

New York University
Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute
JOUR-UA 201, SECTION 4
THE BEAT: THE SPORTING LIFE
SUMMER 2023

Professor Francis Flaherty
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 11:00 A.M. – 3:00 P.M. (EST)
May 23 – June 29

To contact professor: FJF1@nyu.edu/ Phone # TK/ Office hours: By appointment.

THIS COURSE WILL BE CONDUCTED ONLINE

Prerequisite: Journalistic Inquiry: The Written Word (JOUR-UA 101). If you are a visiting student and are interested in taking this course, please email journalism.summer@nyu.edu to find out whether this prerequisite can be waived. You will be asked to provide information about your previous journalism experience or courses.

Course Description

They say all politics is local, and the same can be said of journalism. People are endlessly curious about local news. The focus of this six-week online course is one of the richest areas of local news: sports.

In this class, students will serve as “sports correspondents” for their hometown — whether it be suburban Montclair, N.J., beachfront Venice, Calif., Mexico City, Seoul, the hip East Village in New York City, or the Trastevere quarter of Rome.

Students can write about all sorts of sports and fitness endeavors in this course, from bowling to tennis to cricket to swimming to cycling to skateboarding to parkour, to axe throwing to bodybuilding to spin classes and arm wrestling contests at the local summer fair. These sports can be professional or amateur events or pick-up games at the playground, and they can be team endeavors or individual ones. Because summer is peak season for sports anywhere north of the equator, students will have a wealth of sports from which to choose.

But besides sports themselves, students can report on a variety of sports-related activities. A student might write a profile of a popular local surfboard maker, or of an avid collector of sport stars' autographs, or of a group of obsessive fans who attend every softball game in outlandish costumes. How about a report on how gardeners keep golf courses smooth and green, or on the secrets of horse trainers for the "sport of kings" – horse racing? Sports is a business, of course, so there is also, say, the former felon trying to launch a career as a personal trainer, or the shopkeeper who sells baseball memorabilia or gearless bikes or skateboards.

Why are sports and fitness a good focus for a course? Because they are a major way people socialize: There are creative street games that local kids invent, bowling leagues for senior citizens, ultramarathons and catfish tournaments. Because they encompass many major aspects of life: competition, passion, discipline, heartbreak, triumph, excitement, courage, failure, money and more. Finally, some sports, like bocce (Italy) or petanque (France) or jai alai (Spain), give revealing looks at specific cultures.

More broadly, this course will use the lens of sports and its allied activities to examine the fundamentals of journalism, familiarize students with the concept of beat, sharpen their reporting skills and scrutinize and practice the craft of writing.

Professor Flaherty, a former columnist and editor at The New York Times, has modeled this course after The Times's City Section, for which he was the Deputy Editor. In that section, Times reporters served as correspondents for particular New York City neighborhoods; their "beat" might be Greenwich Village, or Williamsburg, or Tribeca.

Note: Required for NYU students pursuing the print/online track in the journalism major. Also required for the minor in print and online journalism. Counts as an elective for the minor in broadcast and multimedia journalism.

Learning Objectives

In this course, students will:

- Demonstrate awareness of journalism's core ethical values
- Write clear, accurate and engaging prose in an audience-appropriate manner
- Demonstrate critical thinking, independence, and creativity appropriate to the role of journalism in a democratic society
- Interview subjects, conduct research, and evaluate information
- Help each other

- Have fun

Course Structure

This class will feature lectures, critical analysis of readings, exploration of the craft of writing, student-led editing discussions (known as “Editor of the Day”) breakout sessions in which small groups of students will tackle journalistic issues, and guest appearances by outside journalists. The bulk of the work, as with all journalism, takes place outside the class: the search for story ideas, the interviewing of subjects, the reporting of events, and the craft of writing.

Required Texts: *The Elements of Story: Field Notes on Writing Nonfiction.* by Francis Flaherty (HarperCollins). It is available at the NYU Bookstore, Amazon, and many other bookstores both online and brick-and-mortar. It is available in hardcover, softcover and e-book.

We will also analyze standout articles by journalists from *The New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *Slate*, *Salon*, *The L.A. Times*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Washington Post* and elsewhere. We will critique these articles along the following lines: Is the underlying concept smart? Is the reporting thorough? Is the structure solid? Is the writing compelling? Is the approach fair and evenhanded? Then we’ll apply these insights to our own pieces.

N.B. READINGS WILL INCLUDE BOTH SPORTS AND NONSPORTS TOPICS.

Course Requirements: Students will scout out smart ideas for sports stories in their hometowns, develop sources for those stories, report them out, and write them up. They will write several stories during this six-week course in various genres. In addition, students will do the assigned readings, attend our Zoom class regularly, participate actively in those classes, and help other students develop story ideas and write clear and well-ordered stories.

