**Feature Reporting & Writing**

**Fall 2021**

**11 a.m.-12:15 p.m. MW**

**Meeting Room Carroll Hall Room 58**

**Sakai:**

**Instructor: Angelia Herrin**

**Office Hours: By appointment, live or Zoom**

**Best way to find me:** [**angelial@email.unc.edu**](mailto:angelial@email.unc.edu)

**If you really need me: 857 752 6766**

**Zoom Room for Meetings:**

***“Thank God for stories – for those who have them, for those who tell them, for those who devour them as the soul sustenance that they are. Stories give shape to experience and allow us to go through life unblind. Without them, everything that happens would float around, undifferentiated. None of it would mean anything. Once you have a version of what happened, all the other good stuff about being human comes into play. You can laugh, feel awe, commit a passionate act, get pissed, want to change things.” - Alex Tizon***

In this class, we are going to tell stories. The kind of stories that readers are eager to read because they connect the dots, illuminate the world, and make us stop and think and feel how we are connected.

 When you read a feature story that ticks all these boxes, you can’t help asking “HOW did the writer do this?” As a journalism student, you already know the answer: Hard work.

This class will demand that hard work, as you study the tools and techniques of feature writing and build your skills. Much reading, research and interviewing is involved. *Hint: If you don’t like talking to people, this class is probably not for you!* There are weekly writing and editing and rewriting assignments. Class meetings are discussions that demand full participation, as we explore generating story ideas, developing interview and reporting skills, experimenting with themes and structures and embracing the art of critique and rewrite.

So, the work will be challenging, but as Pulitzer Prize-winning author Katherine Boo, says it won’t be boring: “You can’t help but know this kind of work is mind-stretching, life-enhancing, slap-up fun. Go out and find some of it.”

What You Can Learn From This Class:

* How to identify good feature story ideas
* How to research, report and interview for impact
* How to refine writing techniques such as tension, action, detail and character
* How to “show” more and “tell” less.
* How to structure a long-form story, organize it and engage readers
* How to connect the dots and explain what a story *really* means
* How to become a better writer and reporter

Textbooks and Resources

Required texts are:

**"Writing Tools: 55 Essential Strategies for Every Writer"** by Roy Peter Clark. (Available at bookstore and through Amazon)

The **AP Stylebook** and **JOMC Stylebook**.

All other resources will be found in Sakai:  Assigned readings and discussion board will be used for each class.

  Assignments

A story will be due once every three or four weeks**. Start thinking about and planning for ALL assignments at the beginning of the semester. You will send a writing memo to the instructor for each story.  Your upfront work in exploring topics, identifying issues and interviews is crucial.** Writers who challenge themselves with meaty stories or stories that are hard to get will be rewarded. Mundane, simplistic stories will be graded accordingly.

 Best way to fail? **Leave it to last-minute scrambling for a topic and interviews.** The best stories are filled with detail, anecdotes and description. Seeing people, places and events with your own eyes, hearing sounds and voices, feeling the air, smelling the atmosphere all contribute to excellent stories. The easiest way to get those details is to be where they are happening. If you are uncomfortable going out to interview in person, you will need to be able to get this in-depth information another way.

There are four major stories in this class and a final narrative story.

The first story is a 700-word short profile with three human sources, contact information included at the end of story. Stories two and four are reported feature stories that **are 1,000,to 1,200 words each** with four human sources

Students may NOT write a first-person story until we reach the first-person assignment. The third story is a first-person REPORTED story, at 1,000 words with two humans sources ( that doesn’t include you.!)The final is a narrative 1500 to 2,000 word story with FIVE HUMAN SOURCES.

A properly formatted memo pitching your story is **due one week** before these each story are turned in to Sakai: The memo for the final piece is due six weeks before finals. Failure to submit this on time will be reflected in your grade because it means that you haven't planned well, don't take the deadline seriously and/or have no idea what you're going to write about. Each is a recipe for failure. You will have an individual meeting with me to discuss your memo and plan!

