News Writing

Journalism 3

No matter what form the future of news delivery takes – print, broadcast, digital or some format we can’t even imagine now- there will always be sitting at the center of every story a writer. While some of the nuances of writing may differ from medium to medium, the nature of newswriting remains the same. You humble yourself before the facts and report them in such a way that your reader can understand the story and make the important decisions that an informed citizen needs to make in a democratic society.

In that sense, you, as the journalist, provides access to the vital information that keeps a free society operating. It is both inspiring and humbling. In this class you will learn how to find, gather and write the news.

**In this course you will learn how to:**

1. write news stories using the appropriate journalistic style for the story and the medium.

2. use a variety of research techniques to assure the accuracy of the facts presented in news stories.

3. identify and discuss ethical issues related to news gathering as part of developing a personal code of ethics.

**The Assignments**

Lecture Quizzes – 100  
Midterm – 100  
Final – 100

In Class Assignments – 100

Three Chant Stories – 75

Two Government Body Stories – 50

Two Court Stories – 50

Two Profile/Feature Stories – 50

Two Event Stories – 50

One interpretive reporting story – 25

**Grading Scale**

720 -800 = A

640-719 = B

560 – 639=C

480 – 559 = D

Below 480 = F

**Important Dates**

[Note: Quizzes, In-class and out of class writing assignments will be assigned during class sessions at which time the due date will be set. You are responsible for being in class to receive these assignments or to check with the instructor or class mates when you miss a class to keep up with anything assigned during your absence.]

March 7 Midterm

March 11 Last Day to Drop Class

April 18-22 Spring Recess

May 16 Final

**Late Assignments**

Journalists are always chasing deadlines. Therefore, late assignments will be given only half credit if they are no more than 24 hours late. Any stories received more than a day late will receive a zero grade.

All reporting assignments are due by midnight the day following the event being covered. They will be turned in using BlackBoard through links under Assignments. The time/date stamp will be the arbiter of the time submitted.

**Due Dates**

[Note: In class exercises are usually announced a day in advance, but some are impromptu in nature, therefore they are not included in this list. Attendance is vital to keeping up with assignments in this class.]

**Getting In Touch**

Here are the basic ways to get in touch with me.

**Email**

This is your best option most of the time. I check email several times a day and try to answer student email as quickly as possible. You can usually expect a 24 hour or less turn around.

To expedite matters, I would like you to include the word student in the subject line of your email. For instance, “Student Question about the Term Paper.” I have my email program set up to send all student email to a special file which I check first. Also, make the subject line specific. Instead of a subject line like “Your student,” use “Student needs help with book review.”

If you are emailing me through the Blackboard system, you will be using a school provided email account. So, be sure you have activated that account. You can find out more at the Reedley College home page.

**Instant Messaging**

You can instant message me online using Yahoo! Messenger. My ID is webservant2003. If I am online, I will respond. However, please identify yourself as a student. If I’m busy, I may ignore people who just want to chat, but I don’t ignore my students. I leave my IM on most of the time I’m online so you should be able to reach me if I am working on the computer.

**Office Hours**

I keep office hours 4:30-5:30 pm Tuesday, Thursday and Friday. On Tuesday and Thursday, you will usually find me in the library either in the front lobby or in the magazine room. I find I get more work done there and if we need privacy, we can use one of the conference rooms. On Friday, I am in my office Annex-3 (A-3)

**Plagiarism Policy**

I had taught for 6 years before I had my first case of blatant plagiarism. Now, I get 2-3 cases per year.  In spite of my warnings that plagiarized work will result in an “F,” students continue to foolishly turn in the exact same papers as two or three other students in the same class.  It may reflect a general moral bankruptcy in our times, a Napster mentality, or just declining intelligence in the student population.  I suspect, that strange as it seems to me, many students simply do not know what it is and may not know it is wrong.  And I suspect many do not understand why it is a serious offense.  In the next few paragraphs I will discuss what constitutes plagiarism, why it is wrong, and how it can endanger your academic future.

**How Plagiarism will affect your Grade in this Class**

Any plagiarized work I receive will result in zero points for both the paper. That means, if your term paper is plagiarized, you will lose 200 points for the paper. If you plagiarize two papers, you will fail the class.

**What is Plagiarism?**

Put simply, Plagiarism is taking someone else’s work and passing it off as your own. At its most blatant, it’s directly copying a paper or purchasing one from someone else.  Incidentally, if you are considering purchasing a paper from some Internet company, don’t!  I have access to a web-based service where I can compare your paper to thousands available online.  So can virtually any instructor.

