

WRI 310 Advanced Reporting

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Office Hours – Most MWF afternoons after class

TEXTS: Letters to a Young Journalist, by Samuel Freedman
Telling True Stories, Edited by Mark Kramer and Wendy Call
Associated Press Stylebook

The course is designed as a seminar in an effort to take journalism beyond spot-news reporting, and into reporting in-depth. We will study ways to approach stories so that they will go beyond the who, what, when, where, how and why and do some explaining and interpreting what they mean. These ways will include using research techniques and methods in addition to asking someone "What happened?" The topics will address a broad range of issues that are in the public interest

The objective is that students will be able to do in-depth reporting that provides understanding, using main characters to illustrate issues. This is a class in storytelling. We will read and we will write. This class focuses on narrative: how to tell a true story accurately, ethically, and memorably. You'll leave the class with an understanding that strong narrative journalism requires the twin tracks of exhaustive reporting *and* skillful storytelling. We make art of fact; we turn important social issues into readable, compelling stories, not "articles;" in the longform version of the craft, we immerse ourselves in our subjects' lives in order to understand/translate human nature; we read/watch/listen analytically and work to improve our reporting and storytelling. We'll look at scene, dialogue, third-person point of view, and acute detail/description, and we'll consider the under-studied and undervalued craft of structure. Each student will complete four stories of 1,000 - 2,000 words each, write themed assignments in class, plus critique colleagues' work.

There will be weekly current events quizzes on Mondays at the beginning of class, and stylebook quizzes at the beginning of each Friday class. There will be frequent reading/reaction assignments from the books above.

But the big assignments will be four major stories, approximately one every three weeks. The stories must come from broad topic areas that will be your beat for the semester.

Possible beat ideas include an organization (such as ASB, an academic department, a company, a team, the Rescue Mission) a region (such as Ocean Beach) an entity (city government, the art community) a condition (traffic) an issue (immigration, pollution, megachurches, homelessness).

At least one of these stories must be a localized national story, at least one must be a story that comes out of a meeting, conference or major speech. Outlines, source lists, multimedia ideas and other portions of the story will be graded along with the overall story. Stories are a minimum of four typewritten, double-spaced pages, and use at least five sources -- some live and some published.

Topics we will cover in class will include:

- How to distinguish Topic from Story—how to think
- Narrative defined
- The importance of reporting and its relationship to strong narrative journalism
- How to “see” stories everywhere
- Ethics
- Revision
- Organizational strategies

Sometimes we'll start class with a micro-lecture, sometimes we'll jump right in with a writing exercise, sometimes we'll focus entirely on workshop. Some of the topics we'll cover: What makes a story great? What makes a story a *story*? What elements does great narrative require? How does reporting for narrative differ from the reporting one might do for, say, a daily news story or feature? What choices—stylistic, ethical, etc.—must the longform journalist make? What does it mean to write with "voice"? Who is the audience? Does it matter?

There will be no mid-term examination, but there will be a take-home final. Attendance, preparation for class, and participation will be factored into the final grade. Bonus points will be awarded for stories that are published.

In addition, we will discuss techniques and methods for attaining first jobs and internships.

You are expected to read at least one mainstream news site, online, on paper (!) or otherwise, every day and bring in examples of applicable stories for class discussion.

It's essential that you do the assigned reading. Failure to do the reading will show in your classroom participation and in your in-class writing assignments.

And while there are these defined daily assignments, I expect you to be working on your stories (thinking, asking others, reading) at all times on all the other days, too. I want you dreaming about them. It won't be like you'll be able to say, “Now I need to start working on my first big story.” That thought should be on your mind today. After today, I want you actually working on that story. If you start gathering information now, you'll be able to use it in all of your stories, not just your first one.

Story Deadlines:

- Feb. 1

- March 1
- April 3
- April 26

Late stories are not acceptable.

SPECIAL DATES ----- Feb. 21, 22 and 23 ----- Required attendance, 3 pm and 7 pm each day

It's our Writers Symposium By The Sea. www.pointloma.edu/writers. I expect you to make arrangements with your professors and employers to clear EVENINGS AND AFTERNOONS.

The course is designed so that students will achieve at least these outcomes:

1. Show an ability to do in-depth reporting that provides understanding.
2. Show ability to become better storytellers.

The journalism program has adopted these as our desired outcomes for journalism students:

1. Exhibit effective research and reporting practices.
2. Display strong interpretive, analytic, and critical thinking skills.
3. Communicate ideas clearly and accurately in forms appropriate to the purpose, medium, and audience.
4. Employ appropriate ethical and legal standards and professional codes in their service to their communities and cultures.