

Newsroom: From Pitch to Publish

Summer 2024 (6 Week) – Session 1

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Tuesdays, 1pm-7pm

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Course Overview:

A vibrant newsroom buzzes with journalists performing a range of jobs: Reporters pitch ideas to their editors and then go out into the field, hit the phones, and do research. Editors field inquiries from reporters, work on new stories, update works-in-progress, and review first, second, and third drafts. And art departments find visuals—photos, videos, illustrations, maps, and more—that will enhance the articles. And before anyone hits publish, fact-checkers check for accuracy and social media writers craft SEO headlines and tags.

In day-long sessions, students will cycle through that exact process, filling different roles of a newsroom all while learning how to hone their writing ideas and get stories across the finish line. The class will start with a pitch meeting and move into instruction and meetings with editors and writers. Students will work on their own pieces, occasionally cover breaking news when warranted, and collaborate in various roles with other students. As a full-day class, you will spend some of the time out in the field and some of the time working on writing and editing, with the guidance of the professors. The class will conclude with a follow-up meeting to review reporting and plan for the week ahead.

We will bring in editors from publications who are willing to review your pitches and offer insights into the editorial process. Seasoned editors and writers will also address the class on topics including how to find ideas, how to interview people, how to find the right framing for your story, and how to edit the stories.

This class will partner with a set of pre-established media outlets who are open to reviewing pitches and will suggest topics, offering students a unique, real-time opportunity to leave the class with clips for their portfolio. Graduate students will be required to finish the session with four publishable pieces; undergraduates will be required to finish with three. The goal of this class: learn how to frame ideas, report them out, and ultimately *get them published*.

Class format:

We will run this class like a newsroom. So at the beginning of each class, we will talk about how to find ideas and how to frame them. What should we be covering? What suggestions do we have from our publication partners? How are our work-in-progress pitches shaping up? If anything's breaking that day, we can go cover it. We can also think through how to report your features.

Everyone will have the opportunity to work on stories from different vantage points, rotating through the different positions, while working on their own pieces as well. The goal for each student is 3-4 stories with pitches ready to go, enhanced by the editing and art direction experience.

Distinct from other classes in the curriculum, this course's explicit intent is publication, through team collaboration in a newsroom setting and one-on-one support with students from start to finish. Both Prof. Dangerfield and Prof. Surico work with countless students, who have a shared interest in specific help with stories, including how to refine and frame their ideas, revise pieces, and pitch the end product to outlets. This class hopes to deliver on just that.

We intentionally made the syllabus broad so that we could mold the instruction to the students' ideas. For example, although we'll talk about editing in general, we'll focus on editing the particular stories in the class. This won't be a baseline reporting class by any means; this will be a chance for the students to apply the reporting skills they've learned during previous journalism courses in real-time.

To manage the time, Prof. Dangerfield and Prof. Surico will be splitting the class. John will take the first half; Whitney will take the second. However, they will overlap for two hours:

1pm-2pm: For the first hour of class, John and Whitney will both conduct a newsroom meeting, where we discuss students' ideas, ideas from outside editors, and readings from that week. We'll also talk about where things stand with each project.

2pm-3pm: John will then take over, talking through the topic of the day and catering the class to the specific ideas that are in the works.

3pm-5pm: Students will go out in the field and/or work on their writing and editing.

5pm-6pm: Whitney will do a midday check-in and then lead a discussion with 1-2 outside writers or editors.

6pm-7pm: Whitney will help students with their work individually and make sure to set up each student for the work they need to do for the coming week.

Reading/Assignment List:

We're still finalizing a reading list, and we'll likely shift it according to the news cycle. But we want to mostly focus on stories that have run in our partner publications and/or were published by students.

