

## **SYLLABUS: Journalistic Reporting and Writing (JRN 3050), Spring 2021**

Professor: Gregg Birnbaum, adjunct assistant professor

Class hours: This fully online class meets on Zoom on Fridays from 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m.

Remote office hours: After class, 11:05 a.m.-12 p.m., on Zoom, Facetime or the phone, and by appointment.

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**NOTE: Given the coronavirus pandemic, we will rely mostly on “distance reporting” rather than traditional street reporting. Your health and safety is the most important issue in this course.**

### **LEARNING GOALS:**

- Master the basics of reporting and writing news stories.
- Gain proficiency: In understanding and identifying news; generating story ideas and finding angles; writing leads (ledes) and comprehensive, fair, accurate and well-organized stories; interviewing and using quotes and paraphrase effectively; covering a beat; conducting research; and finding and developing sources.
- Sharpen writing skills through in-class drills and home assignments and by analyzing story structure and use of language, authoring clear and accurate spot stories, longer hard news and enterprise pieces and features/profiles.
- Become familiar with the latest tools and techniques of digital journalism and with social media platforms.
- Gain knowledge about ethics, best practices, highest industry standards and how to avoid mistakes, as well as current issues in the field, such as “fake news,” fact checking and media bias.
- Develop the ability to meet deadlines.
- Learn how to think like a journalist.

### **PREREQUISITES:**

- Curiosity about what’s happening in the world around you and what it means.
- Passion, hard work, you care.
- Enjoy listening, talking, discussing.
- Like to read, write.
- Embrace constructive criticism, use it to improve.

### **INSTRUCTOR BIO:**

Professor Birnbaum is the former Assistant Managing Editor for Politics at NBCNews.com, where he supervised online coverage of the White House, Congress, federal agencies, as well as national politics, including the 2020 presidential election, its aftermath and the Biden administration. Previously, Professor Birnbaum was a Senior Editor on the CNN.com politics team from 2015-2017, handling breaking news, the politics live blog, as well as defense/national security coverage. Other positions held by Professor Birnbaum include: Managing Editor/Head of Political Content, New York Daily News; Deputy Managing Editor, POLITICO; and Political Editor, The New York Post.

Professor Birnbaum has been in the news business for more than 30 years as a reporter and editor, beginning his career — and his love affair with journalism — as a “copy kid” at The Wall Street Journal. He received his Master of Science degree from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University in Evanston, Ill., and has been teaching at Baruch since 2014.

### **COVID PROTOCOLS:**

The most important concern is your health and safety. Please do not do anything that compromises your own personal concerns for your health. And always respect the health concerns of anyone you interview or engage with while you are reporting, and pay particular attention to the needs of elderly, the infirm and the ill if you interview them.

I strongly recommend that you do no reporting indoors, except in your own spaces. No stores, no meetings, no health facilities. I encourage students to do their reporting outdoors, at a distance, when necessary.

When you are reporting, remember to:

- Wear a mask
- Practice social distancing of at least six feet
- Avoid crowded areas

If you find people you would like to interview and they agree, you can also ask for their contact info so you can conduct a full interview remotely by phone, Zoom or another application.

I will discuss these important protocols during our first class and answer questions and address concerns that students may have. You are also welcome to discuss any issues related to COVID individually with me after class. I have extensive experience at NBC News directing reporters in the field on how to work safely during the pandemic and will share that with the class. Professor Emily Johnston also has compiled detailed information about how to report safely. Please review that here: <https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/distancedreporting/>

### **CLASS GROUND RULES:**

- **Be on time. It is also worthwhile to join the Zoom session a few minutes early each Friday to make sure that your video and microphone are working.** If a student must miss a class, inform me **before** class begins by email or text as soon as you know you won't be able to make it. If you cannot

attend class for any reason, you are expected to make up the assignments and readings. I will record all classes so students who miss class will have a chance to catch up afterward.

