

New York University Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute

Syllabus JOUR-UA 25.002

Breaking Into Journalism | June 2023

Professor: Nikita Richardson

Mondays and Thursdays, 5 p.m. - 8 p.m. EST

Dates class runs: 6/1 - 6/29

Location: Campus TK

To contact your professor

Phone: TK

Office hours: Fridays, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Course Overview

Course Description

Getting your first job in journalism, whether it's having a freelance pitch accepted or landing a junior position at a major publication, isn't easy. And even once you do land the job, there's an expectation that you be a jack-of-all-trades who is able to come at a story from all angles: generating ideas with a headline in mind, fact-checking, creating social media assets or creating supplemental stories to accompany larger features. The goal of this course is to prepare students for what's to come through lessons on the ins-and-outs of edit tests, writing pitch emails, turning articles around in just a few hours or days, finding story ideas, and understanding the breadth of jobs that fall under the journalism banner.

Learning Objectives

- Write clear, accurate and engaging prose in an audience-appropriate manner
- Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diverse perspectives
- Demonstrate critical thinking, independence, and creativity appropriate to the role of journalism in a democratic society
- Become confident in your ability to generate ideas and pitch them to different types of publications
- Learn to work in group settings and to hone your ideas with the help of others
- Understand a holistic approach to creating stories and speaking to readers

Course Structure

This online course uses a “flipped classroom” model. This means that you will read texts, watch videos, listen to podcasts, and engage with traditional lecture materials on your own, before class. In our live-class meeting time via Zoom, we will discuss the course materials, answer questions, and work in a virtual newsroom to edit and publish our stories. You must complete all assignments before the live class session. You will file your stories in our class folder in the NYU Google Drive and share the link in Brightspace.

The live class works like a newsroom, providing you with valuable experience and a skillset that will translate to wherever you land in your journalism career. Over the semester, you will hone ideas in a group setting with weekly “Ideas Meetings,” create a publication plans for stories including social media, and discuss what it takes to break into journalism and start your career.

Required Texts

PDFs and links for assigned texts and other forms of media will be sent out before the next class. (On Thursdays before the Monday course, and on Mondays before the Thursday course.)

Course Requirements

Attendance/Participation

We’ll do some of our most important work in class, so attendance is key. You can’t, for example, skip all or part of a session because you have an interview lined up with a source who can only speak during class time. And out of respect for your classmates, please don’t be late logging in. NYU will excuse an absence for a death in the family or severe illness.

Deadlines

All assignments will be due by the next class. For example, a Monday assignment will be due before class on Thursday and a Thursday assignment will be due before class on Monday. For more long term assignments (such as edit tests), you will have a week to complete the assignment.

Academic Integrity

Any plagiarism or unauthorized collaboration on assignments will result in a failure and can be grounds for failing the course, or in extreme cases, expulsion from the program. All quotes must be original and verifiable. That means you must include contacts for sources at the end of your draft to clarify or verify quotes. If you draw from someone else’s work without properly crediting them, you could fail that assignment. Please be sure you have read the Cardinal Sins section of the NYU handbook by the first class.

Grades:

- 400-word reported “Ideas Meeting” story - (5%) Due Monday, June 5
- Hed and deks exercise - (5%) Due Thursday, June 8
- Pitch email exercise - (5%) Due Monday, June 12
- “Maintenance Phase” writeup and *Rolling Stone* reading assignments - (5%) Due Thursday, June 15
- Fact-checking exercise - (5%) Due Monday, June 19
- Story sources exercise - (5%) Due Thursday, June 22
- Edit Test Final - (30%) Due Thursday, June 29

The rest of your final grade will be comprised of the following:

- Class Discussions: 10% - Covers discussions in class. Students are expected to converse during online classes, ask questions, offer perspectives and discuss current topics in the news.
- Editorial Professionalism: 10% - Covers attendance, participation, completing readings, and etiquette throughout the course, demonstrating your ability to collaborate on work while respecting and supporting your peers.
- In-class exercises and assessments: 10% - This portion of your grade covers in-class assignments, writing exercises and non-published assignments. Students are expected to complete and submit these assignments on time.

Accommodations

Students with disabilities that necessitate accommodations should contact and register with New York University’s Moses Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at 212-998-4980 or mosescsd@nyu.edu. Information about the Moses Center can be found at www.nyu.edu/csd. The Moses Center is located at 726 Broadway on the 2nd floor.

