

Department of Communication, Illinois State University
COM 165-001 – Spring 2026
Print and Online Newswriting and Reporting
9:35 - 10:50 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday
Fell Hall 102

Instructor: Kevin Capie (kbcapie@ilstu.edu)
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Other times by appointment scheduled through calendly.com/kevincapie

“In the end though – or in the beginning, at least – every word that you write is a choice that you make. That’s the last moment you have control, in fact: when you’re alone, looking at the screen, at the white space under your name. You won’t be perfect. You will make mistakes. You will overreach. You will be too brave and also too fearful. Your writing will make you fans and enemies, and sometimes it will turn one into the other and back again, faster than you can imagine. That’s because the words you write matter – weirdly, given the state of the business, maybe more than ever.” – Former Esquire writer-at-large Chris Jones (@MySecondEmpire), July 20, 2015

Journalistic writing is different than other forms of writing. You will find there is a marked contrast between this and the other “academic” types of writing you are likely used to. Don’t be intimidated and, as Chris Jones tweeted above, don’t be afraid to make mistakes in your writing. This course is structured for you to be successful and learn the tools you need to become strong reporter.

This course will teach you the fundamentals of journalism in order to reach the audience. Those fundamentals begin with selecting, organizing and structuring information before writing. It will also introduce the concept of news values and style that can be applied in writing for print, online, broadcast and public relations.

Course Description

Intensive training in the fundamentals of newsgathering and newswriting for print and online mediums.
Prerequisites: COM 161 or 180 or concurrent registration.

Goals and objectives

By the end of the semester you will:

- Write clearly and concisely with proper grammar, spelling, punctuation and AP Style skills
- Develop basic reporting skills including the ability to use appropriate sources and interviewing techniques.
- Apply concepts of news values, laws and ethics to news stories
- Critique news pieces for content and quality of the writing.

Textbooks and Materials

- **Writing and Reporting For the Media (13th edition)** e-book ISBN: 9780197614884
- ***Suggested: The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law.*** Cambridge: Perseus Publishers.
- Other readings and media assigned throughout the semester and/or posted to Canvas.
- Daily access to print/TV/online news – i.e. Pantagraph, Chicago Tribune, Google News, etc.
- Class Canvas site
- Illinois State e-mail account (preferably checked daily)
- Word processing program

Policies & Procedures

Attendance

As class participation is part of your grade attendance is strongly advised. You get three free absences, no questions asked. For each unexcused absence after the third, 15 points will be deducted from your point total for the semester. If you know in advance that you are going to miss class (i.e. religious holiday, university-sanctioned event, wedding, etc.) arrangements can be made for any in-class assignments or quizzes that may be missed, if approved by the instructor. It is the student's responsibility to in order to make up the quiz or in-class work if the student elects to do so (see Grading below).

Classroom culture

Learning how to take notes the “old-fashioned way” with pen and paper will not only help you learn and understand what we are discussing better, but it is also the predominant way of note-taking in the profession. Cell phones will be turned off and there will be no need to be on Facebook, YouTube and the like. Violating this policy will result in points being deducted (see Grading/Class Participation).

Communication

The best way to reach me is by email (kbcapie@ilstu.edu, if you missed it above). Please allow 24-48 hours for a reply, although it will likely be sooner. When corresponding by email please include the Course No. in the subject line followed by the topic (i.e. COM 165 – Critique). This will expedite a response.

I can also be reached by phone (again, 309-438-7668), but this is much more scattershot when it comes to making contact so if you need/want a reply, the best way to reach me is by email. If there are questions or concerns about a project or assignment do not wait until the last minute to bring them up.

Do not hesitate to stop by during the posted office hours (see above) or make an appointment if those are not convenient. I am also willing to conference via Zoom by appointment if that is necessary.

Discussion

You are responsible to have read the the assigned material before class. Each class meeting will be a mixture of lecture that reinforces and goes beyond the textbook and discussion. Because of this it is important to come to class prepared to participate.