How to Train Your Light Bulb:

- Go through how alum Maria Clara Cobo went from a general idea to a specific idea for “‘Phantom,’ Ends. For Musicians, So Does a Gig of a Lifetime,” which [ran in The New York Times](#)
- How to think about events: Magazine student Elizabeth Patrick’s “[Stepping up: Grueling Empire State Building Run-UP sees 150 people test themselves against 1,576 stairs,](#)” in AMNY
- How to find ideas within your beat (no pun intended): “[How a Group of Brooklyn Beatboxers Became Ambassadors to the World](#)” by alum Tani Levitt for The New York Times
- Read a few “How to Pitch” guidelines as a way to think about story ideas: “[How to Pitch The Cut](#)” and “[How to Pitch Grist](#)”

How to Track Down Sources:

- Go through how alum Jane Zhang met James Cotto in this piece “[James Cotto is Still Living in New York City’s Golden Age of Roller Skating,](#)” which ran in Hell Gate.
- How to interview subjects in tough situations: “[He never expected to be a single dad. Then, a gunman in Virginia Beach made him one,](#)” by our guest Ian Shapira, Washington Post

How to Frame a Story:

- “[What Bobby McIlvaine Left Behind](#)” by Jennifer Senior, The Atlantic
- How to find the angle: “[The Once Unthinkable Revolution Coming to Figure Skating,](#)” by alum Talia Barrington, Slate
- “[Meet the Woman Leading the Charge Against Bail Reform in New York,](#)” by alum Sam Russek in The Nation

How to Edit a Story

- Go through editing back-and-forth: GloJo student Marin Scotten will go through how the editing worked with her Guardian story “[‘Laying claim to nature’s work’: plant patents sow fear among small growers](#)”
- We'll also bring in an editor to walk the students through a story too.

How to Visualize a Story

- Go over how alum Juliette Maigné shot and wrote “[There’s a Lot More to Being a Leatherman Than You’d Expect](#)” for VICE.”

How to Finish a Story

- Go over how alum Arielle Domb made a story she was writing work for a pitch call: “[The Satanic Abortion Clinic That’s Pissed Off Pretty Much Everyone...and Might Beat the Bans Anyway,](#)” Cosmopolitan

- Read How to Pitch Guides with pitching in mind: [How to Pitch Hyperallergic](#), [How to Pitch Slate](#)

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Publications

We are approaching outside publications that we actively pitch in two different ways:

1. Partners who will float topics/areas/ideas that they'd like us to cover and who are willing to review pitches from us. (We've already garnered commitments from AM New York, Our Town Downtown, Village Sun, Brooklyn Magazine; and we're in talks with Queens Daily Eagle, Epicenter, City Limits, Gothamist, Streetsblog.)
2. Publications who are willing to review pitches that we think would be a good fit. (We're considering New York Focus, Curbed, Hell Gate, Salon, Slate, the Metropolitan section of NYT, etc.)

Schedule:

Week 1 – May 21

Theme: How to Train Your Lightbulb

Question: How do we find our stories?

- Syllabus review
- Lecture: Topic vs. story angle
- *Guest speaker TBA and* Robb Pozarycki, editor of AM New York, will be talking about what ideas his publication looks for.

Week 2 – May 28

Theme: How to Track Down Sources

Question: How do we find and talk to sources?

- Interview prep exercises
- Lecture: Source gathering
- *Guest speaker:* Ian Shapira, an enterprise reporter at The Washington Post who writes about school shootings and other hard topics, will be talking about interviewing and sources.

Week 3 – June 4

Theme: How to Frame a Story

Questions: What is the story's thesis?

- Nutgraf writing / outlining exercises
- Lecture: the news peg
- Write initial pitches
- *Guest speaker TBA*

Week 4 – June 11

Theme: How to Edit a Story

Question: How do we structure a story?

- Editing exercises
- Lecture: story structure
- Finalize pitches + pitch plan
- *Guest speaker TBA and* GloJo student Marin Scotten will go through how the editing worked with her Guardian story "[‘Laying claim to nature’s work’: plant patents sow fear among small growers’](#)"

Week 5 – June 18 *NO CLASS – JUNETEENTH*

- Exercises and assignments TBD

Week 6 – June 25

Theme: How to Visualize a Story

Question: How do we bring our stories to life?

- Photo/video exercises
- Lecture: multimedia
- Workshop stories
- *Guest speaker TBA*

Week 7 – July 2 (FINAL CLASS)

Theme: How to Finish a Story

Question: How do we get our stories published?

- Class reflection
- Lecture: workshopping and wrap-up
- Finalize stories
- *Guest speaker TBA*

Grading:

50% - Participation (Attendance, in-class discussions, exercises)

50% - Written output (In-class exercises, assignments)