

Western University
Faculty of Information and Media Studies

MIT 2154G online



**Journalism Practices and Principles
Course Syllabus – Winter 2021**

Instructor: Mark Kearney

Office Hours: via Zoom Tuesdays 2:00 – 4:00 pm. Other times on Zoom by appointment.

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Course Information

The course format will be via OWL and consist of lectures, exercises, assignments, and ongoing discussion in Forums on OWL.

Course Description

This course investigates some of the controversies about, and skills of, journalism, studying both mainstream news services and citizen journalism, and providing an introduction to journalistic writing and news production, and the everyday practices of various types of news organizations.

In this course, we will study a variety of genres of journalistic writing, from hard-news stories written on deadline to event coverage and profiles/features. The genres of writing will be examined in several ways — as products of the news media system, as sources of information, and as the first rough draft of history. Students will have opportunities to practise different journalistic genres.

Writing for the mass media incorporates the basic requirements of good writing as well as knowledge of the special requirements of journalism. The course will focus on the skills and techniques of writing for mainstream media such as daily newspapers, but will also offer insight into citizen journalism and journalism in electronic media.

The course will also examine some of the ethical aspects of journalism and how these affect the daily practices of journalists.

Course Goals /Learning Outcomes

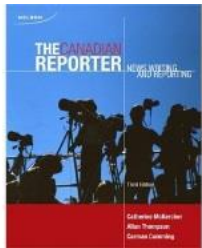
At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to:

- . Recognize genres of journalistic writing
- . Evaluate the appropriate use of each genre
- . Understand how news is gathered
- . Produce journalistic stories in specific genres
- . Identify ethical concerns relating to journalism and evaluate the appropriate response
- . Critically engage with contemporary issues and debates relating to journalism and the movement of information.

Course Tools and Learning Materials

Web Page: OWL will be the primary tool for communication. Please check the announcements regularly as well as your email. Additional readings and information on assignments may be posted on the site.

Recommended Reading:



This text is **not required** but it has good information that some students in the past have found useful. I will have this on reserve in Weldon library.

The Canadian Reporter, 3rd edition, by Catherine McKercher, Allan Thompson and Carman Cumming (Nelson, 2011).

If you want to purchase it and an electronic version of the text is available from

<http://www.coursesmart.com> at a reduced cost, if you prefer.

<http://www.coursesmart.com/the-canadian-reporter-news-writing-and-reporting/mckercher-thompson-cumming/dp/9780176407018>

This link should take you to the e-book where it's available to rent for 180 days at a lower price.

- . Read at least one newspaper daily – electronic or paper.
- . You may be asked to provide a link to a news website for others in the class to read..

- . In addition, you should regularly view or listen to broadcast news.
 - . **You should acquaint yourself with Canadian Press style which I will discuss in class**
- Other required or suggested readings may be posted on the course site.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

All assignments should be double-spaced and in Word (no PDFs, Pages etc. please) and as close to the assigned word count as possible. **Assignments must be submitted via the OWL site for the course.** Emailed assignments may be acceptable in certain circumstances.

If there is time for online workshopping, you will do so in small groups of about five to which you may be assigned. You should provide copies of your draft work to fellow students so they have time to provide you feedback before you submit your final version to me. **There are no final exams in this course.**

Assignments Submission

I don't like to penalize late assignments; however, since one of the purposes of this course is to familiarize you with journalism, you need to know that **deadlines are crucial**. For this reason, all assignments will be due on the date and time specified **unless you negotiate an extension at least 48 hours in advance**. Following any other policy would be an injustice to you as a future writer. Assignments are submitted electronically via OWL and in Word.

Attendance Policies

Obviously we do not meet formally as a "class" in a Distance Studies course. Therefore "attendance" and participation on the Forums Discussion Board and possibly via Zoom are intertwined. Distance Studies classes are generally self-paced, so you must attend class (defined as logging into our OWL section) and participate by introducing yourself, and posting questions and thoughts each week based on the given week's set discussion topic **at least two times weekly. This means at least two separate posts per week (a week is defined as running from Monday to Sunday), at least one of which must be a "new" post** rather than just a reply to someone else's. Extended absences, defined as a failure to post into the OWL classroom for more than a week, must be coordinated with the instructor.

Postings on the Forums must have the following characteristics:

- Contribute something meaningful to the discussion;
- Support your opinion with sufficient reasons or evidence;
- Display good grammar and organization.

Postings should not:

- Contain disrespectful or insulting language;
- Be excessively long or excessively short;

Be unrelated to the week's topic;

Say things that do not contribute anything, e.g. "I agree with you" or "nice comment."

