

Journalism 380W (07860), Writing & Reporting, meets Mondays and Wednesdays from 1:30 to 3 p.m. in CMA 4.152, with a laboratory that meets Fridays from 12 to 3 p.m. in BMC 3.208.

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### Description

This is the required basic skills class for professional master's degree students. In this course you will explore:

- Thinking critically about what news is.
- Grasping the mechanics of gathering news.
- Developing basic forms of news writing and adapting them to specific formats (e.g., spot news, hard features).
- Cultivating a beat (area of reportorial expertise).
- Examining issues of ethics, fairness and accuracy.
- Identifying under-reported social groups and stories.

### Expected Objectives/Learning Outcomes

1. Demonstrate a basic competence in identifying newsworthy stories.
2. Demonstrate a basic ability to gather news.
3. Demonstrate a basic ability to report and write news in an accurate manner.
4. Demonstrate a basic ability to report and write news in a fair, ethical manner.
5. Demonstrate a basic understanding of the difference between hard news and feature news.
6. Demonstrate a basic ability to incorporate multimedia components into their stories.

### Written Assignments

Written assignments consist primarily of two products:

- **Story Proposals:** These are one-page story ideas you pitch to your editors, focusing on what the story is and why we should run it. Suggest *human sources* to interview. Suggest *non-human sources* you would use, such as reputable reports, poll data, other published stories, as appropriate. Suggest *first-hand observations* you would make (e.g., attending an event). Suggest at least one *multimedia element* to accompany your story. Example: "I have some good photos that can accompany this story. I also have clear audio that we can make available on the web site." (See below for more information about multimedia elements.) We will have **editorial budget meetings** in class where you pitch your story idea. We will discuss the merits of your proposal and suggest reporting and writing tactics to help strengthen the story.

- **Out-of-class and off-campus news and feature stories.** Requirements for each of these six stories differ from each other and are specified in the course schedule below.

Unless told otherwise, all written assignments should be written with this *audience* in mind: People living in or near Austin, Texas.

Written assignments are given a *length requirement*. Make sure that your assignment is within this range: plus or minus 10% of the length assigned. Thus, an assignment for a 500-word story may be 50 words shorter or longer than the assigned 500-word length, that is, the story must be between 450 and 550 words. Keep story proposals to no more than one page (one side). For the purposes of this class, the word count will be defined as everything from the first character of the first word of the story to the last character of the last word. Thus, it will not include your identifying information, story title, contact information, any external multimedia content or anything else. See below for where to report the word count. You can obtain a word count easily in Word. Highlight the story from start to finish (as described above), go to the Review tab and click on Word Count. Report the number in the “Word” row.

For each story, unless told otherwise, you must interview at least two human sources. (Some stories will require more sources; see specific requirements for each story in the course schedule below.) You must include, at the end of your story, the *contact information* (phone numbers, email addresses) of anyone you have interviewed. The instructor must be able to verify your sources. Sources will be called to verify that interviews took place and were conducted in a professional manner.

For each story, include at least one *multimedia element*. This could be a chart, illustration, still photograph, web site link, infographic, audio clip, video clip or other multimedia content that complements and enhances your story. *How to submit multimedia elements* depends on the type. A still photograph can be attached to your copy. A web site link can be imbedded in the story itself. An audio or video clip can be made available on your web site. If appropriate, let readers know how to access your story’s multimedia elements.

Written assignments must be *properly submitted*. To avoid penalties for lateness, turn in a *hard copy* of written assignments at the start of class on the due date. Also, by that same deadline, send a *copy via email* to the instructor as a *Word attachment*. In the email *subject line*, identify the assignment. Example: Proposal 1. (See section on “Grades” below regarding penalties for busting deadline.)

Written assignments must be *properly formatted*. Double space all copy. Use 12-point type and one-inch margins. Left-justify all copy (i.e., do not center any copy or justify copy on the right side of the page). At the top left of each story proposal or story, give your name, due date and assignment identification (e.g., Proposal 1). At the top right, give a short (one- to three-word) story slug. The slug identifies the focus of a story and is used by editors and reporters to refer quickly to a particular story. Below that, give the word count. (See above regarding how to give word count.) Then give a possible headline (title) for the story, no more than 12 words. Then drop down a couple of lines and start the story. Do not include a byline. Indent the start of each paragraph. Do not add extra blank lines between paragraphs. At the end of the story, drop down a

couple of lines and add any necessary information on multimedia elements Drop down a couple of more lines and add contact information for all sources. Use Associate Press style. Example: Helena Handbasket has written her third story about the construction of a new mosque:

Helena Handbasket

New mosque

Sept. 30, 2013

Words: 496

Story 3

Planned mosque exemplifies growing diversity of East Austin

This is the start of the story. The story starts with a riveting lead, one that gives the reader the gist of the story, grabs the reader's attention, and makes the reader want to read more.

