

SYLLABUS  
EN / W 220A NEWS WRITING  
FALL 2009

*Instructor:* Dr. James Simon [www.faculty.fairfield.edu/jsimon](http://www.faculty.fairfield.edu/jsimon)  
*Class meets:* M TH, 330-445p, DMH148; three credits  
*My office:* Donnarumma 104  
*My office phone:* 203 254 4000, x2792  
*E-mail:* [jsimon@mail.fairfield.edu](mailto:jsimon@mail.fairfield.edu)  
*Office hours:* T 1-3P; W 10-12 p.m. I am here before and after class, plus many additional hours; come any time, although it's always better to call first.

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*Why does one person or issue attract news media coverage, while others do not?*

*How do news stories differ from the essays you did in EN11?*

*How has the Internet changed news writing and news delivery?*

*Why is that First Amendment considered so important?*

*Can you be a reporter and be ethical, too?*

Welcome to News Writing. This introductory journalism course will answer such questions and teach you the basics of news writing. You will learn about a different kind of writing and information presentation that emphasizes accuracy, timeliness, brevity, and clarity. You will learn how to structure and write a news story in a variety of ways, including traditional text and multi-media presentations. You will write stories based on in-class press conferences, deadline stories involving speakers on campus, and in-depth, original stories of your own choosing.

You will analyze, synthesize and evaluate ethical issues that influence the news writing process. We will look at such issues as academic honesty, journalism conflicts of interest, privacy concerns vs. the public's right to know, and the goals of fairness and balance. We will use your own stories as the basis for much of the discussion.

We also will introduce you to the way a journalist thinks and operates. You will talk to working journalists and to sources who deal with journalists. You will better understand how news organizations decide whether a story is newsworthy, how to deal with editors and the editing process, and whether you want to pursue a career in journalism.

While many of the lessons will be set in a newspaper environment, the skills you learn will benefit you if you are interested in magazine writing, publishing, writing for the Internet, broadcast journalism, public relations, corporate communication, law, government and politics, and many related areas. This course also will result in improved writing skills (and improved usage of spelling, grammar, punctuation and style) that will aid you in virtually every other class you take in college, especially other English Department writing courses.

As part of your course work, you will be encouraged to submit class stories to The Mirror for publication. Many students emerge from this class with a portfolio of stories that they can use to improve their job-hunting prospects.

**Required Materials:**

- ❖ Lieb, T. (2009). All the news: Writing and reporting for convergent media. Boston: Pearson
- ❖ Goldstein, N. (Ed.) AP Stylebook & Libel Manual.
- ❖ \$5 lab fee for university telephone book and other handouts

**Overview:** This course is based on the concept that you should learn some aspects of news writing from the textbook and class discussions, then apply them. Learn some more lessons, then apply them. Learn some more lessons, then apply them to original stories that you conceive, write, rewrite, subject to peer review, and then edit and submit.

We will slowly take you through the news writing process. First, we will bring in a series of guest speakers; you will learn from them and write your first, simple news stories about what they say. Then you will leave the safety of the classroom : ) and attend campus speakers like those at Open Visions Forum and Catholic Studies lectures; you will write a series of stories about those events and also interview some audience members after the show and include their comments. (We call them deadline stories, but they aren't due until a day after the event.) Finally, after a lot of practice, you will come up with two original stories that you will oversee from conception to execution (and possible publishing).

You will look for ways to better tell the story on-line using links, graphics, and other multi-media add-ons.

Much of the course will focus on eight original stories you will write.

STORIES 1 and 2 are in-class Press Conference stories, designed to get you used to the journalism format. The hope is you will both learn from the information delivered by the speaker and learn how to select the most newsworthy information and turn it into a story. It is also a chance to sharpen interviewing skills.

I will bring in guest lecturers who will speak and then entertain questions. You will do a 400-word story on their appearance and e-mail it to me. You also need to attach a reflective essay; details to follow. Your grade will drop two points if you forget the essay.

After I grade and return the story, you will rewrite it once more and create a separate section for it in your portfolio. Place the rewritten version on top, then my graded version, then earlier drafts you have.

STORIES 3, 4, 5, and 6 are Deadline Stories of your own choosing. They should be events -- lectures, meetings, speeches, celebrity appearances -- that you can cover in a single day or night, immediately write up a story (without additional reporting) and submit it (via e-mail) for a grade. Three must be done before our mid-semester 1:1 portfolio meeting.