I prefer that you keep your Zoom video on during class, as it will be easier to get to know one another and seeing the professor and the students together, even if only on a screen, creates a more in-person-like classroom environment and makes communication with each other easier and more enjoyable. However, under CUNY rules, you have the unrestricted right to turn off your video, and you will suffer no penalty for doing so. You also have the right to turn off your audio, and be in silent, listen-only mode. I will be frequently sharing my screen with the class and using the Zoom whiteboard feature to provide examples of concepts we are learning and other material. Any students who misbehave will be removed from the Zoom class.

- Because this online class meets only once a week, the mid-week assignments take the place of the second class. The mid-week assignments are generally due the following Tuesday after the assignment is made on Friday.
- Once the class has started, give it your undivided attention. Focus on the class and not on what may be going on around you from wherever you are Zooming. You may not text, email, tweet, IM or surf the web during class (unless it's for class). If there's an emergency, you may leave the Zoom to deal with it.
- Class sessions are "off-the-record." They may not be recorded by students in any manner and no tweeting, Facebooking, blogging of class activities or discussions is permitted.
- Some of my communications with you will take place through Blackboard and it is essential that you check your Baruch email on a daily basis. I use Blackboard regularly to send important group emails to the class and you miss those at your own peril. Blackboard group emails work only with CUNY email addresses; you will not receive the group emails unless you are checking your CUNY email address.
- **All assignments must be completed by deadline.** That's good training for the news business (and other professions) and we've got a lot of material to cover over the semester so it's vital to keep up with the work. (If there are special circumstances that you think may warrant a deadline extension, please discuss them with me – **before** the deadline has passed.)

**Penalties for late assignments:** An assignment submitted up to a week late will be penalized by a reduction of one full grade, i.e., what would have been a B if it were on time becomes a C; if it is two weeks late, it will be lowered by two full grades, i.e., a B becomes a D. **After two weeks, I will not accept the assignment and you will receive an F GRADE on it. In this course, an F grade on an assignment equals zero for the purpose of calculating your final course grade.**

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** You must promptly read and absorb the feedback, editing, comments and critiques that I provide to you on submitted assignments. I will not tolerate the same mistakes being made over and over as we progress through the semester. If you have questions about any of my feedback or grading on a particular assignment, please discuss them with me.

- Carefully proofread all of your assignments before submission for grammar, style, punctuation and spelling. Work that is riddled with careless errors – for instance, names and places misspelled or incorrect info — will be returned ungraded and must be redone to receive credit.
- The vast majority of assignments must be sent to me by email as attachments. **Please use Word docs; I won't accept PDFs.** Send only one assignment with each email. If, for whatever reason, you have two assignments to send at the same time, put them in separate emails. The email subject line must contain the assignment title and date due. For instance, Home assignment/liquor store robbery/Sept. 8. There will be a few instances in which an assignment can be completed in an email without the need to attach a doc, and I will indicate those.

When you have submitted a doc, the first page should contain, at the top, the story “slug” (the one- or two-word identifying “name” of the story in capital letters, i.e., BIRNBAUMINTERVIEW), your name, date and the word count. **Please use double-spacing between indented paragraphs.** At the bottom of the assignment, type “30” – the traditional journalism marking that signals the end of the story has been reached.

**\*\*PLAGIARISM AND FABRICATION\*\*:**

**These are the equivalent of felony crimes in academia and journalism. Plagiarism and fabrication will not be tolerated in this course. I will fail you on the assignment and report you to college administrators if I have evidence that you have copied or used someone else's work without providing appropriate credit, including taking from a previously published story or article, in whole or part, any quotes or other material for use in your assignment without indicating the source of the information, have made up anything, or have submitted an assignment as your own that was done, in whole or part, by someone else. I will use my own 35 years of experience to detect cheating, as well as turnitin.com. Also, you are not permitted to submit work for this class that has been or is being submitted for another course without permission from both instructors.**

**We will talk about plagiarism and fabrication in the first class, and I will answer any questions you have so that all students are clear on this important issue. You should take academic integrity very seriously; I do. If you have questions about assignments as you are doing them, ask me.**

In addition, visit [www.baruch.edu/academic/academic\\_honesty.html](http://www.baruch.edu/academic/academic_honesty.html) to read the college's policies about academic honesty and send me an email confirming that you understand the principles and will follow them.

