

JOUR328R: Business Journalism

Instructor: Robert Guy Matthews

Time: Tuesday 7pm-9:45pm

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Office Hours: By appointment

This course is more than simply learning the basics of business journalism. At the end of the semester, you will be taught to see how every well-done business-based story is simply a combination of smart sourcing, focused reporting and, above all, compelling story-telling.

Nearly every journalist can write an accurate yet mind-numbingly boring business story. Here, we are going to apply different writing styles, interviewing tactics and research methods to come up with a variety of trend stories, profiles, and curious takes on everyday business life.

Sports, government, crime, entertainment, education etc. can all be stories about business. We will pursue business angles in everyday life and write about them.

Required Readings and Texts:

The Wall Street Journal: Read. Everyday. Without fail. We will discuss and dissect the most interesting stories each class.

The New York Times: Read the business section. Everyday.

The Art and Craft of Feature Writing by William E. Blundell.

Complete Money & Investing Guidebook by Dave Kansas. (I will hand these books out to everyone, free, during the first class.)

A few ground rules:

1. Don't even ask to turn in an assignment late. I will listen sympathetically to everything you need to say and when you are done, I will write a "zero" in the grade book under your name. ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE AT THE START OF CLASS.
2. Accuracy is essential - just as it is at a newspaper. Any story that you turn in to me that includes a misspelled name or company, exhibits faulty math or gets a key fact wrong will receive an "F."
3. Come to class. On time. While I do find listening to the litany of excuses wildly entertaining - I have heard them all before and the result will be the same: no slack from me.

4. Plagiarism & Fabrication: Any story that includes fabricated or plagiarized material will result in an automatic F for the course and a recommendation of expulsion to the Office of Judicial Affairs. Again, I will cut you no slack.

Assignments:

There will technically be no Midterm or Final. Instead you will have a series of writing assignments and quizzes that often will overlap, requiring you to focus on more than one thing at a time.

Quiz 1: 5%

Quiz 2: 5%

Company profile: 5%

Earnings story: 5%

Feature story: 15%

Personal finance memo: 10%

Halloween retail assignment: 10%

Industry perspective story: 15%

Trend story: 10%

Profile: 20%

Note: You will notice that there is no weight officially given for class participation. This class requires a lot of interaction and in-class discussion. I will use the class participation, 5%-maximum, to add to your grades at the end of the course which can be used to increase, not decrease, your final grade.

Academic Integrity: Along with certain rights, students also have the responsibility to behave honorably in an academic environment. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty and plagiarism, will not be tolerated. Adhering to a high ethical standard is of special importance in the world of journalism, where reliability and credibility are the cornerstones of the field. Therefore, the college has adopted a "zero tolerance" policy on academic dishonesty. Any abridgment of the university's academic integrity standards in a College of Journalism course will be referred directly to the dean. The dean will send all confirmed cases to the university's Office of Judicial Affairs with a recommendation of expulsion from the university for any violation of the code. To insure this is understood, all students will be required to sign an academic integrity pledge

at the beginning of the semester that will cover all assignments in the course.

Students With Disabilities: Students with a specific disability (permanent or temporary, physical or learning) needing special accommodation during the semester should make an appointment to meet with the instructor.

(What follows is a tentative ordering of the material.
Please note: Topics may be shifted around to accommodate guests or deal with breaking news).

WEEK ONE (Sept 5):

Course Overview: The scope of the class and of the field. How business news is changing. What to read; where to find sources; how to generate story ideas.

Give out local company assignments.

Assignments:

1. Company profile due Week Two Sept 12.
2. Read chapters 1&2 (Stocks, Main Street) in Complete Money & Investing Guidebook due Week Two, Sept 12.

WEEK TWO (Sept 12)

Earnings. How to understand them. How to write them. 10Qs, 10Ks, SEC.

Ideas: How and where to get them.

Assignments:

1. Write an earnings story for one of your companies due Week Three Sept. 19
2. Read Chapter 2 (Shaping Ideas) in Art and Craft of Feature Writing due Week Three (Sept 19)
3. Read Chapters 3&4 (Bonds, Wall Street) in Complete Money & Investing Guidebook due Week Three, Sept 19.

WEEK THREE (Sept 19)

Quiz

Interviewing: What to ask. How to ask. How to get what you need for the story.

In-class interviewing exercise.

Developing your beat: How to go beyond the obvious.

Class Handouts.

Assignments:

1. Develop a feature idea about one of your companies due Week Four Sept. 26.
2. Read Chapter 5 (Economics and Money) in Complete Money & Investing Guidebook due Week Four Sept 26.

WEEK FOUR (Sept 26)

Planning and Writing the story

Class Handouts

Assignments:

1. Report and Write your feature story due Week Six Oct 10

WEEK FIVE (Oct. 3)

The Economy: Understanding the indicators.

How to read a financial statement and annual reports.

How to organize your business story.

Assignments:

NONE

WEEK SIX (Oct. 10)

Personal Finance coverage: The rise of consumer journalism

Assignments:

1. Write a memo identifying four different sources of detailed information on how to make intelligent choices about credit cards and what criteria are relevant due week seven Oct. 17
2. Read Chapter 9 (Notes on Self-Editing and Style) in Art and Craft of Feature Writing

WEEK SEVEN (Oct 17)

The role of public relations and how it both helps and hurts business journalists

Assignment:

1. Editing your feature assignments due week eight Oct 24.

WEEK EIGHT (Oct 24)

Retailing and how it is an engine of the economy and also a barometer

Class Handouts

Assignment:

1. This is Halloween week. Find a Halloween-related business and tell its tale. Possibilities include candy stores, costume shops, houses of horror, special guided tours, someone throwing a Halloween party (must be charging an admission to gain entry) due Week ten Nov 7.

WEEK NINE (Oct 31)

The intersection of business and business reporting. What you need to know and avoid.

Class Handouts

Assignment:

1. Write an industry perspective of one of your companies. What are the challenges, the history and the business future for this industry? This is a major assignment and you will need to cite several sources and interviews. Details will be explained in class. This assignment will be due week 12 Nov 21.

WEEK TEN (Nov 7)

Reporting on highly compensated executives and unionized labor.

Class Handouts

Assignment:

None

WEEK ELEVEN (Nov 14)

How to write the lengthy story

Class Handouts

Discuss industry assignment due next week

Assignment:

Read chapters 7&8 (Wordcraft, Stretching Out) in Art and Craft of Feature Writing.

WEEK TWELVE (Nov 21)

Writing the trend story

Class Handouts

Assignments:

1. Identify a trend at one of your companies. Write a short story due week fourteen Dec 5

WEEK THIRTEEN (Nov 28)

The art of the person profile

Class Handouts

Assignments:

1. Identify a person to profile at one of your companies. This assignment will act as your FINAL due during finals week.
2. Read Case studies

WEEK FOURTEEN (Dec 5)

Banking and Financial Services

Discussion of person profiles.

Assignment:

None

WEEK FIFTEEN (Dec 12)

QUIZ

Editing profiles.