



The Beat: The Cityscape  
JOUR-UA 201.010 spring 2025  
Prof Mary W. Quigley  
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Zoom personal <https://nyu.zoom.us/j/2606330955>  
Calendy: <https://calendly.com/mwq1>

*This asynchronous course will be taught online and is open to journalism majors taking 12 or more credits abroad. It fulfills “The Beat” requirement for the major. In addition to weekly readings and assignments through Brightspace, students are required to meet on Zoom individually with Prof. Quigley once weekly.*

This semester you will wander hidden alleys, sample new cuisines, hear the clack of trollies and carillons, speak (or try to) a foreign language, befriend strangers, and try to cram in myriad experiences. The sights, sounds, smells of an international locale are the perfect setting to learn and practice feature writing.

In previous semesters, students have covered ballroom culture in Madrid, experimental circuses in Florence, vintage shops in Paris, and women entrepreneurs in the UAE, among other topics. You can find a full range on [Dispatches](#), our publishing website.

Designed for students spending a semester abroad, this online course will teach feature story techniques--research, reporting, and writing—using the adopted city as a source for articles. The

study-abroad locale becomes a classroom that students explore, not as tourists, but as writers, seeking sources and stories. This semester students will cover stories in Prague, Paris, Florence, Shanghai, and Tokyo.

To write journalistic pieces that offer depth and insight, students will focus on one neighborhood with the city, researching its history, discovering the movers and shakers, and interviewing locals, from residents to shopkeepers to policy makers. The goal is to gather ideas for fascinating Q&As, news features, trend pieces and other features. The journalistic journey will be capped by a 1,500-word publishable final piece. We will publish student work on the class website, Dispatches and work to get pieces published in other media both in the U.S. and the study-abroad city.

### Learning Objectives

In this course, students will:

- Demonstrate awareness of journalism's core ethical values
- Practice a writing process that carries a story from concept to publication.
- To conceive, report, write and revise several types of feature stories.
- Learn the basics of covering a beat, from developing sources to monitoring news.
- Interview subjects, conduct research, evaluate information for both fact and story
- Learn how to background for context, focus and sources.
- To explore different models and devices for structuring stories

### Course structure

The goal of this course is for you to find and develop story ideas and to research, report and write—and rewrite—pieces ranging from a Q&A to an in-depth feature. You will have several major assignments over the course of the semester and will rewrite each at least twice. Please see the week-by-week outline below for the due dates.

Even though you are spread across the world, we want to create a community of writers in this class so you will be asked to comment on each other's work.

Covering a specific neighborhood in your adopted city will help you find better stories. As part of the beat proposal (due the second week of the semester) you will list at least six publications, websites, radio stations and podcasts that you will monitor daily to keep up with neighborhood news. Also list which newsmakers, trendsetters, neighbor personalities you'll follow on social media. Over the 14 weeks of the course, you'll hang out in your beat neighborhood, explore the nooks and crannies, develop sources and scout for story ideas.

You will have two-to-three weeks to research/report/write/rewrite each piece. The emphasis is on reporting--not online or on the phone--but getting out and interviewing people, going places, doing things. Your beat will develop and evolve over the semester as you meet more people and learn more about your adopted city. A 250-word story pitch is required for all assignments. The pitch must include the story idea summed up in three to four sentences, the hook or angle, and a reporting plan which includes two or more "live" sources.

To help you develop your journalistic skills, the course will offer on Brightspace a series of mini-lectures, taped interviews, and textbook readings. You will be required to complete these each week and your progress will be tracked. We'll also have weekly assignment pieces of journalism that you will be asked to comment on.

Although this is a feature writing class, the focus is on news reporting because it is the basis of every type of journalism. Nothing is made up; all stories are honest and factual. The class incorporates the basics learned in *Inquiry: The Word* and takes them to the next level. The goal of this class is to help you grow as reporter and blossom as a writer through multiple assignments and rewrites.

### Weekly Game Plan

The weekly flow will look like this:

Class prep: Links to readings and lectures

Writing assignment: Please email me your article; I will return it to you via email.