**CLASS PARTICIPATION:**

Active participation is strongly encouraged, more so than ever because we are remote learning. It will help create a sense of class community and reduce the space between us since we can't be physically

together. We can make this work – Zoom meetings allow for easy communication by all participants. You do not need to “raise your hand” for me to acknowledge you. Simply speak up during a pause to let me know you have a question or would like to make a comment. I prefer oral communication during class, but students can also use Zoom’s group chat function. Questions, comments and discussion are encouraged. Respectful disagreement with your fellow students and/or your professor is invited.

#### **CONTACTING ME:**

My preferred means of communication outside of class time is by email. You can reach me at [gregg.birnbaum@baruch.cuny.edu](mailto:gregg.birnbaum@baruch.cuny.edu), which I check several times a day and should be our main point of contact, or at my backup personal email ([ggbirnbaum@aol.com](mailto:ggbirnbaum@aol.com)) if the Baruch email system is down. You also can text me at 917.414.1622 in an emergency. I almost always respond to emails within 24 hours and usually much more quickly. If you need to speak with me for any reason, please let me know and I will make time. Each Friday after class during the semester, I am also available for one hour. Please make use of this opportunity – I am approachable and welcome the chance to interact individually with students.

#### **GRADING:**

Three substantial assignments account for 50 percent of the final grade. They are:

- **“The Meeting,”** Week 4, Feb. 26: Attend a virtual meeting, panel discussion or similar event and write a 500-word story. Discuss with me in advance the meeting you intend to cover remotely. (This assignment counts for 10 percent of the final grade; deadline: Friday, March 5.)
- **“The Business,”** Week 9, April 9: Write a 650-word story about a business/retail establishment and how it has been impacted by COVID-19, including interviews with the manager or a store employee, several customers and a competitor. Covid-safe interviews can be conducted outside the business or over the phone or other application. (This assignment counts for 20 percent of the final grade; deadline: Friday, April 16.)
- **“The Profile,”** Week 11, April 23: Write a 750-word profile of a person of your choosing. The story will include an in-depth virtual or socially distanced interview with your subject, as well as Covid-safe interviews with at least two people who know your subject. You need my approval of your subject selection before beginning this assignment. (This assignment counts for 20 percent of the final grade; deadline: Friday, May 7.)

For each of these three major assignments, you must “pitch” (present/describe/sell) your story idea to me as though I were your editor at a newspaper/website. That means convincing me in advance why the story is interesting and explaining how you intend to accomplish it. In addition, you will inform me of the reporting methods you will use to ensure that all interviews will be done safely.

The remaining 50 percent of the final course grade is composed of:

- Weekly home assignments that are due on Fridays throughout the semester (not including the three major stories discussed above) are worth 30 percent;
- Mid-week assignments count for 15 percent;
- Surprise quizzes account for the remaining 5 percent;
- Active class participation can help give a boost to your final grade, at my discretion.

Most assignments will receive a letter grade, but not all. Some non-graded assignments during the semester will instead be marked as “completed” or “failed to complete.”

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** I will generally adhere to the syllabus, but I may not follow it precisely every week. I will announce assignments for the coming week in class on Fridays; they will often be what the syllabus indicates, but not always. If you miss a class or are not sure about the assignments for the coming week, ask me or a fellow student. DO NOT DO AN ASSIGNMENT SIMPLY BECAUSE IT IS LISTED ON THE SYLLABUS FOR THE COMING WEEK.

There are no mid-terms or final exams for this course and there is no extra-credit opportunity.

Work materials required for various in-class, mid-week and home assignments, such as fact sets, videos and press releases, will be provided.

#### **READINGS:**

- There is no textbook. The readings are drawn from a variety of sources and will be distributed to you through Blackboard or by email.
- Required daily news dosage: You must read one or more articles each day from major media outlets, such as The New York Times, New York Daily News, The Wall Street Journal, FoxNews.com, CNN.com and NBCNews.com.

