



JOUR 207: Reporting & Writing I

3 Units

Spring 2021 – Tuesdays – 3-5:30 p.m.

Section: 060-21040D

Location: Online

Instructor: Christina Bellantoni

Office: Online

Office Hours: W-F, by appointment

Contact Info: christina.bellantoni@usc.edu

I. Course Description

Welcome to JOUR 207 Reporting & Writing I. The goals of this course are to sharpen your writing, reporting, and critical thinking skills, as well as teach you about news values, ethics, copy editing, interviewing, fact-checking and how to accurately report on and write about a diverse world on deadline.

This course will introduce you to the step-by-step process of producing news content, from understanding the concept of news judgment — when an event is news and why — to the research, reporting, writing and dissemination of news in a 21st century news ecosystem.

We believe students should begin by learning what makes a story newsworthy and what elements should be included in basic news stories. From there we will move to the acquisition of basic news skills, including the writing of tweets, ledes, briefs, shorter stories and the basics of interviewing, reporting/researching and fact-checking through a variety of assignments.

All students will complete online self-directed learning modules on Associated Press style and Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation. The modules are graded and are part of your overall final grade. You will learn how to copy edit the work of others and your own work.

Finally, part of your training in this introductory newswriting and reporting course includes professionalism through a review and discussion of the journalism industry's code of ethics and ethics online studies.

This course will be conducted online through Zoom and Blackboard. Each week, you will be expected to complete a set of readings and exercises independently (asynchronously) before we meet for class. While in class, we will work together (synchronously) to answer questions, review your work and continue to hone your skills.

You are expected to login to [the Zoom link](#) for class on time, prepared (i.e. having done your readings and homework assignments), and be ready to discuss various news-related topics.

Every student is encouraged to schedule a one-on-one meeting with their instructor sometime during the semester, ideally around week 5 or 6. You're welcome to meet with me more often, of course. Each

student is also encouraged to meet at least once with a Media Center writing coach this semester. Writing coaches may not help you with articles not already submitted for classwork and credit.

By the end of this course, you will understand what makes an event newsworthy — worth covering — and have the capability to produce accurate, well-written, well-sourced tweets and short news stories on deadline.

This course teaches you to report and write news stories about topics including crime, courts and local government, speeches and press conferences.

If you miss class, you cannot make up an in-class assignment. In addition, homework assignments will be weighted more heavily in the second half of the class, meaning they will count for a higher portion of your final grade as stories get more complex.

The course that follows, JOUR 307, builds on skills learned in JOUR 207 and focuses on longer enterprise stories, such as feature articles.

Please note: You are not allowed to interview friends or family members for stories. You should not misrepresent yourselves when seeking an interview (i.e. telling a source you are writing for The Daily Trojan or Annenberg Media if you are not actually doing so). You are not allowed to submit single source stories unless specified in an assignment.

II. Student Learning Objectives and Assessment

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- Write a hard news story on deadline with multiple sources, effective quotes, and a compelling lede, using clear and concise language and correct grammar, punctuation, spelling and AP Style.
- Conduct research and verify information using diverse primary and secondary sources.
- Identify newsworthy elements for tweets, ledes and news stories.
- Demonstrate knowledge of ethical issues that face journalists today and apply professional standards of journalism to ethical situations.
- Use the Maynard Institute's "Faultlines" approach to analyze diversity in news stories

Concurrent Enrollment: JOUR 206

JOUR 207 students must also register for JOUR 206, which requires a weekly three-hour, 50-minute shift in the Annenberg Media newsroom based out of the Media Center. Your work for each course will be distinct, but the hope is that skills you learn in each will help you in the other. Your professor is the director of the Media Center, and can help you navigate that work as well, during office hours outside of class time.

You will take the second JOUR 206 practicum concurrent with JOUR 307, so that by the end of the two courses, you will have worked in both the LIVE and COMMUNITY sections of the Annenberg Media newsroom.

