

INTD 0255A: Reporting and Writing the News
Middlebury College, Fall Term 2019

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Class Meets: M-W-F, 10:10-11:00, Axinn 105
Office Hours: M & F, 11-12, Wilson Café or by
appointment

“Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter.”

--Thomas Jefferson

Welcome to Journalism! This is a crash course in effectively reporting on and writing about the world around you. You will learn how to maximize your powers of observation, conduct interviews, evaluate sources of information, remain faithful to the facts, and craft accurate, balanced, and lively stories on deadline. Like the best professional journalists, you will aim to inform, explain, entertain, and unsettle; to ask tough questions and hold those in power accountable; to disrupt complacency and enhance understanding; and always, *always* to pursue the truth. You will respond to events—on campus and in the world—as they unfold in real time. Together, we will explore the rapidly evolving trends and challenges shaping news coverage today, from social media to “fake news,” as well as some of the practical, legal, and ethical issues that reporters face.

Assignments: You will complete three major writing assignments: a news story, a feature story, and an opinion piece (review *or* op-ed). None will be longer than 1,500 words. Each will require a preliminary draft; you must submit first and final drafts of all three assignments in order to pass the course. The goal is for you to produce original, polished, ground-breaking stories that we will aim to publish, either on campus or off. Because what’s the point of writing if no one is going to read your work?

You will also regularly complete short writing assignments and exercises in class or for homework. And to mark one year until the 2020 U.S. presidential election, the students in this class will make presentations on the candidates. (Details to come.) All written work should be submitted as Word documents, emailed to me ***before the start of class*** on the day they are due. No PDFs or Google docs, please, and no hard copies. (I am trying to go paperless). Late assignments will be penalized one-third of a grade for each day they are late.

Readings: The bulk of our readings will be newspaper and magazine articles, available online (though some may be behind a pay wall so will require access through the Midd library). I will send an assignment syllabus each week with links to the readings. I will also distribute relevant handouts from my favorite journalism textbooks. In addition, you will be required to follow the news daily, via a legacy newspaper—*The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Guardian*, etc—in addition to any other sources you like. ***All assigned readings are mandatory and must be completed by the start of each class, as they will inform our discussions.***

Class format: Each class will consist of some combination of the following:

1. *Presentation:* We will begin most classes with a student-led discussion of an article of their choosing. Since I've selected all the other readings, this is your chance to share a piece that *you* want to talk about, whether because it's excellent, terrible, provocative, illuminating, or noteworthy in some other way. It might be a story about an intriguing, new phenomenon; one with a notable lede; one that's thoroughly reported or exceptionally eloquent; or one that's riddled with errors and infuriatingly biased. It doesn't matter, as long as it is timely, reasonably short (under 1,000 words), compelling to you, and worthy of discussion. When it's your turn, you will email your chosen piece to the class **by noon of the day before you are scheduled to present**; everyone must read and be ready to talk about it by the start of the next class. The presenter will introduce it, say a few words about why they chose it, and then initiate discussion.
2. *Discussion:* We will also discuss the news of the day and the assigned readings, almost all of which are a) relatively short, b) highly readable, and c) exemplary in some way.
3. *Lesson/Exercise:* We will regularly go over relevant journalistic concepts and their real-world applications, which you will have an opportunity to practice through informal exercises.
4. *Workshop:* Every student will have at least one major piece workshopped by the class. Details and etiquette rules to follow.

Attendance: You must attend every class and arrive on time. Three tardies will count as an unexcused absence; any unexcused absences will be counted as a cut and will impact your grade. If you know ahead of time that you will not be in class for any reason, please let me know. You are responsible for making up any work missed. I will not chase you down.

Technology: Cellphones are not allowed in class. If you know you cannot resist its addictive allure, leave your phone in your room. Otherwise it must remain in your pocket or backpack at all times. Laptops and tablets may be brought to class but must remain closed unless otherwise instructed. There will be times when they will be necessary, and I will try to give you advanced notice of those days.

