

The University of Western Ontario Faculty of Information and Media Studies



MMJC 9101: Introduction to Journalism Fall 2021

Instructor: **Mark Kearney**

Office Hours: Initially via Zoom, **Tuesdays 10 a.m. to noon**. In person ones may be possible later in the term
Other times by appointment via Zoom. Please email to arrange a time.

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Class Information

Class time: **Wednesdays 1:30 pm to 4:20 pm**. We will meet face to face unless Covid changes that. Be prepared to move online on OWL if needed. I will post lecture notes on OWL even if we meet face to face. Some discussions, practice exercises, and assignments will be completed both in and outside of class time.

Students will be expected to wear triple layer non-medical masks at all times in the classroom as per university policy and public health directives. Students who are unable to wear a mask for medical reasons should seek accommodation through Accessible Education.

Students are expected not to eat or drink while in class to ensure masks stay in place. Students will be able to eat and drink outside of the classroom during scheduled breaks

Course Description

This course introduces the fundamentals of journalism theory and practice, with an emphasis on news judgment, story conception and development, lead writing, hard and soft news writing, interviewing skills and techniques, story structure, and issues in the changing world of media and journalism. It is designed to take students with little or no knowledge of journalism and provide them with the basic foundational skills and learning to grow as a journalist.

In the event of a COVID-19 resurgence that necessitates the course delivery moving away from face-to-face interaction, all remaining course content will be delivered entirely online, either synchronously (i.e., at the times indicated in the timetable) or asynchronously (e.g., posted on OWL for students to view at their convenience). The grading scheme will not change. Any remaining assessments will also be conducted online as determined by the course instructor.

Course Goals / Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students should:

- be grounded in some of the basic principles and practices common to all news media, primarily in text (print) journalism
- understand and practise the fundamental skills of interviewing
- have basic skills in gathering and organizing information necessary for producing primarily text-based journalistic stories
- be able to conceive and write clear, complete and accurate stories
- be able to critically evaluate their own approach and processes in producing journalism
- be familiar with research methods from a variety of sources
- be able to critically evaluate the work of other professional journalists.
- show an understanding of the legal and ethical principles and practices in journalism

Course Tools and Learning Materials

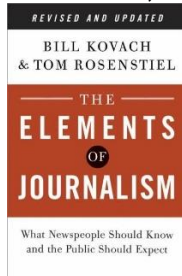
REQUIRED TEXTS

CP Caps and Spelling

The Canadian Press Stylebook, Toronto. (Both are available online via the FIMS Graduate Library)

RECOMMENDED

Kovach and Rosenstiel, The Elements of Journalism, 3rd edition, Three Rivers Press, New York, 2014.



Reporting for the Media: Canadian Edition, John R. Bender et al. Oxford University Press. (one copy available in the FIMS library and some chapters are available on the OWL site under Course Readings)



Expectations

An attitude of professionalism and respect for others in the class is expected from students in this program. Students in this course are required to attend all classes and expected to be on time. Students should also visit the OWL site regularly during the week and participate in any Forum discussions or practice exercises posted there. Class par-

ticipation, discussion and reflection on the weekly lessons are important. Students are expected to immerse themselves in the news culture – reading newspapers and online news sites and following current events is an expected part of this course.

To fully participate in the course and the program, you must be abreast of current events. You must “read-in” daily and be aware of news events locally, nationally, and worldwide. I recommend that you read at least two credible news sites (or newspapers) a day – one national and one local. Be ready to regularly discuss articles, stories, editorials, trending stories, social media developments and other issues in class. **You must be prepared.**

Participation is not to be confused with attendance. Attendance at our classes in the graduate program is mandatory, and MMJC program rules are very clear about not missing class to complete work for other classes.

Participation speaks to your contribution to and engagement with the class. You must do any required readings, be up to date on news events and be prepared to discuss and contribute. Students will be evaluated on the quantity and quality of their contributions to various discussions (including ones posted on the OWL Forum) and to the intellectual life of the class. Students who are clearly and consistently engaged with the course, with the instructor and fellow classmates will be rewarded.

While discussing and/or practising journalism, you may be exposed to sensitive topics and/or material that may be upsetting for you. I will try my best to give advance warning whenever I’m able. We are all learners in this regard and understanding others’ perspectives is an important part of becoming a journalist who writes for a variety of audiences. We should all be respectful of each other inside and outside of class regarding any issues we might discuss or address.

Simply being present in the class does not guarantee marks. Students can also demonstrate they are engaged with the course material by discussions with the instructor during Zoom office hours, volunteering to facilitate a discussion on current journalism issues or by e-mailing to the instructor comments or questions about content related to course topics.