III. Course Notes

1. All readings assigned for that day should be completed *before* each class.
2. Students should submit homework assignments (usually via Google Docs) before class begins on Tuesdays. I will attempt to grade assignments quickly and provide feedback.
3. Always save all assignments and handouts.
4. Read and RE-READ all handouts. You will write better.
5. Students may rewrite **one** assignment that receives a low grade. At my discretion, I'll grade the rewritten assignment and decide whether to average the grade with the prior assignment.
6. If you don't understand a comment or correction, or you disagree, contact your instructor.
7. There will be timed assignments that can **only** be completed in class. Make-up assignments for the in-class work will **not** be possible. (Accommodations will be made for students who are taking the course asynchronously.) You cannot be late on a story and you should not be late to class. There will also be periodic news quizzes in class. These cannot be made up and will be given at the beginning of class. *Please alert your instructor if you're going to be late or miss a class for personal emergencies or illness.*
8. You will be responsible for completing a series of modules on Blackboard on AP style and the GSP (grammar, spelling and punctuation test), each of which are a part of your overall grade.
9. Accuracy is your number one priority. Your reputation as a journalist and the reputation of the news organization for which you work hangs in the balance. Is the information accurate, is the grammar correct, are the names spelled correctly? Have you properly identified the sources of your report? Is the writing clear and concise? Have you written a lede that will grab attention? Is the style and tone appropriate for the report?
10. In addition to being ethical in developing and writing your stories, it is important that you also consider diversity. When looking at your work, you should consider who is involved and how it will impact others. Is your work fair and does it represent all stakeholders in a balanced manner? This class helps you learn how to write in a manner that includes diverse viewpoints. That means socioeconomic/class, race/ethnicity, religion, gender/sexual orientation, geography and generations in the context of current events and journalism.

IV. Description and Assessment of Assignments

- Tweets: Tweets are both informative and easy to digest. You will learn how to use social media for reporting, especially live events, and to write them in an engaging style while also informing your reader.

- News ledes: You will learn how to write an info-packed, yet readable news lede in a sentence of 35 words or less from a fact sheet or other provided information. You will also learn to support the lede in the rest of the story.
- News briefs/assignments: You will write news briefs and short assignments as assigned by the instructor.
- News stories: You will research, report, write and update news stories assigned by your instructor.
- AP/GSP modules on Blackboard: These self-paced modules must be completed before the midterm.
- Ethics discussions: Students will be paired up and assigned a specific journalistic ethical question to research. In class, students will be responsible for leading a class discussion. (How to lead a class discussion and what is expected will be discussed in class, and an outline will be shared with you).
- Ethics/media tear-ups: Each week, a student will present a story from a news outlet to share with the class and discuss key questions about its production and merit. (How to lead a tear-up and what is expected will be discussed in class, and an outline will be shared with you.)
- Midterm: At the midpoint of the semester, you will be tested on grammar, spelling, punctuation, AP Style, ethics and writing.
- Final: You will report and write a 500- to 750-word story on deadline. You will gather background information (known as b-matter) in advance and then finish the story during the final exam period after listening to a guest speaker.

V. Grading

a. Breakdown of Grade

Assignments will be graded on accuracy, grammar, spelling, AP style, clarity, deadlines, conciseness, structure, proper punctuation, quality of interviews/reporting and use of quotes, quality of sources, attribution, research, completeness and newsworthiness. A rubric will be provided for each assignment that details how individual assignments are graded.

You must abide by the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics

(<http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>), NPPA (<https://nppa.org/ethics>), SND (<http://www.snd.org>) and the RTNDA Code of Ethics (http://www.rtdna.org/content/rtdna_code_of_ethics#.VTNMjltAwUU).

Assignments	% of Grade
(AP style, GSP modules. Must be completed by the midterm)	5%

In-Class Assignments	10%
Homework Assignments (before Midterm)	10%
Homework Assignments (after Midterm)	25%
Class Participation: Ethics Discussion (team assignment) and media tear-ups	10%
News Quizzes	5%
Midterm	15%
Final	20%
Total	100%

b. Grading Scale

95% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 94%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

All assignments will be judged first on accuracy and fairness. You will also be evaluated on your ability to highlight the most newsworthy aspects of a story; write active, concise copy; construct a compelling lede; incorporate diverse and appropriate sources; attribute information correctly; choose quotes that add interest and value; use correct grammar, spelling and punctuation; and adhere to word length requirements and AP style.

c. Grading Standards

Journalism

All assignments will be edited on a professional basis and you will be judged first on the accuracy, fairness and completeness of your stories.

“A” stories are accurate, clear, comprehensive stories that are well written and require only minor copyediting (i.e., they can be published).

