Students who make up sources, quotes or descriptions or plagiarize the work of others (including copying and pasting anything from the Internet without attribution) will fail this class. In addition, you are not allowed to recycle stories from previous journalism courses or report the same story for two concurrent classes. Grading will be based on the following scale:

A+ = publishable as is

B+ to A = publishable with light editing

B- to B = publishable with a rewrite

C- to C+ = major problems with facts, reporting, writing

F= plagiarism, fabricated sources or fabricated quotes, missing key facts, gross misspellings

Reporting & Writing Assignments: 40 percent

You will have four formal reporting and writing assignments:

1. Descriptive newser: 5 percent
2. Hunter hard news/inverted pyramid story: 5 percent
3. Person on the Street (POS) story: 5 percent
4. Q&A: 5 percent
5. Profile Feature: 20 percent

For the final Profile assignment, you will file a draft of no less than 800-1,000 words and receive peer feedback in class and written form. In addition, the draft version will be critiqued *and graded* by the instructor during a mandatory one-on-one meeting. You will then submit a rewritten final version of 1,000-1,200 words, posting it on your website and via Blackboard the last day of class. The final version will also be graded and the draft and final versions will be averaged for a final grade, with attention to improvement and responsiveness to editor's notes.

In-Class Work, Homework & News Quizzes: 25 percent

Your in-class work and homework will include an AP style test, writing exercises/homework, in-class deadline writing assignments, weekend reporting assignments and in-class news critiques. There will also be regular weekly pop quizzes on the main news events of the week, reading assignments and material covered during class lecture/discussion. Quizzes may also include short deadline writing exercises.

Final Deadline Writing Exam: 10 percent

This in-class writing exam will involve writing a breaking news story on deadline.

Portfolio and Social Media: 5 percent

You will be developing your personal portfolio website as part of this course and judged on the architecture, presentation, accessibility and content of your portfolio and social media posts.

Midterm Exam: 5 percent

This in-class exam will include short answer questions and an in-class deadline writing exercise.

Class Participation: 15 percent

Attendance and on-time class arrival are expected and required. Each student will be allowed two unexcused absences for a class that meets twice a week, one unexcused absence for a class that meets once a week. Only legitimate and documented emergencies and serious illnesses will be considered for an excused absence. Official documentation must be presented the day you return to class. Each unexcused absence after the limit that will result in a 5-point deduction from your final grade.

On-time arrival to every class is also expected, and habitual tardiness will lower your participation grade. Two unexcused late arrivals (after attendance has been taken) will equal one unexcused absence.

Participation in class is also expected and will be graded. Our class will function as a seminar with discussion in every class period. Students should be in class not only to benefit from the lecture but to interact with fellow students as a community. Exceptional engagement and participation will improve your grade while a lack of participation will hurt your grade.

By enrolling in this course and entering the classroom, each student makes the tacit commitment to participate in the class. Active class participation involves more than mere physical presence. Students are expected to be actively involved in the class. They should take the initiative in discussion and projects, ask relevant questions, and contribute to the overall learning environment of the class.

It is your responsibility:

1. To prepare for class by having read assignments, written papers and/or prepared projects
2. To actively participate in class discussion and activities;
3. To take notes on discussions, presentations, and activities conducted within the class;
4. To complete all course assignments, even if you are absent from a class meeting.

NOTE: Given the nature of this course, incompletes will rarely be given for documented emergencies and serious illnesses, and only at the discretion of the instructor. Any missed in-class exercises cannot be made up, but at least one extra credit assignment will be offered to replace your lowest quiz grade or a missed exercise.

Deadlines & Filing Standards

Deadlines are taken seriously in journalism and this class. If you are ever absent, it's up to you to submit the assignment by the deadline. If you don't turn in your assignment by deadline,

you will lose a half-letter grade (5 points) for every day the assignment is late. The instructor reserves the prerogative to give an “F” to any assignment not turned in within a week of the original deadline, unless an extension has been arranged *prior* to that first deadline.