During lectures and discussions do not be afraid to speak up. You do not have to raise your hand to ask a question. However, you must be respectful of whomever is speaking by not rudely interrupting or attempting to talk over the speaker.

We also will be discussing each other's work. So, please be helpful with the comments you make and do not take anything said in critique of your work personally, nor should you make your critique personal. Everything said in these critiques is with the goal of making you better writers. In a real newsroom, editors seldom mince words.

Canvas

This course is divided into Weeks, as listed on the course site. Each week will include some or all of the following:

- material for you to read, watch, and explore;
- graded assignments and quizzes to allow you to work with the concepts and resources (sometimes individually, sometimes together).

Reporting and Sourcing

When working on assignments or stories that require reporting you must identify yourself as an Illinois State University journalism student and the work may be used publicly in multiple platforms. Do not allow sources to review or approve your story although you may do additional fact checking or allow them to check they are quoted accurately.

Do not use friends, family or colleagues as source material. The purpose of these assignments is to prepare you to function in a professional environment. It is extremely rare in which you would use someone close to you as a source in a straight news story.

Ethics/Plagiarism/Academic Honesty

The definition of plagiarism is “to steal and pass off the ideas or words of another as one’s own.” Students (or groups) are expected to do their own work. Do not borrow or steal from the work of others. This includes press releases, quotes from other news stories and the Internet. When in doubt cite your source material.

Do not use the same works for multiple classes. You may submit stories to *The Scout* only after they have been turned in for a class assignment.

Do not make up any quotes or facts.

If you do any of the above you will fail the assignment and quite possibly the course.

Reasonable Accommodations

Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu.

Health and well-being

The most important thing you need to do is take care of yourself, physically and mentally. If you’re feeling stressed, overwhelmed, lost, anxious, depressed or are struggling with personal issues, do not hesitate to call or visit [Student Counseling Services](#) (SCS). These services are free and completely confidential. SCS is located at 320 Student Services Building, [\(309\) 438-3655](tel:3094383655).

Grading

Nuts and bolts

Grades will be based on accumulated points out of 1000 possible at the end of the semester from quizzes, assignments, five reporting stories, a mid-term exam, a final exam and class participation. I do reserve the right to eliminate assignments. For five extra credit points, submit your favorite song and artist on the ReggieNet quiz by Sept. 1. The breakdown is as follows:

• News Stories (2x150)	300
• Assignments (6x50)	300
• Midterm	100
• Final	100
• Quizzes (11x10)	100
• Media Analysis Paper	50
• Class participation (25x2)	<u>50</u>
	1000

The corresponding letter grades are:

A = 92 percent (920 points based on 1000 point total)

B = 84 percent (840 points)

C = 75 percent (750 points)

D = 65 percent (650 points)

F = 64.9 percent or less (649.9 points or less)

Deadlines

Since writing for the media exists in a deadline-driven environment, **ALL** deadlines will be met as assigned. If you turn something in late, 25 percent of the grade will be deducted for every 24 hour period. (A 100-point assignment is due at the start of class on Monday, you have until 3 p.m. Tuesday to turn the assignment in for up to 75 percent of the value. After 3 p.m. on Tuesday, it becomes 50 percent, etc.). That being said, all it does is take an email in a timely fashion and I will be willing to work with you and revise the deadline. This does not mean that an email at 2:45 p.m. before class is sufficient. But if you let me know on Monday for an assignment due on Wednesday, I can work with you. Take-home assignments will be due at the beginning of class on ReggieNet. One out-of-class paper may be an event covered on deadline. The story, any alternate assignments, and deadline, along with consequences for missing it, will be discussed in class prior to the event.

Class participation

This is the only category where points cannot be earned, only deducted. Violating any of the above policies on classroom culture and discussion decorum will result in points being deducted. The other way to lose points is to be so woefully unprepared to participate in a discussion by not doing the readings or classmate critique.

You will be graded with 25 points at the midterm and 25 at the end of the semester so you can judge your progress and if you are on target for the full semester.