“B” stories require more than minor editing and have a few style or spelling errors or one significant error of omission.

“C” stories need considerable editing or rewriting and/or have many spelling, style or omission errors.

“D” stories require excessive rewriting, have numerous errors and should not have been submitted.

“F” stories have failed to meet the major criteria of the assignment, are late, have numerous errors or both. Accuracy is the first law of journalism. Your copy should not contain any errors in spelling, style, grammar and facts. Any misspelled or mispronounced proper noun results in an automatic “F” on that assignment. Any factual error also results in an automatic “F” on the assignment.

The following are some other circumstances that warrant a grade of “F” and potential USC/Annenberg disciplinary action:

- Fabricating a story or making up quotes or information.
- Plagiarizing an article, part of an article or information from any source.
- Promising, paying or giving someone something in exchange for doing an interview
- Missing a deadline

You may receive an “F” as well if you make a major mistake in fact, such as the spelling of a name in the story, a place or a key element.

d. Grading Timeline

All homework assignments should be submitted no later than Tuesday at 3 p.m. when they are due.

VI. Assignment Rubrics

Rubrics will be shared with you. You should check the rubric before you complete each assignment, as the rubric will likely change from assignment to assignment.

VII. Assignment Submission Policy

- All assignments are due on the dates specified. Lacking prior discussion and agreement with the instructor, late assignments will automatically be given a grade of F.
- Assignments must be submitted per my instructions, usually via a Google Doc shared with me giving edit access.
- Students are encouraged to submit their work for consideration to Annenberg Media or the Daily Trojan, or pitch it to mainstream media outlets. Visit <http://bit.ly/SubmitAnnenbergMedia> for more information about that submission and review process and email Daily Trojan news editors at dt.city@gmail.com for more on how to pitch your work to the campus newspaper. Work in this class does **not** count toward fulfilling your JOUR 206 shift in the Annenberg Media newsroom.

VIII. Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Title: *Inside Reporting: A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism* (2012)

Author: Tim Harrower.

McGraw-Hill, 3rd edition, 2012

ISBN: 978-0073526171

“The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law,” edited by Darrell Christian, Sally Jacobsen and David Minthorn (2019)

ISBN-10: 1541699890

ISBN-13: 978-1541699892

We'll expect you to use AP style in all of your assignments. All USC students have access to the AP stylebook via the USC library at this link: https://libproxy.usc.edu/login?url=http://www.apstylebook.com/usc_edu/ and you can also use Amy the Stylebot in the Annenberg Media Slack account for style specific to that newsroom.

Please note there are new AP style guidelines about race and ethnicity, which include capitalizing Black and deleting the hyphen in Asian American. The NLGJA Stylebook on LGBTQ Terminology includes more detailed information about accurate coverage of LGBTQ people.

The following Diversity Stylebooks are on Blackboard:

Diversity Style Guide: <https://www.diversitystyleguide.com>
National Center of Disability and Journalism: <http://ncdj.org/style-guide>
LGBT Terminology: <https://www.nlgja.org/stylebook>
NAJA Styleguide: <https://www.naja.com/resources/naja-ap-style-guide>
NABJ Styleguide: <https://www.nabj.org/page/styleguide>
AAJA Styleguide: <http://sjsujmc.com/MCOM285/alaban/2018/03/29/aajas-guide-to-covering-asian-america>
Immigration Styleguide: https://www.raceforward.org/sites/default/files/DTIW_update_JournalistStyleGuide4.pdf
[Annenberg Media Guide to Thoughtful Language](#)

SPJ Code of Ethics: <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>
ONA Code of Ethics at <http://www.journalists.org?page=onamission>

NOTE: Please see additional reading links embedded in the syllabus. I also will assign some news stories throughout the semester.

As journalists, it is imperative you become a daily news consumer. Watch, read and check news sources every day. You must follow the news and be familiar with what is going on around the world, the country, California and Los Angeles. You should read the Los Angeles Times and The New York Times **every day**. As students, you have free online access to each. Check the Daily Trojan and uscannenbergmedia.com for campus news stories.

Free subscriptions to the LA Times, New York Times and Wall Street Journal are available at <http://latimes.com/USCAnnenbergOffer> <http://nytimesaccess.com/usc> and <https://libraries.usc.edu/databases/wall-street-journal>

Develop a list of other news sources you check daily, sign up for newsletters and download apps from news organizations.