All assignments, unless otherwise indicated, must be submitted to the instructor via Blackboard with the following info on the document:

- Document “name” = “rw1-spring2020-YOURNAME-ASSIGNMENTNAME_DATE
- Document slug on top as
rw1-spring2020
YOURNAME (PARTNERNAME, if applicable)
ASSIGNMENT NAME
DATE
WORDCOUNT (where applicable)
- A contact sheet for all sources, including source name, phone/email/any social media handle

Required Texts/Subscriptions/Equipment

REQUIRED: *Inside Reporting*, 3rd Edition, Tim Harrower (buy for about \$70-75 or rent for \$32 - at Amazon.com:

(http://www.amazon.com/Inside-Reporting-Tim-Harrower/dp/0073526177/ref=sr_1_3?s=b&ie=UTF8&qid=1407719466&sr=1-3&keywords=harrower)

REQUIRED: *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law 2019* (online or book version) (<https://store.apstylebook.com/apstylebookonline.html> or <https://www.apstylebook.com> or via <http://hunter.textbookx.com>

The Elements of Journalism, by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel (handout on Blackboard)

REQUIRED: *The New York Times*: You will be responsible for reading the *The New York Times* (nytimes.com) every day and keeping up with the news in general, as the NYT’s stories and technique will frequently be discussed during class. Hunter students are eligible for a free mobile and digital *New York Times* subscription. Please sign up for a free subscription ASAP! <http://library.hunter.cuny.edu/news/new-york-times-online-access>

You should also select a news organization as your homepage and sign up for mobile alerts.

Events

There may be required Journalism Program events or newsroom tours during the term, with dates and details to be announced. If an event or tour falls outside the regular class time and you are unable to take part, an alternate assignment will be provided.

Instagram & Twitter

You are required to have a professional Instagram and Twitter account for photo and reporting assignments. You are required to post at least one post on each platform for every assignment that is to be posted on your website, in order to promote your story with a link to your personal

website and also tagging Hunter Journalism by using the hashtag [#hunterjourn](#) on Twitter and [#hunterjourpgm](#) on Instagram.

Unless instructed otherwise, to get credit for your social media posts, plan to share a screen grab of any Instagram or Twitter posts with your professor on Blackboard.

Academic Integrity

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining an unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the [CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity](#) and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the [Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures](#).

Please read this carefully: Integrity and credibility are the two pillars of journalism. All work submitted in this class must be your original work. Any student presenting the work of someone else, whether off the Internet or from another publication or a classmate will receive an F for the course. ***Copying and pasting from the internet without identifying the source is plagiarism even if it's unintentional.*** For MEDPL classes, all sources and quotes must be authentic and reported by you alone (unless working on a team project). You will be required to turn in a contact sheet for all assignments and sources and quotes will be spot-checked. You may not interview friends or family except in rare circumstances and *only* with advance permission and notation of this in your story. You also may not tell sources what to say or ask them to read or reread a quote for a soundbite *even if it's their own words from a previous interview*. In addition, you are not allowed to recycle stories from previous journalism courses or report the same story for two classes. You may not stage events or interviews for any journalism assignment. Any student suspected of fabricating events, quotes, sources, soundbites, or plagiarism will receive an F for the course and will be reported to the Office for Academic Integrity.

Resources

Hunter College Student Success Center:

Rockowitz Reading/Writing Center: Offers students help with their writing at every stage of the writing process. You can make an appointment at: <http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/reading-writing/>

Dolciani Mathematics Learning Center: Tutoring services to students across disciplines seeking skill enhancement, including math concepts and statistics: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/dolciani>

Skirball Science Learning Center: Comprehensive assistance in all areas of the natural sciences and technology: <http://library.hunter.cuny.edu/skirball-science-learning-center>
(NOTE: All located in Hunter East, 7th Fl Library)

Counseling and Wellness Services:

Counseling and Wellness Services (CWS) is another campus resource and service center for all matriculated students in Room 1123, Hunter East. It offers counseling services at no cost to all Hunter students. You can make an appointment at:

<http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/student-services/counseling-and-wellness>

Students with disabilities should contact the Office of AccessABILITY at 1124 East Building to determine your disability status and obtain appropriate accommodations and services. For more information, go to: <http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/access>

Accessibility:

In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical, and/or Learning) consult the Office of Accessibility located in Room E1124 to secure necessary academic accommodations. For further information and assistance, please call (212) 772-4857/TTY (212) 650-3230. PLEASE NOTE: If you have registered with the Office of Accessibility, please let the instructor know at the start of the term.

