

## Feature Reporting & Writing

Fall 2023

2 p.m- 3:15 p.m. MW

Meeting Room Carroll Hall Room 58

Instructor: Angelia Herrin

Office Hours: By appointment (after class is always good!). We can be live or Zoom

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

If you really need me: 857 753 6766

Zoom Room <https://unc.zoom.us/j/94280439175?pwd=eXhUZDRaL0FCOUJzUnduVjlsWU51dz09>

Meeting ID: 942 8043 9175

Passcode: 596429

***“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 we connect the dots, illuminate the world, and make readers stop and think and feel how we are all 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! If you don't like reading, get out now!* 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 800-word short profile with at least three human sources, contact information included at the end of story. Stories two, three and four are reported feature stories that **are 1,000, to 1,200 words each** with four human sources contact info at the end.

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 research plus three humans ( 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 the first four stories 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 these on time will be reflected in your grade because it tells me 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 final 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 three 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. **YOU WILL BE COMMENTING ON THE FORUM BOARDS FOR EACH ONE.** And your grade will be impacted if you do not THINK before you write – and if you miss the 5 a.m. deadline.

**Writing:** In class, 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 – get your mind out of the 153 Trap.

### **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. I don't discuss every chapter with you in class, but you will be sad, very sad, if you do not read and stay up. At least that is what former students tell me.

## 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 %
Story 4	20%
Final	30%

Stories 1, 2, 3 and 4 will be graded twice. I will read, comment and grade BOTH versions.

My comments 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 for that version and it will be averaged in. Otherwise, second grade is based on the story AND how much you've improved it. If that first version does not have all the sources, and a sound structure – you are in very low-grade territory.

Rewrites will NOT get a higher grade than a 92 unless you blow my socks off. And I wear socks.

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:

<b>92 and above</b>	<b>= A</b>
<b>80 - 89</b>	<b>= B</b>
<b>70 - 79</b>	<b>= C</b>
<b>60 - 69</b>	<b>= D</b>
<b>below 60</b>	<b>= F</b>

Grades will be assigned plusses and minuses using this scale: A numerical grade of 80-83 is a B-; 84-87.9 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](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (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](#) when making a request for a University approved absence.*

*(source: <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>). 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 Associate Dean Julie Dixon-Green, 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> 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](http://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](#) 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](http://safe.unc.edu)) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), 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](#) with accompanying goals. These complement the University policy on [prohibiting harassment and discrimination](#). 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.

### 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 at least once a week. The notes are essential guidance to making your way through the class – and of course they are incredibly, endlessly, amazingly entertaining.**

Week	Date	Topic	Readings & Assignments
1	MONDAY August 21	Opening Day! Syllabus Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Interview assignments due Tuesday, August 22, 11 p.m. in Sakai</li> </ul>
1	WEDNESDAY August 23	What Makes a Great Story? How do you find one?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ stories in Week One folder.</li> <li>▪ COMMENT on stories in Sakai forum by 5 a.m. WEDNESDAY</li> <li>▪ PREP for Spitball: Submit a list of ideas SUNDAY by 8 p.m.</li> </ul>
2	MONDAY, August 28	Finding Stories Part Two How to Pitch Those Great Ideas: TRY IT OUT How to Use a Writing Tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT story package in Week Two folder</li> <li>▪ Did you submit your spitball list?</li> <li>▪ READ Writing Tools 1-5</li> </ul>
2	WEDNESDAY, August 30	A Person of Interest: Profiles!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT on story package in Week Two folder</li> <li>▪ READ Writing Tools 6-10</li> <li>▪ Submit Profile memo by <b>September 5, TUESDAY, 9 a.m.</b></li> </ul>
3	MONDAY September 4	Labor Day No Class	
3	WEDNESDAY September 6	Secrets of the Dead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Did you get the profile memo to me?</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> <li>▪ READ story package in Week Three folder and student story and COMMENT on Sakai</li> <li>▪ READ Writing Tools 11-12</li> </ul>
4	MONDAY September 11	Interviewing: What Could Possibly Go Wrong? Sources and their sources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ story package in Week Four</li> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT on Stories and Student Story on Sakai</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> </ul>
4	WEDNESDAY September 13	Leads and Angles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Do not forget your profile is due in Sakai at noon Sunday, September 17</b></li> <li>• READ story package in week Four</li> <li>• READ and COMMENT on Stories and Student Story on Sakai</li> <li>• PRESENTER</li> </ul>



