

New York University
Arthur L. Carter Journalism Institute
Syllabus JOUR-UA 203.001
YouTube for Journalists
Summer 2023
Instructor: Seth Kugel

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Course Description

As traditional nightly newscasts struggle for younger viewers and 24-hour news networks face accusations of partisanship, YouTube is still a free-wheeling, growing medium, with very low barriers to entry. So why are there so many more channels featuring make-up artists (and maybe even ukulele teachers) than journalists? In part it's because creating quality journalism usually requires reporters, producers, camera operators and video editors, and lone YouTubers have to do it all themselves – and create enough content to keep the almighty algorithm happy.

Sure, anyone can be a “journalist” on YouTube, doing whatever it takes to go viral, but in this course we'll be striving to remove those quotation marks and produce content that both meets high journalistic standards and stands a chance of gaining an audience. In other words, we'll steer well to the right side of the quackery vs journalism line on a medium where there are few ethics monitors and absolutely no requirement – or really even mechanism – for corrections.

Participants in this new course will create a YouTube channel with a distinct identity – or expand a channel they already have, and produce four videos including some combination of commentary, interviews, vlog-style narratives, explainers (“What's going on with ___?”) and a short documentary.

About the Instructor

Seth Kugel is the host of Amigo Gringo, a YouTube channel with 580,000 subscribers that attempts to explain the culture and news and politics of the United States to a primarily Brazilian audience, and writes the Tripped Up column for the New York Times travel desk. He was the Frugal Traveler columnist for the Times from 2010 to 2016 and has also covered everything from the Bronx to the Brazilian health care system to luxury tree houses for the Times.

Prerequisite

A basic to intermediate working knowledge of video editing. In-class examples will be on Premiere Pro but students are welcome to use whatever editing software they are comfortable with.

Learning Objectives

In this course, students will:

- Demonstrate awareness of journalism's core ethical values
- Interview subjects, conduct research, and evaluate information
- Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness, and diverse perspectives
- Apply journalistic methods to social media and video formats
- Use technological tools and apply quantitative concepts as appropriate

Course Structure and Assignments

Class meetings will generally be divided into three sections with ten-minute breaks. Typically, the first hour will include a short lecture and the sharing and critique of a video by a class member; the second hour will feature a guest speaker or viewing and critiquing of videos in groups and the third hour will be some form of workshop and/or peer review.

Course Requirements

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the day's readings or videos; should submit assignments on time, echoing the rhythm of journalistic deadlines, and alert me well in advance in the very exceptional and totally unavoidable occasion that they need more time. Students should follow department guidelines on plagiarism and follow Associated Press style in their work, where applicable.

ASSIGNMENTS:

- 1) a channel proposal (500 words, 10% of grade)
DUE: Friday, May 26, noon
- 2) a commentary or opinion video (3-8 minutes, 15%)
ROUGH CUT: Thursday, June 1, noon
FINAL: Tuesday, June 6, noon
- 3) a vlog or related first-person narrative (5-10 minutes 15%)
ROUGH CUT: Thursday, June 8, noon
FINAL: Tuesday, June 13, noon
- 4) an interview (5-10 minutes, 15%)
ROUGH CUT: Thursday, June 15, noon
FINAL: Tuesday, June 20, noon

- 5) explainer or a short documentary or a repeat of one of the other formats or a different format – to be pre-approved. (5-10 minutes, 15%)

ROUGH CUT: Thursday, June 22, noon

FINAL: Tuesday, June 27, noon

- 6) YouTube Practical and Ethical Guide for Journalists: Imagine you have been asked by YouTube to create a pdf document for aspiring YouTube journalists. (700 to 900 words, 15% of grade)

DUE: Thursday, June 29, noon

Class participation and comments on others' videos account for the final 15%.

Assignments will be downgraded once (i.e. from B to B-) (for each day or portion thereof) they are late, up to four days.

Grading

Grading will conform to the Journalism Department's policy:

A = publishable as is

B = publishable with light editing

C = publishable with a major rewrite

D = major problems with organization, facts, reporting, writing

F = missing key information, containing gross misspellings, plagiarism or libel.

All grading will be numerical, with one point = 1% of class grade. The final grades will be determined by this chart:

A = 93+

A- = 90-92.99

B+ = 87-89.99

B = 83-86.99

B- = 80-82.99

Etc.

CLASS SCHEDULE

(Unless otherwise indicated, speakers and assignments will be announced a week in advance.)

SESSION 1 (Tues, May 23): Journalism: A crash course

What is journalism? What is reporting? And what do the terms “influencer” and “creator” have to do with it? We do a quick crash course and then hit the streets.

SESSION 2 (Thurs, May 25): Journalistic Ethics in the age of YouTube

Is it possible to be an ethical journalist and making a living? Has YouTube changed the rules of journalism, or do we need rules to change YouTube?

Guest Speaker: Adam Ellick, Director of Opinion Video, the New York Times

Material for class:

Read: [Ethical Journalism](#), The New York Times

Watch at least three opinion videos executive-produced by our guest speaker:
[How Life Looks Through My ‘Whale Eyes’](#)
[Trump Isn’t the Worst Pandemic President](#)
[New! A Hotline for Racists](#)

SESSION 3 (Tuesday, May 30): Commentary

Creating an opinion or analysis piece – and looking at how this differs on YouTube compared with traditional journalistic outlets.

Material for class: No assignment

SESSION 4 (Thursday, June 1): Process and Content

The nuts and bolts of content production: scripting, producing, filming, using volunteers

Material for class: Part II of [Many Americans Get News on YouTube...](#)” Pew Research Center; watch “[Searching for Ganja in Azerbaijan](#),” Bald and Bankrupt.

SESSION 5 (Tuesday, June 6): Team Production

Working as a production team, with students assigned to roles like producer, camera, researcher, host, editor and more, we produce a video in its entirety over the course of one three-hour class.

SESSION 6 (Thurs, June 8): Interviews

“I would have done a shorter interview, but I didn’t have the time” – interviewing skills and choosing a subject.

Material for class: Excerpts from The Art of Interviewing. PDF available [here](#).

SESSION 7 (Tues, June 13): A Step Back: What Is Journalism and How Does It Work on YouTube

What is journalism and how does it manifest itself in a YouTube video? Well, for one thing, it involves reporting, which involves research, innovative analysis, and/or (gasp) talking to human beings.

Material for class: TBA

SESSION 8 (Thurs, June 15): Audience Engagement

Using analytics to self-evaluate, including audience loss of interest, demographics and sources of traffic. Spurring more audience engagement through content and interaction.

To read:

“Four Quick Wins To Increase Your YouTube Engagement,” [neilpatel.com](#)

To watch:

“How to Increase YouTube Engagement and Subscribers,” Nick Nimmin

SESSION 9 (Tues, June 20): Explainers/documentaries

Being serious without losing your audience.

Material for class:

To watch:

“[India’s Trucks Are Works of Art](#)”, Vox

“[New Polls Show Americans Want to Secede](#),” Phil DeFranco

SESSION 10 (Thurs, June 22): Working with Brands: The Mock Proposal

To read:

“[Disclosures 101 for Social Media and Influencers](#),” U.S. Federal Trade Commission

To watch:

[“Three Evil Gringos Try to Imitate the Brazilian Accent,”](#) Amigo Gringo

SESSION 11 (Tues, June 27): Planning the future and monetizing

Evaluating accomplishments and long-term planning.

Material for class: TBA

SESSION 12 (Thurs, June 29): Is YouTube a Good Medium for Journalism?

Given what we’ve learned, what can we teach other journalists? We record a video on being journalists on YouTube, based on final assignments.