

# MCOM 2140

## Newswriting and Reporting Spring Quarter 2003

### class time & location

Tuesday & Thursday, 9–10:50 a.m.  
MCOM 113

### instructor

Laura A. Ruel  
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e-mail: lrue@du.edu  
office: MCOM 107

### office hours

1-2 p.m.  
Tuesdays and Thursdays  
or by appointment

*Please use these times to discuss  
story ideas, grading or concerns*

### required purchases



• “Telling the Story,” The Missouri Group, sixth edition



• “The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual” (print or online version)

• 3.5-inch disks (as needed)

### recommended purchases

- Webster’s New World Dictionary
- 3-ring binder for class notes and handouts

### copy of syllabus

A PDF file of the syllabus is on the disk you received during the first day of class AND on my DU homepage, [www.du.edu/~lrue](http://www.du.edu/~lrue).

## Introduction

Of all the skills you will need to make it through college and into the work force, the ability to write well and with confidence is one of the most important. If your career goal is to become a member of the print, broadcast or online media, this course is for you. However, even if you are not sure of your long-term goals, this class is also for you. It offers you the ability to boost or develop your writing skills by teaching you the tried and true methods of reporters. You will learn the step-by-step methods it takes to turn an idea into a well-researched, clearly-written, accurate story. Moreover, you will learn how to execute these methods quickly and confidently.

This course also will give you the ability to understand and critically judge the media. You will come to understand what news is and the reasons some stories get covered while others do not. You will learn to think like a journalist. Indeed, you will be a journalist when you are out on your story assignments. You will learn by doing, and this experience will give you keen insight into the business of news gathering.

## Course objectives

By the end of the quarter, students should be able to:

- plan and conduct a successful interview.
- recognize and eliminate editorializing in news copy.
- understand the editing standards of the news industry.
- write a clear, accurate news story that requires minimal editing.

## Attendance, participation, DEADLINES...

The philosophy of this class is to simulate a newsroom environment as much as possible. Therefore, attendance is required, participation is expected and deadlines are absolute. Deadlines are a way of life in the news business. Simply put, all assignments are due at the beginning of class on the dates stated on the syllabus. **NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

## Story notes

Each student will be required to write five original news stories. Two of these stories will be speech stories, and they will cover speeches given by guest visitors to our class. The other three stories will be written on any topic you choose. For these three stories you will be required to submit a Story Idea Sheet. The due dates for stories and idea sheets are specified on the syllabus calendar.

All stories should be written using a computerized word-processing program and saved onto your disk.

The average story should be 2-3 double-spaced pages.

Any story you write may be rewritten for a better grade. Your final grade on the assignment will be calculated by averaging the score you received the first time and the score you receive on your rewrite. To rewrite a graded story you **MUST** consult with me first so that we may contract what you will do and a deadline for it. Remember, rewrite means **REWRITING** - not just correcting errors. When you hand in a rewrite you **MUST** include your graded copy of the original story.

The following journalistic formats **MUST** be used on all papers:

Name  
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date  
slug

Headline: Suggest a headline  
Begin typing your story here.  
Document should be double-spaced.

Watch for spelling, grammar and style errors. Remember, these will affect your final grade.

Continue to write. When you reach the bottom of the page,

MORE

Name  
date  
first add  
slug

type the word "MORE" and continue writing on the next page.

Remember to include a story slug on all pages.

A slug is a one-word name for your story. Pick a word that describes the content. For example, this story could be slugged "FORMAT."

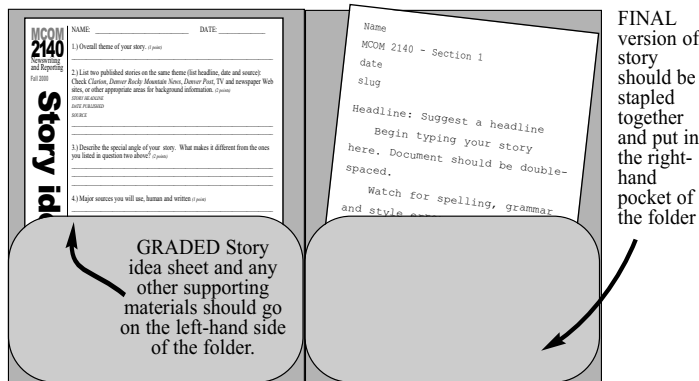
MORE

Name  
date  
second add  
slug

With each new page, be sure to note, "first add," "second add" and so on.

To signal that your story has ended, type the "#" symbol.