The experience is designed to give you a taste of writing under deadline pressure, while allowing you to pick a topic you will enjoy writing about. You also will interview five audience members and include comments from at least two of them in the story. I encourage you to bounce any deadline story idea off me ahead of time. You can cover additional deadline stories; I will use the four highest grades and give you extra credit. You also need to attach a reflective essay (details to follow). Your grade will drop two points if you forget the essay.

One new wrinkle for Fall 09: Using Twitter, you will immediately send me a 140-word version of the deadline story. You will then file a longer version the next day by 10a. After receiving the graded version from me, rewrite it once more and post it on your blog portfolio.

STORIES 7 and 8 are multimedia, Original Stories. Story 7 you will do yourself; story 8 can be a group project. You will:

- a. Generate a story idea and bounce it off me for feedback. To do so, bring a typewritten Budget Line to class. It consists of a focus sentence on the topic, then a brief explanation of “who cares,” and a list of sources (people and on-line). Example:
 

*Topic: My Original Story will look at changes in the number of Fairfield students who study abroad.*

*Who cares: Due to increased threats of terrorism, students may be less likely to go and may go to safer countries.*

*Sources: I’ll talk to students who have studied abroad, those considering it now, the University College officials who run the program, and check the Chronicle of Higher Education and U-Wire for information on the subject from other schools*
- b. Spend about a week in doing a complete draft version of the story. Penalty for no draft: 10 points off on final grade. The draft is due even if you miss class; send it via e-mail. Bring copies of the draft story to class so your peers and the professor can comment. Bring one copy of the reflective essay and give it to me along with one copy of your draft.
- c. After receiving class feedback, spend another week on the story and submit it to me via e-mail for a grade. On this version, you also need to revise the reflective essay. Your grade will drop two points if you forget the essay.
- d. After I return this rewritten version of the story with a grade, you must rewrite it yet once more and place it in your blog portfolio.

Here is a timetable

	<i>Original Story 1</i>	<i>Original Story 2</i>
Budget line	Oct. 22	Nov. 12
Full draft	Nov. 2	Nov. 19
Graded version	Nov. 9	Dec. 3

**Reflective Essays.** For all of the in-class press conference stories, deadline stories and original stories that you write, you also will include a cover memo that gives you a chance to step back from the story and discuss the reporting and writing process. In three to four full paragraphs, discuss:

- ✓ Your goal for the piece; what do you want your audience to think, feel and/or do?
- ✓ What textbook/classroom lessons have been relevant (or misleading)?
- ✓ How did the story compare to others you may have done?
- ✓ What went right, what went wrong? What was easy, challenging, surprising?
- ✓ What lessons did you learn? What skills do you still need to sharpen?

- ✓ Were my comments on any draft useful?
- ✓ The names of specific classmates, friends, others who have read this story and what they contributed to this version.
- ✓

**Getting Stories Published.** Many students emerge from this course with a portfolio of stories that they do for class, then submit to the Mirror and get published. On their resume, students can list themselves as a contributing writer to The Mirror, then use their portfolio of published work to improve their chances of getting a good internship or initial job out of college. There is no requirement to submit your stories. But to encourage you to do so, I will raise the final grade by two-thirds of a letter grade on any class story that you submit to The Mirror and get published. (Example: a B goes to a B+ and then an A-.) The Mirror used more than 20 stories from this class last semester(!)

When grading your papers, I will often note whether I think it is a good candidate for publication, but you also can act on your own. Here is the process:

- After you see my comments on your graded version, consider any suggested changes, then send your story via e-mail to the Mirror editor I suggest.
- Write on the top: *I did this story for Dr. Simon's News Writing class and I want to submit it to the Mirror for possible publication. You can reach me at extension XXXX with any questions. Thank you.*
- Add a byline, listing your name as you want it to appear atop the story. Headline is optional.
- Keep a copy of any stories appearing in the Mirror. Show them to me at our end of the semester portfolio meeting to ensure I give you the grade boost.

**Technology.** This course will focus more on news gathering and news writing, less on the technology to disseminate stories. You will create a Twitter account and send me initial 140 word versions of all Deadline stories, from the site of the event if possible (using your laptop). You also will create a Blog for this class (using Blogger or other software that you might prefer). This will serve as an electronic portfolio, and you will post a final version of stories before each of our portfolio meetings.