Zoom meeting: You are required to meet with me once a week to go over your work. Schedule a meeting via Calendly: <https://calendly.com/mwq1>

Publishing: After receiving my feedback and completing revisions, students will be responsible for publishing their final stories to Dispatches. There are easy-to-follow instructions here:

<https://youtu.be/SZjFmxvffdU>

<b>Assignments</b>	<b>Mondays , 6 a.m. New York time</b>
1: Observation exercise	Monday, January 27
2: Beat Report and Q&A pitch	Monday, February 3
3: Q&A 400 words	Monday, February 10
4: Q&A rewrite; pitch news feature	Monday, February 17
5: News feature draft 1 750 words	Monday, February 24
6: News feature draft 2	Monday, March 3
7: News feature draft 3; pitch trend	Monday, March 10
8. Trend draft 1	Monday, March 17
spring break	Monday, March 24
9: Trend draft 2	Monday, March 31

10: Trend draft 3	Monday, April 7
11: Final feature annotated pitch	Monday, April 14
12: Final feature draft 1	Monday, April 21
13: Final feature draft 2	Monday, April 28
14: Final feature draft 3	Monday, May 5

All assignments are due via email to me on Mondays, 6 a.m. New York time. Please “slug” your attachment with your last name first followed by the assignment name. Your name, date and the word count must be in the upper-left-hand corner.

Every assignment MUST include a list of sources at the end. This includes “live” sources, over Zoom, on the phone, and via email even if they are not quoted in the final piece. You must also link to your top three research sources. Any assignment without the source list will be downgraded.

All interviews with your primary subject must be conducted in person. Secondary sources preferably in person but also on the phone, via Zoom or via email. No dm on Instagram or Facebook are allowed to substitute for an actual interview. The number of interviews increases with each assignment. The final piece will require 6 interviews.

In addition, there are several other requirements. Every piece needs a photo, preferably one taken by you. Every story also needs a headline, in fact two. One for an online publication, and the other designed for optimal SEO on the web.

<https://www.wordstream.com/blog/ws/2017/05/17/how-to-write-great-headlines>.

#### Attendance and deadlines

While the class is asynchronous, weekly reading and reporting assignments expected to be done on time. Students will need to budget time outside of class to research, report, write and edit their work, at least four hours a week.

**You are required to meet with me via Zoom once a week.** Sign up via Calendly. This one-on-one meeting is essential to your success in the class.

Late assignments will not be accepted, reviewed, nor critiqued. I do not chase down students for their work. If you need an extension of a deadline, you must email me at least 24 hours before deadline, tell me why you might miss the deadline and present a solution.

Free Pass: Because life happens, everyone gets one free pass. After you used your free pass though, that’s it! Late assignments are downgraded.

#### Grades:

By May you will have several graded assignments. Your final grade will reflect your scores on your writing assignments and class participation. Your final grade will be based 75 percent on your feature articles and 25 percent on class participation, which includes the weekly meetings..

### Texts

- There's just one text which can be ordered online
- All other readings are available in Brightspace.
- The Elements of Story: Field Notes on Nonfiction Writing, Frank Flaherty Available on Kindle or paperback.
- Also read a daily news sites as well as subscribe as sites like <https://apnews.com/hub/europe>
- Please make sure you have taken advantage of the library's free subscriptions to The New York Times and the Wall Street Journal. <https://guides.nyu.edu/journalism#s-lg-box-27288179>. You need access for many of the readings.

### 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](mailto:mosescsd@nyu.edu). Information about the Moses Center can be found at [www.nyu.edu/csd](http://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 several 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.

*Note: readings will change*

### Week 1: Feature writing

What is feature writing? How to find story ideas: applying news judgment from the streets to social media. How to explore your beat from demographics and history to institutions and community groups.

e-book

- How to find story ideas
- What is feature writing?
- How to cover a beat
- Interview with Seth Kugel, travel writer extraordinaire

read:

- Flaherty Part 1: The Human Face
- [People-Watching: Here's Looking at You](#)
- [The 40 coolest neighborhoods in the world](#)
- [At a Bar 'Made by Africans,' Migrants Put Down Roots in Mexico](#)
- [7 Things I learned from Ernest Hemingway](#)
- [The Big, Wide World of Narrow Beats](#)
- [21 Ways to Find Story Ideas](#)

### Writing Assignment 1: Observation—400 words due Monday, January 27

Find a tourist locale that's not listed in guidebooks. Spend an hour or two perched at the locale where you can observe and take notes on a small scene. Write 400 words that zoom in and capture the personality of the place. No questions and no "I" in the piece. Start researching for your beat report.