WORD of CAUTION. We are doing original work. You may **not** submit stories written for another class or a publication, including the Daily Tar Heel. Instead we will write original stories you expect to get published.  Each student should strive to have their story selected to be a recommended entree for the Hearst Awards. The categories are Feature Writing, Sports Writing and Personality Profiles. This is a description of each category and expectations: http://www.hearstawards.org/guidelines/entry-guidelines/writing/

**Final story:**

The final story will be a narrative non-fiction feature in which you will shadow a source or sources for some time and write the story from a narrative perspective. This feature, like the other stories you write for this class, must be written in third person. Reporting for this story is crucial. Writers must set up their follow/shadowing reporting early to have enough time to gain experience with the source to be able to tell the story from inside.

The format is the same as a regular feature except the word length is 1,500-2,000. **At least five human sources are required**.

 A stern word on deadlines: Stories submitted after the deadline will be accepted but will be considered late. Late stories are docked one letter grade for each day they are tardy.

**Classwork**

**Stories:** In most classes we will discuss several stories. We will use the Sakai Weekly folder to post feature stories of interest for in-class discussion. Each student will lead a discussion based on the feature story he or she selected. Students will be expected to have read the stories and make comments on them on the Sakai Discussion page prior to the discussion. **This counts as part of your class participation grade**.

              Your selected story must be posted on SAKAI four days prior to your presentation.

**Readings**: I will assign readings about writing for most classes from the text or other sources. The purpose is to teach you skills about the craft and to encourage you to think about your style.

**Writing:** You will write from a prompt I give you on many days. The purpose is to allow you time to practice specific challenges in your writing craft. I will read, comment and return these promptly. These writing exercises will not be graded. They are designed for you to experiment with your writing.

**Quiz**

Writing skills are important. That's why we use the Roy Peter Clark text. Two-thirds of the way through the semester you will be quizzed on the writing tools in the text.

**Grading:**

All grading on stories is to a great extent subjective, as are opinions of editors and readers. An editor will be judging your style, mechanics, reporting, precision, enterprise, how you write, how you capture a reader’s interest and maintain it, tone and whether the story is interesting. I will evaluate your stories the same way. Turn in a story to a publication that’s boring to the editor and it won’t be published. Make silly style or grammar mistakes and no one will assign you a story. Be professional.

Grade breakdown:

                             Classwork                       15%

                          Story 1 profile             10%

Story 2 15%

Story 3 (First person) 10 % (one grade)

Story 4                           20%

                             Final                               30%

Stories 1, 2, and 3 will be graded twice. Each grade will have the same weight. I will read, comment on and grade your first version story. My comments will address reporting, writing and form. You may then rework your story to improve it and **resubmit it within three days.**

I will read, comment on and grade your story on its rewrite. If you do not turn in a rewrite you will get a zero. This will be based on the story's final form AND how much you've improved it. WARNING: If that first version does not have all the sources, and a sound structure – you are in very low-grade territory.

 Rewritten stories can NOT get a higher grade than a 91.

Grading throughout the semester is conducted on a numerical scale. Each student begins each assignment with a raw score of 100. Points are added or subtracted from that according to the standards listed below. You may determine your approximate grade standing in the course by converting your numerical grades to letter grades on your assignments according to this scale:

**90 and above                = A**

**80 - 89                             = B**

**70 - 79                             = C**

**60 - 69                             = D**

**below 60                         = F**

Grades will be assigned plusses and minuses using this scale: A numerical grade of 80-82.9 is a B-; 83-87.9 is a B;

and 88-89.9 is a B+. The same applies to all letter grades except there is no A+ or D-.

**Under the definitions established by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, students who receive the following letter grades are considered to have reached the level of attainment defining that letter. Thus, letter grades received for reporting and writing courses may be interpreted this way:**

**Generally speaking, for stories:  
A = publishable story with no factual or style errors and written well.  
B = near-publishable story with minor errors of style or logic; no fact errors; needs revision.  
C = unpublishable story with serious errors of style, logic, reporting or readability.  
D = sub-par, unpublishable work with major errors of style, logic, approach; reporting gaps; low level of engagement with the story  
F = unacceptable work, including factual errors, many style errors, major logical errors, minimal reporting; generally embarrassing to the writer. Don’t go here.**

**Seeking Help**

**If you need individual assistance, it’s your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you have a question or aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.**

Attendance:

**University Policy:**

No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](https://ars.unc.edu/) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](https://eoc.unc.edu/what-we-do/accommodations/) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](https://odos.unc.edu/), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators,](https://womenscenter.unc.edu/resources/gender-violence-services/) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](https://eoc.unc.edu/what-we-do/accommodations/) (EOC).

