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### Introduction To Journalism

Barbara Nevins Taylor  
*CUNY City College*

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## Introduction to Journalism

Syllabus Fall 2019

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**MCA 233-4PR-28707**

**OFFICE HOURS:**

**ROOM 463**

**ONE HOUR BEFORE AND AFTER CLASS**



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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

We need curious journalists, willing to work hard to pursue the truth, perhaps more than ever before. This course aims to give you a theoretical and practical understanding of what it takes to become a journalist and the importance of journalism to democracy.

Despite attacks on reporters and news organizations by some political leaders, the right to practice journalism is embedded in the United States Constitution. The law of our land highlights the importance of honest reporting about government and those in power to ensure that they are accountable to the people.

The digital revolution transformed the way we consume and deliver news, but the important principles of reporting remain the same. Every day, we see that journalism comes in many forms and appears on every platform from traditional print newspapers and magazines, to online sites that offer broad content or specialize in niche information, to social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat. Local TV news and network broadcasts continue to use traditional formats but increasingly are experimenting with social platforms. Podcasts and public radio have become go-to sources of information for millions. And like a surprise in a stack of Russian dolls, you'll also find carefully reported news stories within the noise of some cable TV "news" programs.

Serious journalists who work for serious news outlets continue to share the age-old principles of journalism. Whether we report about politics, events of the day, culture, sports or entertainment, we share the same goals. Our curiosity drives us. We carefully observe situations and people and record or make note of what we see. We analyze, synthesize and lay out the facts to provide information that allows people to make informed decisions.

At this challenging time in our country's history, we need accurate reporting and talented journalists willing to dig deep, write, record, shoot, produce and give unbiased context to what happens in our communities, the nation and the world. Here in New York and elsewhere, we need committed journalists willing to go into our neighborhoods and report at ground level about what's going on now. That's what you'll do for your class assignments.

In this class, you'll learn how to write using the active voice to give your stories energy and power. You'll learn how to identify what makes news, find, report and follow stories and gather information to craft into stories than can appear on multiple platforms.

Get ready to follow your curiosity, roll up your sleeves, put on your running shoes and practice journalism. Then see your stories posted on our class website, [CCNY Introduction to Journalism-Truth Matters](#), or on [HarlemView](#) and [Dateline CUNY](#).

I also hope that you'll write for [The Campus](#) and share your work with the class.

## Course Learning Outcomes

### **This course will help you learn:**

How to work ethically to find the truth, pursue accuracy, fairness and diversity, and report strong news stories.

How to use your analytic skills to determine what makes a news story.

How to think creatively, independently, and critically about local and world events.

How to gather information, synthesize complicated details, and craft a succinct, logical story with a beginning, middle and end.

How to write stories of 300 to 500 words for print, digital and other platforms.

How to gather information using photographs, video and audio effectively.

How to use math and statistics to provide context.

How to understand the changes in the media industry and what they mean for journalists and news consumers.

How to meet deadlines.

## **Required Reading**

Download the [AP app](#). It's free. You must keep up with current events and the news. This will help you do it.

Get a free subscription to The New York Times. Read the Daily News online. Watch TV news, local and national. Try PBS NewsHour. Watch Vice. Listen to the radio. Try WNYC 93.9 in the morning. Use a news aggregator like Google News, Yahoo, Apple News, Gothamist, or Facebook Trending. Use Twitter.

Add news sources, elected officials and newsmakers to your Twitter feed. Associated Press @AP, @Reuters, @Bloomberg, @NYT, @WashingtonPost, @theroot, @fusiontv Look for mainstream and diverse sources that offer different points of view. They can keep you up-to-date and engaged in the news.

## **Read this book:**

[The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor](#) by Gabriel Garcia Marquez. The book is available for free in the City College library. I donated eleven copies.

## **Articles and links:**

I will post articles, links and essays for you to read regularly on the class website and will include questions about the stories in the quizzes.

## **Attendance**

Our class meets once a week. We have a lot of ground to cover and that means you need to come to class and show up on time.

Two unexpected absences will mean you get a lower grade. If you must miss a class, email or text me in advance.

If you miss more than four classes we'll ask you to withdraw from the course. Please don't do this.

Three instances of lateness will count as one unexcused absence.

Please get into the excitement of journalism and come to class on time.

## **Grading**

Assignments: 30 percent

Class participation and news quizzes: 20 percent

Midterm exam: 20 percent

Final grammar exam: 10 percent

Final writing, photography, video or audio project: 20 percent

## **Class Conduct**

Please put away your digital devices and other distractions. We need your full attention. Multi-tasking and concentration don't mix.

Journalism requires collaboration. We depend upon one another in newsrooms, in the field and in the classroom, and we need to play nice.

Students will present their work in class for review and we want to provide positive feedback that helps them move their work forward.

Analyze the work before you speak up and then offer constructive criticism. Try to start with something positive and then explain your criticism.

Please use a word processor and double space your assignments.

## **Assignments**

I'd like to keep you close to the news and our assignments may vary depending upon what happens in the news cycle. But theoretically you'll have writing assignments to:

1. Write a personal first-person profile.
2. Cover the Democratic presidential debate.
3. Report on a news conference or a breaking news story.
4. Report on the Halloween Parade for a feature story.
5. Report on a story for a group enterprise or investigative story.

I'll edit your work so that you can improve week by week and you'll be expected to rewrite and submit several drafts, if necessary.