### Grading Summary.

Two Press Conference stories @ 3 pts	6%
AP quiz	3%
Four Deadline Stories @ 7 points each	28%
10 Questions	5%
Original Story 1	15%
Original story 2 (incl. web presentation)	16%
Two tests @ 7 points each	14%
Four Tweets	4%
Class participation	<u>9%</u>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

*There is no formal mid-term exam, final exam or term paper.* Most students like this arrangement. But in return, you are expected to put extra time into this course throughout the 14 weeks of class.

**How do I get an A? :** ) Here is a rubric that I use in grading writing your stories:

“A” – Outstanding achievement. Publishable as is. No significant style errors. Shows superior command of facts, judgment, organization and writing. On some level, extraordinary.

“B” – Superior; better than average. Handled assignment very well. Very few style errors. Copy only needs a bit of rewriting and polishing before it could be published.

“C” – Acceptable; average job. Not a story someone would read unless the information was really needed. Several style errors. Some basic organizational or writing problems. Needs significant rewriting.

“D” – Minimal achievement but passing. Poor piece. Lacks fundamental judgment and/or writing skills. Frequent style errors. Important facts omitted.

“F” – Failure of news writing assignment. This rarely occurs because constant rewriting and revision will catch most grievous errors.

**How to get an A, part two...** A study in Journalism Educator looked at which college journalism students did the best in an introductory news writing course. The researcher looked at the students’:

- high school GPA,
- college gpa,
- they worked on their high school newspaper or yearbook,
- worked for the college newspaper,
- read newspapers outside of class,
- whether they had a high sense of self-esteem.

The best predictor:                     .

**Portfolio meetings.** We want you to see the progress you have made in this new writing style, so you will collect the work in a blog. We will look across your writing twice this semester. We will meet individually in my office at mid-semester for 20 minutes, then again during the final exam period. We will use your blog portfolio as the starting point for a discussion on how well you are doing in class, problems you have encountered, and any suggestions you might have for improving the class.

**Late assignments.** Deadlines are important in News Writing. Students will suffer a loss of 10 points for each day a story is late, up to a maximum 20 points. After two days, the professor has the right not to accept a late story. The stories build on one another, so please never give me more than one overdue story at a time.

### **Gathering Information.**

1) We will be discussing, at length, the ground rules for gathering information and when you should go "off the record" with a source. Unfortunately, many students in this class violate the rules by telling a source the story "is just for class," and then the angry source sees their name in The Mirror.

Therefore, you must introduce yourself to all sources by saying you are working on a news story for class that **may** get printed in The Mirror. (My advice: say you are "working on a story for The Mirror on Subject X.") The source will take you – and the issue – more seriously.

Again, you must alert sources from the start that their remarks may wind up in the paper. If the sources are reluctant to talk to you, use your persuasive skills (and tips we will learn) to get them to cooperate. But under no circumstances should you say the story is just for class; too many students make such a statement, get the story published in the Mirror for extra credit, and then face an angry source.

2) Sources routinely ask to see a story before it is published. This is widely frowned upon in journalism. Do not agree to show anyone the story before publication. Instead, offer to call them back or send an e-mail and double check their own quotes and any information they gave you. This will result in a stronger, more accurate story and avoid any ethical dilemma. Obviously, if you agree to call back a source and double check the information, you must do so.

*If you violate these rules -- by telling a source their remarks won't be used in the newspaper or by agreeing to let them see a story before publication -- it is grounds for receiving a failing grade on the story.*

**Deadly errors.** Imagine a Mirror profile on your roommate that misspells her/his name in the first sentence: would you believe the rest of the story? News stories lose all credibility when the reader notices a glaring error and starts to wonder how many other problems there are within the story. Therefore, misspelling the name of a principal actor in a story will result in your receiving a failing grade on the story. THIS HAPPENS AT LEAST TWICE A SEMESTER; DON'T LET IT HAPPEN TO YOU!

**Attendance.** Skipping class is like skipping a day of work. If you can't manage your time, then journalism isn't a good career option for you.

I am very old-fashioned about attendance; I take it every period based on the theory that you learn more when you are in class. Your final grade in the course will drop two percentage points starting with the third cut (e.g., a 90 will drop to an 88). Save your cuts for when you are sick or have an emergency, medical or academic. The only exception will be made for lingering illnesses or family emergencies that force you to miss consecutive classes. For your grade, I also take into account your being chronically late to class. For my sake and the sake of your classmates, please be on time.