**Class Policy**:

*Instructors may work with students to meet attendance needs that do not fall within University approved absences. For situations when an absence is not University approved (e.g., a job interview or club activity), instructors determine their own approach to missed classes and make-up assessments and assignments.* Please communicate with me early about potential absences. Please be aware that you are bound by the [Honor Code](http://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/honor-code/) when making a request for a University approved absence.

*(source:*[*http://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/attendance-grading-examination/*](http://catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/attendance-grading-examination/)*)*

**HONOR CODE:**  
I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system ([http://honor.unc.edu](https://outlook.unc.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=_PwXhu5wkEKfdEIVTpil9KJAr6RORM8IBwmgW7JyZPUuO4or7Dri_9D4gXEkBO0Z0IIreRKEjIQ.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fhonor.unc.edu)). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor’s responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean C. A. Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

ARS

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: [https://ars.unc.edu](https://ars.unc.edu/) or email [ars@unc.edu](mailto:ars@unc.edu).

(source: <https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>)

Counseling and Psychological Services

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more. 

*TITLE IX*

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University’s Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim – [titleixcoordinator@unc.edu](mailto:titleixcoordinator@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](https://safe.unc.edu/).

POLICY ON NON-DISCRIMINATION

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals’ abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University’s [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](https://unc.policystat.com/policy/4467906/latest/) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.  Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at  [safe.unc.edu](https://safe.unc.edu/)) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](http://eoc.unc.edu/), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students.  Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve; I appreciate any suggestions.  More broadly, our school has adopted diversity and inclusion [mission and vision statements](http://hussman.unc.edu/diversity-and-inclusion) with accompanying goals. These complement the University policy on [prohibiting harassment and discrimination](https://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm/).  In summary, UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. The Dean of Students (Suite 1106, Student Academic Services Building, CB# 5100, 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5100 or [919] 966-4042) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the University’s nondiscrimination policies.

MASK USE

All enrolled students are required to wear a mask covering your mouth and nose at all times in our classroom. This requirement is to protect our educational community -- your classmates and me – as we learn together. If you choose not to wear a mask, or wear it improperly, I will ask you to leave immediately, and I will submit a report to the [Office of Student Conduct](https://cm.maxient.com/reportingform.php?UNCChapelHill&layout_id=23).  At that point you will be disenrolled from this course for the protection of our educational community. Students who have an authorized accommodation from Accessibility Resources and Service have an exception.  For additional information, see <https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/university-guidelines-for-facemasks/>.

Syllabus Changes

The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

**DAY BY DAY SCHEDULE**

**As noted above, this syllabus is subject to change, so stay alert and read the CLASS NOTE  that I send out a least once a week. The notes are essential guidance to making your way through the class – and of course they are entertaining.**