- I will track your postings to the discussion Board, and it will be part of your 10% Online Discussion/ Exercises/Workshopping mark indicated below. **Failure to meet the minimum posting requirements will result in a significant deduction to your participation grade in the course.**

Because this is an online course, you are expected to check into the OWL site on a regular basis, to read the material **and your fellow students' comments**, participate in online discussions and to take part in any writing exercises posted. This policy will be waived only for medical or compassionate reasons. If your absence is extended and prolonged (over one week of continuous non-attendance), then you should discuss it with your academic advisor in your home faculty, who may require documentation. That advisor may then contact all of your instructors.

Expectations: Because this is a second-year class, an emphasis is placed on rigorous engagement with the course materials and active participation. **Yes, grammar and spelling do matter in all written work.**

Evaluation:

Assignment		Due Date
Journalistic writing assignments:		
Assignment One (News story)	20%	Feb 5
Assignment Two (Follow-up story OR covering an event if possible)	30%	March 2
Assignment Three (Profile) (proposal for story due March 24)	40%	April 5
Participation/online exercises/ Workshopping	10%	Ongoing

Journalistic Assignments: Please note that **you will not be allowed to profile and/or interview any family members for this or any other assignment. Any use of relatives in any story will result in an automatic five-mark deduction.**

There is one *news writing assignment*: it will be completed in a specific time frame online at the OWL site.

The *second assignment* asks you to either write a follow-up story that is Covid-related or BlackLivesMatter related (or some other news item of your own choosing) OR you'll cover an event of some kind if that's possible for you to do safely.

The *third writing assignment* will be in the form of a profile on a subject/person of your choosing (no family members). A short three or four line proposal must be sent to me for approval and input by March 24. **The proposal will not be marked, as such, but must be submitted by the due date or you will receive a five-mark deduction on the grade of the profile.**

Detailed information on assignments will be posted on OWL.

Deadlines

Deadlines are sacred in journalism and assignments should be submitted electronically before the specified time via OWL. I will indicate that for each assignment. Unless prior arrangements for an extension have been made with the instructor **at least 48 hours in advance** of the due date, late assignments will be subject to a **deduction of five per cent per day including weekends.**

Contacting the instructor

E-mail: **Students must regularly check the course website on OWL and possibly their UWO email accounts for important announcements such as additional information regarding assignments or other changes.**

I will have Zoom office hours at which time you can contact me that way or make an appointment to do so. More details to come.

Please allow a 24-hour turnaround for an email response – and please do not expect quick responses over the weekend.

Any email correspondence should have MIT 2154 in the subject headline. **Use the OWL website and your UWO email account ONLY. No messages from hotmail or Gmail accounts please.**

E-mails to the instructor, however, are best reserved for short questions that require a brief response. E-mail is often not a useful pedagogical tool for explaining course concepts or providing detailed advice on assignments. I cannot give out or discuss grades via e-mail.

Please also read the *Notes from the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Information and Media Studies* that I have placed on the OWL site for this class.

Welcome to the course and let's work together to make it productive and enjoyable.

Land Acknowledgement

Western University is situated on the traditional territories of the Anishinaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Lunaapeewak and Attawandaron peoples who have longstanding relationships to the land and region of southwestern Ontario and the City of London. The local First Nation communities of this area include Chippewas of the Thames First Nation, Oneida Nation of the Thames, and Munsee Delaware Nation. In the region, there are eleven First Nation communities and a growing Indigenous urban population. Western values the significant historical and contemporary contributions of local and regional First Nations and all of the Original peoples of Turtle Island (North America).

Please note that students will receive graded work worth no less than 15% at least 3 days prior to the deadline for withdrawal without academic penalty. This year, the date by which students are to have received at least 15% of their grade in a second semester course is March 12, 2021. Students can find details about this academic policy here: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/exam/evaluation_undergrad.pdf.

Please note, students who receive academic accommodation for the assignments on which these grades are based may not receive feedback in time to meet this deadline. Students are responsible for ensuring that they are aware of the grades they have received in their courses.

Schedule of Topics, Assignments

	Topic
Week One	
Jan. 11	Journalism Guidelines, What is News, news writing practice
Week Two	
Jan. 18	Writing for a Mass Audience Writing Leads, the inverted pyramid, differences between journalism and academic writing, more news writing practice
Week Three	
Jan. 25	Other types of leads, the importance of accuracy, Canadian Press style, story ideas

Week Four

Feb. 1 Covering Events, event story samples,
writing follow-up stories such as ones on Covid-19
News Assignment 1 due on Feb. 5
Submit story via OWL

Week Five

Feb. 8 Interviewing quoting people,
More story examples of event and follow-up coverage

Feb.15 -Feb 19 **Reading Week - no classes**

Week Six

Feb. 22 Features/Profiles
Writing for the Web and Social Media

Week Seven

March 1 Features/Profiles Continued
grammar review
Assignment Two due via OWL on
March 2

Week Eight

March 8 Basic Editing/ Headlines
structuring stories, more sample profiles.