*If you are going to miss a class, I expect you to call or e-mail ahead of class and tell me not to expect you there. We then can make arrangements for you to make up the work missed.*

**Class participation.** Participating in class is a given; you are expected to come to class well prepared to take an active part in discussions. If you repeatedly are unprepared for class, I reserve the right to adjust your final grade. If you miss a class, it is your job to find out what you missed and make it up so you don't fall farther behind in the next class.

**Writing Format.** All writing assignments must be double-spaced and typed on 8½" by 11" paper using a conventional font. Writing a headline is optional. Place your name, the type of assignment (e.g., Draft, Original Story #1) and your home telephone number in upper right hand corner of the first page. Be sure the pages are stapled. Please send stories via attachment; put both the reflective essay and story in single attachment. Please indent each paragraph and do not put an extra space between paragraphs.

**AP Stylebook.** Professional journalists are expected to follow a stylebook, and so are you. In this class, we will follow *The Associated Press Stylebook*, which is used in more news rooms than any other. Both tests have a Stylebook section. After a stylebook rule has been tested, you will lose 1 point for each style error made on your stories.

**E-mail.** Today's journalists rely on computer communication, and so will you. For this class, you need to use your StagWeb e-mail address and to get in the habit of checking it every day. Many class assignments will be made via e-mail. I check my e-mail constantly on most days; it is the best way to communicate with me. Do not hesitate to call me in my office, though, if you have a more immediate need.

**Accommodation of disability.** The instructor will work with the Office of Student Support Services to provide appropriate accommodations for students with documented disabilities. If you qualify, I invite you to privately contact me on the matter.

**Fairfield's Writing Center** (second floor, Donnarumma) is a free service in which student tutors are given training, then help students like you with their writing. Check 'em out. Former members of this class and some Mirror editors work there; they can be a big help. (If you enjoy writing or want some practice in informal teaching, it's also a good place to work. See Dr. Bowen, English Department.)

**Cell phones** are an obvious distraction to any class. Please turn your phone off when entering. In the rare instance when you expect a call that is truly emergency in nature, please inform the instructor before class begins.

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*Tentative Schedule, News Writing, Fall 2009\_v2*

	<i>Focus</i>	<i>Assignment Due</i>
Thurs Sept 3	Introduction and welcome	
(Mon Sept. 7 is a holiday)		
Th Sept. 10	Ch 1, News in the age of convergence Ch 2, Deciding what's news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student profiles due via e-mail</li> <li>• AD 1.2</li> <li>• Ch 1 discussion questions</li>   <li>• AD 2.1, make before and after table. Research Tip: probe university web page</li> </ul>
Mon Sept. 14	Information Gathering  Ch 3, Researching and interviewing  Developing story ideas	Ch 2 discussion questions
Th Sept. 17	More Information Gathering	Ch 3 discussion questions AD 3.3 AD 3.4 AD 3.5
Mon Sept 21		
Th Sept 24	Ch 4, Short news reports Discuss 10 question assignment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AD 4.1, 4.2</li> <li>• Rewrite story fact sheets</li> <li>• Ch 4 discussion questions</li> </ul>
Mon Sept. 28	In-class press conference 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In-class press conference 1, via AD 2.2. Reminder: Reflective essay</li> <li>• Optional: Sept. 30, cover Open Visions speaker Campbell Brown as a deadline story. Due 10a, Oct 1. (Three deadline stories of your choice are due before Oct. 29)</li> </ul>
Th Oct 1		
Mon Oct 5	In-class press conference 2	In-class press conference 2
Th Oct 8	Ch 5, Basic Text Story Punctuating quotations	AD 5.1, 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, 5.7 Punctuate story sheets



		Ch 5 discussion questions
Tues Oct 13 (note, we do meet due to Monday switch)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 questions assignment due</li> <li>• Ideas, Original Story 1</li> </ul>
Mon Oct 15	Ch 6, Advanced Text story Before class, create blog through Blogger.com or alternative means. Post bio, pix, other background material. Post revised versions of in-class press conference and deadline stories	AD 6.1, 6.2 Ch 6 discussion questions
Th Oct 22	Test 1	200 word interview story Budget Line, Original Story 1
Mon Oct 26		
Th Oct 29	No class. Individual 1:1 portfolio meeting	Update, Original Story 1 (Three deadline stories of your choice are due before Oct. 29)
Mon Nov 2	Peer review	Draft, Original Story 1
Th Nov 5	Ch 7, Basic Online story	AD 7.1, 7.2, 7.3 First half, Best Blogs, p. 137 Ch 7 discussion questions
Mon Nov 9		Final, original Story 1 Ideas, original Story 2 Second half, Best Blogs, p. 137
Th Nov 12		Budget line, Original Story 2
Mon Nov 16	Ch 12, Advanced Online story	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AD 12.1 (can be your Story #2); 12.2; 12.3 (planning only, not actual coverage)</li> </ul> Ch 12 discussion questions
Th Nov 19	Peer review	Draft, Original Story 2
Mon Nov 23	Test 2	