Honor and Integrity: Your foremost responsibility is to take an ethical approach to this course, your classmates, and your written work. Plagiarism is a serious offense—on campus and in the workplace—and will be punished accordingly. Fortunately, transparency is the essence of good journalism. Do not take ideas, direct quotes, or information from other sources without crediting them in your work, by hyperlink, citation, or both. The only things you do *not* need to attribute are a) commonly-known facts (e.g. Christmas is on December 25) and b) anything you experience firsthand through your own five senses. When you interview sources for a story, you must reveal to them that you're reporting for a journalism class and that your story may appear in print. You may not record anyone during an interview—even over the phone—without their express permission.

While I expect your work for this course to be original and exclusively your own, I also know from personal experience that collaboration can really enhance a story. As practicing journalists for the duration of the term, you are permitted—even encouraged—to turn to your classmates **in this course only** to brainstorm story ideas, reporting approaches, and sources; to clarify story angles and lines of reasoning; to provide feedback on rough drafts; and to edit and proofread final copy before you submit it.

Free pass: Everyone has a bad day, when you are feeling sick, stressed, tired, or otherwise incapacitated. Fear not; you are entitled to one (1) free pass, which you may apply without consequence to any homework or classroom assignment that you are unable or unwilling to complete. (Please note that the pass does *not* apply to any of the major assignments, the readings, or your presentation.) If you know ahead of time when you would like to take your “bye,” please let me know in advance. Otherwise, I will just apply it to your first missed assignment. Subsequent ones will be penalized.

Assessment: Grading something as subjective as writing is difficult. I wish I didn’t have to do it, but I do. I will use checks, pluses, and minuses to assess class exercises and short pieces, and letter grades for longer stories, the “One Year Out” presentation, and class preparation/participation. For each major assignment you will hand in a mandatory first draft, which I will comment on but not grade; I will assign a grade only to the final version. To earn an A, a story must be well-conceived, exhaustively researched, solidly structured, and clearly written. Above all, it must be accurate: no misspelled names, mistaken dates, misquoted sources, distorted facts.

Your final grade for the course will reflect effort and growth as well as mastery of the material. I am looking for initiative and creativity in conceiving ideas; solid preparation for and participation in class discussions and group work; and overall effort and improvement in your written work. Be present, be engaged, and throw yourself into the material, and you will do very well.

Approximate Grading Breakdown

Class Preparation/Participation/Growth	20 %
Feature Story	20 %
In-class/Homework Exercises	15 %
One Year Out project	15 %
News story	15 %
Review/Op-Ed	15 %

Week 1

What is news, anyway?

Mon 9/9

Introductions, expectations, goals

Homework (due Wed):

READ: [Does Journalism Have a Future?](#) By Jill Lepore

WATCH: [The Medium is the Message](#) (short video about Marshall McLuhan)

Wed 9/11

Social vs. traditional media

Homework (due Fri):

READ: [Student Journalism in the Age of Media Distrust](#) by Adam Harris

[Students Fall for Misinformation Online. Is Teaching Them to Read Like Fact Checkers the Solution?](#) By Beckie Supiano

[How Smartphones Hijack Our Minds](#) by Nicholas Carr (this is behind the Wall Street Journal paywall, but the library has an electronic subscription so you can read it there.)

FILL OUT: Student start-of-term questionnaire

Fri 9/13 Mock press conference

Homework (due Mon):

READ: [The incredibly absurd Trump/CNN SharpieGate feud, explained](#) by Emily Stewart
[‘All the Forces’: China’s global social media push over Hong Kong protests](#) by Brenda Goh
[An Entire Nation Just Got Hacked](#) by [Ivana Kottasová](#)
[More Color: A Call for the Journalism of the Hiaasen Family in the Wake of the Capital Gazette Shooting](#) by Daniel Krugman
Inside Reporting, Chapter 3--Newswriting Basics: pp. 36-51 (This will be very helpful in your weekend writing assignment.)

