

Comm 476.2
Sports Writing
Fall 2007

Instructor: Malcolm Moran, 5 Carnegie

Class Meetings: 1:00 to 2:15 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 19 Carnegie

Office Hours: 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. Tuesdays; 9:30 to 11:30 a.m. and 1:30 to 2:30 p.m. on Wednesdays; other hours by appointment.

E-mail: mum24@psu.edu

Telephone: 814-865-0926 (*)

(*) Whenever possible, please communicate by e-mail or in person during office hours or an appointment.

PURPOSE

In this course, students learn to master the skills sports journalists must call upon, understand the circumstances they will face and identify the issues they will confront in a competitive and constantly changing media landscape. An emphasis will be placed on the development of critical, creative and independent thinking under the pressure of a deadline, and an ability to evaluate, describe and improve their work. Each student will produce a final project with a goal of having it published.

TEXTBOOK & OTHER RESOURCES

We will use *The Rise and Fall of the Press Box*, by Leonard Koppett (Sport Classic Books, 2003). Koppett, who was honored by the Baseball Hall of Fame and Basketball Hall of Fame, wrote a memoir, not a textbook. But the observations he made over a career of six decades will become part of our discussions and produce topics for journal assignments.

Please note: You are expected to bring to class the three publications provided on campus, the Centre Daily Times, The New York Times and USA TODAY. These publications will be used for classroom discussion and journal assignments.

You will be guided by a dictionary and the Associated Press Stylebook. Access to web sites dealing with media developments and sports sections throughout the world can be reached through ussportspages.com.

PROFESSIONALISM

The premise for this course is based upon the responsibilities of a professional media environment. A foundation for improved performance will be built upon information from lectures, informal discussions and guest speakers. If an absence from a class, meeting or other scheduled activity is necessary because of illness or other personal circumstance, the information should be communicated ahead of time whenever possible. Please note the entry under “assignments” for an additional explanation.

To lend credibility to our professional environment, please take into consideration these requests:

Please do not wear hats in the classroom.

Please do not wear team jerseys to class.

If you are covering an event outside of class, please remember that the most appropriate dress is **business casual**. It is not unusual for a student covering an athletic event on this campus to suddenly become part of a group that includes officials up to the university president. Your dress can help determine the first impression you make when that happens.

In the classroom, an expectation of basic courtesy will be similar to what you would find in a professional environment. This expectation includes, but is not limited to, the following:

It is important to keep all screens blank when not used for research or class assignments.

The use of cell phones, including text messaging. Please turn them off. If a personal or family emergency makes phone use necessary, please let me know.

Conversations, computer use or any reading or writing not directly related to the discussion.

Any act of disrespect for the stance of another student.

Please note the “No Food or Drink” sign. In addition to that ban, this course will offer its full support to the Clean Classroom Campaign, the university-wide initiative to create a cleaner, safer, more professional environment.

ASSIGNMENTS

Assignments will be due **at the start of class** on the established date. Please note that a malfunction of the classroom printer will **not** be considered an acceptable excuse for a late submission. (An important reality in the media business: Stuff happens. It is your responsibility to make sure you overcome any unexpected obstacles.) Please make sure printouts are made prior to coming to class.

Unless specified, articles should be submitted as printouts, with the following information in the upper left corner:

Student name

Comm 476.2

Slug (One-word name for assignment: Example: Column.).

Note: Specified deadline assignments should be submitted as word-document attachments on emails, with the above information in the upper left corner of the first page.

Effective time management is an essential part of a reporter's development. Deadlines will be established with the understanding that you have other academic and work obligations and that the scheduling and execution of interviews can take time. Please be sure to use your time wisely and leave time for the possibility of a problem. As is the case with media organizations, those factors are not considered acceptable reasons for a late submission.

The policy regarding late submissions is based upon the realities of the media workplace. Unless an illness requiring treatment or a significant personal circumstance is the cause, late submissions will not be accepted. The assignment would be graded as zero. As in the case with any reasonable media organization, the reporting of an illness or personal circumstance by email, no later than 5 p.m. on the day the story is due, could create a revised due date. Of course, if the matter is of such a serious nature that alerting me is impossible, the 5 p.m. deadline would be waived.