Sometimes the sheer stupidity of the plagiarizers amazes me.  I’ve had four students in a single class who sat together and were best friends turn in the same paper right down to the misspelled words.  Like, I wouldn’t notice? Others have turned in papers with one person’s name obviously whited out and the student’s name typed in with a different font and color ink.

 But a paper doesn’t have to be exactly word for word to count as plagiarism.  If the paper is “substantially similar” to another paper, it is still considered cheating.  For instance, I had two students, a boyfriend and girlfriend, turn in two papers which were identical except that the first two paragraphs were reversed from each other.  Just shuffling the order of the writing doesn’t create an original paper.

 Sometimes a paper is plagiarized because it is made up of paragraphs taken almost bodily from books and articles and pieced together without any commentary by the student and with no source citations.  These tend to be obvious by the different styles of the authors of the paragraphs clashing and the lack of transitional material.  I had one person give a speech that she read directly from a Xerox copy of a magazine article. I could hardly believe it when I saw her turning the pages of the article.

Certainly, you can quote from other people, but give due credit and don’t pass the work of others off as your own.  Also, you need to create an original work which incorporates the quotes and doesn’t simply string a bunch of them together without obvious synthesis.

 Sometimes plagiarism occurs in take-home essay exams and even with the in-class exams in which I allow you to bring notes.  Many times I find that the answers are direct quotes from the text book.  That may have pleased your high school teachers, but it doesn’t please me.  Your answers must be your original work.  Likewise, if you have had one person write down the notes for everyone, don’t copy them word for word.  I had one class where no less than 8 people answered the same question the same way misspelling the same words.  And, frankly, the answers weren’t that good to begin with.

 In other words, if the paper, exam or speech is largely the work of someone else, then it is plagiarism.  These papers or speeches will receive an “F” grade and two such papers will give you an “F” in the class.

**Why is Plagiarism Wrong?**

I shouldn’t even have to address this, but I feel I need to.  A number of students when confronted with the fact of their plagiarism, look at me in all apparent innocence and say, “But I got the paper in on time.”  One explained that the plagiarism was okay because it was for extra credit.  Obviously, something has gone wrong with the moral compass of our society when students can be caught and not even realize that cheating is wrong.

Plagiarism is wrong on two levels. The first level is that of basic honesty.  When you turn in a paper, you make an implied claim that this is something original.  When it is not original, that quite simply is a lie.  Secondly, plagiarism is wrong because it represents an attempt to obtain the benefits of a college degree without doing the work.  Completing the courses necessary for your degree will give you an edge in the job market, and provide a certain social status in society.  However, if you have obtained that degree by cheating, you are benefiting from something you did not earn. And, of course, on a personal level, you won’t learn anything unless you do your own work.  That will reduce the skills you need to succeed in business and personal life.  You can’t cheat on the job and expect to do your job well.

In some ways, I have to admit that the college system which places such a high emphasis on grades rather than on comprehensive evaluation of learning, contributes to this.  We all know that grades do not always equate to learning.  And sometimes we as instructors lose sight of the purpose of assignments.  They are not simply products to be delivered, but tools to facilitate learning.

However, in admitting this, it does not excuse students cutting corners by cheating.  A paper or a speech is not a product I have ordered which has value independent of your learning experience.  The assignment is for your benefit and not mine.  Only by completing the assignment will you learn.  In writing this policy, I am committing myself to making the effort to keep learning first and grading as merely a natural outcome of the learning process.

**What Effects Can Plagiarism Have on your Academic Future?**

Most Four-Year colleges and universities treat plagiarism as a major infraction of the rules.  You can be placed on academic probation, fail a class or even be expelled from the college.  If expelled for plagiarism, you will find it hard to be admitted to another college. Even if you are not removed from the school, your hopes of graduate work could be diminished.  You can find it difficult to get a faculty advisor for your thesis or dissertation.  If an academic probation becomes part of your transcripts, it can also impact your ability to get a good job.

This type of thing can haunt you for years.  About 20 years ago, Sen. Joe Biden was running for President.  He had a reasonable chance of taking his party’s nomination.  However, it was discovered and reported that he had plagiarized a paper in law school.  His support vanished and eventually he withdrew from the race over something that had taken place more than two decades before.

Is it really worth the risk.  Do your own work.  It’s  the right thing to do.  It’s the smart thing to do.