### Week 2: Interviews Part 1

An interview is a controlled conversation and fact-gathering expedition. How to ask questions; different types of questions and interview techniques. When to direct quote and when to paraphrase. The importance of accuracy and attribution. Also, the importance of inclusive reporting, seeking diverse perspectives, developing a source network. How to write a Q&A that both informs and reveals the personality of the subject.

e-book

- Interview Power Point
- Interview Script
- Quotes and attribution

- Working with Quotations
- Human Sources
- Inclusive Reporting
- Editing Quotes

read:

- Flaherty: Part 11: The Theme
- [Amsterdam Bans Marijuana Smoking on Streets of Red-Light District](#)
- [How to Live Abroad as a Digital Nomad Journalist](#)
- [How to Cope with Moving Home After Living Abroad](#)
- [American Things I Missed When Living Abroad](#)
- [100 Best Expat Blogs and Websites](#)
- [5 Questions the Most Interesting People Will Always Ask in Conversations](#)

Writing Assignments:

Beat Report and e-mail pitch for Q&A with an ex-pat journalist due Monday, Feb. 3

Arrange a 30-minute in-person interview with a reporter who covers your city.

Arrange your interview as soon as possible to accommodate your subject's

schedule. Do background research on both the person and their coverage. Use your

phone to record the interview, and DON'T FORGET to ask permission to record.

For some good examples please see two from Dispatches: one with a [Czech podcaster](#) and the other with [ex-pat freelancer in Madrid](#). You can find other Q+As on Dispatches. Please note the format. [Another good example](#) was written by Whitney Dangerfield, our publications director, with Helene Stapinski, an NYU adjunct and prolific freelancer.

Week 3: Interviewing for scene

Building observational and listening skills. Show don't tell. Using the five senses to capture details and paint scenes. More interviewing techniques; the rules of threes.

e-book

- Get the name of the dog part 1
- Color and Detail part 1
- How to write a Q and A Power Point

read:

- Flaherty Part 111: Motion
- [Flaco the Owl, Zoo Escapee, Leaves Central Park for the East Village](#)

- [According to TikTok, Americans Are Very, Very Thirsty](#)
- [A Summer Rite in Spain: Coping With the British Tourist Invasion](#)

**Writing assignment: First draft Q&A due Monday, February 10**

Write a 150-word introduction to your interview explaining who the person is and why you are talking to them. Write up four interesting, related questions you asked and their answers, paying attention to accurately reporting the quotes and context. Take a photo of your subject or ask them for a photo.

Week 4: The feature story structure 1

Types of features including news features, sidebars, human interest and backgrounders. How to choose the right one. Structure basics.

e-book:

- News feature planning and structure Power Point
- Get the name of the dog part 2
- Defining a news feature
- Telling a story through a feature
- Feature x-ray

read:

- Flaherty: Part IV Artfulness
- [Paris' rental electric scooter ban has taken effect](#)
- [Daily Blackouts Strain a Poor Spanish Neighborhood. Is Marijuana to Blame?](#)
- [Social media saves traditional herb shop in the heart of Prague](#)
- [Boulangeries in knead: French government rolls out energy aid for bakers](#)

**Writing Assignments: Second draft Q&A and news feature pitch Monday, February, February 17**

Find a story idea based on a local news story. To make it topical, look for a story that ties to a larger theme, like the economy or social issue. Seek out at least three interviews and data points.

Week 5: Ledes, nut grafs, and kickers

Different types of leads. What's a nut graf and how to write and support it. Transition techniques and words. Why the ending is as important as the beginning.



e-book:

- Leads and endings
- What's a nut graf ? Betty Ming Liu
- Feature template
- X-ray read

read:

- [Need to Find a Bathroom in New York City? Try TikTok](#)
- [Tobacco Companies Clean Up Butts in Spain](#)
- [Why beef-loving Brazil is so obsessed with an American steakhouse chain](#)
- [Hungry \(but Not for Human Contact\), Americans Head for the Drive-Through](#)

### **Writing Assignment: News feature draft 1 due Monday, February 24**

Write a 750-word feature story based on your reporting and research. Include two interviews and data points. Make sure you have a soft lede and nut graf. Also include art that relates to the story.

Here are two good examples written by students: [El Rincón Guay: A Haven for LGBTQ+ Immigrants](#) and [Czechs Face Energy Crisis.](#)

Week 6: The feature story structure 2

Managing the “middle” of a feature; transitions and other writing devices; structural approaches

e-book

- Managing the Middle
- Structural Approaches
- X-ray read: Classic
- X-ray read: Wall Street Journal approach
- X-ray read: Five Boxes

Read:

- Flaherty Part VI: Leads and Other Article Parts
- [According to Tik Tok, Americans are Very Very Thirsty](#)
- [How Malaysia Got in on the Secondhand Clothing Boom](#)
- [Ride out: how the #BikeLife movement reclaimed London's streets for its youth.](#)
- [Chef's Table Experience in Prague Fuses Thai Spice with Aussie Passion](#)
- [Foreign Candy Puts American Candy to Shame](#)