Follow at least three news organizations on Twitter and sign up for three push alerts. Watch at least one national and local newscast every day, and listen to NPR.

Add these news organizations (and others of your choice) on Instagram and watch their Stories:

The Guardian

CNN

The New York Times

PBS NewsHour

Helpful websites:

BBC Social Media Academy: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/journalism/skills/social-media>

Media Shift: <http://www.pbs.org/mediashift>

Journalist's Toolbox: <http://www.journaliststoolbox.org/archive/mobile-journalism>

NPPA: <https://nppa.org>

SPJ: <http://www.spj.org>

NPR training: <http://training.npr.org/category/social-media>

NPR Social Media Code of Ethics: <http://ethics.npr.org/tag/social-media>

IX. Laptop Policy

All undergraduate and graduate Annenberg majors and minors are required to have a PC or Apple laptop that can be used for Annenberg classes. Please refer to the **Annenberg Digital Lounge** for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, please visit USC's **Information Technology Services** website.

X. Add/Drop Dates for Session 001 (15 weeks: 1/15/2021 – 4/30/2021; Final Exam Period: 5/5-12/2021)

Friday, February 5: Last day to register and add classes for Session 001

Friday, February 5: Last day to drop a class without a mark of "W," except for Monday-only classes, and receive a refund for Session 001

Tuesday, February 9: Last day to drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund for Session 001

Friday, March 5: Last day to drop a course without a mark of "W" on the transcript for Session 001. Mark of "W" will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply. (Please drop any course by the end of week three (or the 20% mark of the session) to avoid tuition charges.)

Friday, March 5: Last day to change pass/no pass to letter grade for Session 001. [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]

Friday, April 9: Last day to drop a class with a mark of "W" for Session 001

XI. Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Important note to students: *Be advised that this syllabus is subject to change based on the progress of the class, news events, and/or guest speaker availability.*

Week 1 – Tuesday, January 19

Course intro: Newsworthiness, Ethics, Diversity and Tweets

Reading to be done *before class starts*:

Alan Rusbridger, "Breaking News," Intro (to be shared on Blackboard)

Introductions and more

- Get to know each other and your instructor.
- Review *syllabus*.

- *AP and GSP Modules* – What are they? How do they work? Must be completed **before** the midterm.
- What is *AP Style*? Why do we care?
- What about *journalism ethics*? Why ethics are more important today than ever.
- Students are assigned dates for ethics discussions. What are ethics discussions? How do they work? What's expected?
- Media tear-ups. Individual students *sign up* for tear up discussions. What is a tear-up? How do they work? What's expected?
- Plagiarism and other deadly sins.

State of the news media. An industry in flux – what basics still hold?

Twitter. Its many uses, from news gathering to disseminating news. Some let your personality shine through, and some are for straight news reporting.

Newsworthiness. What makes an event or a person *newsworthy*? How do you develop news judgment?

In-Class:

Students will watch a press conference and “live tweet” it. (Write all tweets in a Google doc.) What's the most important information for the tweet? Review as a group.

Homework:

Watch another news event that will be shared with you. Write at least five tweets about the event in a Google doc and submit no later than **Tuesday, January 26, at 3 p.m.**

Readings:

Harrower, Chapters 1, 7 and 8.

On Blackboard:

SPJ Code of Ethics: <https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>

ONA Code of Ethics: <https://journalists.org/tools/social-newsgathering>

<https://www.poynter.org/news/what-every-young-journalist-should-know-about-using-twitter>

<https://www.nyguild.org/front-page-details/basic-best-practices-for-journalists-on-twitter>

<https://www.poynter.org/news/twitter-dustups-are-reminder-journalists-you-are-what-you-tweet>

Week 2 – Tuesday, January 26

From a tweet to a lede (sometimes referred to as lead)

Review homework tweets

Ethics discussion

Tear-up session

Tweets to ledes. Writing a lede is not that different from writing a tweet. Both require a clear, straightforward account of the news or information of interest for the reader. Tweets let your personality shine through, however, while ledes are a bit more formulaic adhere and should include as

many of the 5Ws and H as possible (who, what, where, when, why and how). In this class we also include a dateline in the lede, as explained in the AP Stylebook.

News judgment. Review news judgment. How did you decide what facts to pull out of a press conference? What's most important?