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When you hand in your story, I would like you to put it (and the other materials noted in diagram at left) in the folder I gave you on the first day of class.

## Extra credit

All stories you write for this class have the potential to be published, and I may refer you to a publication or Web site that may be interested in using your story. Anytime your story is selected for use in one of these venues, your final grade on the assignment will be increased by 5 points.

## In-class writing and quizzes

During many of our classes this quarter, you will be asked to immediately put into practice what you have learned. You will be given writing assignments to complete in class or by the next class meeting. Also, quizzes that relate to the readings should be expected and may be unannounced.

## Journal writing

I firmly believe that in order to become an accomplished reporter and writer, you must write constantly. In order to better understand the communications industry, you must think about it critically and reflect on it often. For this reason, you will be required to complete 10-15 minutes of writing during some classes. I will provide a topic or statement to get you started and keep you focused. You will be required to hand in a printout of your in-class writing journal on the last day of class. Although I will expect your writing to be spell-checked and proofread, I will not have the expectation that each day's writing will be a well-formed composition. The goal of this assignment is to get you thinking critically about the media, forming ideas and describing them.

## Field trips

Our class will be taking two fieldtrips. During one trip we will visit a newspaper's main newsroom as well as its online newsroom. Our second trip will be to a television newsroom. Specific dates follow on the syllabus calendar. More details about the trips will be provided during the class periods preceding the trips.

## Grading procedures for stories

When calculating your grade on a story, the story's content, accuracy, grammar, spelling, punctuation and style will be taken into account. The following standardized criteria will be used:

### Grade Criteria

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| A (90-100 points)   | Outstanding performance. Your written copy is publishable with little or no editing.   |
| B (80-89 points)    | Superior performance. Your copy is publishable with minor editing and revision.  |
| C (70-79 points)    | Satisfactory performance. Portions of your copy would need to be rewritten and closely edited before the story could be published.                   |
| D (60-69 points)    | Marginal performance. Your copy contains factual, structural, writing and/or usage flaws. Copy is not publishable without significant work.          |
| F (below 60 points) | Unacceptable performance. Your copy contains factual, structural, writing and/or usage flaws that must be corrected by more reporting and rewriting. |

**NOTE: 10 percent (10 points out of the possible 100) of the grade you receive on your three original stories will be determined by how well you complete your story idea sheet.**

## Final grade

Your final grade will be weighted according to the following formula:

**Five original news stories:** 100 points each, 500 total points, 50 percent of your final grade

**Quizzes, in-class (and next class) writing, editing day feedback sheets:**

10-30 points each, 300 total points, 30 percent of your final grade

**In-class writing journal:** 100 points, 100 total points, 10 percent of your final grade

**Class participation, attendance:** 5 points each class, 100 total points, 10 percent of your final grade

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## Class calendar

**Thursday  
March 27** **Lecture/discussion/in-class exercises:**  
Introduction to MCOM 2140, setting goals, understanding what news is,  
understanding newsrooms and the news industry

**To prepare for next class:**  
Read syllabus and complete syllabus questions – due next class  
Read pages 1-67 in “Telling the Story”

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**Tuesday  
April 1**

■ **DEADLINE FOR: Syllabus questions** ■

**Lecture/discussion/in-class exercises:**  
Syllabus questions, interviewing and other reporting tools

**To prepare for next class:**  
Complete short profile from in-person or e-mail interview – due next class  
Read pages 86-135 in “Telling the Story”  
Bring “AP Stylebook” to next class

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**Thursday  
April 3**

■ **DEADLINE FOR: In-person or e-mail interview** ■

**Lecture/discussion/in-class exercises:**  
Basic story structure, the inverted pyramid- a historical perspective  
Understanding the “AP stylebook”

**To prepare for next class:**  
Read pages 68-85 and pages 136-154 in “Telling the Story”  
Bring “AP Stylebook” to next class  
Complete Story Idea Sheet – due next class

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**Tuesday  
April 8**

■ **DEADLINE FOR: First Story Idea Sheet** ■

**Lecture/discussion/in-class exercises:**  
Beyond the inverted pyramid  
Understanding the “AP stylebook”

**To prepare for next class:**  
Read pages 155-170 in “Telling the Story”  
Read Appendix 1 in “Telling the Story”

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**Thursday  
April 10**

**Lecture/discussion/in-class exercises:**  
Speech stories and the rules of peer editing

**To prepare for next class:**  
Collect background information and compile questions for speaker you will cover during next class