Diversity & Inclusion

The Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute is committed to creating an anti-racist learning environment that embraces diversity, complexity, and honesty. We are an intellectual community enriched by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, sex, gender identity, class, ethnicity, sexualities, abilities, religion, and culture. Our student body is excitingly international. We welcome a multiplicity of perspectives. We acknowledge that listening to other perspectives on some of these issues may be personally challenging, and we accept that challenge. We further acknowledge that our profession, journalism, and our home, New York University, have participated in the systemic racism that underpins U.S. history. We are committed to teaching and practicing fair, rigorous, and engaged journalism that helps all our communities move toward justice and equality.

Class Schedule

June 1 | Looking for story ideas

- **Due:** Please read “Bad Art Friend” and “How Bad Art Friend Became Twitter’s Favorite Parlor Game” by Robert Kolker (Due June 1)
- In class: We will have two guest speakers (TBD) share how they come up with ideas and where they look for ideas. Afterwards, we will have an “Ideas Meeting” in class and each student will be “assigned” a story to write.
- **Assignment:** Write a reported 400-word story akin to a blog post based on your idea from today’s class. (Due June 5)

June 5 | Writing headlines and deks

- **Due:** 400-word reported “Ideas Meeting” story
- In class: We will discuss how different publications approach headline and dek writing based on their audiences. We will look at examples of how different publications “advertise” the same story according to their brand and discuss what is essential to heds and deks. We will have another “Ideas Meeting” but this time pitch solely using heds and deks.
- **Assignment:** Read two assigned stories and come up with heds and deks of your own. (Due June 8)

June 8 | Researching publications and writing pitch emails

- **Due:** Hed and deks exercise
- In class: We will discuss how to research a publication and read through it to get an idea of how it works. Figuring out a publication’s vibe relatively quickly is essential when it comes to pitching that publication. We will have two guest editors (TBD) discuss what they look for in pitches.
- **Assignment:** Write pitch emails for two of the ideas you’ve had approved by me in class, with headline and dek proposals, for a publication of your choice. Please include the best person to pitch your idea to.
 - Reading: “[SBF: The Virtue Was The Con](#)” from *New York* magazine. (Due June 12)

June 12 | Building a story from the ground up

- **Due:** Pitch email exercise
- In class: We will discuss how publications build story packages and look at packages from across publications. Students will be given a single topic and come up with three ideas for how to add to the story (i.e. sidebars) or contribute to a larger package.

- **Assignment:** Listen to [the “School Lunches” episode](#) of the “Maintenance Phase” podcast. Write 300 words on your main takeaways from the episode.
 - Reading: “Five years on, the lessons from the Rolling Stone rape story” by Lucia Graves and “Rolling Stone fact checker acknowledges U-Va. gang-rape article flaws” by T. Rees Shapiro (Due June 15)

June 15 | Fact-checking and errors in journalism judgment

- **Due:** “Maintenance Phase” writeup and *Rolling Stone* reading assignments
- In class: We will discuss the repercussions of the *Rolling Stone* rape story as well as the “Maintenance Phase” episode. We will also go over best practices in fact-checking, including what to look for as you’re reading through a story. Guest speaker TBD
- **Assignment:** Take home fact-check (Due June 19)

June 19 | Responsibility in reporting

- **Due:** Fact-checking exercise
- In class: We will go over the fact-checking assignment and discuss best practice in finding sources for articles, how to reach out to sources and gain their trust, and ethics in journalism.
- **Assignment:** Students are given a general story topic and asked to come up with a diverse list of people they would interview for the story and why. (Due June 22)

June 22 | Edit tests

- **Due:** Story sources exercise
- Students will randomly choose one of three publications for their edit test and study up on them (i.e. who their main competitors are, what sets them apart from similar publications, how they’re formatted, what kinds of stories they regularly run). We will discuss the ins-and-outs of edit tests and what hiring managers are looking for in edit tests.
- **Assignment:** Take-home edit test. You will have a week to complete a mock edit test for one of three publications. You will also be put into groups with students who are not working on the same edit test as you to hone your ideas. In addition to your edit test, you will turn in an analysis of another student’s edit test. (Due June 29)

June 26 | Careers in journalism

- **Due:** Nothing due. Please use this time to continue working on your edit tests and analyses.
- In class: We will have seven speakers with different jobs in journalism come talk about their careers in 20 minute increments.

- **Assignment:** Update your resumes. At the bottom, link to three open jobs you would be interested in applying to after graduation. (Due June 29)

June 29 | Applying to journalism jobs

- **Due:** Edit tests/analyses and resumes.
- In class: We will talk about best practices for writing your resumes and discuss writing cover letters based on job descriptions. The speaker will be HR hiring professionals on what they look for in resumes and cover letters.
- **Assignment:** Congrats you made it through the course — thank you for all your hard work this semester!