## **Class Calendar**

**\*\*\*This may change as we move through the semester.**

### **Week One**

Thursday, August 29

Getting to know you. Introduction to class. What makes journalism?

Observation and listening exercises.

What the United States Constitution guarantees and what journalists need to know to fulfill their mission.

Where does news come from?

What makes a news story?

How much do you know about your government?

How you can follow developments and report what's going on.

### **Homework:**

Read, watch and listen to the news.

Check the AP app. It will help you with the weekly news quiz.

Write a 300-word essay to answer the following questions:

Who am I?

Where am I from?

Where am I going?

Include a photo. It doesn't have to be of you. But it should express something about the story.

Deadline: Tuesday September 3 at 5 p.m.

Find out and write down the names of your city council member, assembly member, state senator, mayor, county executive, U.S. senators, U.S. representative, the police commissioner.

Find out the number of New York City council members and U.S. representatives to Congress. How many representatives does New York State have? New York City?

Begin to read [The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor](#).

[New York Press Club Conference](#) will be held on Saturday September 7. If you would like to attend, we can get a sponsor to pay your way. It's a good opportunity to hear from working journalists and network.

**No class on Thursday September 5. Classes follow a Monday schedule.**

## **Week Two**

### **Thursday, September 12**

Anatomy of a news story. The basic elements and how we construct stories. The Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of Journalism. How to incorporate that in your story.

What's a news angle?

Keeping yourself out of the story.

How to distill information quickly. My quick and dirty guide.

Writing workshop. We'll review grammar and begin to understand active writing. Active writing exercises. How do we write numbers, time, addresses?

Using the [Reuters' Style Guide](#).

### **Homework:**

Read, watch and listen to the news.

Choose a candidate in the Democratic primary debates. Watch the debate and report what that candidate said and how she or he was perceived by the audience. Observe how the moderators and questioners interact with the candidates.

- a. 500 words
- b. Submit by Monday, September 16 at 7 p.m.

## **Week Three**

### **Thursday, September 19**

What did you learn from the primary debate? What's the role of a journalist-moderator in a political debate?

Objectivity: What's it all about?

What's an opinion piece?

The ethics of journalism and how we apply it. Case studies from the news and how we would deal with these situations.

Active writing and style, class exercises.

#### **Homework:**

Read, watch and listen to the news.

Finish [\*The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor\*](#).

## **Week Four**

### **Thursday, September 26**

News Quiz including questions about [\*The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor\*](#).

The art of the interview. How to conduct an interview with the President of the United States, a grieving mother, a celebrity, a child and anyone else. We look at examples in the news.

Telling stories with images. How to make every story better with photos and video.

Setting up a shot that tells a story.

#### **Homework:**

Read, watch and listen to the news.

Read the story or stories provided.

Depending upon the news cycle there may be a reporting and writing assignment.

## **Week Five**

**Thursday, October 3**

We visit a news organization.

## **Week Six**

**Thursday, October 10**

News Quiz

Ethics and copyright. Creative Commons licenses and how you find information, photos, video and music that you can legally and ethically use in your own work.

The difference between PR and news. We re-write a press release.

### **Homework:**

Read, watch and listen to the news.

Finish press release rewrite. Deadline Monday, October 14 at 5 p.m.

## **Week Seven**

**Thursday, October 17**

News quiz

Guest Speaker

How to cover a news event or press conference from A-Z for print, digital, TV and radio.

### **Homework:**

Read, watch and listen to the news.

## **Week Eight**

### **Thursday October 24**

We attend a news conference to report about it.

#### **Homework:**

Read, watch and listen to the news.

Write 300 to 500 words about the news conference. Your report is due at October 28 at 5p.m.

We need at least one photo.

## **Week Nine**

### **Thursday, October 31**

#### **Happy Halloween**

We report on the Halloween parade for a feature story. We might decide to cover another event tied to holiday for the same assignment.

#### **Homework:**

Write a 300-500 story about what you observed. We need at least one photo.

Deadline: November 4, at 5 p.m.

## **Week Ten**

### **Thursday, November 7**

#### **News Quiz**

How history informs journalism. We look at White Supremacism.

Covering a story that's important to you.

How do you find information to make it a broad story?

How to write a story pitch. Who looks at the pitch in a newsroom and who gives you approval to report a story?

**Homework:**

Read, watch and listen to the news.

Write a pitch for the story you want to cover. If I give you the go-ahead, you might want to begin reporting.

Pitch due: November 11 at 5 p.m.

**Week Eleven, November 14**

News Quiz

Review of your pitches. Solving problems in research and writing.

Examples of stories that cover similar subjects.

**Homework:**

Read, watch and listen to the news.

Report and write your story.

First draft of stories due November 18 at 5 p.m.

**Week Twelve**

**Thursday, November 21**

Review of stories.

How can you improve your writing and reporting?

Advocacy journalism and when it works for the public good.

News Quiz

**Homework:**

Read, watch and listen to the news.

Work on your stories.

**Thursday, November 28- Thanksgiving!! We're off**

**Week Thirteen**

**Thursday, December 5, 2019**

News Quiz

Review of yours stories. Work on edits.

TV journalism, a quick look.

**Homework:**

Finish your stories and submit the final draft by Monday, December 9, at 5 p.m.

**Week Fourteen**

**Thursday, December 12**

Last day of class. Cookies.

Thank you for learning about journalism!