

Reporting—Fall 2006
Journalism 61-327, Section A01L/Clow 150
Mondays & Wednesdays 12:40 p.m. to 2:50 p.m.

Instructor: Miles Maguire

Telephone: 424-7148

E-mail: maguirem@uwosh.edu

NOT maguire@uwosh.edu

Office: Clow 112

Fax: 424-7146

Office Hours: MTWTh

11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Web Site: http://www.uwosh.edu/faculty_staff/maguire/

Required Texts & Materials:

- “News Reporting and Writing” (10th edition), Mencher, (2006).
- The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law (or earlier version).
- A pocket-sized or steno notebook for interviewing.
- Pens or pencils.

Optional Equipment

- A cell phone with voicemail or an answering machine with remote access. (Helpful but not critically important for this course.)
- A handheld voice recorder. (There are pros and cons to this. The department has a limited number that it can lend to students on a short-term basis.)

Course Content

Reporting is, without a doubt, the best job in the world.

Reporters get not just a front row seat on history but also the opportunity to get up from that seat and affect history. And then, when they want, they get to sit back down.

Reporters get treated like royalty, sometimes; they also get treated like trash. Reporters get to travel to the top of the town, and they also get to see life’s underside. Reporters get to meet the most fascinating people in the world. They get to ask intimate, inappropriate questions, and no matter how boorish their behavior they almost always get invited back.

Sometimes reporters feel like pinballs—bouncing from one story to the next, repeatedly changing speed and direction, and setting off lights and noises as they move along. The good ones are rarely bored.

This course is designed to introduce you to the basics of reporting, a discipline that is built upon three interconnected activities: gathering information, evaluating information and communicating information.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you will have been given the chance to learn how to:

- Ground yourself in current issues and events.
- Develop and apply news judgment.
- Identify and cultivate sources.
- Use standard research methods and techniques.
- Evaluate and synthesize information that is inconsistent or even contradictory.
- Write articles on a variety of topics.
- Assess the quality of others’ reporting and writing.

All of this boils down to just three essentials that we will try to develop this semester. We will work on improving writing skills, interpersonal skills and critical analysis skills. Indicators of good writing can be found in areas such as vocabulary, AP style and sentence structure. Your interpersonal skills are reflected in such things as your ability to put yourself in uncomfortable situations, your ability to put others at ease and your ability to maintain your poise even when dealing with difficult people and questions. Critical analysis is sometimes described as skepticism, and good reporters are always skeptical both of what others are saying and of what they themselves think they know. Critical analysis is based on an awareness and appreciation of the complexity of human existence and leads good reporters to mirror that complexity in their articles.

Course Structure

The course is divided into seven modules, each of which will address a particular kind of news article. We will devote four class sessions to each module, which will generally follow a pattern. In the first session, I will introduce the topic and give a preliminary reporting assignment. The second session will be a discussion based on student analysis of published articles of the type we are working on. In the third session, students will bring their drafts to class, and we will discuss their progress. **If you do not have a draft by the third meeting, participation points will be deducted from your semester grade.** Based on that discussion, a final assignment will be given, which may or may not differ from the original assignment. The fourth session will be devoted to assessment and feedback, which will be provided in a variety of ways.

As much as possible, we will focus our attention on reporting about events that occur on or near campus. In some cases, you will use class time to go out and seek out sources. Some additional reporting will have to be completed outside of class time. To the extent possible, scheduled class time will be shortened on those occasions when you are expected to do substantial outside reporting. If your schedule prevents you from covering a particular event outside of class, you can propose an alternative assignment.

We will be covering actual events as they come up during the course of the semester, and your instructor will attempt to craft assignments based on those events. This should make the course more interesting, but it may also require significant changes to the planned course schedule and syllabus. **Students will receive ample notice of such changes if they become necessary.**

Grades

Your final grade will be based on a 1,000 point scale. You can earn points as follows:

- Article assignments (700 points).
- Draft analyses (70 points).
- X-ray reading (30 points).
- Participation, including class preps (100 points).
- Visual storytelling project (100 points).

There will be some extra credit opportunities.

Final letters grades will be assigned based on the following scale:

A	930 to 1,000	C	700 to 759
AB	890 to 929	CD	650 to 699
B	810 to 889	D	600 to 649
BC	760 to 809	F	000 to 599

In general you must complete the assignments in each area. Even if you have enough points to receive a passing grade for the course without turning in a particular assignment, you must still do that assignment unless it has specifically been identified as optional. Otherwise you will get an incomplete for the course.

The cutoff points for grades are not negotiable. In other words, an 889 will translate into a B and will not be rounded up to an AB. It is possible that you will come within a handful of points for a higher grade, but if you wish to receive that higher grade, you must earn it, which you can do by putting maximum effort into each assignment.

Because of the importance of careful writing, grades will be reduced for any and all manner of errors, including spelling, grammar, style and factual inaccuracy. Missed deadlines will also lead to reduced scores.

For article assignments, the following points will be among the factors taken into consideration:

1. Lead. The lead is the most important part of an article. Even though it is usually a relatively small part of the article, it matters a lot because it is your one and only chance to get your readers' attention.
2. Content. Factors include accuracy, thoroughness, balance and fairness.
3. Presentation. This is mostly a reflection of verbal skill. Choice of words, use of visual language, ability to handle quotes, simplicity in sentence structure and originality of approach are some of the key factors.
4. Mechanics. This includes such matters as grammar, punctuation and adherence to AP style.

In general, a point will be deducted for every AP style error in your copy. Any article that contains misspelled words will receive a failing grade, and you will receive no points for an article that contains a misspelled name.

Articles that do not meet deadline will not earn any points.

From time to time during the course of the semester, your instructor will provide you with an indication of your current grade. If you have any questions of where you stand at any time, please feel free to discuss this with your instructor.

1. Article Assignments (700 points).

Over the course of the semester, you will receive assignments to write seven news articles of different types, each of which will be worth up to 100 points (except the first).

As the starting point of each assignment, you will be asked to identify, read and comment on an example of a professionally written article of the particular type we are working on. You