WRITE: 250-300 word description of an event on campus or in town. (It doesn’t have to be anything major; it could be a soccer team practice, a choir rehearsal, or a lecture, but it can’t just be a description of you and your friends hanging out eating dinner; something has to actually *happen*.) You must attend the event and use your powers of observation to describe/explain it. Take good notes and report straightforwardly on what you see. Focus on using strong verbs (avoid forms of “to be”) and minimal adjectives.

Week 2 **Hard News/Reporting Nuts & Bolts**

Mon 9/16 Interviewing

Homework (due Wed):

READ: *Inside Reporting*, Chapter 4, Reporting Basics pp. 68-77 and Interviewing pp. 78-85

[Terry Gross and the Art of Opening Up](#) by Susan Burton

[The All-American Menstrual Hut](#) by Lena Dunham (Q&A w Mary Karr)

WRITE: Interview classmate and write a 250-300 word ‘character sketch.’ Focus on packing as much information as possible into your sketch, using clear, direct language and colorful details to create a vivid picture of your subject. Due: Friday by the start of class.

Wed 9/20 Using quotes/attribution

READ: [Facebook fake-news writer: ‘I think Donald Trump is in the White House because of me.’](#) by Caitlin Dewey
[Trump’s Twitter War on Spelling](#) by Sarah Lyall
[India’s Cult of Modi](#) by Shashi Tharoor

Fri 9/22 Share profiles

Homework (due Mon):

- READ:** News and sports sections of *The Campus* (comes out Thursday; look for copies in kiosks around campus). This will give you a sense of what your upcoming weekend news stories should cover.
- WRITE:** 500-750 word draft of a news story, covering an event on campus or in town. It should not be something you are participating in, but rather something you can observe and report on as an outsider: a sporting event, a club meeting, a lecture, or a cultural event (concert, art exhibit, etc). If you have any questions about the suitability of a particular event, please check with me. You should thoroughly report the story, using your own five senses and interviews with *at least* two sources, both of whom you must quote in the story.

Week 3

Mon 9/23

Putting News Stories Together

- *News stories due by start of class; please email it to me AND bring two hard copies to class
- Classmate article presentation
- Share classmate character sketches
- Peer edit/Workshop news stories

Homework (due Wed):

- READ:** [India's 2019 National Election and Implications for U.S. Interests](#)
[U.S.-India Trade Relations](#)
[Narendra Modi and U.S.-India Relations by Ashley Tellis](#)
[America and India: Embracing an Age of Ambition](#)
- PREPARE:** Questions for our press conference Wed with special guest "Swaraj Singh," the Foreign Minister of India (played by Middlebury's Diplomat-in Residence Jeff Lunstead, a career diplomat who spent decades working for the Foreign Service in Asia).

Wed 9/25: Mock press conference with Indian foreign minister "Swaraj Singh," who will read a statement and then take questions from the Washington press corps (played by YOU). Take good notes!

Homework (due Fri):

- WRITE:** 500-600-word news story based on your research and Professor Lunstead's mock briefing. Make sure your lede conveys the most newsworthy information to emerge from the press conference. Experiment with different ways of using quotes: complete quotes, partial quotes, paraphrasing, summarizing. Make sure you use proper attribution (see Harrower, pp. 84-85) for his quotes **and** for any information you get from other sources. Story due by start of class Friday.
- READ:** Frances article for Friday presentation

Fri 9/27: *India press briefing story due
Article presentation: Frances
Peer edit/Workshop news stories

Homework (due Mon):

- READ:** *Inside Reporting*, Chapter 6, Features, pp. 116-123

The Middlebury Campus (pay close attention to any feature stories)
[Pellets, planes and the new frontier](#) by Todd C. Frankel
[Lin-Manuel Miranda's Passion for Puerto Rico](#) by Michael Paulson
[Does Free College Work? Kalamazoo Offers Some Answers](#) by Josh Mitchell and Michelle Hackman (this is on the WSJ site and behind a pay wall, so you will need to access through the Midd library)

Week 4

Features

Mon 9/30

Workshop news stories/Intro to Features

Homework (due Wed):

