

The cool thing about journalism is that it gives you an excuse to ask questions about things that interest you. Whether it's an issue at school, my kids' health or a family trip, I always try to leverage my curiosity into a story. When I was eight months pregnant and broke my ankle on the ice, I remember thinking on the way to the emergency room: This will make a great story. Later that year, I wrote a health story for *The Washington Post* about the impact of pregnancy on your balance and your bones.

Caralee Adams, freelance journalist based in Bethesda, Md. as quoted in Daniel Reimold's book, *The Journalism of Ideas* (Routledge, 2013)

COM 338: The Newsroom

Instructor: Miriam Ascarelli
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Office Hours: Wednesdays -- 10:00 a.m.-11:15 a.m. and by appointment

Office: Cullimore Hall 410
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Course description:

This course focuses on the fundamentals of newsgathering and writing -- in short, how to think like a journalist. For those interested in working in communications, be it news, public relations, marketing, etc., an understanding of how reporters do their jobs is essential. But regardless of your major, I think you'll find that "journalistic skills" will help you in your other classes and in life.

We'll begin with a crash course in journalism basics, starting with some hands-on exercises designed to help you find the stories that interest you. Then, because interviews are integral to newsgathering, we'll learn how to determine who to interview, how to prepare for an interview (yep, that means research!), and how to conduct the actual interview. We'll also break down news and feature stories in order to better understand how they are put together.

From there, we'll go on to commit our own "acts of journalism." Students will be encouraged, but not required, to focus their reporting on stories related to climate change, the environment, and sustainability. (See extra credit opportunity below.)

Take 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.
- Over the course of the semester, I will also encourage you to take advantage of publishing opportunities geared toward students writing about climate change and sustainability issues. Specifically, we'll look at planetforward.org, an online platform at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. that publishes by work by college students across the country. We'll also check out CivicStory.org, a New Jersey-based non-profit news organization, that offers reporting fellowships to student journalists interested in sustainability issues.

- You are encouraged to join *The Vector*, NJIT's student newspaper. Staff meetings are held every Friday from 11:30-1 p.m. in *The Vector* offices on the fourth floor of the Campus Center.

Prerequisites: HUM 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 the characteristics of news and feature stories, and learn how quality news organizations use labels to distinguish opinion pieces from straight reporting.
- Learn how to deconstruct stories in order to better understand the reporting and writing process.
- Learn how to find sources, conduct interviews, and write 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*: Given its leading role in American journalism, it is important to become familiar with *The New York Times*. Thanks to NJIT's Van Houten Library, all NJIT faculty, students, and staff may register for free access at [NYTimes Group Pass](#) using their NJIT email address. Once you have a login, you can connect directly to *The New York Times* on the web from any device.
- *The Wall Street Journal*: The NJIT library also offers a group pass for the Wall Street Journal. Here's the [link](#).
- Handouts and readings provided by the instructor; these will be posted on Canvas.

Final Grades: A = 90 – 100 B+ = 87 – 89 B = 80 – 86 C+ = 77 – 79 C = 70 – 76
D = 60 – 69 F = 0 – 59

Assignments:

- Quizzes (3): 10 percent
- Homework: 10 percent
- Reading journal & short presentation: 10 percent
- Story #1 (~600-800 words)
 - Pre-reporting research, pitch & interview request: 5 percent
 - Final (multimedia) package and reflection: 20 percent
- Story #2 (~ 600-900 words)
 - Pre-reporting research, pitch & interview request: 5 percent
 - Final (multimedia) package & reflection: 20 percent

There is no final exam in this course!

Also note:

- You cannot make up a missed quiz unless you provide verified documentation to the Dean of Students Office about your absence.
- All work must be written by you unless it is a collaborative assignment.
- Tentative assignment due dates are listed on the class schedule, but are subject to change
- I calculate final grades manually at the end of the term. So, while I do post grades on Canvas for individual assignments, you will not be able to see your grade total. However, don't hesitate to talk to me if you have a question about your grades.

Homework: There will be regular homework assignments and readings. Homework will be graded on a 4-point scale. Late homework will receive a maximum grade of a 2, or a C. You will have until the class period after the original due date to turn in late homework. **Anything later will not be accepted.**

Late work (reporting assignments, including pre-reporting work): Because so much in-class time is devoted to your reporting assignments, late work will be automatically downgraded to a C. I will not accept reporting assignments more than one week late.

Revisions: Reporting assignments may be revised, but only if they were turned in on time to begin with. Revisions must be submitted within a week after the assignment has been returned. The final grade for the assignment will be an average of the original grade and the grade for the revision.