If a difficult circumstance is affecting your performance in this or any other course, please remember that I respect your privacy and would be eager to help in any way possible.

GRADING

Articles will be graded based on a maximum score of 100 points.

Journal entries will be graded on a maximum score of 10 points.

There will be some ungraded assignments. This policy is based upon an observation made by Red Smith, a longtime sports columnist and Pulitzer Prize winner: “Writing is easy,” he said. “All you have to do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein.”

If the process begins to feel like torture, don’t despair. Welcome to the club. Early attempts to think and write at a faster rate will not take place while facing the possibility of a disappointing grade. The development of an efficient, confident deadline writer can involve as many steps backward as forward. If you emerged from the cradle as a polished deadline writer, you should be teaching this course, not taking it. For everyone else, take heart: The process is what will count. In the early stages of the course, exercises involving speed will not be graded. The grades for that work will be determined by two other assignments: A revision of the original, followed by an explanation of the necessary changes.

Later in the semester, when a foundation has been established, an assignment requiring speed will be graded based upon the need for editing. One warning: There will be the challenge of the occasional obstacle thrown in your path, based upon experiences that have taken place in press boxes and press rooms. You will be prepared for each of them.

The final grade will be determined by the following:

Class discussion, analysis of readings, journal submissions: 25 percent.

Writing assignments and class writing exercises (some of which will be based upon readings): 50 percent.

Final assignment: 25 percent. An article of 1,500 words. (Please see “Purpose” entry above.)

An important note: Errors in spelling or fact will result in an **automatic** deduction of points from the grade for that assignment, with the amount of the deduction determined by the frequency of the errors. Similar mistakes in subsequent stories will result in additional deductions. Deductions will also be made when articles are considerably below or above the assigned story length. Please be sure to budget your time to allow for self editing.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly and creative activity in an open, honest and responsible manner, free from fraud and deception, and is an educational objective of the College of Communications and the university. Cheating, including plagiarism, falsification of research data, using the same assignment for more than one class, turning in someone else's work, or passively allowing others to copy your work, will result in academic penalties at the discretion of the instructor, and may result in the grade of "XF" (failed for academic dishonesty) being put on your permanent transcript. In serious cases it could also result in suspension or dismissal from the university. As students studying communication, you should understand and avoid plagiarism (presenting the work of others as your own). A discussion of plagiarism, with examples, can be found at: <http://tlt.its.psu.edu/suggestions/cyberplag/cyberplagstudent.html>. The rules and policies regarding academic integrity should be reviewed by every student, and can be found online at: www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20, and in the College of Communications document, "Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures." Any student with a question about academic integrity or plagiarism is strongly encouraged to discuss it with me.

NOTE TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) located in Room 116 Boucke Building or at 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit their web site at www.equity.psu.edu/ods/. Please notify me as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments.

COURSE SCHEDULE

(Subject to revisions that will include the presence of guest speakers)

Aug. 28/ Introduction

Aug. 30/ Sources of information and their risks

Sept. 4/ Preparation before kickoff

Sept. 6/ The importance of credibility

Sept. 11/ Story organization: Where's the lede?

Sept. 13/ B copy as survival tactic

Sept. 18/ Navigating the post-game maze

Sept. 20/ Connecting the dots: Identifying trends

Sept. 25/ Dealing with limited access

Sept. 27/ The use of quotes

Oct. 2/ Blog does not have to be a four-letter word

Oct. 4/ Coverage of a crisis

Oct. 9/ Column writing (part one): A lost art?

Oct. 11/ Column writing (part two): Making the case

Oct. 16/ Analysis vs. column writing

Oct. 18/ Navigating the post-game maze

Oct. 23/ The unnamed source

Oct. 25/ Developing trust with your subject

Oct. 30/ Thinking in pieces: Conceiving graphics.

Nov. 1/ Overcoming logistical hazards

Nov. 6/ Seeking a greater truth

Nov. 8/ Trusting your editors (or else)

Nov. 13/ Relying on the hinge

Nov. 15/ The group effort: Working as a team

NOTE: Final assignment is due on Nov. 15

Nov. 27/ Story presentations

Nov. 29/ Story presentations

Dec. 4/ Story presentations

Dec. 6/ Story presentations

Dec. 11/Story presentations

Dec. 13/The last sprint