#### **TWITTER:**

It’s become a vital part of the news business and will be discussed and used in this course. All students are required to have a Twitter handle so they can learn how journalists consume news on social media and how they use it to promote their work. If you aren’t already on Twitter, take a few minutes to get there by setting up an account, which is free and easy to do. After you get started, some useful news accounts to follow and get started with include: @nytimes; @AP; @NBCNews; @CNNbrk; @DRUDGE; and @reuters. There are literally thousands of others. Find who and what interests you and “follow” it. Consider following your classmates. I also would suggest @BaruchCollege, @DandSmagazine and @BaruchTicker. (If you would like a program to organize your Twitter feed, I recommend TweetDeck.)

#### **MINIMUM TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS:**

To progress in this fully online course, you will need regular access to a laptop and/or desktop computer, a working knowledge of how to use basic word-processing software and a web browser, an active

Baruch email account and access to Blackboard. A smartphone or access to one to record audio for assignments also would be helpful. If you don't have a smartphone, please discuss alternatives with me.

**ACCESS:**

Students with disabilities may be eligible for reasonable accommodation to enable them to participate fully in courses at Baruch. If you feel you may be in need of an accommodation, please contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities at 646.312.4590.

## **CLASS OUTLINE: 14 WEEKS**

### **WEEK 1: FRIDAY, JANUARY 29**

**Topic:** Welcome/Introductions/Remote learning/COVID protocols/What is news?

**Key points covered in class:**

- Introductions/Course learning goals/Syllabus review
- How we'll make Zoom work for us this semester
- Reporting safely during the Covid-19 pandemic
- Class rules, including plagiarism-fabrication, grading, instructor expectations
- What is news? (and what isn't)/Definitions, types/Reporters and curiosity/Thinking about the reader, always
- Dog bites man (not news) and man bites dog (news – and it's happened)

**Mid-week assignment:** Write a 350-word essay about your interest in journalism, what you're passionate about, which skills you want to develop and improve and what you hope to get out of this course. Deadline: Tuesday, Feb. 2, 5 p.m.

**Home assignment:** Choose the best lede in each of five multiple-choice examples and briefly explain in one or two sentences your reason for each selection. Deadline: Friday, Feb. 5, 5 p.m.

**Reading assignment:**

- *"Inside Reporting,"* Tim Harrower on "The five W's"
- The Society of Professional Journalists one-page code of ethics:  
<http://www.spj.org/pdf/ethicscode.pdf>

### **WEEK 2: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5**

**Topic:** Leads ("ledes")/Ethics

**Grammar/style corner:** Its/It's

**Key points covered in class:**

- What is a lede?/The five “W’s”/Inverted pyramid/Elements of strong ledes/What can go wrong: The buried lede and other no-no’s
- Case study: Early, later ledes on the Denver Post’s Aurora mass shooting coverage
- Lecture on journalism ethics and standards: Fairness/Objectivity/Accuracy/Unacceptable conduct
- Discussion of the SPJ code
- How the media rights its wrongs with corrections-clarifications-editor’s notes, public editors

**Mid-week assignment:** What’s wrong with eight ledes. Deadline: Tuesday, Feb. 9, 5 p.m.

**Home assignment:** Write the lede and a half dozen additional paragraphs for a 350-word spot news story based on a fact set about a liquor store robbery. Deadline: Friday, Feb. 12, 5 p.m.

**Reading assignment:**

- Harrower on “Leads that succeed”

\*\*To begin preparing for “**The Meeting**” assignment in Week 4, students need to find an upcoming virtual meeting, speech, panel discussion or similar event to cover remotely. Students will discuss with me in advance the event they have selected and how they plan to report on it.