## Writing assignment: News feature draft 2 Monday, March 3

Week 7: Research: Going Beyond the Basics; trend stories

How to find expert and other sources of information: academics, authors, advocacy and non profit groups, think tanks, research organizations. Fact checking. Spotting and covering trends

e-book:

- NYU librarian Katy Boss reviews research techniques
- How to research story ideas
- How to partner with experts (video)
- How to Fact Check
- Trend reporting
- Trend rubric
- X-ray read

read

- Flaherty V11: The Big Type
- Sequins, feathers, homemade pasties: D.C.'s queer nightlife is in bloom
- A Mother's Love—a Bargain at \$450 a Year, Plus applicable fees.
- [Can Sukeban Make Female Wrestling Fashionable with Americans?](#)
- Does Anyone Drink Hot Coffee Anymore?
- <https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/nyu-journalism-fact-checking>
- <https://sites.google.com/nyu.edu/digital-verify-module/>

## Writing Assignment: News feature draft 3 and pitch trend due Monday, March 10

Find a trend that reflects cultural or social phenom among the under-30 crowd in your city. Think relationships, arts, culture, lifestyle, lesiure, spending, money.

Two good examples from study-abroad students: [Sketching for the Soul](#) and [Overspending Comes Easy.](#)

Week 8: Review

We are midway through the semester with two major writing assignments in the coming weeks. This is a good time to review some of the essential lessons that we covered in the first part of the semester.

Also think about where you're struggling: story ideas, mining your beat, leads and nut graphs, managing the middle, interviews. We provide links here for easy reviews. We'll also set up one-on-one session to go over your work so far.

Course ebook to review:

- How to find story ideas
- How to cover a beat
- Interview script
- Get the Name of the dog part 1
- Get the Name of the dog part 2
- Color and detail part 1
- Leads and endings
- What is a nut graph
- Managing the middle

**Writing assignment: Trend piece draft 1, Monday, March 17**

Week of March 24: spring break

Week 9: profiles

Profiles come in all styles and sizes, ranging from a 350-word quick hit to a 4,000-word deep dive. Different types of profiles. Tips and techniques on writing meaningful and memorable profile stories.

e-book

- What is a profile
- The Art of the Profile
- Profile Power Point
- X-ray read

Read:

- [Profile: A Sri Lankan Baker's Baguette Conquers France](#)
- [She's a Registered Farmer and She's Only Six Years Old](#)
- [The TikTok Star of Washington Square Park](#)

**Trend piece draft 2 due Monday, March 31**

Week 10 Murder your darlings

Course ebook: The art of revision. What to leave on the cutting room floor. How to work through successive edits. Rewriting strategies. Trimming your prose and striving for clarity.

e-book

- [ME, MYSELF, AND I: EDITING TECHNIQUES -- HOW TO TRIM YOUR PROSE](#)

read:

- [9 Ways to Review and Revise Your Writing](#)
- [How to Self-Edit](#)
- [LITERARY FORENSICS A diagnostic tool for writers and editors](#)

**Assignment: Trend piece draft 3 Monday, April 7**

Week 11: Ethics and accuracy

Course ebook: How to ensure your reporting is truthful, fair and accurate.

Maintaining source lists and paper trails. Ethics, cardinal sins of journalism, and defamation, libel and slander.

e-book

- [NYU Journalism Handbook for Students](#)
- [Makkula Center for Applied Ethics: Journalism Ethics 101](#)
- Final pitch form

Read:

- [Flaherty: Part V Truth and Fairness](#)
- [The Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics](#)

**Writing assignment: Annotated pitch final piece, due Monday, April 14**

Week 12: The Writing Process

Strategies for researching and reporting a longer piece.

e-book

- The Writing Process Power Point

read:

- [Esquire's 70 Best Sentence](#)
- [How listening to foreign languages can enrich your writing](#)

**Assignment: First draft of your final 1000-word piece Monday, April 21**

Week 13: Rewriting and self editing

We've been reading your classmates work all semester. Now you get to edit it!  
You'll be assigned two classmates' final story drafts. Please offer substantive feedback on both the overall content and the writing.

**Writing Assignment: draft two final piece due Monday, April 28**

Week 14: Wrap up

The finish line. One-on-one story conferences

e-book

- Final piece rubric

**Writing Assignment: draft three final piece Monday, May 5**