Headlines. A good headline summarizes the story and is told in a way that entices the reader to read the rest of your story. We'll discuss.

News ledes: The 5 Ws and H: Who, what, when, where, why and how.

As a new journalist, try to write basic news ledes that are one sentence long and 35 words or shorter. Yes, news ledes can be much longer and much more complex, or short and pithy. But it's best to start with a clean, accurate and easy-to-read one-sentence lede. At the very least, make sure your lede has emphasized the correct news element — it includes the what, who, when and where — and a source or attribution. If you can fit in the "why" and "how," great. If not, save it for later in the story.

In-Class:

Write several ledes. The class will peer review and review together. What was the important part of each story? If time permits, students will write their own lede for class.

Homework:

Write five ledes from provided material in a single Google doc.

Due Tuesday, February 2, at 3 p.m.

Readings:

Harrower, Chapter 3, pp 36 – 47.

Week 3 – Tuesday, February 2

Supporting your lede, objectivity, Fault Lines

After you have written an info-packed hard news lede, the second paragraph of a story must support the lede. We'll write a lede and supporting paragraph in class.

As reporters you also must be mindful of being inclusive when it comes to coverage of your community and include a wide range of voices in your stories. We'll discuss the Maynard Institute's Fault Lines approach to think about issues of generation, gender, class, race/ethnicity, geography and access to technology.

We also will discuss objectivity and how that idea has evolved over the years.

Watch videos about:

- Supporting paragraphs
- Fault Lines
- Objectivity

Readings:

Harrower, Chapter 3, Pgs. 36-47.

AP Stylebook, A, B, C, D, E

On Blackboard

["A Reckoning Over Objectivity, Led by Black Journalists."](#)

[Twitter thread response to Lowery](#)

[How Alexandra Bell is disrupting racism in journalism](#)

[How to Cross Your Fault Lines](#)

In class:

News quiz

Review ledes and supporting graphs

The Inverted Pyramid

Small group discussion

Team ethics discussion/media tear-ups

Write a lede and supporting paragraph together

Homework for Week 3:

Write three ledes and supporting paragraphs from fact sheets in a Google doc.

Due Tuesday, February 9, at 3 p.m.

Week 4 – Tuesday, February 9

Writing a news brief, basic story structure, guarding against bias

This week we'll learn how to write news briefs, tell a complete story. They can be one paragraph to three paragraphs long. Each paragraph can be one to three sentences long. There's no exact formula. You use critical thinking skills to determine what your audience needs to know and how to break up information.

Story structure is based on **the inverted pyramid**, where the most pressing information goes at the top. Data shows us that this is the most read portion of a digital story.

We'll discuss implicit bias and how that may impact journalism and newsrooms.

Watch videos on:

- News briefs and story structure/inverted pyramid
- [How Journalists Minimize Bias](#)

Readings:

Harrower, Chapter 3, Pg. 41-53; 82-85.

AP Stylebook, F, G, H, I, J

On Blackboard:

["How Implicit Bias Works in Journalism."](#)

In-class:

Review news briefs

Class activity – write news brief

Team ethics discussion/media tear-ups

Homework for Week 4:

Write three news briefs from provided information in a Google doc

Due by Tuesday, February 16, at 3 p. m.

Week 5 – Tuesday, February 16

Writing longer stories, using quotes, sidebars, protest coverage and editing

This week we'll start writing full news stories. Moving from a three-paragraph news brief to a 300- to 500-word story is not that much of a leap. The key is organization. It involves expanding on and supporting the five W's and H with data, description and quotes.

We'll discuss what qualifies as a good quote, go over when something should not be in quotes and do an in-class exercise.

We will discuss how to think about "sidebars" or other stories related to the main story.

And we'll learn how to copy-edit and self-edit.

Watch videos on:

- Writing longer stories, quotes, sidebars
- [SPJ Video -- Editing](#)
- [Journalist's Toolbox – Copy Editing Tools](#)

Readings:

Harrower, Pgs. 50-64.

AP Stylebook, K, L, M, N, O

On Blackboard:

["It's Time to Change the Way the Media Reports on Protests. Here are some Ideas."](#)

[By dismantling its copy desk, The New York Times is making a mistake that's been made before](#)

<https://twitter.com/JaymeKFraser/status/981937179147431936>

In-class:

Review longer stories

Editing activity
Team ethics discussion/media tear-ups

Homework for Week 5:

Write two stories from provided information, one 300 words the other 500 words.