**[SCHEDULING NOTE: THE COLLEGE IS CLOSED FRIDAY FEB. 12 (LINCOLN’S BIRTHDAY). WE SKIP THAT WEEK SO OUR NEXT CLASS WILL BE FRIDAY FEB. 19.]**

**WEEK 3: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 19**

**Topic:** Interviewing

**Grammar/style corner:** Punctuating quotes

**Key points covered in class:**

- Interviewing: What makes for a good interview/How-to, effective methods, finding your comfort zone, technical aspects/What not to do/Interviewing during the pandemic
- Discussion of the “choose the best ledes” assignment from Week 1 and the what’s wrong with the eight ledes assignment from Week 2

**In-class assignment:** Students pair up for short interviews to unearth a few interesting facts about each other. Students can conduct these interviews over the phone, Facetime or whatever is their preferred



remote method of real-time communication. Several pairs then present to the class on Zoom about their interviewing experience, lines of questioning, what they learned, any difficulties.

**Mid-week assignment:** Write a short news story of 6-8 paragraphs from a fact set about Connecticut banning state police use of hand-held radar guns. Deadline: Tuesday, Feb. 23, 5 p.m.

**Home assignment:** Interview five-six people about a current event and write a 400-word “reaction story” based on those interviews. Students will discuss their topic with me in advance and how and where they plan to conduct the interviews safely. I would suggest a park or street with some foot traffic for Covid-safe outdoor and socially distanced interviews. Deadline: Friday, Feb. 26, 5 p.m.

**\*\*Students need to finalize plans for “The Meeting” assignment in Week 4 by finding an upcoming virtual meeting, speech, panel discussion or similar event to cover remotely. Students will discuss with me in advance the meeting they have selected and how they intend to cover it.**

**Reading assignment:**

- Harrower on “Interviewing”
- Highlights of Associated Press style
- Pro Tip Sheet #1

#### **WEEK 4: FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 26**

**Topic:** Covering a meeting, speech/News writing/Story structure

**Special guest speaker:** Courtney Gross, political reporter, NY1

**Key points covered in class:**

- What comes after the lede/Ways that stories can be organized/How ledes are supported/“Nut grafs”
- Lecture: Covering a meeting, speech, panel discussion
- Discussion of the liquor store robbery home assignment from Week 2 and mid-week assignment on radar guns from Week 3

**Home assignment: “The Meeting.”** Attend a virtual meeting, panel discussion or similar event and write a 500-word story. Students will discuss with me in advance the meeting they plan to cover remotely. Deadline: Friday, March 5, 5 p.m. (Reminder: This assignment counts for 10 percent of your course grade.)

**Reading assignment:**

- Harrower on “Covering meetings” and “Covering speeches” and “Covering Politics” [all in one pdf]

## **WEEK 5: FRIDAY, MARCH 5**

**Topic:** Using quotes, paraphrase/Story structure, con't/"Fake news"

**Grammar/style corner:** Numbers

**Key points covered in class:**

- Quotes: Why quotes are important/Recognizing good ones and moving the story forward/How to use quotes effectively, when to paraphrase/"Kickers"/Red flags – accusations, inappropriate language, context, precision
- Analysis of the Associated Press story, "Thousands gather on Capitol steps for animal rights"
- What is "fake news"?/Where does it come from, why is it problematic and how can it be spotted?/Examples, including fake stories about the Pope, the 2020 presidential election and COVID-19/What are "deep fakes"?

**In-class writing drill with fact set #1:** A murder

**Mid-week assignment:** Redo the in-class writing drill. Deadline: Tuesday, March 9, 5 p.m.

**Home assignment:** Write a 400-word news story based on NY Gov. Andrew Cuomo's coronavirus briefing. Deadline: Friday, March 12, 5 p.m.

**Reading assignment:**

- Harrower on "Finding and using sources" and "Quotations"

## **WEEK 6: FRIDAY, MARCH 12**

**Topic:** Open Meetings Law/Sourcing

**Key points covered in class:**

- Key aspects of New York's Open Meetings Law
- Sources, sourcing ("All the President's Men" garage meeting with "Deep Throat" film clip)
- Review "best of" examples from "**The Meeting**" assignment from Week 4

**Home assignment:** Rewrite the Associated Press "late package" story to use quotes and paraphrase properly. Deadline: Friday, March 19, 5 p.m.