Here's the second paragraph. Note the indent and no extra blank lines between paragraphs. Note also that the copy is not justified on the right, only on the left.

Here's the last paragraph.

Multimedia elements: To hear more from members of the Islam faith and others living in East Austin about the new mosque, [click here](#) (include website address here).

Contact information:

Nazrul Ibrahim, 512-345-6789, [nibrahim@gmail.com](mailto:nibrahim@gmail.com)

Fortunata Perez, 512-987-6543, [perez21@yahoo.com](mailto:perez21@yahoo.com)

## Grades

Grades will be determined by:

1. Evaluation by professor and teacher assistant of the stories you write:
  - A story that needs at most minor editing or additional reporting (facts, quotes, sources) gets an A.
  - A story that needs major editing **or** additional reporting (**but not both**) gets a B.
  - A story that needs both major revision **and** major additional reporting gets a C.
  - Some effort at writing or reporting gets a D.
  - No serious effort at writing or reporting gets an F.
  - Please note that the university grading policy allows for uses of pluses and minuses.
2. Deadlines. Miss your deadline and your highest potential grade can drop one grade level at each of these benchmarks: 15 minutes late, 12 hours, 24 hours. Many assignments can be completed well before the deadline – in some cases days and even weeks beforehand. **All outside work is due at the start of class.**
3. Class participation and class and lab exercises and assignments.

**Stories 1-5** are each worth **10 percent** of the final grade, for a total of **50 percent**.

**Story 6**, our “capstone” story, is worth **15 percent** of the final grade.

**Class exercises and participation** are worth a total of **20 percent** of the final grade.

**Lab exercises and participation** are worth a total of **15 percent** of the final grade.

## Required Texts

*The Associated Press Stylebook – latest edition*

*Inside Reporting: A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism, by Tim Harrower, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*

## Attendance

**Be on time. Important announcements are often made at the beginning of class.** If you can't make class, let the instructor know as far in advance as possible.

## Religious Holy Days Observance Policy

The Texas Education Code specifies that an institution of higher education shall excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

<http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi03-04/ch4/ch4g.html#attendance>

## Students with Disabilities

Please notify your instructor of any modification/adaptation you may require to accommodate a disability-related need. You will be requested to provide documentation to the Dean of Student's Office in order that the most appropriate accommodations can be determined. Specialized services are available on campus through Services for Students with Disabilities.

Students may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 471-6259.  
<http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>

### **Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty**

Do not plagiarize, make up quotes or make up facts. The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records, and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, providing false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment for two courses without the prior permission of the instructor. By accepting this syllabus, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of a work-career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. [http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint\\_student.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/acint_student.php).

### **The University Honor Code**

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community.

### **Course Schedule** (subject to changes)

Classes will sometimes begin with a “news meeting.” We will go around the room and ask you to identify the important news of the day, how they should be prioritized in terms of “play” or “placement” in a publication. Be prepared to serve in any editorial capacity.

Wednesday, Aug. 28:

- Introductions. The Reporter’s Road Map.
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Story 1. Attend an event *on campus* that would be of interest to Austin-area residents and write a 400-word straight news story. Interview and quote at least two people. Proposal 1 is due Sept. 9. Story 1 is due Sept. 18.

*Friday, Aug. 30, Lab.*

Monday, Sept. 2:

Labor Day holiday—no class.

Wednesday, Sept. 4:

- How newsrooms work. News values. Basic news elements: heads, leads, captions, etc.
- **ASSIGNMENT:** One-page status report on who you have interviewed and intend to interview for Story 1. Due Sept. 11.
- **READING:** Harrower, 17-29; 35-41.

*Friday, Sept. 6, Lab.*

Monday, Sept 9:

- Leads.
- **DUE:** Story Proposal 1.
- **READING:** Harrower, 42-49.

Wednesday, Sept. 11:

- Reporting basics: Interviewing, observing, sources, quotes, attribution.
- **DUE:** Status report on Story 1 sources.
- **READING:** Harrower, 68-85.