Due Tuesday, February 23, at 3 p.m. via Google doc

Email me any questions you may have about the Midterm

Watch this video on verification: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o9rBZ5FwFjw>

Week 6 – Tuesday, February 23

Review for Midterm

We will review homework on writing a full story.

For the midterm, we'll review the basics of writing a lede, a hard news story, writing conventions, AP Style and editing tips.

We'll also review the Maynard Institute's Fault Lines.

Readings:

Review all your graded work.

In-class:

Poll on Fault Lines

Peer reviewed writing assignment

Group editing assignment

Team ethics discussion/media tear-ups

Week 7 – Tuesday, March 2

Midterm

The midterm will include an editing assignment and writing assignments (ledes, a brief and a story from factsheets) that are due **today** by the end of class. You may use the AP Stylebook and dictionary for both.

Homework for Week 7

Identify and get contact info for a working journalist requesting a short interview for this class. Send that person an email to schedule the interview. Have a backup as well in case you do not get a response.

Due -- a copy of your email request to the reporter (and the person's response) should be sent to me by 3 p.m. on Tuesday, March 9.

You will be writing a story next week – after we discuss how to conduct an interview – that will include basic information about the reporter but also answer the following questions: what do young journalists

need to master to succeed in the world of journalism today? Is the lack of diversity in newsrooms a problem? If so, what can be done about it?

Week 8 – Tuesday, March 9

Reporting and Interviewing

Reporting can involve stories that are “breaking” and that you are sent out on, and stories that you propose yourself. In both cases, you must spend whatever time you have to find sources, primary and secondary, to help with your reporting and writing. Your sources also should help to challenge the information you believe you know, to help you check yourself and avoid bias. And you must prepare yourself to interview those sources.

You must learn to use the web, improve your observation skills, take notes as well as use recording devices for notes, photos and video, and most importantly, learn about interviewing, from the initial “ask to the “follow-up.” We’ll discuss and simulate a reporting exercise.

Tips about Journalists and the Law also will be reviewed.

Watch videos on:

- Interviewing
- [5 Simple Journalist Techniques for Effective Interviews](#) (for broadcast, but good tips overall)
- [Katie Couric on how to conduct a good interview](#) (also from a broadcaster, but good pointers)
- [SPJ Student Law Video](#)

Readings:

Harrower, Pgs. 68-85.

AP Stylebook:

“Briefing on Media Law.”

https://archives.cjr.org/realtalk/the_art_of_the_interview.php Good tips on interviewing

In-Class:

Possible guest – Reporter on how to research, prepare for an interview and write a story

Team ethics discussion/media tear-ups

Homework:

Write an article based on the interview with the journalist of no more than 500 words. **Due via Google doc by Tuesday, March 16, at 3 p.m.**

Week 9 – Tuesday, March 16

Speeches, meetings and news conferences

The major differences between covering speeches, meetings and news conferences are that meetings and news conferences often have *several* speakers while a speech has *one* speaker, which adds to the level of complexity. No matter what you are covering, it is your job as the reporter to use your critical

thinking and news judgment skills to choose the most noteworthy element of what is discussed during a speech, meeting or news conference to feature in the lede and story. That includes making a decision about who to quote, and how many quotes to use.

It is critical you study the meeting agenda (for a meeting) beforehand and get up to speed on items that are listed, or do research on the speakers at a news conference in advance. (You can also write ahead using b-matter, which we'll be discussing in class.)

To produce a fully reported story, journalists must find sources, primary and secondary; as well as real people who are affected by the news.

Watch videos on:

- Covering speeches, meeting and news conferences
- Tweeting
- [SPJ Video: Fake News](#)

Readings:

Harrower, Pgs. 106-110

In-class:

Discuss coverings speeches and other presentations

Review interviews with reporters

Team ethics discussion/media tear-ups

Homework for Week 10:

You will write about a 500-word story about a meeting, news conference or speech (likely via Zoom). Something "on" campus is fine, but you should get instructor signoff once you decide on your topic. Be sure to do research on the subject/speaker or get a copy of the meeting agenda.

Due via Google doc by Tuesday, March 30, at 3 p.m.

