

SYLLABUS: Journalistic Reporting and Writing (JRN 3050), Fall 2021

Professor: Gregg Birnbaum, adjunct assistant professor

Class hours: This fully online class meets on Zoom on Tuesdays from 5:40 p.m.-7:20 p.m. (NOTE: I will launch the Zoom each week 15 minutes early, at 5:25 p.m., to give students a chance to talk with me about any issues they wish – news and current events, how the Yankees are doing, or where to get the best cup of coffee. These sessions are informal, conversational and non-mandatory.)

Remote office hours: After class, 7:20 p.m.-8:20 p.m., on Zoom, Facetime or the phone, and by appointment at other times during the week.

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MAIN LEARNING GOALS:

- Identifying and understanding news events
- Writing strong and accurate ledes
- Constructing comprehensive news stories

ADDITIONAL GOALS:

- Gain proficiency in interviewing and using quotes and paraphrase effectively, covering a beat, conducting research, and finding and developing sources.
- Sharpen writing skills 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.
- Acquire knowledge about ethics, best practices, fairness, accuracy, objectivity and eliminating bias, highest industry standards and how to avoid mistakes.
- Develop the ability to meet deadlines.
- Learn about the news industry, how reporters do their jobs and what it means to think like a journalist.

INSTRUCTOR BIO:

From 2017 to spring 2021, Professor Birnbaum was the 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 early Biden administration. Previously, Professor Birnbaum was a Senior Editor at CNN.com politics 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. Currently, he is serving as the interim Business Editor at the Miami Herald.

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 1985 and has been teaching journalism at Baruch since 2014.

COVID PROTOCOLS:

While Covid has receded in New York City over the last few months, the most important concern remains your health and safety, particularly in light of the delta variant. Please do not do anything that compromises your health. I will discuss Covid during our first class and answer questions and address concerns that students may have. You also are welcome to discuss any related issues individually with me after class.

CLASS GROUND RULES:

- **Be on time. It helps to join the Zoom a few minutes early each Tuesday to make sure that your video and microphone are working, or to take part in the open discussion period before class begins.** If a student must miss a class, inform me **before** class 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.

Classes will be recorded to give you the chance to watch any classes you might have missed. Here is Baruch's policy about recording:

“Students who participate in this class with their camera on or use a profile image are agreeing to have their video or image recorded solely for the purpose of creating a record for students enrolled in the class to refer to, including those enrolled students who are unable to attend live. If you are unwilling to consent to have your profile or video image recorded, be sure to keep your camera off and do not use a profile image. Likewise, students who un-mute during class and participate orally are agreeing to have their voices recorded. If you are not willing to consent to have your voice recorded during class, you will need to keep your mute button activated and communicate exclusively using the ‘chat’ feature, which allows students to type questions and comments live.”

I prefer that you put 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 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 listen-only mode. I will be frequently sharing my screen with the class 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 Friday after the assignment is made on Tuesday.
- Once 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 a class assignment). 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, Instagramming blogging or public sharing 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 (unless there are special circumstances that we have previously discussed) 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. In addition, I do not use Blackboard to record student grades; I use my own grading book. If you have a question about what your grade was on a particular assignment or where you stand overall with your course grade at any time during the semester, please ask me.

- **CAREFULLY PROOFREAD** all your assignments before submission for accuracy, grammar, style, punctuation and spelling. Work that is riddled with careless errors – for instance, names and places misspelled or incorrect info or improper grammar and style (**particularly with quotes**) — will be returned ungraded and must be redone correctly to receive credit.

- The vast majority of assignments must be sent to me by email as attachments. **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 should 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.** You do not need to write headlines or titles for your stories. 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. Having others do assignments for you or substantially assist you with assignments also is prohibited.

We will talk about plagiarism and fabrication in our 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 related questions about assignments as you are doing them, ask me.

In addition, visit 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 distance learning, and **COUNTS FOR 10 PERCENT OF YOUR FINAL COURSE GRADE.** It will help create a sense of class community and reduce the “space” between us since we aren’t 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, as opposed to using Zoom’s chat function. Questions, comments and discussion are encouraged; respectful disagreement with your fellow students and/or your professor is invited.

I also have set up a wide-open class **DISCUSSION BOARD** in Blackboard where students can raise issues, comment and respond throughout the semester.

CONTACTING ME:

My preferred means of communication outside of class time is by email. You can reach me at gregg.birnbaum@baruch.cuny.edu, which I check daily and should be our main point of contact, or at my backup personal email (ggbirnbaum@aol.com) if the Baruch email system is down. You also can text me at 917.414.1622 in a pinch. If you need to speak with me for any reason, please let me know and I will make time. As was indicate previously in the syllabus, each Tuesday 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. In addition, I hope to be able to Zoom or phone call with each student at least once during the semester to check in on how things are going.