**Tuesday  
April 15**

**COVER A SPEECH STORY**

Guest speaker:  
Kyle MacMillan, Critic-at-large, *Denver Post*

**To prepare for next class:**

Complete speech story – due next class  
Bring “AP Stylebook” to next class

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**Thursday  
April 17**

■ **DEADLINE FOR: First speech story** ■

■ **REVISION DEADLINE for this story, FRIDAY, APRIL 18TH - 9 A.M.** ■

**EDITING DAY**

**To prepare for next class:**

Read pages 171-201 and Appendix 2 in “Telling the Story”  
Read entries in “AP Stylebook:” Quotations in the News, and Punctuation – Quotation Marks

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**Tuesday  
April 22**

**Lecture/discussion/in-class exercises:**

Using quotes correctly, other types of basic stories, beat reporting

**To prepare for next class:**

- Read handout  
“Backpack Journalism is Here to Stay”
- Visit: [rockymountainnews.com](http://rockymountainnews.com) and familiarize yourself with the site

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**Thursday  
April 24**

**Fieldtrip:**

Visit the *Rocky Mountain News* newsroom and [rockymountainnews.com](http://rockymountainnews.com) newsroom  
(More details will be provided. It is possible that that because of the war and heightened security, our visit will be cancelled. We will be updated shortly before this date.)

**To prepare for next class:**

Read pages 339-346 in “Telling the Story”

**BRING INTERACTIVE CD-ROM THAT CAME WITH YOUR TEXT TO NEXT CLASS**

Bring “AP Stylebook” to next class

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**Tuesday  
Feb. 6**

**Lecture/discussion/in-class exercises:**

Editing, AP style and Crisis Coverage

**To prepare for next class:**

Complete first original story – due next class

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**Thursday  
May 1**

■ **DEADLINE FOR: First original news story** ■

■ **REVISION DEADLINE for this story, FRIDAY, MAY 2ND - 9 A.M.** ■

## EDITING DAY

### To prepare for next class:

Review pages 155-170 in “Telling the Story”

Collect background information and compile questions for speaker you will cover during next class

Complete Story Idea Sheet – due next class

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**Tuesday  
May 6**

■ **DEADLINE FOR: Second Story Idea Sheet** ■

## COVER A SPEECH STORY

Guest speaker:

George Tanner, Assistant News Editor, *Rocky Mountain News*

### To prepare for next class:

Complete speech story – due next class

Bring “AP Stylebook” to next class

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**Thursday  
May 8**

■ **DEADLINE FOR: Second speech story** ■

■ **REVISION DEADLINE for this story, FRIDAY, MAY 9TH - 9 A.M.** ■

## EDITING DAY

### To prepare for next class:

Read pages 263-276 in “Telling the Story”

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**Tuesday  
May 13**

## Lecture/discussion/in-class exercises:

Writing for public relations, writing news releases

### To prepare for next class:

Complete second original story – due next class

Bring “AP Stylebook” to next class

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**Thursday  
May 15**

■ **DEADLINE FOR: Second original news story** ■

■ **REVISION DEADLINE for this story, FRIDAY, FEB. 23 - 11 A.M.** ■

## EDITING DAY

### To prepare for next class:

Read pages 263-276 in “Telling the Story”

Complete Story Idea Sheet – due next class

**Tuesday  
May 20**

■ **DEADLINE FOR: Third Story Idea Sheet** ■

**Lecture/discussion/in-class exercises:**

Writing for radio and television

**In-class writing**

**To prepare for next class:**

- Visit: <http://www.kcncnews4.com>  
and familiarize yourself with the site

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**Thursday  
May 22**

**Fieldtrip:**

Visit Channel 4 newsroom

(More details will be provided. It is possible that that because of the war and heightened security, our visit will be cancelled. We will be updated shortly before this date.)

**To prepare for next class:**

Read pages 277-328 in “Telling the Story”

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**Tuesday  
May 27**

**Lecture/discussion/in-class exercises:**

Writing for all forms of media / Law / Ethics

**To prepare for next class:**

Complete third original news story – due next class

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**Thursday  
May 29**

■ **DEADLINE FOR: Third original news story** ■

■ **REVISION DEADLINE for this story, FRIDAY, MARCH 9 - 11 A.M.** ■

**EDITING DAY**

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**Tuesday  
June 3**

■ **DEADLINE FOR: In-class writing journal, 9 a.m.** ■

■ **DEADLINE FOR ALL REWRITES (except fifth news story), 9 a.m.** ■

**NO CLASS  
MEETING**

■ **REWRITE DEADLINE (for fifth news story), WEDNESDAY, JUNE 4TH - 9 A.M.** ■