Writing, Research & Reporting Workshop I: BER (JOUR-GA 1021.001)
Tuesday 8:30 a.m. – 2:20 p.m.

Professor Adam L. Penenberg
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Office Hours: Tuesday 3 p.m. to 5 p.m.; Thursday 11:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.
Rm. #634

Course Description

Writing, Research & Reporting I: BER is designed to help you develop the skills you’ll need to cover business news in all its forms—hard news, soft news, blog posts, columns, profiles, etc. You’ll learn everything from how to write on a daily (or even hourly) deadline for newspapers, websites and wire services to penning short and medium-length magazine pieces, profiles, blogging, database research and literature searches, interview techniques, social media, multimedia, and much more.

The emphasis will be on learning by doing, with regular reporting and writing assignments inside and outside of class. We’ll operate class as a newsroom and launch and maintain a class online publication that focuses on NYC startups. Depending on the week, each student will act as a reporter, editor, copy chief, post and edit stories, come up with art and photos, effectively market the site by engaging in social media, track traffic and analytics—in short, you’ll do what most successful journalists today are expected to do. I’ll also invite professional journalists to lead coverage on topics near and dear to their hearts and to lead small groups to offer expert editing feedback on your stories.

We’ll dissect media coverage by analyzing the merit and structure of good (and bad) news stories, and engage in many in-class writing exercises. You’ll be expected to stay abreast of the news, whether through newspapers such as The New York Times and Wall Street Journal, business magazines (Fortune, Forbes, BusinessWeek, etc.), wire service reports, online news and blogs like Quartz, The Verge, and Vox. By the end of the semester, you should be able to write snappy ledes and smart nut graf as in your sleep—the first step in becoming a first rate journalist—acquired the requisite skills to write tight, informative business stories in various styles for a variety of

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publications and platforms, gained experience as an editor, and amassed a large collection of clips.

**Required texts**


Predictably Irrational, by Dan Ariely

The Associated Press Stylebook

You can pick up used copies of these books for a fraction of the list price.

I will also regularly assign articles, blog posts, research studies, and lots of other material, including a series of Automated Learning Modules (ALM). This is an interactive journalism textbook I created that covers journalism craft, practice, history, ethics, landmark legal cases, as well as grammar and punctuation—the kinds of problems that often bedevil even well trained journalists. ALMs have a series of knowledge checks to test your comprehension and mastery of the material. You must be signed in to the NYU homepage under your NYU email address to access them.

**Attendance**

We’ll do some of our most important work in class, so attendance is key. **Don’t tell me you have to miss a portion of class because you have an interview to conduct or a job interview to attend.** If you are sick and have to miss class, email me beforehand. Don’t make me contact you about it. Three missed classes can result in an **incomplete** for the semester. And don’t be late: it’s disrespectful to your classmates.

**Assignments**

Almost every week you’ll have to research and write a story, which you’ll file with the site’s editors at the beginning of class. We’ll put your story through the usual editorial process—editing, adding additional material, fact checking, copyediting, adding art, before publishing. I’ll also assign shorter pieces in class on tighter deadlines.
**Twitter**

Twitter has become an important platform for journalists. It’s not only an excellent way to market your work; it’s also a media filter. The higher the caliber of people you follow, the higher the quality of the information you can process. (No, it’s not about tweeting about what you had for lunch, your cat’s latest trick or why you are fond of chocolate cupcakes.) It’s what Prof. Jay Rosen calls “mindcasting.” Sign up for Twitter (if you already haven’t) and “follow” selected journalists, media critics, and thinkers relevant to business, technology, the media industry and your chosen blog beat. Stay focused; don’t stray. An easy way to amass people to follow is to search for reporters, editors, and businesspeople on your beat and select from their list of followers. You should tweet every day, multiple times, if possible. That’s the only way for you to attract a following and introduce yourself to the community of journalists. My Twitter handle is @penenberg.

**Facebook Group**

On our BER-18 Facebook Group we will engage in discussions, post links, and share information. Consider it our class hub. While the page is public, and can be seen by anyone, only you and I can post to the group.

**Grades**

Class online publication = 80% of your grade.

You’ll be accessed on the quality and quantity of your posts and writing assignments and leadership as an editor, plus the look and feel of the site (i.e. graphics), the marketing of your work through Twitter, Facebook, etc., site analytics: how much your audience grows over the course of the semester, and amplification. (That is, how often other bloggers pick up on your writings.) This is an opportunity for you to shine, to introduce yourselves to the world, to impress prospective employers.

Final community snapshot assignment with multimedia: 20%.