*Friday, Sept. 13, Lab.*

Monday, Sept. 16:

- More newswriting basics: 5Ws & H. Story structure.
- In preparation for turning in Story 1, review these 2 checklists: The Reporter's Checklist (end of this syllabus); Deadline Checklist (Harrower, 59). Also review Assessment Grid used to evaluate stories (end of this syllabus).
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Story 2. Attend an event *off campus* that would be of interest to Austin-area residents and write a 500-word straight news story. Interview and quote at least two people. Proposal 2 is due Sept. 23. Story 2 is due Oct. 2.
- **READING:** Harrower, 50-59.

Wednesday, Sept. 18:

- Selected critiques.
- **DUE:** Story 1.

*Friday, Sept. 20, Lab.*

Monday, Sept. 23:

- Libraries: Story resources.

Wednesday, Sept. 25:

- Covering speeches & meetings.
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Story 3. Attend an on-campus or off-campus speech, presentation, lecture, press conference or official announcement that would be of interest to Austin-area residents and write a 500-word story about it. Quote at least two people, including the person giving the speech, lecture, etc. Proposal 3 is due Oct. 7. Story 3 is due Oct. 16.
- **READING:** Harrower, 106-109.

*Friday, Sept. 27, Lab.*

Monday, Sept. 30:

- Multimedia journalism.

- **READING:** Harrower, 160-180.

Wednesday, Oct 2:

- Accidents & disasters.
- **DUE:** Story 2.
- **READING:** Harrower, 98-101.

*Friday, Oct. 4, Lab.*

Monday, Oct. 7:

- Diversity in news coverage.
- **DUE:** Proposal 3.
- **READING:** Harrower, pg. 88-91.

Wednesday, Oct. 9:

- Crime & courts.
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Story 4. Write a 500-word story based on matters concerning police, fire, emergency workers, rescue workers or other first responders. The story does not have to be “breaking news” but must be of interest to Austin-area residents. Interview and quote at least two people. Proposal 4 is due Oct. 21. Story 4 is due Oct. 30.
- **READING:** Harrower, 102-105.

*Friday, Oct. 11, Lab.*

Monday, Oct. 14:

- Features.
- **READING:** Harrower, 116-123.

Wednesday, Oct. 16:

- More on features.
- **DUE:** Story 3.

*Friday, Oct. 18, Lab.*

Monday, Oct. 21:

- Math for journalists. Fuzzy quantifiers.
- **DUE:** Proposal 4.
- **READING:** Harrower, 86-87.

Wednesday, Oct. 23:

- Weak verbs.
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Story 5. Attend an official public meeting, hearing, civil trial proceeding, criminal trial proceeding or other official proceeding. It could be at any level, including community, city, county, state, regional, federal or international, but it must be open to the public. Examples: Local school board meeting, committee

hearing at the state capitol, Travis County Commissioners Court meeting, state agency public hearing. Write a 750-word story. Interview and quote at least two people. Proposal 5 is due Nov. 4. Story 5 is due Nov. 13.

*Friday, Oct. 25, Lab.*

Monday, Oct. 28:

- Profiles.
- **READING:** Harrower, 124-125.

Wednesday, Oct. 30:

- Local and community news.
- **DUE:** Story 4.

*Friday, Nov. 1, Lab.*

Monday, Nov. 4:

- Presentations on local/community news story budget lines & reporting blueprints.
- **DUE:** Proposal 5.

Wednesday, Nov. 6:

- Under-reported groups & stories.
- **ASSIGNMENT:** Story 6. This is our final “capstone” story, worth more than all other stories. Write a 1,000-word feature profile of an individual doing social justice work or social service work in Central Texas. This will be someone trying to address a significant problem in our society: a volunteer at a nonprofit organization (e.g., a food bank), a community activist (e.g., leader of a group trying to help homeless people get off the streets), a pro bono lawyer (e.g., someone fighting for local environmental protections). Find someone who is doing work to provide social services to specific people or is trying to address specific social justice issues. We need color and action in the story, which means we need to see the person in action, doing things to address a social problem. To do this well, you will need to spend considerable time with this person and others who know the person well. Interview and quote at least three people, including your profile subject. Proposal 6 is due Nov. 18. Story 6 is due Dec. 2.

*Friday, Nov 8, Lab.*

Monday, Nov. 11:

- Brainstorms: Story 6 ideas.

Wednesday, Nov. 13:

- Context, history and sweep: Investing your stories with intimate details, hard reporting and a sense of historical context.
- **DUE:** Story 5.



*Friday, Nov. 15, Lab.*

Monday, Nov. 18:

- Editorials, columns, reviews.
- **DUE:** Proposal 6.
- **READING:** Harrower, 134-137.
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Wednesday, Nov. 20:

- First-person accounts.
- Humor. News bites.