READ: Classmate article for presentation

[That Noise? The Rich Neighbors Digging a Basement Pool in Their \\$100 Million Brownstone](#) by David Margolick

Wed 10/2

Kinds of features/Ledes and Nut grafs

Homework (due Fri):

READ: Classmate article for presentation

WRITE: Based on [this report](#) from the Pew Research Center about the partisan divide in Americans' views of higher education, write a) a hard news lede, which should sum up the facts straightforwardly in a sentence or two; and b) a lede and nut graf or billboard for a feature story, which should be at least two paragraphs (they can be short). You may click on any links you like on the Pew site but please DO NOT Google around to see how professional news organizations may have covered the report. That's cheating and will be treated accordingly. But if you want to see another example of the difference between hard-news and feature ledes, you may look at [this study](#) about teens and social media use, and then see how [Business Insider](#) wrote a hard-news lede, and [Bloomberg](#) focused on one aspect of the study, treating it more as a feature. Due: by start of class Friday.

Fri 10/4

Classmate article presentation

Homework (due Mon):

READ: Classmate article for presentation

['We Have Fire Everywhere': Escaping California's Deadliest Blaze](#) by Jon Mooallam

[The Jeffrey Epstein Case Was Cold, Until a Miami Herald Reporter Got Accusers to Talk](#) by Tiffany Hsu

WRITE: Final draft of your news story (due Monday)

Week 5

Features

Mon 10/7

*Final draft of news story due by start of class

Classmate article presentation

Homework (due Fri; no class Wed):

READ: [When the Terror Began](#) by Alexander Wolff (FYI the byline on the archived story is incorrect; it's by Alex, and he will be coming to class Friday to discuss so think up good questions!
[Frank Sinatra Has a Cold](#) by Gay Talese
[Shaun Hill and the Price of Perfection](#) by Rowan Jacobson
[The Education of Amandla Stenberg](#) by Reggie Ugwu
[David Hogg, After Parkland](#) by Lisa Miller
Inside Reporting, Writing Profiles, pp. 124-125

Wed 10/9 **NO CLASS/Yom Kippur**

Fri 10/11 Class visit: Former Sports Illustrated writer Alex Wolff
Homework (due Monday)

READ: Classmate article for presentation
[Inside the San Quentin Marathon](#) by Jesse Katz
[Refugees Encounter a Foreign Word: Welcome](#) by Jodi Kantor and Catrin Einhorn
[Immigrant kids fill this town's schools. Their bus driver is leading the backlash.](#) By Michael E. Miller
[Being with the bees: Davis Wertheimer '16 and Stanford Beekeepers discover joys of apiculture](#) by Emma Johanningsmeier
[Wage wars: A Look at the Wage Gap in Athletics](#) by Josue Simplicie
[Friday Night Flights: A Culture of Brewing Ferments at Middlebury](#) by James Lynch

BRAINSTORM: 2-3 potential feature story ideas for discussion Monday

Week 6 **Developing Story Ideas**
Mon 10/14 ***Feature story ideas due**
Classmate article presentation
Features/brainstorming session

Homework (due Wed):

DEVELOP: Your feature story idea and plan of attack; come in with one sentence "elevator pitch" of your idea AND a list of sources you will contact.

READ: Classmate article for presentation
[The NBA's Secret Addiction](#) by Baxter Holmes

Wed 10/16 Classmate article presentation

Homework (due Fri):

READ: Classmate article for presentation
[Shadow of a Nation](#) by Gary Smith

WORK ON: Your feature story! (Do not wait until last minute or you will regret it. Sometimes interviews take a week or more to arrange.) Set up/conduct interviews, do research, attend necessary meetings/events, start blocking out paragraphs, write your lede and nut graf, etc. Figure out what you need to tell the story and go get it! (DUE: 10/28)

Fri 10/18 Classmate article presentation

Homework (due Wednesday; no class Monday):

