

# COM 201 – 04 Journalistic Writing

## Fall 2019

Schedule: MWF 12:00-12:50 p.m.  
Location: Caterpillar Global Communications Center 207

Instructor: Dr. Cory Barker  
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Office hours: Friday, 9-11 a.m., or by appointment

### ***COURSE DESCRIPTION***

COM 201 will introduce you to the fundamentals of journalism, including news values and judgment, story format and structure, basic reporting techniques, and appropriate professional style. The course also will address the history and social responsibility of journalism, along with legal, ethical, and economic issues facing contemporary practitioners and newsrooms around the world.

### ***GOALS & LEARNING ENVIRONMENT***

I recognize that most students who take this course do not strive to be journalists or consider themselves active readers of “the news.” That’s okay. My goal with COM 201 is not to convince you that journalism is the most important major or career path in media. I have two goals with the course:

- First, I want to show how the foundations of journalism (clear writing and curiosity about the world) can improve anyone’s skills as a communicator and thinker.
- Second, I aim to explain how the news industry connects to the other media sectors and consistently embodies broader trends and challenges related to technological change, audience engagement, and political discourse.

We will cover a wide range of material to accomplish these goals. Some days class will focus entirely on style and rules related to writing. Other days will highlight complex ethical issues that arise during the reporting process. I hope to create a welcoming atmosphere where you feel invited to explore and question course topics every day. I see this as a fun course to teach and try to bring a realistic enthusiasm to each day. I ask that you invest in the course material and consider how it interfaces with your interests. This approach will help you build a toolkit to understand journalism’s function in society as well as develop your media literacy skills.

### ***LEARNING OBJECTIVES***

By the end of the semester, students should:

- Write clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions and audiences they serve. This includes understanding and use of news values, leads, nut graphs, the inverted pyramid, and correct grammar and AP style.
- Articulate the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping news.
- Evaluate their work and that of others for accuracy, grammar, and style.

- Comprehend and apply principles and laws of freedom of speech and the press.
- Exhibit professional ethics in the pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity.
- Display media literacy related to information access, sources, inquiry, and self-expression.

## ***MATERIALS***

- John R. Bender, Lucinda D. Davenport, Michael W. Drager, and Fred Fedler, *Writing and Reporting for the Media, Eleventh or Twelfth Edition*. New York: Oxford UP, 2016/2019.
- *The AP Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*. Cambridge: Perseus Publishers, 2017.
- Additional readings and resources posted on our class Sakai page.

## ***ASSIGNMENTS***

Detailed descriptions and expectations of graded work will come as things are assigned, and I may recalibrate assignments based on the flow of the course. Broadly speaking, however, your output will derive from three main areas: **classroom work** (25 percent of final grade), **papers and projects** (65 percent), and **professionalism** (10 percent).

**Classroom work** will largely consist of activities assigned and completed during a single class meeting. It will involve applying learned techniques like diagramming stories, writing leads and nut graphs, style and grammar prompts, and critiquing work from professionals and peers. You will also complete brief in-class quizzes on assigned readings. Classroom work will be submitted on Sakai and generally cannot be made up. Many of these assignments are participation based and graded pass/fail.

**Papers and projects** will be predominantly completed outside of class. These assignments ask you to demonstrate a command of media literacy, basic journalistic skills, reporting ethics, and the professional industry environment. You will complete these assignments in a variety of formats, including short analytical essays, in-class presentations, and practical journalism exercises.

- The *story analyses* (x3) will require you to apply concepts from a class unit to professional reporting in 3-page essays. Analyses will be scattered across the semester instead of exams.
- *Issue day moderation* will see a small group of students organize and lead the discussion for our topical Friday “issue days.” Topics will range from privacy law and anonymous sources to news deserts and news on social media. Though I will assign the topic, groups will prepare key points and discussion questions to generate topics for the entire class.
- *Issue day reflections* (x3) are 2-page considerations of the issue day topics. You will draw connections between issue days, other class content, and personal interests. Students will **not** be asked to present and write reflections on the same day. Reflections are due one week after the corresponding issue day class period.
- The *mock press conference* and *interview transcription* will apply interviewing, note-taking, and transcription skills. You will speak to unique sources for the assignments.
- Late in the semester, you will work collaboratively in a competitive *team news challenge* combining the course’s integral journalistic skills. Teams will compete in a series of writing, editing, interviewing, and researching tasks with bonus rewards and penalties at stake.
- The *publication profile* is an analysis of a particular news organization. Students will select a publication early in the term and execute a series of brief (~3 minutes) in-class progress reports about different components or challenges facing that publication. The profile will culminate with a formal presentation and a 5-page written report at the end of the semester.