GRADING:

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

- **“The Meeting,”** Week 4, Sept. 28 Attend a meeting, panel discussion or similar event and write a 500-word story. Discuss with me in advance the meeting you intend to cover. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me. Deadline: Tuesday, Oct. 5, 5:00 p.m. (This assignment counts for 10 percent of the final grade.)
- **“The Business,”** Week 9, Nov. 2: 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, improvements, 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. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me. Deadline: Tuesday, Nov. 9, 5:00 p.m. (This assignment counts for 20 percent of your grade.)
- **“The Profile,”** Week 11, Nov. 16: Write a 750-word profile of someone other than a family member or friend. 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 interview your subject for at least 30-45 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. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me. Deadline: Tuesday, Nov. 23, 5 p.m. (This assignment counts for 20 percent of your grade.)

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.

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

- Weekly home assignments that are due on Tuesdays throughout the semester (not including the three major stories discussed above) are worth 20 percent;
- Mid-week assignments count for 15 percent;
- Class participation, as previously mentioned, is 10 percent; and
- Surprise quizzes make up the remaining 5 percent.

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,” which counts as a zero.

IMPORTANT NOTE: I will generally adhere to the syllabus, but I may not follow it precisely each week. I will announce assignments for the coming week in class on Tuesday; 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 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.

As Professor Mills has said, “To produce good reporting and writing, you must *read* good reporting and writing.”

SPECIAL GUEST SPEAKERS: We will have several journalists speaking to the class during the semester from various news outlets. Those appearances will be announced the week before.

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 you can learn how journalists consume news on social media and how they rely on it to promote their work. If you aren't 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 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, reliable Wi-Fi, 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.

DISABILITY ACCOMMODATION:

Baruch has a continuing commitment to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Like so many things this fall, the need for accommodations and the process for arranging them have been altered by COVID-19 and the safety protocols currently in place. Students with disabilities who may need some accommodation to fully participate in this class should contact Student Disability Services as soon as possible at disability.services@baruch.cuny.edu or call 646/312-4590.

CONNECTIVITY NOTE:

If I suddenly disappear from the Zoom, it most likely means my Wi-Fi has gone down, an occasional hazard of remote learning. Please wait in the Zoom class until I have re-established my connection; that may take a few minutes.

CLASS OUTLINE: 14 WEEKS OF NEWS

WEEK 1: TUESDAY, AUG. 31

Topic: Welcome/Introductions/Remote learning/What is news?

Key points covered in class:

- Introductions/Course learning goals/Syllabus review
- How we'll make Zoom work for us this semester
- Class rules of the road, 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 – it's happened)

Mid-week assignment: Write a 350-word essay about your interest in journalism, what you're passionate about, the skills you want to develop and improve and what you hope to get out of this course. Deadline: Friday, Sept. 3, 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: Tuesday, Sept. 7, 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>

SCHEDULING NOTE: We do not meet on Tuesday, Sept. 7, due to the Jewish holidays. We skip one week and our second class will take place Tuesday, Sept. 14

WEEK 2: TUESDAY, SEPT. 14

Topic: Leads ("ledes")/Journalism 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 fails
- 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

Mid-week assignment: What's wrong with eight ledes. Deadline: Friday, Sept. 17, 5 p.m.

Home assignment: Write a 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: Tuesday, Sept. 21, 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 meeting, speech, panel discussion or similar event to cover. Students will discuss with me in advance the event they have selected and how they plan to report on it. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me.

WEEK 3: TUESDAY, SEPT. 21

Topic: Interviewing

Grammar/style corner: **Punctuating quotes**

Key points covered in class:

- Interviewing: What makes for a good interview/How-to, effective methods, technical aspects/What not to do
- Discussion of the choose the best ledes assignment from Week 1 and the what's wrong with the eight ledes assignment from Week 2

Mid-week assignment: Write a short news story of 6-8 paragraphs from a fact set about Connecticut state police banning use of hand-held radar guns. Deadline: Friday, Sept. 24, 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. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me. Deadline: Tuesday, Sept. 28, 5 p.m.

Students need to finalize plans for "The Meeting**" assignment in Week 4 by finding an upcoming 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. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me.