**Reading assignment:**

- Harrower on "Covering a beat"

## **WEEK 7: FRIDAY, MARCH 19**

**Topic:** Beat reporting/Semester halfway point update

**Special guest speaker:** Eugene Scott, reporter covering identity politics, The Washington Post

**Grammar/style corner:** Commas

**Key points covered in class:**

- What is a beat?/Examples of core beats, governmental and non-governmental/How a beat reporter does it/Types of stories/Words of caution
- Analysis of a Supreme Court story by Linda Greenhouse, past Pulitzer Prize winner for beat coverage

**In-class writing drill with fact set #2:** Corporate news

**Mid-week assignment:** Redo the in-class writing drill. Deadline: Tuesday, March 23, 5 p.m.

**Home assignment:** Write a 400-word story based on the transcript of a school board meeting. Deadline: Friday, March 26, 5 p.m.

**Reading assignment:**

- Pro Tip Sheet #2

**\*\*Students need to begin the process of finding an appropriate store/retailer for “The Business” assignment in Week 9 on how the establishment has been impacted by COVID-19. The store should be locally owned and relatively small; no large chains like Starbucks. The story must include interviews with a manager or employee, several customers and possibly a competitor. Students will discuss in advance with me the business they want to write about and how they plan to conduct the interviews safely.**

## **WEEK 8: FRIDAY, MARCH 26**

**Topic:** Beat reporting, con’t/Web analytics/Digital journalism

**Key points covered in class:**

- Lecture: Beat reporting, cont’d
- Understanding reader behavior: Web analytics-metrics/Chartbeat demonstration/mobile
- Speaking internet journalism: UVs; page views; CMS; SEO; UGC, UX, AMP, engagement time; loyalty; linking; producing a web story.

**Home assignment:** Make choices in three journalistic ethics cases and explain your reasoning in two-three sentences for each. Deadline: Friday, April 9, 5 p.m.

\*\*Students need to lock in an appropriate store/retailer for **“The Business”** assignment in Week 9 on how it has been impacted by the pandemic. The store should be locally owned and relatively small; no large chains like Starbucks. The story must include interviews with a manager or employee, several customers and possibly a competitor. Students will discuss in advance with me the business they want to write about and how they will conduct interviews safely.

**Reading:**

- Harrower on “News writing tips”

**[SCHEDULING NOTE: COLLEGE SPRING RECESS FROM MARCH 27 THROUGH APRIL 4 MEANS THAT WE DO NOT HAVE CLASS ON FRIDAY APRIL 2. OUR NEXT CLASS IS FRIDAY APRIL 9.]**

**WEEK 9: FRIDAY, APRIL 9**

**Topic:** Social media/streaming news

**Grammar/style corner:** Subject-verb agreement

**Key points covered in class:**

- Review the Week 7 home assignment on the school board meeting
- Social media lecture: Trump and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on Twitter/How newsmakers are employing Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and other social media platforms/Memes, news that goes viral
- How reporters can use social media to promote their work, find stories and sources and engage readers/Don’t get fooled: The pitfalls of social media and why journalists should be cautious
- NBC’s “News Now” streaming news service

**In-class writing drill with fact set #3:** A plane crash

**Home assignment: “The Business”:** Write a 650-word feature story about a small, locally owned store/retail establishment and how it has been impacted by COVID-19. Tell the reader something new and/or interesting about the business. In particular, readers want to know if the business is growing, stable or going downhill and why. And what are the challenges it faces? What changes, improvement, innovations are planned or have been forced by the pandemic? The story must include quotes from the

owner/manager, employees, several customers and possibly a competitor. Students will discuss with me in advance the business they have selected. Deadline for the story: Friday, April 16. (Reminder: The assignment counts for 20 percent of your grade.)

\*\*Students also need to start thinking about a subject for “**The Profile**” story in Week 11. Students will discuss their subject selection with me in advance and how they plan to conduct the interviews safely.