(Th Nov 26 is holiday)		
Mon Nov 30	Class meets off-campus to sit in on editorial news meeting	
Th Dec 3	Ch 14, Journalistic principles	Ch 14 discussion questions You will be assigned one of these: AD 14.1, 14.2, 14.3, 14.4 Graded version, Original Story 2
Mon Dec 7	Ch 15, legal issues and journalistic ethics	Ch 15 discussion questions Ethics check sheet AD 15.1, 15.2, 15.3 CT FOI pamphlet
Th Dec 10	Wrap up Students evals of course Schedule 1:1 portfolio meetings	

## Contract: Encouraging Academic Honesty at Fairfield

You are part of a community of scholars at Fairfield University. Part of the tradition in that community is to acknowledge the sources of information you use in academic work. Such a tradition has an ethical component: you should give credit where credit is due and avoid any appearance of your improperly taking credit for the work of others. But there is also a practical side: someone who reads an idea in your paper may be affected by it and want to find where he or she can gain additional information on the subject. One famous example of this involves Sir Isaac Newton, the 17th-century scientist who is commonly given credit for the discovery of gravity. He protested that his success was based on the work of many others before him. His famous quote: **“If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.”**

In much of your work at Fairfield, you will stand on the shoulders of giants who have done major work previously in politics, communication and other fields. When you make a formal argument, you will cite earlier studies, statistics, quotations and other forms of support. Again, it is important to let your audience know the source of the information. Frankly, it may strengthen your argument to state that the information came from The New York Times rather than off the top of your head or based on something you once saw casually on the Internet. Imagine you generate original concepts and others fail to credit you; how would you feel about this theft of your intellectual property?

Fairfield will teach you how to properly cite information, starting with this class. After you understand the rules, it becomes your responsibility to apply them and avoid the problems with academic honesty that affect many students who fail to follow the rules either intentionally or unintentionally.

One set of rules involves plagiarism. There can be gray areas and judgment calls, as we will discuss in class. But generally, the rules call for you to properly attribute:

- 1) material taken directly from a source (including work done by other students);
- 2) paraphrasing of a source;
- 3) use of the same or very similar organization of source material;
- 4) any submission that contains the thoughts or work of others.

There are more blatant violations of academic honesty:

- 1) cheating of any kind on any assignment or assessment (examination);
- 2) submission of the same academic work to fulfill the requirements of more than one course without the authorization of all instructors in those courses; and
- 3) the acquisition (through purchase or any other means) of material for submission in fulfillment of a class assignment, such as papers and other materials downloaded or otherwise acquired from the Internet.
- 4) stealing, which includes the taking of property, including library materials such as books, magazines (or any portion thereof), videotapes, audiocassettes, or files.

Students who exhibit academic dishonesty will receive an automatic F in the course and will be reported to the Dean. Those who give and those who receive in the processes of cheating, stealing or plagiarism are equally guilty. Copying of part or all of another student's work will result in disciplinary action against both students. I hope it's obvious I take this seriously. I hope you will, too, so I have drafted this contract.

I have read and I understand the class policy regarding academic honesty, discussed above. I recognize that it is my responsibility to understand the terms described here, including plagiarism, stealing, and academic dishonesty, and that the faculty will answer any questions I may have. Finally, I understand that the penalty for academic dishonesty is an automatic F for the course in which the infraction occurs.

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Name

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Name of course and semester



*Student personal profile, ENW220, Fall 2009*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Intended major(s) or minor(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Campus address and box # \_\_\_\_\_

Alternate e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #s \_\_\_\_\_ (cell phone or campus/home extension)

Dream job after graduation:

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**I give my permission to have my work in this course reproduced so long as it is used for educational purposes. I also attest that I have read the course requirements as laid out in the syllabus; I understand and abide by them.**

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Print name: \_\_\_\_\_