Reading assignment:

- Harrower on "Interviewing"
- **Punctuating quotes pdf**
- Highlights of Associated Press style
- Pro Tip Sheet #1

WEEK 4: TUESDAY, SEPT. 28

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

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

Home assignment: "The Meeting." Attend a 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. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me. Deadline: Tuesday, Oct. 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: TUESDAY, OCT. 5

Topic: Quotes, paraphrase/Story structure, con't/

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"

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

Mid-week assignment: Find five great quotes from recent news stories and write a sentence or two about why you chose each. Deadline: Friday, Oct. 8, 5 p.m.

Home assignment: Redo the in-class writing drill. Deadline: Tuesday, Oct. 12, 5 p.m.

Reading assignment:

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

WEEK 6: TUESDAY, OCT. 12

Topic: Open Meetings Law/Sourcing

Key points covered in class:

- Key aspects of New York’s Open Meetings Law
- Sources and sourcing: Where do journalists get information and how
- 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, Oct. 19, 5 p.m.

Reading assignment:

- Harrower on “Covering a beat”

WEEK 7: TUESDAY, OCT. 19

Topic: Beat reporting/Semester halfway point update

Grammar/style corner: Commas

Key points covered in class:

- What is a beat?/Examples of core beats, governmental, 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 (for a business beat reporter)

Mid-week assignment: Redo the in-class writing drill. Deadline: Friday, Oct. 22, 5 p.m.

Home assignment: As if you were an education beat reporter, write a 400-word story based on a transcript of a school board meeting. Deadline: Tuesday, Oct. 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. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me.

WEEK 8: TUESDAY, OCT. 26

Topic: Beats, 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.

Mid-week assignment: Find five examples of well-reported and well-written business profiles and write a sentence or two about why you chose each. Deadline: Friday, Oct. 29, 5 p.m.

Home assignment: Make choices in three journalistic ethics cases and explain your reasoning in two-three sentences for each. Deadline: Tuesday, Nov. 2, 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. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me.

Reading:

- Harrower on "News writing tips"

WEEK 9: TUESDAY, NOV. 2

Topic: Features/Business profiles

Grammar/style corner: Subject-verb agreement

Key points covered in class:

- Review the Week 7 home assignment on the school board meeting
- Discuss examples of well-reported, well-written business profiles
- Lecture: What are features, how they differ from hard news stories/Various types, such as profiles, human interest, trends, explainers, utility/What is a "feature lede"/Use of description, quotes, anecdotes, detail and feature story structure

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, improvements, 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. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me. Deadline: Tuesday, Nov. 9, 5 p.m. (Reminder: This assignment counts for 20 percent of your grade.)

Students also need to start thinking about a subject for “The Profile**” story in Week 11.

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: TUESDAY, NOV. 9

Topic: Profiles/Social media

Key points covered in class:

- Writing profiles: Examples, tips/Analysis of “New Orleans Finest”
- Discuss three ethics cases from Week 8
- 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

Mid-week assignment: Find three recent profile stories and explain in a sentence or two what you found compelling/interesting about each. Pay particular attention to the journalistic techniques used in your examples. Deadline: Friday, Nov. 12, 5 p.m.

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: Tuesday, Nov. 16, 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. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me.

Reading assignment:

- Harrower on “Features”

WEEK 11: TUESDAY, NOV. 16

Topic: Business stories/Obituaries

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

Key points covered in class:

- Present “best of” examples from “**The Business**” assignment from Week 9
- Obits: Structure, style/Telling details from a life/Sensitive issues/Memorable obituaries

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

Home assignment: “The Profile.” Write a 750-word profile of someone other than a family member or friend. 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 30-45 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. If you are not comfortable doing this assignment in person, discuss options with me. Deadline: Tuesday, Nov. 23, 5 p.m. (Reminder: This assignment counts for 20 percent of your grade.)

Reading assignment:

- Harrower on “Understanding libel”

WEEK 12: TUESDAY, NOV. 23

Topic: 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 early deadline: Monday, Nov. 29, 5 p.m.**

Reading assignment:

- Harrower on “Taste and decency” and “The seven deadly sins”

WEEK 13: TUESDAY, NOV. 30

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, Dec. 3, 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. **Special early deadline: Monday, Dec. 13, 5 p.m.**

WEEK 14: TUESDAY, DEC. 7

Topic: Ethics, cont’d/Movie time/The End

Key points covered in class:

- Ethics, cont’d: CHCH TV’s decision revealed, discussion
- Movie hour: Documentary on The New York Times, “The Fourth Estate,” Part 2, “The Trump Bump”//See what life is like inside a real newsroom
- Zoom endgame: Course closing remarks/Open discussion for students/final housekeeping notes/Goodbyes...