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: The Class Schedule and Paper Schedule (below) respectively set out deadlines for all readings and for all papers. and all stages of those papers, from the Pitch for the paper topic, to

the Draft of the Paper, to the Final of the Paper. Deadlines are critical to journalism; please observe these dates accordingly.

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: There will be four papers that will collectively account for 70% of the final grade: Paper 1 (500 words) —10%; Paper 2 (600 words) —15%; Paper 3 (900 words) --20%; and Paper 4 (1,200 words)—25%. Class attendance and participation will constitute 15%. Occasional quizzes on assigned readings will account for 10%. Improvement during the course may be factored into grades, which can be lowered for lateness to or absence from class, late or undelivered assignments and plagiarism or other ethical issues.

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 of race, sex, gender identity, class, ethnicity, sexualities, abilities, religion, and culture. 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

Below are the lecture topics, reading homework and class exercises for each class meeting. Below that is the schedule for the various stages of the reported articles.

MAY 23 Hometown Journalism: An Introduction Finding and evaluating ideas for local sports/athletics/fitness stories: Print and Web resources. Community boards, block associations, parks departments, local high schools and colleges, sports leagues, runners clubs, pools, and other primary sources. Freshness as a journalistic value. “Local” doesn’t mean “little” – major sports issues, like concussions and CTE, have local as well as national focuses.

How can you tell a 500-word idea from a 1,000-word idea? Has someone already done this story? If so, do we care?

- Your hometown: basic characteristics (Demographics, chief industries, local institutions (churches, schools, museums), geography (mountains, beaches, downtowns, shopping malls, farmland), history (famous residents, historical monuments, noteworthy events).
- Your hometown sports/fitness profile: Local teams, clubs, institutions, fan scene, stores and services that are sports-related, sports history.
- Exercise: The Ice Breaker

Homework

* Research your hometown – Recent news stories, local politics, current “hot button” issues, future worries and aspirations. Then zero in on its sports and fitness scene.

*Readings: “A Long Jump to Manhood in the Bronx,” by Sam Dolnick (New York Times) (teenage boys dive from a cliff into the Hudson in a male rite of passage).

MAY 25. The Motor of English How to make a story move. Building motion into your reporting. The virtue of focused verbs. The two, simultaneous jobs of the writer.

*Appraisal of assigned reading

*Exercise: A Still Life in the Front Yard

Homework

- Research your beat by phone, Skype, Zoom, Google, etc.
- Write a 200-word paragraph on a familiar place – and make it fresh!
- Prepare Pitch 1 for Paper 1
- Reading: “When Surfing the Rockaways, It’s Workout or Wipe Out,” by Lisa Collins (NYT)

MAY 30 A Typology of Story Ideas Slow News, Contrarianism, Symbolic Stories, The Virtues of Idleness. Look Inward, Angel. The Peg. The Unlit Corner. The Cobbler. Man Bites Dog, etc.

- Peer Review: 200-word “familiar” scene

- Roundtable appraisal: Pitches for Paper 1
- Class Presentations: The Basics of the Beat

Homework

- Reading: “The Extremist,” by Michael Specter (New Yorker)
- Report and write draft of Paper 1

JUNE 1 The Art of the Interview An interview is a conversation. Pick your interviewee carefully. A good interview happens before the interview. Be open and honest and professional. The two questions you should always ask.

- Peer Review: Paper 1 Draft
- Guest Speaker: TBA
- Class discussion: Being a good listener is the most important trait of the journalist

Homework

- Reading: “What About George?” by Saki Knafo (NYTimes) and “One Day of Anarchy at Coney Island,” by Fan Chen (unpublished student paper)
- Submit Final of Paper 1 before class on June 9
- Pitch for Paper 2 (Summer ritual or other event)
-

JUNE 6 A Human Face The difficulty of putting a human face on your story. The difficulty of reporting emotions. Talking heads vs. real people. The journalistic importance of empathy.

- Exercise: The Body Language Dictionary
- Class Roundtable: Evaluating pitches for Paper 2
- Exercise: Conveying Emotions In a Striking Way
- Editor of the Day 1

Homework

- Report and write draft of Paper 2
- Read “The Blind Man Who Taught Himself to See” by Michael Finkel (Men’s Journal)

JUNE 8 The Devil Is in the Details Spelling, grammar, punctuation: These are all admittedly little things, but they can have an outsize impact on readers' respect for a piece of writing. How to handle these issues well, and efficiently.

- Peer Review: Draft of Paper 2
- Class roundtable: Reporting and writing problems
- Exercise: The Grammarian
- Editor of the Day 2

Homework

- Write final of Paper 2 by 6/16
- Read "What About George?" (NY Times)
- Prepare pitch for Paper 3

JUNE 13 The Theme: Like the Trunk of a Tree A subject is not a story. The theme is not the "truth." Be loyal to your theme – but not too loyal. The theme is not the only part of a story, but it is the biggest and the most central.