Hunter College Policy on Sexual Misconduct:

In compliance with the [CUNY Policy on Sexual Misconduct](#), Hunter College reaffirms the prohibition of any sexual misconduct, which includes sexual violence, sexual harassment, and gender-based harassment retaliation against students, employees, or visitors, as well as certain intimate relationships. Students who have experienced any form of sexual violence on or off campus (including CUNY-sponsored trips and events) are entitled to the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights for Hunter College. Sexual Violence: Students are strongly encouraged to immediately report the incident by calling 911, contacting NYPD Special Victims Division Hotline (646-610-7272) or their local police precinct, or contacting the College's Public Safety Office (212-772-4444).

All Other Forms of Sexual Misconduct: Students are also encouraged to contact the College's Title IX Campus Coordinator, Dean John Rose (jtrose@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-650-3262) or Colleen Barry (colleen.barry@hunter.cuny.edu or 212-772-4534) and seek complimentary services through the Counseling and Wellness Services Office, Hunter East 1123.

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

Please be advised that the schedule below is subject to change. You are responsible for checking this syllabus and Blackboard for any changes to our schedule.

January 29, 2020

- Class introductions. Class orientation. Review of syllabus. Emphasize plagiarism.
- What is News and Who Decides? An explanation of news values and gatekeeping
- The difference between opinion journalism & unbiased/fact-based journalism

What is this week's homework?

Reading (due February 19): Harrower Ch. 7 on 1st Amendment law and media ethics; pp. 134-137 on editorials, columns & reviews.

Reading (due February 19) "[Hudson Yards Is Manhattan's Biggest, Newest, Slickest Gated Community. Is This the Neighborhood New York Deserves?](#)" By Michael Kimmelman, Architecture critic, The New York Times March 14, 2019

Reading (due February 5): Kovach and Rosenstiel handout; Harrower, chapters 1-2.

Identify a news story and an opinion piece on the same issue, *due February 19*.

Sign up for a New York Times subscription and set up Twitter and Instagram accounts.

February 5, 2020

- News Ledes: How to begin your news story and what options you have
- AP Style: The news media's standard for writing stories across platforms
- Observational Reporting: Creating a story that gives more than just facts
- Media Ethics and 1st Amendment law Jeopardy!

What is this week's homework?

Reading (due March 4): Harrower, Chapter 3 + pages 74-75 on observation

Reading (March 11): Social media backgrounders. "[Why Everyone Should Register a Domain Name,](#)" D. Gilmor.

Weekend reporting assignment #1 due March 4.

Sign up for an account on Wordpress.com.

AP Style take-home test due March 25.

(Next Wednesday is February 12. We do not meet. Work on your reporting assignment)

(There will be a pizza lunch from 1-2:30 p.m. February 6 at Hunter North 503 for students who want to apply for a Pulitzer Fellowship. I strongly recommend you attend this event)

February 19, 2020

- First News Quiz of the semester
- Portfolio Workshop: How to create one and why they're so important for you
- Discussion and dissection of weekend reporting assignment #1
- Practice writing hard news ledes and writing in AP style
- Review of hard news vs opinion pieces you've selected

What is this week's homework?

A portfolio website skeleton is due February 26

Begin working on reporting assignment #2 (Facts & Details) due March 18

(There will be a workshop between 1 to 2:30 p.m. February 26 at Hunter North 503 for students who want a summer internship. I strongly recommend you attend this event)

February 26, 2020

- News Quiz #2
- Review of Lede Exercises that were submitted February 19
- Progress update & strategies for weekend reporting assignments #1 and #2
- Practice writing alternative ledes (due at the end of class)
- One on one reviewing portfolio website

What is this week's homework?

REMINDER: Homework: AP Style take-home test due Session 8.

REMINDER: Reporting & Writing Assignment #1 (Descriptive newser) due next class

March 4, 2020

- News Quiz #3
- Story Structure: The Inverted Pyramid and the Martini Glass
- In-Class Exercise: Inverted pyramid story from GE fact set (a rough draft is due for review on March 11.)

What is this week's homework?