I won’t be putting grades on the stories we publish for class. Instead I’ll judge your entire body of work over the course of the semester. Have you improved? Have you put into practice what you’ve learned? Did you publish as many assignments as your classmates and you file them on time? In
addition, I will make time to meet with each of you individually to discuss your work, brainstorm ideas, offer tips, etc. If there are times you feel stuck—let’s say your lede isn’t going well, or you’re having trouble conceiving of an angle for a story assignment—email me. I’m happy to help. Or visit me during office hours, although please schedule an appointment in advance, as the line out of my door can get long.

About This Syllabus

This syllabus is not etched in stone. It will likely change during the course of the semester. Sometimes events will dictate a change in plans. Links to online resources can disappear. In that case, I’ll find alternative sources. So go with the flow.

Schedule.

Week 1

Course overview.
Intro to our class online publication and editorial schedule.
Copyright, fair use, and uploading photos/art.
Attribution, plagiarism and other issues.
WRI Facebook group and Twitter.
Introduction to ALMS.
The Inverted Pyramid: ledes and nut grafs (handout).
Writing about startups (introduction).

Read for next class:

“The Newsletter That Became a $100M Business Selling Stuff to Dudes,” by Ryan Tate, Wired:
http://www.wired.com/2014/08/hype-commerce-thrillist/

“Makerbot’s 3D Printers Let Consumers Dream Up Prototypes of Pretty Much Anything,” by Rob Walker, Fast Company:
http://www.fastcompany.com/1802733/makerbots-3-d-
printers-let-consumers-dream-prototypes-pretty-much-anything-do-we-need-more-p

“The Art and Craft of Business,” Economist:

“How Yahoo Killed Flickr and Lost the Internet,” by Matt Honan, Gizmodo:

“Social Media Startup Raises $105 Million, Sealing its Unicorn Status,” by Harini Chakrapani, Crain’s:

Due next class:

ALM Unit 1: What Is Journalism? (60 to 90 minutes):
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OvP--Mu2BDuZUHYZ06iGU1QIbUK0D7urtOTl2sAc/edit?usp=sharing

A 500-word article on a New York startup: minimum one human source that you interview; provide contact information at the bottom of your story.

Week 2

Press conference with Ken Goldstein, an economist with the Conference Board, a New York-based think tank: 845 Third Avenue (btw. 51st & 52nd St.) Meet in class at 8:30 a.m. sharp and travel together uptown. Bring your NYU ID and a Metrocard.

Status of our class online publication.

Editing techniques: focus, logic, transitions, proof, cutting extraneous material.

Economic Indicators (introduction).
Break into groups to edit and workshop New York startup stories (post final drafts to our class online publication).

Read/view for next class:

“What’s Up With That: Why It’s So Hard to Catch Your Own Typos,” by Nick Stockton, Wired:
http://www.wired.com/2014/08/wuwt-typos/

“Six unusual Economic Indicators,” by Danielle Kurtzleben, ABC News:

Watch “50 Economic Indicators That Really Matter: Simon Constable's guide to the indicators a savvy investor watches” (7-minute video):

Four Major US Fundamental Indicators Introduction:
http://www.jmibrokers.com/4majorusfundamental


A 500-word analysis piece on an economic indicator—housing, price levels, consumer confidence, McDonald’s Big Macs. I encourage you to use material and quotes from your Conference Board visit.
Week 3

Editorial meeting (8:30 a.m. – 9 a.m.): Executive Editor, Managing Editor, and Photo/Social Media Editor. Rest of class convenes at 9 a.m.
AP style: editing and copyediting articles for our class publication (introduction).
More ledes & nut grafs (handout).
Break into small groups to edit and workshop economic indicator stories.
Research Librarian Katy Boss presents a seminar on useful databases and resources covering business.

Due next class:

Bobst Library Database Primer/Test. This automated module walks you through the most important databases for journalists that NYU licenses. You must be signed into your NYU account to access it:
https://goo.gl/forms/YAdXdHmyOB9ypV5a2

A 500-word article (minimum of two human sources) on tourism and the dollar. Head to Soho or the Village and interview tourists, shopkeepers, vendors, etc. to find out why so many foreign tourists are attracted to shopping in NYC. What are they buying? Where are they shopping? What countries do they come from? Check exchange rates against the dollar. Conduct background research on the issue. Make sure you get contact information from each source in case you need to go back for more information or clarifications, and ask for a job description so you can describe her.