Week 10 – Tuesday, March 23

Wellness day – No class

Week 11 — Tuesday, March 30

Covering law enforcement

Crime and public safety are top concerns. Covering these topics accurately and not sensationalizing stories is key, however. So is avoiding stereotypes, keeping victims safe, treating suspects and minors fairly, and learning how to interview victims and witnesses of trauma in a sensitive manner.

Watch videos on:

- The police beat
- [SPJ Video on Writing Headlines](#)

Readings:

Harrower, Pgs. 102-103

Selection from Edna Buchanan's "The Corpse had a Familiar Face"

On Blackboard:

["The Mug Shot, a Crime Story Staple, is Dropped by Some Newsrooms and Police"](#)

[The Dart Center – Working with Victims and Survivors](#)

In-class:

Review homework

Possible guest speakers

Homework for Week 11 — Write a 500-word crime story from provided information. **Due via Google doc by Tuesday, April 6, at 3 p.m.** about a criminal case, from provided information

Week 12 — Tuesday, April 6**Covering court trials**

After a suspect is charged, the court reporter takes over from the cop reporter. Learning about how civil and criminal courts work is imperative no matter what beat you cover, be it sports or celebrities or business. You also find stories about social justice gone wrong or inspiring stories of redemption. There are heartbreaking murder trials, important legal rulings and incredible human-interest stories. We'll go over how courts work, from misdemeanor to federal courts.

- Who are the key players?
- Finding court documents.
- What makes a court case worth covering?
- Using accurate language.

In-Class:

Review articles on criminal case

Searching for court cases. How do you find a case that is newsworthy? How do you find and interpret documents in a court case? How do you report them?

Readings:

Harrower, pp 104-105.

Tony Rodgers, "[Reporting on the Courts](#)," ThoughtCo.

On Blackboard:

[About California Courts](#)

[Reporting on Courts](#)

[Should we be afraid of AI in the Criminal Justice System?](#)

Homework for Week 12:

Identify a case to write about. You can use services like Pacer or the LA Superior Court system. Or you can use information from the court case filed in the USC admissions scandal case by using the following information (but should go beyond the information to find added info if possible). Write about the conclusion of the case, interview a lawyer or law student or someone else who can provide useful information for the piece.

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-ma/press-release/file/1278131/download>

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-ma/press-release/file/1278131/download>

<https://www.justice.gov/usao-ma/page/file/1234481/download>

You must let your professor know what you have chosen via email no later than **Sunday April 10 at midnight**. If you have trouble, I can help you identify a case.

Week 13 – Tuesday, April 13

Writing on deadline

Writing on deadline is a necessary element for any reporter, whether you're writing for a newspaper, online or just about anywhere else. Increasingly, news needs to be immediate. Writing it quickly – and also accurately and informatively – is expected of you. Often, even what you write will be overcome by events and you will need to rewrite it – again and again – and quickly. There are some simple tricks to master this, and we'll go over them in class – planning ahead, writing b-matter, and topping the story when news requires it.

In-class writing exercises will get you ready for the final. We'll also cover additional subjects, including law and ethics issues.

This week, we will learn how to compile b-matter for your story and how to top it with a-matter.

Writing faster on deadline

<https://www.thebalancecareers.com/how-to-write-faster-on-a-newsroom-deadline-12150>

Watch videos on:

- Writing "A" and "B" matter

[Diversifying your Sources](#)

In-class:

Review court articles

Team ethics discussion/media tear-ups

Write b-matter on a subject to be supplied in class

Homework: "Top" your b-matter with a-matter following guidance given in class. Due via Google doc by **Tuesday, April 20, at 3 p.m.**

Week 14 – Tuesday, April 20

Accountability journalism -- covering local governments

Team ethics discussion/media tear-ups

A journalist's job can be to keep public officials accountable by reporting to the public.

But how do you know where to start? In Los Angeles, there are a dizzying array of municipalities, officials and agencies. You need to know how to distinguish who's who and how to get information from them. What does local government do (cops, fire, roads) and where does it get the money to do it? Reporters cover the actions of municipal agencies and departments and the interplay of citizens, interest groups and local governments in making policy. Some of these stories include budgets, taxes, bond issues, politics, zoning and planning, and education. Reporters are watchdogs, making sure city agencies and departments are carrying out their responsibilities efficiently, effectively and economically. These are all things that are paid by taxpayer dollars and in the public interest to report on critically.

