

“I saw stories everywhere. At dinner parties, I would leave with two or three story ideas. Every phone conversation, every movie or play, every walk down the street or trip on the subway brimmed with possibilities. I wrote down every idea that occurred to me, on scraps of paper that I stuffed into my jacket pockets. When I arrived at the office, I would empty my overflowing pockets and sort through the scraps.”

Arthur Gelb, former *New York Times* managing editor
reflecting on his days as deputy metro editor

COM 339: Practical Journalism

Instructor: Miriam Ascarelli

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Office: Room 410, Cullimore Hall

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursday 10 -11:30 a.m. and by appointment

Course description:

There is no question that these are challenging times for journalists. And while this is prompting many changes in the news industry, it's important to remember that, at its heart, the primary purpose of journalism remains the same. That purpose, as Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel write in their classic book *The Elements of Journalism*, is “to provide citizens with the information they need to be self-governing.”

This course is an introduction to journalism. We'll begin with some readings about A.I. in order to gain some perspective on what is may be the biggest information revolution in history. This will also give us a jumping-off point to talk about the appropriate use of A.I. in our classroom and to better understand how A.I. is affecting journalism. From there, we'll move on to developing our own stories about the campus and the surrounding Newark community.

It is my hope that by the end of the semester, you will have a greater appreciation for the craft of journalism and the role journalists play in our democracy.

One 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.

Prerequisites:

Prerequisites: ENGL 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 media terminology, the characteristics of different types of stories, and how quality news organizations use labels to distinguish opinion pieces from straight reporting.
- Learn how to deconstruct stories in order to better understand what quality journalism looks like.

- Learn how to conceive stories, find and evaluate sources, conduct interviews with people you don't know, and write up your 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*. Networkling 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*; to get a free subscription using your NJIT ID, click [here](#).
- *The Wall Street Journal*; to get a free subscription using your NJIT ID, click [here](#).
- Other reading materials will be provided by me and posted on Canvas.

Useful Resources:

- Keep up with what is going on in the world of student journalism by subscribing to [The Nutgraf](#), a weekly newsletter on Substack geared for student journalists. This is a great resource for story ideas and to learn about best practices and internship opportunities.
- Be inspired by the award-winning college journalism from the [Associated Collegiate Press Clips & Clicks contest](#), the [monthly Hearst Awards](#), the College Media Association [Pinnacles](#) and Associated Collegiate Press [Pacemakers](#).
- Sample college media from around the country, including *The Daily Northwestern*, *The Observer* (Fordham) as well as our own NJIT *Vector* by checking out the dozens of college news sites hosted on [SNOsites.com](#).
- Keep up with what is happening in Newark by subscribing to [TapIntoNewark.com](#). TapintoNewark generally produces one story a day, so it's not overwhelming, and it's a good window into the workings of a strong hyperlocal news organization. Subscriptions are free.

Grades will be based on the following:

- Attendance and participation: 10 percent
- Homework and in-class work: 30 percent
- Mid-term and end-of-the-semester in-class writing: 30 percent
- Reporting project: 30 percent

Also note:

- You cannot make up a missed in-class writing or exam unless you provide verified documentation to the Dean of Students Office about your absence.
- 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.

AI Policy

I take it as a given that all of you have experimented with AI and have probably incorporated it in your workflow in some way. In fact, realistically, it's impossible to avoid AI; the minute you step onto the Internet, it is embedded in even a simple Google search.

Which brings me to this class and what brought us all here: namely, to learn. That is why some assignments in this class will be device-free and written the old-fashioned way: with paper and pen/pencil. The point here is to help you gain confidence in your own thinking and reading abilities, not to outsource these mental tasks to a machine. (And, frankly, it is impossible for me to know what people can do on their own if all of their work is "cleaned up" by AI.)

At this point, I've read enough about the impact of A.I. on education to know that one of the things we must safeguard is learning. I was definitely among those nodding when I read the following lines in a [recent op-ed by Clay Shirky](#), the vice provost at New York University: "A student who cuts and pastes a history paper is enrolled in a cutting and pasting class, not a history class. If the student's preferred working methods reduce mental effort, we have to reintroduce that effort somehow."

The same is true for journalism. A student who cuts and pastes an AI-generated news story is enrolled in a cutting and pasting class, not a journalism class.

That said, I can't deny there are circumstances where it makes sense to use AI -- an obvious one involves the generation of a transcript of an interview, a tedious job that once involved stopping and starting your tape recorder in order to write down every word of an interview. With A.I., that task takes seconds, though AI is not perfect, so you still need to double-check the A.I. (And do note: Transcript \neq story. I didn't say, *ask A.I. to write the story*. That is NOT OK!)