Approximate due dates for work in this papers and projects category are as follows:

Assignment	Due Date
Analysis #1	Week 4
Analysis #2	Week 7
Mock Press Conference	Week 8
Interview Transcript	Week 10
Team Challenge	Week 12
Analysis #3	Week 14
Issue Day Reflections	Various
Publication Profile	Week 17

**Professionalism** will be established through preparation, respect for peers, active participation, integrity, and a willingness to offer and receive constructive criticism. It will also be established through attentiveness to class material and a healthy technology etiquette toward me and peers.

### ***GRADING SCALE***

Grades are assigned based on the following scale:

Percent	Grade
90-100	A
80-89	B
70-79	C
60-69	D
0-59	F

### ***POLICIES & EXPECTATIONS***

COM 201 will require you to use a laptop nearly every class period. In-class assignments will be submitted digitally via Sakai, Google Drive, or email. I encourage you to use **technology** (also including tablets, cell phones, and recording devices) in whatever ways that best facilitate your learning. However, please be mindful of instances that your technology use might interfere with the learning of others. I will, for instance, occasionally ask that you close your laptops and participate in other, non-technological ways. Distracting technology use will be noted and impact professionalism scores. Let's keep an open dialogue about this throughout the semester.

Please keep a basic level of **professional communication etiquette** in mind. I will keep the class Sakai updated with course materials and regular announcements. Read them. Emails should be addressed to me and use proper grammar. I do not check my email after 6 p.m. I will do my best respond the next morning and absolutely will respond within 12 hours. Please respect my desire for work-life balance and do not send numerous follow-ups expecting that it will inspire me to respond. I love to talk to students before or after class or during office hours. Do not hesitate to ask for an alternative in-person meeting time or location.

**Attendance** will be taken every day. You have **three** absences to utilize for any reason. You do not need to provide documentation for these absences. I understand that there may be certain points of the

semester where you need to prioritize other classes, your job, or something else. If you are regularly late to class, it will impact your professionalism grade and, if warranted, count as a full absence. Each absence after the third will negatively affect your professionalism score by 10 percent.

If you do miss class, it is your responsibility to acquire any notes from a peer or assignment prompts from me. Please do not email me simply asking for a slide deck or if you “missed anything important.” **Missed in-class work** cannot be made up.

Media careers are premised on punctuality and reliability. Journalists who miss deadlines do not often get second chances. As such, the **late policy** for COM 201 is stringent. You will have 24 hours to submit any late assignments. Late assignments submitted in the first 12 hours will receive a 25 percent grade penalty; those submitted within the next 12-hour window will receive a 50 percent grade penalty. There are few legitimate excuses for late assignments, but keep me in the loop.

### ***ACCOMMODATIONS AND ACCESSIBILITY***

I want this all things related to this course to be fully accessible to everyone. If you have any concerns regarding learning accommodations, religious considerations, or anything at all, please communicate those to me as soon as possible. I am happy to work out a satisfactory alternative, but it is harder to accomplish at the absolute last moment.

Specific disabilities requiring alternative classroom arrangements must abide by university policy. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations in this course, please contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. You must be registered with the [Office of Student Access Services](#). The SAS is located in Heitz Hall 100 and can be reached by phone at 309-677-3654. If you need help with this, let me know—I am happy to guide you through the process however I can.

[Bradley University’s Counseling Center](#) offers mental health guidance to address students’ personal, social and career challenges. Services include confidential mental health assessment, counseling (individual and group), and referrals. The Counseling Center can be found in Markin Center 52 from 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday. It can also be reached by phone at 309-677-2700, and after hours at 309-677-3200. Please do not hesitate to talk to me for assistance. I will even walk you to the Counseling Center if you would like.

It can be challenging to do your best in class if you have trouble meeting basic needs like nutrition, safe shelter, and sleep. If you have difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day or lack a safe and stable place to live, I urge you to contact [Student Support Services](#) or me. We are here to help.