Incomplete grades: In accordance with the provost's directive, 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 turning in 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.

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 of the course.

Please, note, however, that even if there are legitimate reasons for missing class, excessive absences put you at risk for failing the course.

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.

How to reach me: Email is my preferred method of communication. I will respond to your emails within 24 hours. Please remember to maintain an appropriate tone in all school-related correspondence and include a SUBJECT line and your NAME.

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.

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.

Beyond that, however, 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 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 (115 Cullimore Hall) is available for 45-minute individual and group appointment with professional writing tutors online. This resource is indented 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. For more information, please visit <https://www5.njit.edu/writingcenter/>.

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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. All I did was insert NJIT, where relevant.

What to do:

- **Be professional.** Always represent yourself as 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. 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, I am 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 me. 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 or place of origin.



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

COM 338 (The Newsroom) Spring 2024 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!

Class meets from 11:30-12:50 p.m. on Mondays and Wednesday in room 341 of the Central King Building

	Monday	Wednesday
Week 1 Crash course	Jan. 15 NO CLASS – MLK Day	Jan. 17 Intros and class overview; make NYT and WSJ account + upload a selfie & introduce yourself to class + write a letter to me introducing yourself as a writer. HW #1: Study the “What’s it Called” handout, then find three stories from TapIntoNewark.com . In each story, identify the following: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Headline Byline Lead Quote Attribution List all of sources that were identified in the story (or at least as many as you can)
Week 2 Crash course: how to find story ideas	Jan. 22 In-class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What makes journalism different? Sign up for presentations; Launch 5 Ws + H photo assignment Last day to drop/add course Reading for next week in preparation for reading quiz #1 on Wednesday: packet #1 (fabrication and plagiarism) + Scanlan (<i>33 Ways not to Screw up your Journalism</i>): introduction + pages 1-31	Jan. 24 In-class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First presentation! Complete 5 W’s & H assignment 5 W’s + H assignment due at 11:59 p.m. Wednesday
Week 3 Crash course: Parts of a story, sources, genre	Jan. 29 Planet Forward – guest speaker (Anneliese Palmer, senior editor and education lead)	Jan. 31 Quiz #1 Story types & breaking down stories for structure and leads

		Reading for next week in preparation for quiz #2 on Wednesday: Reading packet #2 (anonymous sources) + Scanlan, pages 31-68.
Week 4 Crash course: leads & story structure	Feb. 5 More leads + Try your hand at writing the Laura Lynn Hardy story HW: Read assigned stories and break them down; speculate about what questions were asked	Feb. 7 Quiz #2 1) In-class: Stories are everywhere: Brainstorm potential stories + three sources you could interview to flesh them out. 2) HW: Look at three stories; examine their leads; be able to classify them + explain why you like (or dislike them); do some reverse outlining. Reading (prep for Quiz 3): Scanlan, 69-114 + listen to NPR Interview with Dean Nelson “Want To Know How To Ask Questions? Longtime Journalist Shows How It's Done In New Book”
Week 5 Crash course: practice story	Feb. 12 Practice story; each person in group must interview two people so everyone will have practice interviewing + learn how to use AI transcription services; then write a 350-word story	Feb. 14 350-word practice story due Quiz #3 Review stories in class HW: rewrite story
Week 6 Crash course – story inspiration + story proposals	Feb. 19 What is a story proposal? What will you need to include in yours? Continue work on practice story, if necessary	Feb. 21 TBA
Week 7 Story proposal #1	Feb. 26 Work on story proposal in class	Feb. 28 Guest speaker: TBA

Week 8 Story proposal #1	March 4 Organizing guest speaker story	March 6 Continue work on guest speaker story continued Journal entries set #1 & story proposal #1 due @ 11:59 p.m.
Week 9	March 11 SPRING BREAK	March 13 SPRING BREAK
Week 10 Welcome back!	March 18 Mini workshops on story elements: Headlines, grammar, leads and more	March 20 Mini workshops on story elements: Headlines, grammar, leads and more
Week 11 Story	March 25 Editing your piece	March 27 Story #1 due @ 11:59 p.m.
Week 12	April 1 LAST DAY TO DROP A CLASS In-class work on proposal #2	April 3 TBA
Week 13	April 8 Proposal #2 due	April 10 TBA
Week 14 Story #2	April 15 TBA	April 17 TBA
Week 15 Story #2	April 22 TBA	April 24 Story #2 due

Week 16	April 29 – Last day of class Journal entries set #2 due	
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