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| **Week** | **Date** | **Topic** | **Readings & Assignments** |
| 1 | Wednesday, Aug 18 | Opening Day!  Syllabus Review | * Interview assignments due Thursday in Sakai, 8 p.m. |
| 2 | Monday, Aug 23 | What Makes a Great Story?  How do you find one? | * READ stories in Week 2 folder. * COMMENT on Sakai * PREP for Spitball |
| 2 | Wednesday, Aug 25 | Pitch Those Great Ideas | * READ pitch story package in Week 2 folder * READ Writing Tools 1-5 |
| 3 | Monday, Aug 30 | Secrets of the Dead | * READ story package in Week 3 folder and comment on Sakai * READ Writing Tools 5-11 * Your in-class writing assignment due |
| 3 | Wednesday, Sept 1 | A Person of Interest: Profiles! | * READ story package in Week 3 folder and COMMENT on Sakai * READ Writing Tools 5-10 * **Submit Profile memo THURSDAY by 8 a.m.** |
| 4 | Monday, Sept 6 | **NO CLASS** |  |
| 4 | Wednesday, Sept 8 | Interviewing: What Could Possibly Go Wrong? | * READ story package on Sakai * READ and COMMENT on Stories and Student Story on Sakai |
| 5 | Monday, Sept 13 | WORKSHOP PROFILE | * READ story package in Week 5 on Sakai * READ and COMMENT on Stories AND Student Story on Sakai |
| 5 | Wednesday, Sept 15 | Mark it on your Calendar: Event Stories  In-class Exercise | * READ story package in Week 5 on Sakai * READ and COMMENT on Student Story * READ Writing Tools 11-16, plus, bonus chapter 22 * **Memo for Second story due Sept. 19** |
| 6 | Monday, Sept 20 | How to Hook a Reader: Leads and Angles | * READ Story Package in Week 6 folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ Writing Tools 23-26 |
| 6 | Wednesday, Sept 22 | Exploring Narrative Long Form | * READ Story Package in Week 6 folder * READ and COMMENT on stories and student story |
| 7 | Monday, Sept 27 | Workshop Event: Second Story | * READ and COMMENT on student story |
| 7 | Wednesday, Sept 29 | GUEST SPEAKER | * Read story package and POST QUESTIONS in Week 7 folder * READ and COMMENT on student story |
| 8 | Monday, Oct 4 | Reader Rewards: Give Me a Good Reason to Keep Reading! | * READ Story Package in Week 8 folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ Writing Tools 32-33 |
| 8 | Wednesday, Oct 6 | Like a Brick House: What Structure Can Do for Your Story | * READ Story Package in Week 8 folder * READ and COMMENT on student story |
| 9 | Monday, Oct 11 | Make It Personal: Beauty and Danger of First Person | * READ story package in Week 9 Folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ Writing Tools 17-21 * **NOTE: YOUR THIRD STORY MEMO IS DUE WEDNESDAY** |
| 9 | Wednesday, Oct 13 | The Sweetest Thing | * READ Story Package in Week 9 folder * READ and COMMENT on stories and student story |
| 10 | Monday, Oct 18 | A Sense of an Ending | * READ Story Package in Week 10 folder * READ and COMMENT on stories and student story |
| 10 | Wednesday, Oct 20 | Workshop Event: Third Story | * READ Writing Tool 39 * **FINAL PROJECT MEMO DUE OCT 22** |
| 10 | Friday, Oct 22 | **NO CLASS** | * **DID YOU TURN IN YOUR PROJECT MEMO??** |
| 11 | Monday, Oct 25 | The VOICE | * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ and COMMENT on Story Package in Week 11 folder |
| 11 | Wednesday, Oct 27 | Small is Beautiful: Writing Short and Tight | * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ and COMMENT on Story Package in Week 11 folder |
| 12 | Monday, Nov 1 | **PROJECT CHECK-IN!**  **NO FORMAL CLASS** | Make your appointments!!!!  Fourth Story Memo Due TUESDAY 8 a.m. |
| 12 | Wednesday, Nov 3 | Metaphor, Poetry and Place | * READ stories in Week 12 folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ Writing Tools 27-30 |
| 13 | Monday, Nov 8 | Literary Forensics and the Art of Self Editing | * READ stories in Week 13 folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ Writing Tools 40-45 |
| 13 | Wednesday, Nov 10 | Workshop Fourth Stories | * READ stories in Week 13 folder * READ and COMMENT on student story |
| 14 | Monday, Nov 15 | Tools of the Trade | * READ stories in Week 14 folder * READ and COMMENT on student story |
| 14 | Wednesday, Nov 17 | The Ethics of the Truth | * READ stories in Week 14 folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ Writing Tools 46-50 |
| 15 | Monday, Nov 22 | GUEST SPEAKER |  |
| 15 | Wednesday, Nov 24 | THANKSGIVING!  **NO CLASS!!!** |  |
| 16 | Monday, Nov 29 | In-class EDITS ON PROJECT | * READ assigned editing partners!!! |
| 16 | Wednesday, Dec 1 | Last Class Event | * PRE-READING required |