### ***ACADEMIC INTEGRITY***

Any breaches of university standards will be treated severely and, [as per the undergraduate handbook](#), will be reported to Residential Living and Leadership. Instances of academic misconduct may result in, though are not limited to, a zero on the assignment, failure of the course and further potential discipline as determined by the university, up to and including the possibility of expulsion. If there are questions or concerns about the academic integrity standards, I will be more than happy to clarify expectations. Uncertainty about academic misconduct policies will not be considered a valid justification for an offense.

*If tempted to commit an instance of academic dishonesty, please contact me. Rather than commit an intellectual crime, we can explore alternatives—possibly an extension or some other solution that doesn't involve risking your academic welfare.*

### **TENTATIVE COURSE SCHEDULE**

The schedule is likely to change as we tailor course content to your needs. Readings should be completed by the day they are listed. Check Sakai regularly for readings and updates.

<b>WEEK 1</b>		
<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Reading</i>
W 8/28	Class Introduction	N/A
F 8/30	Media & News Literacy	Literacy Folder (Sakai)
<b>WEEK 2</b>		
M 9/2	Foundations of Journalism	Bender, Chapter 1
W 9/4	News Characteristics	Bender, Chapter 2
F 9/6	Publication Profile Overview	PP Assignment Sheet (Sakai)
<b>WEEK 3</b>		
M 9/9	Newswriting Style	Bender, Chapter 3
W 9/11	Language of News	Bender, Chapter 4
F 9/13	Issue Day #1	ID1 Folder (Sakai)
<b>WEEK 4</b>		
M 9/16	AP Style	Scan Bender, <i>Style Guide</i> , 1-15
W 9/18	Style & Grammar Workshop	N/A
F 9/20	Issue Day #2	ID2 Folder (Sakai)
<b>WEEK 5</b>		
M 9/23	Basic News Lead Writing	Bender, Chapter 7
W 9/25	Inverted Pyramid Structure	Bender, Chapter 9, 181-189
F 9/27	Pub. Profile Progress Report #1	N/A
<b>WEEK 6</b>		
M 9/30	Alternative Lead Writing	Bender, Chapter 8
W 10/2	Beyond the Inverted Pyramid	Bender, Chapter 9, 190-204
F 10/4	Issue Day #3	Bender, Chapter 5
<b>WEEK 7</b>		
M 10/7	Quotes & Attribution	Bender, Chapter 10
W 10/9	Mock Press Conference	Presser Folder (Sakai)
F 10/11	No Class — Professor Travel	N/A
<b>WEEK 8</b>		
M 10/14	No Class — Fall Break	N/A
W 10/16	Research & Reporting	Research Folder (Sakai)

F 10/18	Issue Day #4	Bender, Chapter 6
<b>WEEK 9</b>		
M 10/21	Conducting the Interview	Bender, Chapter 11, 234-244
W 10/23	Using Your Interview	Bender, Chapter 11, 245-248
F 10/25	Pub. Profile Progress Report #2	N/A
<b>WEEK 10</b>		
M 10/28	Editing & Revising	Revisions Folder (Sakai)
W 10/30	Seasonal Reporting	Halloween Folder (Sakai)
F 11/1	Issue Day #5	ID5 Folder (Sakai)
<b>WEEK 11</b>		
M 11/4	Team News Challenge	N/A
W 11/6	Team News Challenge	N/A
F 11/8	Team News Challenge	N/A
<b>WEEK 12</b>		
M 11/11	Team News Challenge	N/A
W 11/13	Covering Your Industry #1	TBD (Sakai)
F 11/15	Issue Day #6	ID6 Folder (Sakai)
<b>WEEK 13</b>		
M 11/18	Covering Your Industry #2	TBD (Sakai)
W 11/20	Covering Your Industry #3	TBD (Sakai)
F 11/22	Pub. Profile Progress Report #3	N/A
<b>WEEK 14</b>		
M 11/25	No Class — Early Break	N/A
W 11/27	No Class — Thanksgiving Break	N/A
F 11/29	No Class — Thanksgiving Break	N/A
<b>WEEK 15</b>		
M 12/2	Issue Day #7	ID7 Folder (Sakai)
W 12/4	Final Project Workshop	N/A
F 12/6	Media Literacy in 2020	Literacy Folder (Sakai)
<b>WEEK 16</b>		
M 12/9	Final Project Workshop	N/A
W 12/11	Study Day	N/A
FINAL EXAM MEETING: Monday, December 16, 2:30-4:30 p.m.		