**Reading assignment:**

- Harrower on “Journalism and social media”
- Pro Tip Sheet #3
- “10 ways journalists can use Twitter before, during and after a story”:  
<http://www.poynter.org/how-tos/digital-strategies/146345/10-ways-journalists-can-use-twitter-before-during-and-after-reporting-a-story/>

**WEEK 10: FRIDAY, APRIL 16**

**Topic:** Features, profiles

**Special guest speaker:** Caitlin Fichtel, social media reporter, NBCNews.com

**Key points covered in class:**

- Lecture: What are features, how they differ from hard news stories/Various types, such as profiles, human interest, trends, explainers/What is a “feature lede”/Use of description, quotes, anecdotes, detail and feature story structure
- Writing profiles: Examples, tips/Analysis of “New Orleans Finest”
- Discuss three ethics cases from Week 8

**Home assignment:** Write a 300-word story based on a fact set about a Good Samaritan who returns a large amount of lost money. Deadline: Friday, April 20, 5 p.m.

\*\*Students must finalize their subject and arrangements for “**The Profile**” story in Week 11. Students will discuss their selection with me in advance and how they plan to conduct the interviews safely.

**Reading assignment:**

- Harrower on “Features”

**WEEK 11: FRIDAY, APRIL 23**

**Topic:** Fact-checking/Obituaries

**Special guest speaker: Tom Topousis, former reporter, The New York Post**

**Grammar/style corner:** There/They're/Their

**Key points covered in class:**

- Fact-checking: Who does it, why/How it works/Examples: The Washington Post's "Pinocchios," Politifact
- Present "best of" examples from "The Business" assignment from Week 9
- Obits: Structure, style/Telling details from a life/Sensitive issues/Memorable obituaries

**Home assignment: "The Profile."** Write a 750-word profile of a person of your choosing. Focus on a couple of the most significant events in your subject's life to find an angle for your story. You should arrange to speak with your subject for at least 45 minutes. Also, you must interview at least two people who know your subject and quote them in your story. Students will discuss their subject with me in advance and you plan to report safely. Deadline: Friday, May 7, 5 p.m. (Reminder: This assignment counts for 20 percent of your grade.)

**Reading assignment:**

- Harrower on "Understanding libel"

## **WEEK 12: FRIDAY, APRIL 30**

**Topic:** Profiles, features, con't/Libel laws

**Grammar/style corner:** Who, whom

**Key points covered in class:**

- Features: Analyze several stories with a focus on anecdotal ledes and nut grafs/Examples from The New York Times, the Washington Post and Newsweek
- Libel lecture: The First Amendment/What is libel/NYT v. Sullivan/Case studies

**Home assignment:** Read the "Find the holes." Essential information is missing from each of the stories provided to you (creating a large "hole" in the story). In one or two sentences for each of the stories, describe the single piece of vital information that has been left out and why it's needed. **Special deadline: Thursday, May 6, 5 p.m.**

**Reading assignment:**

- Harrower on "Taste and decency" and "The seven deadly sins"

## **WEEK 13: FRIDAY, MAY 7**

**Topic:** Thinking like a journalist/Tabloids

**Grammar/style corner:** Whose, who's

**Key points covered in class:**

- Lecture: Thinking like a journalist
- Discussion of "Find the holes"
- What is "tabloid journalism"?/New York Post "Doomed" cover

**"The Newsroom":** Our Zoom meeting will be transformed into a virtual newsroom to report on fact set #4: A company leaves town. We will "cover" this breaking news story under a tight deadline and critique student ledes in class.

**Mid-week assignment:** Redo the in-class writing assignment. Deadline: Tuesday, May 11, 5 p.m.

**Weekly assignment:** Read "Words of the Dying CHCH TV and Constable Garrett Styles" and explain in 250 words whether you would have chosen to broadcast the constable's last words and the reasons behind your decision. **Deadline: Thursday, May 13, 5 p.m.**

#### **WEEK 14: FRIDAY, MAY 14**

**Topic:** Ethics, cont'd/Movie time/The End

**Key points covered in class:**

- Ethics, cont'd: CHCH TV's decision revealed, discussion
- Review "best of" The Profile assignment from Week 11
- Movie hour: Documentary on The New York Times, "The Fourth Estate," Part 2, "The Trump Bump"
- Zoom endgame: Course closing remarks/Open discussion for students/final housekeeping notes/Goodbyes...