- * Exercise: A Packet of Pitches – You Be the Editor
- *. Roundtable: Evaluating Paper 3 Pitches
- *. Editor of the Day 3

Homework

- Reading: "Bleak House," by Richard Morgan (NYTimes)
- Report and write draft of Paper 3
- Prepare pitch for Paper 4

JUNE 15 Pruning: Every Word You Write, the Reader Must Read. Trimming down your prose. The concept of the wasted word. A half dozen ways to say things shorter. The three-step process of shortening a story.

- *. Peer Review: Draft of Paper 3
- * Editor of the Day 4
- * Exercise: Pruning an Overgrown Garden
- *. Roundtable: Evaluate pitches for Paper 4
- * Guest Speaker: TBA

Homework

- *. Report on Paper 4
- * Submit final of Paper 3 before class on 6/2
- * Reading: “Mountains of Pi,” by Richard Preston (The New Yorker)

JUNE 20 The Components of an Article Ledes, nut grafs, context grafs, billboard grafs, transitions, kickers: How the fundamentals work, and some pitfalls to avoid.

The Interactive Writer: Reading is unavoidably a largely passive activity; the reader has to take what the writer gives him. But there are ways to give the reader an active role, and the reader will appreciate writers who deploy them.

- Exercise: Show Don’t Tell: Chloe Is the Most Organized Person I Know
- Editors of the Day 5, 6
- Exercise: The Hunt for the Lede
- Peer Review: Draft of Paper 2

Homework

- * Continue reporting on Paper 4
- *. Read selections from The Cut (New York magazine)

JUNE 22 Outline I Simplicity Is the Good News. The Five Kinds of Outlines. The Outline as Reporting Aid. Outlines and Transitions

- * Class roundtable: Paper 4 pitches
- * Editor of the Day 7
- * Exercise: Reporter at the Video

Homework

- Write draft of Paper 4
- Reading: “Stranger in the Woods: The Last True Hermit” (Men’s Journal)

JUNE 27 Outline II One Subject, Many Stories. The Perils of the Planless Writer. Sidebars, Charts and Other Organizing Tools. Numbering Your Notes.

The Art of Quotes, and Their Nuts and Bolts Direct quotations are powerful: for readers, they are as if another person has walked onto the page. But there are times when direct quotations don't work, and times when they are invaluable. How to sort those circumstances out, and use the proper placement and punctuation while you are at it.

- Editor of the Day 8, 9
- Peer Review: Paper 4 draft

Homework

- Write final of Paper 4
- Reading: "A Son of Football Calls His Mother," by Dan Barry (NYTimes)

JUNE 29 The Artful Writer: Saying It Without Saying It A major writerly task is to express ideas and scenes in a riveting, memorable way. An exploration of three techniques a writer can use to grab the reader's attention.

- Editor of the Day 10
- Workshop: Final Reporting and Writing Issues with Paper

PAPER SCHEDULE

PAPER 1 – 500 WORDS (ANY TYPE); PAPER 2 – 600-WORD EVENT STORY; PAPER 3 – 900 WORD PROFILE; PAPER 4 – 1100-WORD TREND/REPORTED STORY. P1 = PITCH FOR PAPER 1; D1 = DRAFT FOR PAPER 1; F1 = FINAL FOR PAPER 1. AND SO ON FOR PAPERS 2, 3 AND 4.

DRAFTS NEED NOT INCLUDE ALL THE REPORTING OR BE AS LONG AS THE FINAL IS SUPPOSED TO BE. BUT I WOULD LIKE DRAFTS TO BE AT LEAST HALF THE FINAL LENGTH, AND TRY TO DO ENOUGH REPORTING AND WRITING TO GIVE A GOOD SENSE OF THE WHOLE PIECE. THE BIGGER THE DRAFT, THE MORE THOUGHTFUL MY COMMENTS CAN BE.

IMPORTANT! THE PITCH DATES ARE FINAL DEADLINE DATES FOR THOSE PITCHES. FEEL FREE TO PITCH STORIES AT ANYTIME, EVEN WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE PITCH DEADLINE DATE. THE MORE PITCHES YOU HAVE APPROVED, THE MORE YOU CAN FOCUS YOUR ATTENTION ON THE REPORTING AND THE WRITING.

THINGS ALWAYS GO AWRY IN JOURNALISM – A SOURCE DISAPPEARS, A STORY TURNS OUT NOT TO BE A STORY, ETC. DO NOT FREAK OUT; THIS IS PART OF WHAT YOU ARE MEANT TO LEARN. BUT WHEN YOU PITCH HAVE A BACKUP PITCH (OR TWO) IN CASE THESE MISHAPS HAPPEN.

MAY.	23.	FIRST CLASS
MAY	25	P1
MAY	30	
JUNE	1	D1 P2
JUNE	6	F1
JUNE	8	P3 D2
JUNE	13	F2
JUNE	15	D3 P4
JUNE	20	F3
JUNE	22	D4
JUNE	27	
JUNE.	29	F4 FINAL CLASS