Expectations

Major fact errors, numerical mistakes, misspelled proper names and misidentified sources will reduce your grade on an assignment. Your copy is expected to use correct grammar and Associated Press Style and be free from typos and general sloppiness. Those also will lower your grade.

A rough breakdown of what the grade will be based on the quality of assignment (we will go over these in more detail for each assignment):

- A – Could be published immediately with only minor line-editing
- B – Could be published with more line-editing and minor content tweaks
- C – Could be published after editing for content as well as line-editing
- D – Could be published after partial rewrite for content, grammar and style
- F – Unpublishable

Schedule

Here is a very tentative schedule subject to change with major assignment due dates (which are unlikely to change). The assigned readings for each date are to be done before class. Non-textbook readings are on Canvas under each the appropriate week listed. I will also be posting weekly to-do lists in the forums with the other assignments and blog post due dates. You will see a number of lab periods. These will allow us to catch up if we get behind. Or, if we stay on schedule, give you opportunities to work in class on upcoming projects. These are to be treated as a normal class period and you must attend. If the schedule does change I will let you know in class, on ReggieNet and/or by email. If nothing else, this lays out the anticipated order of progression to the course.

Week 1

Jan. 13 – Class Introduction

Jan. 15 – What is News?
Read WRM Ch. 1

Week 2

Jan. 20 – Selecting and Reporting the News
Read WRM Ch. 2

Jan. 22 – The Craft of Writing
Read WRM Ch. 3

Week 3

Jan. 27 – Newswriting Style
Read WRM Ch. 4
Assignment No. 1: News Values Critique Due

Jan. 29 – Basic Leads
Read WRM Ch. 7
Quiz No. 1

Week 4

Feb. 3 – Alternative Leads
Read WRM Ch. 8

Feb. 5 – Semester Assignments/Lead Review
Assignment No. 2: Lead Writing Due
Quiz No. 2

Week 5

Feb. 10 – Body of a News Story
Read WRM Ch. 9

Feb. 12 – NO CLASS
Quiz No. 3

Week 6

Feb. 17 – Quotes and Attributions/In-class Assignment
Read WRM Ch. 10
Assignment No. 3 Story Writing Due

Feb. 19 – NO CLASS
Quiz No. 4

Week 7

Feb. 24 – Interviewing
Read WRM CH. 11

Feb. 26 – Story pitches/In-class Assignment
Quiz No. 5

Week 8

March 3 – MIDTERM REVIEW
Assignment No. 4 Interview Story Due

March 5 – MIDTERM

Week 9

March 10 – NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

March 12 – NO CLASS – SPRING BREAK

Week 10

March 17 – Feature Stories
Read WRM Ch. 12

March 19 – Speeches and Meetings
Read WRM Ch. 15
Quiz No. 6.

Week 11

March 24 – Public Affairs No. 1 (Crime and Accidents)
Read WRM Ch. 17.2
Quiz No. 7.

March 26 – Public Affairs No. 1 (Crime and Accidents)
Read WRM Ch. 17.2
Quiz No. 7.

Week 12

March 31 – Public Affairs II (Local Governemtn)

Read WRM Ch. 17.1

April 2 – Public Affairs III (Courts).

Read WRM Ch. 17.3

Story No. 1 Due

Quiz No. 8.

Week 13

April 7 – Investigative Reporting

Read Ch. 18

April 9 – Libel

Read WRM Ch. 5

Quiz No. 9

Week 14

April 14 – Ethics

Read WRM Ch. 6.

April 16 – Broadcast Writing

Read WRM Ch. 3

Story No. 2

Quiz No. 10.

Week 15

April 21 – Visual Journalism

Read WRM Ch 14

Assignment No. 5 – Broadcast Writing

April 23 – TBA

Quiz No. 11

Media Analysis Paper Due

Week 16

April 28 – Journalism and Public Relations

Read WRM Ch. 19

April 30 – Final Review

Assignment No 6 – Press Release Due.

Final exam

TBA