Which brings me back to our class. Here are the rules of the game: you do NOT have permission to use AI for every aspect of your work. I will do my best to define guidelines for appropriate AI use for the various assignments, but you must also uphold your end of the bargain by asking questions and openly disclose AI use with me and your peers. This will help ensure that we are using these tools in productive and ethical ways.

NOTE: Due dates (see tentative schedule below) are subject to change. Please keep copies of all assignments (with grades and comments attached, if applicable)

Final Grades:

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

Late assignments:

Late work on reporting assignments will automatically be downgraded by five points for each day late. Assignments that are more than a week will not be accepted. (TBH: We devote a lot of in-class time to getting traction on these assignments, so there is really no reason for work not to be turned in on time.)

Late homework: Homework is due on Canvas at the start of class. You will have up until the next class period after the original due date to turn in missed homework, but the work will automatically be downgraded to the equivalent of a C. After that, late work will not be accepted.

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 in the course. **Please note: even if you are absent for legitimate reasons, it is still possible to fail the course if you have an excessive number of absences.**

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 (Fri., Sept. 13).

How to reach me:

Email is my preferred method of communication. I will respond to your emails within 48 hours. Please remember to maintain an appropriate tone in all school-related correspondence and include a SUBJECT line and your NAME.

Incomplete grades

In accordance with the Provost's directives, 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 the uploading of 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 for a post-semester grade adjustment.

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.

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 (Central King Building, Ground Floor, Room G1) is available for 45-minute individual and group appointments with professional writing tutors online. This resource is intended to help you improve your communication and writing skills. Tutors can help with planning assignments, improving your writing, refining an essay or multimedia project, or other communication-based needs. Appointments are scheduled on Navigate. For more information, please visit <https://www5.njit.edu/writingcenter/>.



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

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.

What to do:

- **Be professional.** Always represent yourself as a [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, and make sure that person has agreed to an interview. 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, faculty are 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 your professor. 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.

TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE

This class meets on Mondays and Wednesdays from 10-11:20 a.m. in room 305 of Faculty Memorial Hall!

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!

	MONDAY	WEDNESDAY
Week 1 Day 1: Mon., Sept. 1	Day 1: NO CLASS! LABOR DAY!	Day 2: CLASS INTRO!

<p>Day 2: Wed., Sept. 3</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make NYT and WSJ, and TapIntoNewark accounts; • Complete the Academic Engagement assignment; • Class basics: attendance, syllabus and tentative schedule <p>HW for Monday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce yourself to the class using the Canvas “Discussion” thread • Read, print out and annotate “The myth of automated learning” (Nicholas Carr) and “It’s an all-purpose study tool – and it’s changing students’ relationships with professors and peers” (Beth McMurtie)
<p>Week 2</p> <p>Day 1: Mon., Sept. 8</p> <p>Day 2: Wed., Sept. 10</p>	<p>TOPIC: Tools of the trade – reading, writing, and asking questions</p> <p>Day 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter to my instructor • Discuss readings: who are the authors, when were the pieces published; purpose; your thoughts + what questions do they raise; how do the pieces interact with one another? • Intro: “My Happy Place” assignment <p>HW: Reading to be completed by Mon., Sept. 15: “The New Members: How Computers are different from printing presses” from Yuval Noah Harari’s book, <i>Nexus</i>. Print out your own hard copy to class with you and annotate it on the page.</p>	<p>Day 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-class work on “My Happy Place” • Assignment due at 11:59 p.m Friday

<p>Week 3 Day 1: Mon., Sept. 15 Day 2: Wed., Sept. 17</p>	<p>TOPIC: Tools of the trade & our historical moment</p> <p>Day 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Watch Michael Soha's video "The Printing Press Revolution" on YouTube • Intro to historian Yuval Noah Harari via this interview from The Daily Show in class together <p>HW: Reading to be completed by Mon., Sept. 22: Scanlan book: Intro + Being Human + "Bad Attitude" + Letting Objectivity Reign" + Unforced Errors" (xi-14) + "How we're using AI" (<i>Columbia Journalism Review</i>)</p>	<p>Day 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Device-free in-class writing about Yuval Noah Harari + discussion • How are journalists today navigating this new paradigm?
<p>Week 4 Day 1: Mon., Sept. 22 Day 2: Wed., Sept. 24</p>	<p>TOPIC: News literacy</p> <p>Day 1: How do Algorithms work? (Checkology.org)</p> <p>HW to be completed by Mon., Sept. 29: Complete the self-directed assignment "Practicing Quality Journalism) on Checkology.org; this assignment takes about an hour.</p>	<p>Day 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating the NYT and the WSJ: opinion pieces vs. reported pieces and how to identify them. • Parts of a story: "What's it called" • Small-group work identifying the parts of a story in articles I will be sharing with you.
<p>Week 5 Day 1: Mon., Sept. 29 Day 2: Wed., Oct. 1 Wellness Day: Thurs., Oct. 2</p>	<p>TOPIC: How do reporters do their jobs?</p> <p>Day 1: Screening of the film, "Spotlight"</p> <p>HW to be completed by Mon., Oct. 6 : Scanlan book: lesson #5 (Letting Fear Stop you", #6 ("Distrusting the Process") #7 ("Stumbling on the steps of effective interviewing");</p>	<p>Day 2: Screening of the film, "Spotlight"</p>