READ: Kevin's article for presentation next Wednesday

[Going Under the Knife, With Eyes and Ears Wide Open](#) by Jan Hoffman

['We still need to eat': Tech boom creates working homeless](#) by Janie Har

[Weed yoga, naked yoga, yoga with goats: Have we reached peak namaste?](#) By Karen Heller

WORK ON: Your feature story! (Do not wait until last minute or you will regret it. Sometimes interviews take a week or more to arrange.) Set up/conduct interviews, do research, attend necessary meetings/events, start blocking out paragraphs, write your lede and nut graf, etc. Figure out what you need to tell the story and go get it! (DUE: 10/28)

Week 7

Writing the Feature Story

Mon 10/21

NO CLASS/FALL RECESS

Wed 10/23

Classmate article presentation

Troubleshooting features

Homework (due Fri):

READ: *The Middlebury Campus*

Classmate article for presentation

WORK ON: Your feature story

Fri 10/25

Classmate article presentation

Conferences/In-class work day

Homework (due Mon):

READ: [Shitty First Drafts](#) by Anne Lamott

WRITE: Your feature story: first draft due Monday!

Week 8

Features

Mon 10/28

*Feature story rough draft due

Peer edit/workshopping

Homework (due Wed):

READ: Classmate article for presentation

Peer articles TBD for workshopping

Wed 10/30

Classmate article presentation

Features workshop

Homework (due Fri):

READ: Peer articles TBD for workshopping

Fri 11/2

Features workshop

Homework (due Mon)

READ: Classmate article for presentation

Peer articles TBD for workshopping

Week 9 **One Year Out: Primary Analysis**
Mon 11/4 Finish workshopping feature stories

Homework (due Wed):

READ:
WRITE:

Wed 11/6 One year out presentations

Homework (due Fri):

READ:
WRITE:

Fri 11/8 Classmate article presentation
One year out presentations

Homework (due Mon):

READ: Classmate article for presentation
Features TBD for workshopping Monday
WORK ON: Feature story revisions

Week 10 **Features**

Mon 11/11 Classmate article presentation
WORKSHOP FEATURES

Homework (due Wed):

READ: Classmate article for presentation
WORK ON: Feature story revisions

Wed 11/13 Classmate article presentation
WORKSHOP FEATURES

Homework (due Fri):

READ:
WORK ON: Feature story revisions

Fri 11/15 *Feature story final draft due

Homework (due Mon):

READ: Classmate article for presentation
Harrower on reviews (will send/post pages)
Harrower on op-eds (will send/post pages)
A small selection (3-5) of professional book, movie, theater, music,
restaurant, or product reviews of your choosing. Audience or user reviews do
not count. Bring an example that you admire to class.

Week 11**Op-Eds/Reviews****Mon 11/18**

Classmate article presentation

Reviews/ share reviews/components of a review/what makes a good review

Homework (due Wed):**READ:**

Emily's article for presentation Wed

[The Rich, White Civil War](#) by David Brooks[Parenting the German Way: Let the Children Fight](#) by Sara Zaske[Why Colleges Should Ditch Honor Codes](#) by Susan H. Greenberg[Pregnant at Harvard?](#) By Anonymous[A Model Diet?](#) By Caroline Dunn[Gay Teen Worried He Might Be Christian](#), The Onion**Wed 11/20**

Classmate article presentation

Op-Eds

Homework (due Fri):**READ:****WRITE:** Op-ed or review, 750-800 words**Fri 11/22**

*Rough draft of op-ed/review due

Week 12**Op-Eds/Reviews****Mon 11/25****Homework (due next Monday):****READ:****Wed 11/27****NO CLASS/Thanksgiving recess****Fri 11/29****NO CLASS/Thanksgiving recess****Week 13****Reviews/Op-Eds/Journalistic Ethics****Mon 12/2****Homework (due Wed):****READ:****REVISE:** Op-ed/Review**Wed 12/4**

Ethics: Role playing scenarios

REVISE:

Op-ed/Review (due Friday)

Fri 12/6

Final opinion pieces due

Evaluations/End of term breakfast