Read for next class:

“The End of the Printed Newspaper,” by Clay Shirky: https://medium.com/@cshirky/last-call-c682f6471c70

“We Have No Idea If Online Ads Work,” by Jordan Weissmann:
http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/technology/201
4/06/online_advertising_effectiveness_for_large_brands_online_ads_may_be_worthless.single.html


Week 4

Editorial meeting (8:30 a.m. – 9 a.m.): Executive Editor, Managing Editor, and Photo/Social Media Editor. Rest of class convenes at 9 a.m.
The business of journalism, the decline of print, and how advertising works. The end of monopolizing readers’ attention.
Ethics discussion: Conflicts of interest, undercover reporting, recording interviews, libel, and other potential issues.
Startups that pivot
Break into groups to edit and workshop tourism and the dollar stories.

ALM Unit 2: Research & Interviews (60 to 90 minutes): https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tyhapnMyqzVpXcxKxXv6qvLoU4f7JMdZJ7xAvjTLPI/edit?usp=sharing

Due next class: A 600-word story on a startup that pivoted. Don’t profile a nearby dry cleaner. Stretch beyond that. Conduct an in-person interview with someone from the company (in a position of authority). Before you meet dig up online as much information about her as possible. You must have a minimum of two additional quoted sources in your story beyond the person from the company you interviewed.
**Week 5**

Bobst Library Treasure Hunt (3 hours). Meet in the Bobst Library Atrium at 8:30 a.m. sharp. Bring your smartphone and be sure you have downloaded a QR Reader app beforehand. The top three finishers can apply their points to buy their way out of a future assignment (some restrictions).

Editorial meeting (12:30 p.m. – 1 p.m.): Executive Editor, Managing Editor, and Photo/Social Media Editor. Rest of class convenes at 1 p.m.

In-class writing assignment: The “hot take.”

Earnings reports (handout).

Due next class: 500-word earnings report on a company of your choice. You can find company press releases at prnewswire.com and businesswire.com or take part on an earnings report conference call.

ALM Unit 3: The Structure of News:
[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vq2_4PaKILCq9gIrpgg-EZJYDpKpSCXExoR_qqps1Vs/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1vq2_4PaKILCq9gIrpgg-EZJYDpKpSCXExoR_qqps1Vs/edit?usp=sharing)

**Week 6**

Covering an event in-class assignment. Come to class at 8:30 a.m. sharp to receive your assignment (500 to 750 words). Deadline is noon sharp.

Editorial meeting (12:30 p.m. – 1 p.m.): Executive Editor, Managing Editor, and Photo/Social Media Editor. Rest of class convenes at 1 p.m.

Break into groups to edit and workshop your earnings reports and upload to the site.

Read for next class:

*Predictably Irrational.*

“My Outsourced Life,” by A.J. Jacobs, Esquire:

“This Column Was Outsourced by Servio,” by Adam L. Penenberg, Fast Company: 
http://www.fastcompany.com/1773610/column-was-crowdsourced-servio


Due next class:

Carry out a Predictably Irrational experiment and write it up as a case study. I’ll email you samples that past BER students have completed to give you an idea of the format.

Week 7

Editorial meeting (8:30 a.m. – 9 a.m.): Executive Editor, Managing Editor, and Photo/Social Media Editor. Rest of class convenes at 9 a.m.
TV interviews: We’ll head to the NYU TV studio where you’ll act as both interviewer and interviewee on camera (9 a.m. - 11 a.m.) The topic: your Predictably Irrational experiments.
You, the story: Using your own experiences as the basis for stunt journalism.
Writing short and trimming your prose: Condensing complexity into few words (in-class exercise).

Due next week:

ALM Unit 4: Ethics: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1TppF08AKPCKBrsvpua_BtZlbUBCHciy2nBTMcQioVA8/edit?usp=sharing

A 750-word stunt journalism piece (that features you).

Week 8

Editorial meeting (8:30 a.m. – 9 a.m.): Executive Editor, Managing Editor, and Photo/Social Media Editor. Rest of class convenes at 9 a.m.
Workshopping your stunt journalism pieces.
In-class hard news writing assignments on a variety of topics and deadlines.
The art of the explainer/Storify/live blogging.
Upcoming election coverage: We’ll be taking trip to a swing state the weekend before the Nov. 8th election to report from the field. We’ll brainstorm potential topics in class. Plus, you’ll be assigned a neighborhood from which to report and file stories on Election Day.

Read/view for next week:

The Fracking Song (My Water's On Fire Tonight): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=timfvNgr_Q4

“Quantitative Easing Explained”:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PTUY16CkS-k

Mashable coverage of Ferguson protests on Storify:
https://storify.com/mashable/ferguson-live-updates-con-t

Reuters Live Blogs: http://live.reuters.com/#LiveEvents

“Steve Jobs: A Mega, Meta Appreciation”:

“Last Week Tonight with John Oliver: Native Advertising”:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_F5GxCwize

“Women as Background Decoration: Tropes vs. Women in Video Games” (video: contains graphical sexual and violent game footage and language):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5i_RPr9DwMA

Read for next class:

US election 2016: How does it all work? 