Students are not authorized to copy or distribute course materials, or to upload any course content to note-sharing websites such as OneClass, CourseHero, Studydrive, etc.

Academic Accommodation

Medical Accommodation

For Western University policy on accommodation for medical illness, see:

www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf

Student Medical Certificate (SMC): studentservices.uwo.ca under the Medical Documentation heading

Students seeking academic accommodation on medical grounds for any missed tests, exams, participation components and/or assignments worth 10% or more of their final grade must apply to the Academic Counselling office of their home Faculty and provide documentation. It will be the Dean's Office that will determine if accommodation is warranted.

For work worth less than 10% of the final grade, the instructor will consider requests for academic accommodation on medical grounds made in a timely manner in writing or by appointment in office hours. Such requests need not be accompanied by documentation. The instructor may, however, decide to require documentation be submitted to the appropriate Academic Counselling office.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for accommodation on medical grounds, or for other reasons. All documentation must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's home Faculty.

Compassionate Accommodation

Academic accommodation (extensions, makeup tests and exams, additional assignments etc.) may be given to students on compassionate grounds. The situations for which compassionate accommodation can be given must be serious, including significant events such as death in the immediate family, trauma (fire, robbery, harassment, muggings, car accidents, etc.) or emergency situations. Documentation is required.

If a member of your immediate family is seriously ill, obtain a medical certificate from the family member's physician and submit the documentation to your Academic Counsellor. If you have been involved in a severe accident, fire or some other exceptional crises, obtain a copy of the police report or be prepared to provide the necessary documentation upon request.

Bereavement

Generally, for deaths within a student's immediate family (parents, guardians, caregivers, siblings, spouses), bereavement leave is granted, upon provision of documentation.

For deaths within a student's extended family, academic accommodation is given for one to three days, upon provision of documentation.

Students seeking additional bereavement leave for religious or other reasons should contact their Academic Counsellors and provide valid documentation.

Religious Accommodation

Students should consult the University's list of recognized religious holidays, and should give reasonable notice in writing, prior to the holiday, to the Instructor and an Academic Counsellor if their course requirements will be affected by a religious observance. <http://multiculturalcalendar.com/ecal/index.php?s=c-univwo>

Further specific information is given in the Western Academic Calendar.

Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Western's "Health and Wellness" http://www.uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/index.html for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Statement on Academic Offences

Scholastic offences are taken seriously, and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

In addition, all submitted work must be originally created specifically for MMJC 9101A. Students may not repurpose content from other coursework or past courses/internships/employment to use in MMJC 9101A

Methods of Evaluation

Deadlines and accuracy are vital in journalism. Given that most journalistic outlets work to strict deadlines it would be a disservice to you to not be prepared for such a working environment. Each assignment will be graded based on the quality of writing, the strength of its lead, the overall structure of the story and how it meets the specific criteria for the type of work being

produced. **Please read the specific grading rubric for the course on the OWL site set up for this class.**

Deadlines are crucial. Assignments submitted after the deadline will be penalized by five per cent per day unless an extension has been granted by the instructor beforehand for such issues as medical or compassionate grounds. Extensions may be granted with or without penalty at the instructor's discretion. There will be penalties for work that contains serious name and/or fact errors. It is your responsibility that your assignment submissions have been uploaded properly on OWL.

Assignments

1. Two hard-news stories – (10% for the first (**due Sept. 23**), 15% for the second (**fluid deadline depending on what story you cover. Deadline no later than Oct. 28**)).
Total: 25%.

2. Interview story (15%) (**due Oct. 8**)

3. A follow-up or alternative story (20%) (**due Nov. 18**)

4. An enterprise story (30%) (**due Dec. 8**)

5. Overall professionalism including class participation, non-graded reporting exercises, posting on the course's OWL site and quizzes (two short news quizzes). The practice writing exercises will allow you to hone your reporting skills before doing graded assignments. Your quizzes will be pass/fail (minimum 7 out of 10). If you have a valid reason for missing a quiz please email me **prior to the quiz** and the absence will not detract from your grade.

Attitude counts. Be keen and professional (10%).

All marked assignments will be submitted online through the OWL site for this course. For all assignments you are not allowed to interview and quote any relatives or fellow classmates in your stories.

Land Acknowledgement

I acknowledge that Western University is located on the traditional lands of the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak and Attawandaron peoples, on lands connected with the London Township and Sombra Treaties of 1796 and the Dish with One Spoon Covenant Wampum. This land continues to be home to diverse Indigenous peoples (e.g. First Nations, Métis and Inuit) whom we recognize as contemporary stewards of the land and vital contributors of our society.