Reading (due April 7): Finding and cultivating sources, generating story ideas: Harrower, pp. 68-73, 98-113 & 116-119

Begin weekend reporting assignment #3 (Facts, Quotes & Details) due April 22.

Sign up for news story one-on-one consultation with me for March 11 or March 18.

March 11, 2020

- News Quiz 4
- Quick review of the inverted pyramid story structure
- Workshop the GE stories from last session
- In-Class Exercise: Inverted pyramid story on Mr. Muscles (final version is due for a grade on April 29)
- In-Class evaluation of Mr. Muscles story while in development

What is this week's homework?

REMINDER: The Reporting & Writing Assignment #2 is due March 18 (next week)

REMINDER: Sign up for story one-on-one consult with me (if you haven't already)

March 18, 2020

- News Quiz #5

- In-Class Exercise: Deadline story with the martini glass story structure
- Reviewing and critiquing Reporting Assignment #2
- Examples of Q&A stories and how they're created
- An in-class writing assignment that's a midterm example

What is this week's homework?

REMINDER: A final version of your Portfolio Website is due on March 25
Study for midterm

March 25, 2020

- Complete the midterm exam
- The News Interview: Generating crucial material for a story
- Explain Reporting & Writing Assignment #3 (Person on Street)
- Pairs are assigned and story ideas are cultivated
- Read Harrower pages 76 through 85
- Present a few portfolio websites

What is this week's homework?

Person On Street reporting pairs meet to plan story pitch(es).
Write the weekend reporting assignment #4 (Q&A) due April 1.

(There will be a Pulitzer Center talk from 6 to 7 p.m. March 30 at the Roosevelt House called China: Power and Prosperity. The guest speaker is PBS News Foreign Correspondent Nick Schifrin. I strongly recommend you attend this event because there's optional extra credit)

EXTRA CREDIT: Optional

Attend the Pulitzer Center event

BEFORE THE EVENT: post to Blackboard 1-2 questions to ask the speakers at event **AFTER THE EVENT:** post a photo & caption with quote from the event on either Instagram or Twitter and then share a link or a screengrab of the post to Blackboard

April 1, 2020

- News Quiz #6
- Pitching your POS story (teams)
- Turn in your Q&A
- Guest Lecture: Perfecting the Pitch with Janelle Griffith of NBC News

What is this week's homework?

Continue working on your POS story with your partner

REMINDER: Next week's class meets on Tuesday (April 7) instead of Wednesday

April 7, 2020

- News Quiz #7
- Critiquing weekend reporting assignment #4 (the Q&A)
- Critiquing weekend reporting assignment #3 Person on Street
- Read (in-class) Harrower, pages 115 to 125
- Announce Reporting & Writing Assignment #5 (Feature Profile)
- Reporting the Feature Profile

What is this week's homework?

Think about who you would like to write a profile feature on and prepare to pitch it.

(the following Wednesday is April 15. That's Spring Break. We don't meet. Enjoy!)

April 22, 2020

- News Quiz #8
- Profile pitch
- A complete story checklist (lede, sensory details, facts & details)
- Basic grammar lessons and AP style review
- In-class assignment: identifying AP style errors

What is this week's homework?

Make edits and tweaks to Q&A and Person on Street
Continue working on Feature Profile

April 29, 2020

- News Quiz #9
- Critiquing first draft of Writing Assignment #5 (Feature Profile)
- Critiquing Portfolio Website

What is this week's homework?

Sign up for one-on-one editing sessions for profile stories (May 6 or May 13)

May 6, 2020

- News Quiz #10
- Student Course Evaluations
- Peers Critique Feature Profile Submissions
- The entire class discusses each profile

What is this week's homework?

Sign up for one-on-one editing sessions for profile stories (if you haven't already)

May 13, 2020

- Final Exam review followed by an in-class deadline writing exercise
- Final Exam - In-Class Deadline Writing.

What is this week's homework?

Make sure you finalize your portfolio website

Finalize your Reporting & Writing Assignment #5 (Feature Profile)

Post all your reporting assignments from this semester onto your portfolio website

May 20, 2020

- Portfolio Website presentations
- Career Cafe: What you can do now to make sure you graduate with a job
- Farewell!