Week Nine

March 15 Other kinds of journalism – opinion, columns,
longer features, beat reporting

Week Ten

March 22 Specialized reporting, freelancing, recycling your stories,
query letters, payment for articles, profile checklist

Profile Proposal due March 24

Week Eleven

March 29 Ethics and Legalities, copyright
Workshopping Profile
Assignment Three (Profile) due April 5

Week Twelve

April 5 Future of Journalism
Wrap up

Classes end on April 12

NOTES FROM THE FIMS DEAN'S OFFICE

Winter 2021

Rights and Responsibilities

The conditions governing a student's ability to pursue their undergraduate education at Western are ratified by Senate and can be found on the Academic Policies section of the University Secretariat:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/academic_policies/rights_responsibilities.html

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_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism

Students must write their essays and assignments, including take-home exams, in their own words. Whenever students take an idea, or a passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence. All papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software Turnitin 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.

Accommodation Policies

Students with disabilities work with Accessible Education (formerly SSD) which provides recommendations for accommodation based on medical documentation or psychological and cognitive testing. The accommodation policy can be found here: [Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities](#)

Academic Consideration for Student Absence

Students will have two (2) opportunities during the regular academic year to use an on-line portal to self-report an absence during the term, provided the following conditions are met: the absence is no more than 48 hours in duration, and the assessment

for which consideration is being sought is worth 30% or less of the student's final grade. Students are expected to contact their instructors within 24 hours of the end of the period of the self-reported absence, unless noted on the syllabus. Students are not able to use the self-reporting option in the following circumstances:

- during exam periods,
- absence of a duration greater than 48 hours,
- assessments worth more than 30% of the student's final grade,
- if a student has already used the self-reporting portal twice during the academic year

If the conditions for a Self-Reported Absence are NOT met, students will need to provide a Student Medical Certificate or equivalent documentation, if the absence is medical, or provide appropriate documentation if there are compassionate grounds for the absence in question. Students are encouraged to contact the FIMS Undergraduate Student Services Office to obtain more information about the relevant documentation.

Students should also note that individual instructors are not permitted to receive documentation directly from a student, whether in support of an application for consideration on medical grounds, or for other reasons. **All documentation required for absences that are not covered by the Self-Reported Absence Policy must be submitted to the Academic Counselling office of a student's home Faculty.**

For Western University policy on Consideration for Student Absence, see [Policy on Academic Consideration For Student Absences - Undergraduate Students in First Entry Programs](#) and for the Student Medical Certificate (SMC), see: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

In the event of a Covid-19 resurgence, it is possible that different procedures may need to be put in place on short notice.

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. Additional information is given in the [Western Academic Calendar](#).

Grading at FIMS

- Normally, first year courses required for entry into an MIT or MPI module (MIT 1020E and MIT 1025F/G) are expected to have a course average between 68-72%.
- Normally, second year required courses (MIT 2000, 2100, 2200, 2500) are expected to have a course average between 70 and 75%.
- Normally, third year required courses (MIT 3000, 3100) are expected to have a course average between 72 and 77%.

Elective courses and 4th year seminars have no recommended course averages.

Support Services

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

<http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/>

SUPPORT SERVICES - LINKS

Office of the Registrar:

www.registrar.uwo.ca

Mental Health Support:

<https://www.uwo.ca/health/psych/index.html>

Accessible Education:

http://academicsupport.uwo.ca/accessible_education/index.html

Accessibility Information:

www.accessibility.uwo.ca/

Writing Support Centre:

<http://writing.uwo.ca/>

Learning Skills Services:

<https://www.uwo.ca/sdc/learning/>

Academic Learning and Support for Online Learning:

<https://www.uwo.ca/se/digital/types/academic-and-learning-support.html>

Indigenous Services:

<https://indigenous.uwo.ca/>

Western International:

<https://international.uwo.ca/>

Career Centre:

<http://careerexperience.uwo.ca/>

Appendix A: Suggested Grade Ranges in MIT, MPI and MTP

Guidelines to the MIT Grade Range

These guidelines are benchmarks, and are not to be followed as rigid regulations. They will be adjusted as appropriate to take into account the level of the course and any specific instructions given by a professor. As well, competency in English language usage (including spelling and grammar) may be taken into account in the assignment of grades by individual instructors. Note that the 70-79 grade range is broken into two divisions, as this is the grade range into which a large number of students fall.

90-100 (Outstanding, A+)

The report shows sparkling originality and exhibits a high degree of critical analysis of the topic. Sophisticated synthesis and analysis of the theoretical and conceptual dimensions of the topic are demonstrated. Mastery of complex material and ideas is immediately evident. The topic is treated with sensitivity and subtlety of thought. The quality of the writing and background research is exemplary.