	<p>Lesson 8 (“Iceberg Right Ahead”); Lesson #9 (“Bloated Quotes”); Lesson #12 (“Tuning in to USuck FM”); Lesson #13 (“Revision Rejection”) + article: Opinion I’m a Gen Z journalist. My generation doesn’t know what that means. The issue with younger generations is deeper than media mistrust. It’s that no one knows what a journalist is.</p>	
<p>Week 6 Day 1: Mon., Oct. 6 Day 2: Wed., Oct. 8</p>	<p>Day 1: “Spotlight” discussion with journalist Margaret Schmidt</p> <p>Handout in class: “The role of the student press” + “Covering a Campus” (excerpts from <i>The Student Newspaper Survival Guide</i>)</p> <p>HW: reading to be completed by Mon., Oct. 13: “Thirteen Journalists on how they are Rethinking Ethics” (Columbia Journalism Review”</p>	<p>Day 2:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss Scanlan readings thus far • Story genres and terms: elements of news, news story, profile story, trend story, feature story, hard news vs. soft news, what we mean by localizing a national story Work in groups to come up with six story ideas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ News story about an upcoming event ○ Profile story of a student, professor or staff member ○ Trend story ○ Local angle on a national story ○ Wildcard #1 ○ Wildcard #2
<p>Week 7 Day 1: Mon., Oct. 13 Day 2: Wed., Oct. 15</p>	<p>Day 1: TBD</p>	<p>Day 2: Mid-term exam</p>
<p>Week 8 Day 1: Mon., Oct. 20 Day 2: Wed., Oct. 22</p>	<p>TOPIC: Interviewing</p> <p>Day 1: NPR interview with Dean Nelson, author of the book, Talk to Me. + discuss the following from class journalism packet (to be posted on Canvas):</p>	<p>Day 2: continue work on classmate profile story</p>

	.Harrower on the record-off the record; interviewing files; model Stories (Savannah School of Design) Begin classmate profile assignment based on a 10-minute practice with a classmate!	
Week 9 Day 1: Mon., Oct. 27 Day 2: Wed., Oct. 29	TOPIC: Classmate profile story Day 1: Draft due your classmate profile stories.	Day 2: final edits on classmate profile story – story due 11:59 p.m. Friday
Week 10 Day 1: Mon., Nov. 3 Day 2: Wed., Nov. 5	TOPIC: Make your own journalism (final project) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work on a story pitch that proposes a 500-650 word story that profiles an individual (or group) or localizes a trend or issue that is relevant to the NJIT community 	Day 2: Pitch fest <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pitches due 5 p.m. Friday
Week 11 Day 1: Mon., Nov. 10 Day 2: Wed., Nov. 12 Make your own journalism: step 1 = pitch	Workshop week	
Week 12 Day 1: Mon., Nov. 17 Day 2: Wed., Nov. 19	TBA	TBA

Reporting		
<p>THANKSGIVING WEEK!</p> <p>Week 13</p> <p>Day 1: Mon., Nov. 24</p> <p>Day 2: Wed., Nov. 26</p> <p>(Friday classes meet on Wednesday)</p> <p>Reporting</p>	TBA	<p>NO CLASS – Friday classes meet, per university calendar!</p>
<p>Week 14</p> <p>Day 1: Mon., Dec. 1</p> <p>Day 2: Wed., Dec. 3</p> <p>Writing and editing</p>	TBA	<p>Story due 11:59 p.m. Friday</p>
<p>Week 15</p> <p>Day 1: Mon., Dec. 8</p> <p>Day 2: Wed., Dec. 10 (last day of class)</p> <p>Classes end Thurs., Dec. 11</p>	<p>Day 1: In-class writing</p>	<p>Day 2: Final wrap-up!</p>