Schedule

(This is an approximate schedule and may change depending on circumstances, possible guest speakers and other developments). Please note that Lessons will be posted in Course Content after each class and that you can check on the OWL site throughout the week. Any changes will be announced in advance on the class website and by email. Note that you should have any optional readings completed for the week they are listed, i.e. please have the readings for Week One read before that first class, etc.

1. Week One

(Sept. 8)

Introduction. Outlining the course, assignments, deadlines, grading, participation and professionalism.

What is Journalism For?

Introduction to some basics of journalism and writing leads.

In-class writing exercise: short bio of fellow student. Not for marks.

Possible news writing practice

Optional Reading: Reporting for the Media: Chapter 5 (pages 74-83)

The Elements of Journalism, Chapters 1-2

2. Week Two

(Sept. 15)

The basic news story: form and structure

Objectivity, Fairness and Balance.

Reviewing the first news practice

Writing for an audience

Understanding and writing leads

Another news practice

Optional Readings: The Elements of Journalism, Chapter 3

3. Week Three

(Sept. 22)

The Nature of news: Basic news values

The Importance of CP style

Interviewing basics

More about writing styles

Optional Reading: Reporting for the Media: Chapter 4 (pages 53-64)

News story 1 – writing from a fact sheet, assigned in-class via Zoom (**Due by 10 a.m., Sept. 23**)

Assign Interview story (due by Oct. 8)

4. Week Four

(Sept. 29)

Discussing assignment 1 in class

Hard leads, covering events and speeches.

Steps in covering a story from assignment to interview to completed article

Possible guest speaker – TBA

Doing some in-class exercises.

Optional Reading: Reporting for the Media: Chapter 9 (pages 184-198)

5. Week Five

(Oct. 6)

More about news coverage

Different ways to structure a story

Writing follow-up stories.

More writing practice and discussion

Possible workshopping of interview story

Optional Reading: Reporting for the Media: Chapter 7 (pages 116-125 and 131-140)

6. Week Six

(Oct. 13)

Alternative leads, soft news story forms

Constructing and writing a profile

Discussing ideas for next news assignment

Optional Reading: Elements of Journalism: Chapter 4 and 6

7. Week Seven

(Oct. 20)

Generating ideas, finding stories. Basic journalistic research

Introduction to soft news/features

Discussion of news story 2. There will be a time limit to gather and write your own news story. Something you cover must be written and submitted by the next day. (Deadline is fluid but no later than Oct. 28)

Please read the *Dalton Camp Award for the best essay on the link between media and democracy at*

<https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/06/06/journalism-has-become-a-poor-reflection-of-our-world-and-thats-a-problem-for-our-society-and-our-democracy.html>

Assign Follow-up/Alternative (**Due Nov. 18**)

8. Week Eight

(Oct. 27)

Reviewing News story 2 progress. What were the highlights and challenges?

The enterprise story. More on features. Style and form.

Sample follow-up stories deconstructed

Review of good and bad leads

Grammar refresher as needed

Optional Reading: Reporting for the Media: Review Chapter 9

Nov. 1-5 – MMJC Research Week.

No classes

9. Week Nine

(Nov. 10)

Critical thinking, accuracy and problems in reporting

Diversity in Canadian media

Statistics in the news.

Checking in on follow-up/alternative story

More about Enterprise reporting

Grammar refresher as needed

Guest speaker – TBA

Follow-up/alternative due by Nov. 18

10. Week Ten

(Nov. 17)

Legal issues, libel

Other types of coverage – beats etc.

Working with numbers

Possible workshopping on follow-up/alternative story

Copy editing introduction.

Grammar refresher as needed

Optional Reading: Reporting for the Media: Chapter 13

11. Week Eleven

(Nov. 24)

Discussion of job profiles

Checking in on enterprise story.

Other approaches, how to pull the stories together, challenges in writing.

Copyright

12. Week Twelve

(Dec. 1)

Advanced Interviewing: The Sawatsky Method

Freelancing, markets, payment

Ethical issues in journalism.

Assigned Reading: The Question Man by Susan Paterno on AJR

<http://ajrarchive.org/article.asp?id=676>

Workshopping enterprise story.

Enterprise story due by Thursday Dec. 8

Guest speaker – TBA

13. Week Thirteen

(Dec. 8)

Final class.

Finish up workshopping if needed

Review and wrap up.