80-89 (Excellent, A)

The report shows originality and exhibits a high degree of critical analysis of the topic; it gets to the heart of the matter with comments and/or questions. It is clearly focused and logically organized. The quality of writing makes the report immediately understandable. Mastery of complex material and ideas is demonstrated. The report is of appropriate length, while preserving the priorities and emphasis of the material, so that the result is meaningful, not simplistic.

75-79 (Very Good, B+)

The report shows above average analysis, critical thinking and independent thought. Claims are supported by ample evidence and the components of the topic are well-researched and presented. The topic is addressed in reasonable depth and/or breadth and covers material appropriate to the course. The analysis is organized around focal points and the argument is easily followed. The report demonstrates an above average ability to write in an intelligible style and to condense material meaningfully and with a concern for priorities of that material.

70-74 (Good, B)

The report shows an attempt at analysis and critical thinking. Claims are supported by reasonable evidence. The topic is addressed in some depth and/or breadth, with references to the appropriate literature and course material. The analysis is organized around focal points. The report is generally well written and well argued.

60-69 (Competent, C)

The report demonstrates adequate comprehension of the topic. The report is on topic and is a reasonable summary of material covered in the course, but goes no further. Facts are stated accurately; the quality of writing is sufficiently intelligible with enough elaboration and enough connections made between ideas to permit a reader to understand the point of the report.

50-59 (Marginal, D)

The report shows less than adequate comprehension of the topic and of the material covered by the course. The report is a less than adequate summary of sources and/or is considerably off-topic. Facts are stated inaccurately or ambiguously; the writing style is difficult to follow; there is insufficient elaboration to permit reader's comprehension of relations among ideas; little judgment is shown in selecting detail for inclusion in the report.

Below 50 (Unacceptable, F)

The report demonstrates a failure to comprehend the topic. The material is disorganized and unintelligible. The report clearly does not meet the minimal requirements of the assignment.

Appendix B: Guidelines of Academic Appeals for FIMS Students

Grounds for Appeal:

The Faculty of Information and Media Studies does not view the appeals process as an opportunity for students to solicit a second opinion on a grade assigned to a particular piece of work. Appeals must pertain to the final grade in a course, and will only be entertained if sufficient grounds for appeal can be met, including: medical or compassionate circumstances, a defect in the evaluation process, bias, inaccuracy or unfairness.

Stages in the Appeals Process:

The first stage of the process is a discussion of the disputed grade with the appropriate Teaching Assistant (if applicable), and subsequently, the course Instructor. For grades assigned to individual assignments, essays, lab reports, projects and tests completed throughout the term, the student first must appeal to the Teaching Assistant or Instructor of the course, within three weeks of the date on which the Instructor or Teaching Assistant returned the assignments to the class. The Appeals Committee will not hear any further appeals about the final grade in any course unless this first step has been taken.

If completion of the first stage has not resolved the matter, the student may appeal the final grade in the course to the FIMS Appeals Committee. Appeals of final grades must be **within the time frame indicated in the Undergraduate Calendar.** It is the student's responsibility to ensure that the appeal is submitted within the deadline. The student shall submit a formal letter to the FIMS Appeals Committee outlining the grounds for the appeal, the remedy sought and relevant materials including the information about when and with whom (Teaching Assistant and/or Instructor) the student met, as described in Stage 1. If the appeal involves a request for work to be regraded, the original marked work and a clean copy (if possible) must be included. If the appeal is commenced once the deadline has passed, it will not be considered either by the Appeals Committee or by the Associate Dean.

The FIMS Appeals Committee has the discretion to determine whether the grounds for appeal have been met.

If the Committee deems that the reasons for the appeal are not legitimate, the Associate Dean will be informed. The appeal will be terminated and the student will be informed.

If the Committee decides that the grounds for appeal have been met, the following steps will be taken:

1. the course Instructor will be shown the appeal letter and offered an opportunity to make a written response;
2. if work is to be regraded, a reader will be appointed who is competent in the area in question and was not involved in the assignment of the original mark. The reader will consider the work in question and will arrive at an independent evaluation. If there is a large discrepancy between the original mark and the regraded mark, a second reader may be appointed by the Committee. **If the appointed reader(s) arrive at a grade within five marks of the original, the original grade will stand.**

The FIMS Appeals Committee will review the evidence and will make a recommendation on the case to the Associate Dean Undergraduate.

The Associate Dean Undergraduate will consider the recommendation from the Appeals Committee, and will make a decision. The student and the instructor will be notified promptly and in writing by the Associate Dean of the decision and of the change in grade, if any. Within the Faculty of Information and Media Studies, the Associate Dean's decision on the matter is final.

Further appeals are possible under certain circumstances to the Senate Review Board Academic (for Undergraduate students) or to the Faculty of Graduate Studies (for Graduate students) but the student should carefully consult the guidelines regarding such Appeals.