Fivethirtyeight’s election poll:
http://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/2016-election-forecast/#now


Due next class:

Create your own explainer related to the upcoming presidential election. You can examine the Electoral College or express differences in the positions of the two major presidential candidates. You can analyze the impact of swing states on the election or create a graphic that shows how the polls have changed over time. You can create a mash-up of election predictions or offer a history of voting in the United States. Whatever topic you choose, make it fun and interesting. Post to our class online publication before the start of class.
**Week 9**

Editorial meeting (8:30 a.m. – 9 a.m.): Executive Editor, Managing Editor, and Photo/Social Media Editor. Rest of class convenes at 9 a.m.

Explainer presentations. We’ll view each one in class and offer feedback.

Election 2016: We’ll look at the latest news on the election and publish quick reaction pieces in class.

Brainstorm topics for stories from the road.

Nov. 5th – 6th: We’ll travel to a swing state to report from the field. Details to follow.

Due in **two** weeks: Contact a journalist and interview her/him about a story. Deconstruct all the steps—from the initial idea to the research to final publication. Provide a step-by-step breakdown (minimum 1200 words) in a detailed case study. (I’ll share samples from previous years’ students to give you an idea as to format.)

**Week 10**

Election Day coverage. You’ll report from the field while editors prep your stories for the site. The Photo/Social Media Editor will run a live blog covering today’s events.

Read for next class:


Due next class: Journalist case study.

Week 11

Editorial meeting (8:30 a.m. – 9 a.m.): Executive Editor, Managing Editor, and Photo/Social Media Editor. Rest of class convenes at 9 a.m.
Post journalism case studies to site after copyediting.
Community snapshots: You’ll choose a NYC neighborhood to profile.
Google-fu: How to pull up vast amounts of information on someone (in-class exercise).
Covering tech: Tracking a black hat hacker selling cybermunitions, tracing IP addresses, finding out who is behind anonymous email and domain addresses (WHOIS) lookups, IP spoofing, using patents and trademarks to inform your reporting
Encryption: what journalists should know about protecting sources and information from prying eyes.

Due next class: 800-word business piece or profile with a technology slant. It could be about a New York Silicon Alley tech company or some aspect of business security—hackers v. computer systems, protecting integrity of medical records, security products, etc.
Minimum of three quoted sources.

Read for next class:

“Roulette Russian,” by Julia Ioffe, New Yorker: http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/05/17/roulette-russian
“Motorhead Messiah,” by Clive Thompson, Fast Company:
http://www.fastcompany.com/60868/motorhead-messiah

“Defcon Live,” by Adam L. Penenberg, Forbes:
http://www.forbes.com/1999/07/16/feat2.html

Also: Compile as much information (articles, blog posts, and other data) on the neighborhood you’ll be covering for your final project. Write a 1-page memo on the major themes you will focus on. What kind of multimedia will you create?

Week 12

Editorial meeting (8:30 a.m. – 9 a.m.): Executive Editor, Managing Editor, and Social Media Editor. Rest of class convenes at 9 a.m.
Present your neighborhood snapshot memo to our in-house editorial board for feedback.
Workshop biz-tech articles.
Wire Service test (in-class assignment). Write three articles in under an hour.
The impact of blogging, tagging, social media and citizen journalism on news coverage. Twitter as a news platform.

Read for next class:

1) The Death and Life of Chicago,” by Ben Austen:

2) “Brooklyn Communal Cool: The Brand,” by Julie Satow:
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/02/nyregion/brooklyn-communal-cool-the-brand.html?hp&_r=1

3) “Costly Rents Push Brooklynites to Queens,” by Michelle Higgins:
http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/18/realestate/costly-
4) New York’s Next Hot Neighborhoods,” by Michelle Higgins, New York Times: 

Due next class:

ALM Unit 5: The Modern Age of Journalism

1st draft of your neighborhood snapshot 1200 words). It has to be a full draft, ready to workshop. I’ll invite editors and reporters from major news organizations to lead small groups and offer feedback on your drafts.

Due in two weeks: Final draft of your project:
Community snapshot (1,200 words + video segment, which you’ll post to the class blog.)

Week 13

1 p.m. – 2:20 p.m: workshop 1st draft of your community snapshot.

Due next class: Community snapshot final draft + video segment.

Week 14

Final project due: Community snapshot (1,200 words + video segment).
Multimedia presentation: Present the class your video segments for your community snapshots.
Tips for internships and landing a job in journalism.

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