In-Class:

Review the structure of local agencies in Los Angeles or other local cities. Who's who and why does it matter? What's in a city budget and how do you find it? Who are the council members and how do they get to power?

Discuss covering government meetings and government budgets, a key to understanding how a local government or agency conducts its business. It is the job of the reporter to use his/her critical thinking and news judgment skills to choose the most noteworthy information to feature in the lede and story.

Under normal circumstances you'd find a local government meeting to attend. Instead, we'll find pandemic-friendly ways to cover a local municipality and discuss what it shows about the workings of that government.

Homework:

Write a story of 400 words about something happening in a local municipality.

Due via Google doc no later than Tuesday, April 27.

Week 15 – Tuesday, April 27

Final exam review

The final exam will be a 500- to 750-word story written on deadline during the exam period. It will involve research into the topic ahead of time. You will then listen to a live presentation by a speaker during the final exam period and write the story.

Your final story must include research and sources you contacted and quoted ahead of time as well as a lede and quotes from the speaker you just heard from.

Homework:

Write draft of b-matter for final story. I will review it and provide feedback that will help you do your best on the final if you send it to me **no later than Wednesday, May 5, at 7 p.m.**

In-class:

Review trial stories
Review "B" matter for final stories
Course and instructor evaluations
Small group discussions

FINAL EXAM

Tuesday, May 11, 2-4 p.m.

Quickly incorporate information from the guest speaker's appearance into your b-matter for a 500- to 750-word story.

XII. Policies and Procedures

Communication

As your professor and editor for this class, I am available to you outside of structured classroom time. I will hold office hours Wednesday through Friday but you must email me to set up an appointment. If you don't get a response from me during the week within 24 hours, feel free to text. On the weekend, text if you don't get a response within 48 hours. If you know you are going to miss class, you need to let me know the day before.

Here are the details for our weekly class sessions:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://usc.zoom.us/j/95180964800?pwd=b1oyeENsUWtFV2FGVmxuclFuQlpuZ09>

Meeting ID: 951 8096 4800

Passcode: TEkZrV_SZ9

One tap mobile

+16699006833, 95180964800# US (San Jose)

+12532158782, 95180964800# US (Tacoma)

Internships

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course that undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to 1 percent of the total available semester points for this course. To receive instructor approval, a student must request an internship letter from the Annenberg Career Development Office and bring it to the instructor to sign by the end of the third week of classes. The student must submit the signed letter to the media organization, along with the evaluation form provided by the Career Development Office. The form should be filled out by the intern supervisor and returned to the instructor at the end of the semester. No credit will be given if an evaluation form is not turned into the instructor by the last day of class. Note: The internship must be unpaid and can only be applied to one journalism or public relations class.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

a. Academic Conduct

Plagiarism

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

USC School of Journalism Policy on Academic Integrity

The following is the USC Annenberg School of Journalism’s policy on academic integrity and repeated in the syllabus for every course in the school:

“Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found plagiarizing, fabricating, cheating on examinations, and/or purchasing papers or other assignments faces sanctions ranging from an ‘F’ on the assignment to dismissal from the School of Journalism. All academic integrity violations will be reported to the office of Student Judicial Affairs & Community Standards (SJACS), as per university policy, as well as journalism school administrators.”

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself, and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

b. Support Systems

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call

suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention and Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press “0” after hours – 24/7 on call

studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED)- (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298

equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected*

characteristics: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

uscsa.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

<https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/additional-funding-resources>

The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

XIII. About Your Instructor

Christina Bellantoni is a professor of professional practice and the director of the Annenberg Media Center. She joined Annenberg in August 2018 after serving as a member of the masthead at the Los Angeles Times for three years. Over her 20 years in journalism, Bellantoni worked as a reporter and

editor, behind the camera as a producer and in front of it as an analyst on national television. She has covered local, state and federal government, along with four presidential campaigns and the White House. is

She spent 12 years as a journalist in Washington, D.C. She served as editor-in-chief of the Capitol Hill newspaper Roll Call until moving to Los Angeles in 2015. Before taking over Roll Call, Bellantoni was the political editor at the PBS NewsHour. She also covered politics at Talking Points Memo and the Washington Times. Before moving to D.C., she worked at three newspapers in the Bay Area.