*Friday, Nov. 22, Lab.*

Monday, Nov. 25:

- Making the global local.

Wednesday, Nov. 27:

- Off-campus work on Story 6. Do not report to classroom. Work outside the classroom on your final “capstone” story.

*Friday, Nov. 29, No Lab (Thanksgiving holiday).*

Monday, Dec. 2:

- **DUE:** Story 6.
- Course catch-up, unfinished business and review.

Wednesday, Dec. 4:

- Post-mortems and goodbyes. Course evaluation.

*Friday, Dec. 6, No lab.*

## THE REPORTER'S ROAD MAP

1. Find someone or something with inherent “news value”: different, important, singular, worth knowing, relevant to society, under-reported, new, etc.
2. Learn about your topic by these methods: Observe. Interview. Read/research.
3. Weigh your observations, interviews and research and decide what the Central Thesis of your story is. What is the “main” information to convey? What is the point of your story?
4. Ask yourself if you need to do more observing, interviewing, reading/research. Often a “one source” story is useless. Do you need to interview more people? Use critical thinking to make sure you are not being led astray by sources who are not accurate, have an agenda, are covering up, etc.
5. After you are satisfied you have done enough reporting, write down the Central Thesis in one sentence. Would your best friend from high school understand it? Would most people understand it? Think of it as “the headline” of your story.
6. Begin composing your story. **THINK OF YOUR INTENDED AUDIENCE.** Does each sentence add information? Does each sentence hold a reader's interest?
7. When you are done, see if your Central Thesis has been clearly presented. Prune all extraneous material. Cut any repetition. Cut quotes if they do not convey information or emotion. Is the writing always clear and compelling?

## THE REPORTER'S CHECKLIST

**Are multimedia elements/possibilities noted in your story proposals?** [Example: “I have some good photos that can accompany this story. I also have clear audio that we can make available on the web site.”]

**Are you taking careful notes and using a digital recorder and/or camera as often as necessary?** [You may be asked to submit your story notes to your editor (instructor) for examination.]

**In the first paragraph for a hard news story:** If you are doing a basic hard news story, does the first paragraph convey the most important Who, What, When, Where and Why information of a story?

**In the first paragraph of a feature story:** Does it grab the reader's attention? Does it set the tone and mood for the story? Does it intrigue the reader, create some sort of tension, develop a plot, etc.?

**Nut graph:** If you are doing a story where you do not want to put the Who, What, Where, When, Why and How in your first paragraph then will you write a so-called “nut graph” and introduce it later in your story? This is a summary paragraph explaining why you are writing this story at this time, why this story is important. Nut paragraphs, or nut graphs as they are more commonly called, are often the second, third or fourth paragraph in a typical news feature story.

**Accuracy & context:** Are all names spelled correctly? Are the numbers, dates, ages accurate? Is the story fair? Is it complete (no holes)? Do you have adequate historical context and supporting information? Is it clear and understandable, especially to readers unfamiliar with the subject?

**Organization:** Is there a maintained focus throughout the story? Does it flow logically, leading the reader from one thought to the next?

**Quotes:** Is quote style followed? Do the quotes add new information? Do they convey emotion? Are you pulling quotes out of context? Are you using partial quotes? Are you quotes adding to the story – or are they just repeating facts?

**Sources:** Are there reliable sources? Are sources appropriate for the story? Are sources properly identified and attributed? Have you obtained and reported necessary contact information?

**Writing:** Consider these things: Word choice, clarity and conciseness; sentence construction; transition, flow; active voice; clear storytelling technique. Think about remaining in on tense – either the present tense or past tense. Only switch tenses for a good reason.

**Your voice:** Should it be in the story? Is it appropriate for this story?

**Mechanics:** Grammar, spelling, punctuation, AP style.

### Assessment Grid for J380 Writing and Reporting

The instructor will use the following framework in evaluating your work:

1. The story has inherent news value (it is newsworthy) and fits the assignment.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4

2. Basic news elements—who, what, where, when, why and how—are included, as appropriate.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4

3. The story is accurate.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4

4. The story is fair and ethical.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4

5. The lead tells readers what the story is about and grabs their attention, making them want to read more.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4

6. The story is clearly and smoothly composed, structured, written and reported, including a satisfying and effective ending.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4

7. Grammar, spelling, punctuation and style are correct.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4

8. The work provides all necessary contact information for sources.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4

9. The story contains and identifies at least one multimedia element.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4

10. The story was submitted properly and on time.

0                      1                      2                      3                      4