5	MONDAY September 18	<b>WORKSHOP PROFILE STORY ONE : BRING THREE COPIES</b>  <b>Everyone is a Critic- How to be a Good ONE</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ story package in Week Five on Sakai</li> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT on Stories AND Student Story on Sakai</li> <li>▪ REWRITE is due FRIDAY by Midnight</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> </ul>
5	WEDNESDAY September 20	Mark it on your Calendar: Event/Trend Stories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ story package in Week Five</li> <li>READ and COMMENT on story and Student Story</li> <li>▪ READ Writing Tools 13-16, plus, bonus chapter 22</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> <li>▪ <b>Second story memo due by Tuesday. September 26. HAPPY TO READ IT EARLIER!</b></li> </ul>
6	MONDAY September 25	No Class  FALL BREAK	
6	WEDNESDAY September 27	How to Hook a Reader: Leads and Angles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Did I get your memo for story two? We are going to spitball it today</li> <li>▪ READ Story Package in Week Six</li> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT on story and student story</li> <li>▪ READ Writing Tools 23-26</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> </ul>
7	MONDAY October 2	Reader Rewards and Structure: Give me a Reason to Keep Reading!  <b>GOLD COIN DAY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ Story Package in Week Seven and student story and COMMENT</li> <li>▪ Read Writing Tools 21</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> </ul>
7	WEDNESDAY October 4	So How Would YOU Build this story ?(in class exercise )	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• READ and COMMENT on student story</li> <li>• Read instructions for class exercise</li> <li>• Story from Exercise Due Friday a.m.</li> <li>• PRESENTER</li> </ul>
	MONDAY October 9	<b>Workshop Story Two: BRING THREE COPIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• READ and COMMENT on student story</li> <li>• PRESENTER</li> </ul>

8			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rewrite due Saturday noon</li> </ul>
8	WEDNESDAY October 11	<b>Guest Speaker</b>  <b>Richard Griffiths, former vice president of CNN Network</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT on student story</li> <li>▪ READ WRITING TOOLS 32-33</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> </ul>
9	MONDAY October 16	Make it Personal: Dangers and Beauty of First Person	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ Story Package in Week Nine folder</li> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT on story and student story</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> <li>▪ <b>First Person Story memo Due Sunday, October 20 noon! HAPPY TO READ IT EARLIER</b></li> </ul>
9	WEDNESDAY October 18	A Sense of an Ending: Making a Plan Part One	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ Story Package in Week Nine folder and COMMENT on story and student story</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> </ul>
10	MONDAY October 23	EXPLORING NARRATIVE PART ONE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ story package in Week Ten</li> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT on story and student story</li> <li>▪ READ Writing Tools 17-21</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> <li>▪ <b>YOUR FOURTH STORY MEMO IS DUE</b></li> </ul>
10	WEDNESDAY October 25	<b>The Sweetest Thing</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT story in Week 10 and on student story</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> </ul>
11	MONDAY, October 30	<b>Workshop Story Three: BRING THREE COPIES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ Story Package in Week 9 folder</li> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT on stories and student story</li> <li>▪ Your rewrite due SATURDAY noon</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> </ul>

11	WEDNESDAY November 1	Like a Brick House: Structure and Scene Blocks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Your Final Project Memo is due: Spitball in Class</li> <li>▪ READ AND COMMENT on Stories in Week Eleven and student story</li> <li>▪ Presenter</li> </ul>
12	MONDAY November 6	Metaphor and poetry and a Sense of Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ Story Package in Week Twelve</li> <li>▪ READ AND COMMENT on stories and student story</li> <li>▪ READ Writing Tools 34, 35</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> </ul>
12	WEDNESDAY November 8	One on One Consults	INDIVIDUAL MEETING SCHEDULE WILL BE IN RESOURCES: We will discuss progress on story Four, your project development
13	MONDAY November 13	<b>Speaker Jerri Rowe explains how to put it all together</b>	READ and COMMENT on Student Story  PRESENTER
13	WEDNESDAY November 15	Literary Forensics and Transitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read and Comment on stories and student story</li> <li>• READ Writing Tools 40-45</li> <li>• PRESENTER</li> </ul>
14	MONDAY November 20	<b>WORKSHOP STORY FOUR: Bring Three Copies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT on student story</li> <li>▪ READ Writing Tools 27-30</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> </ul>
14	WEDNESDAY November 22	Happy Thanksgiving  NO CLASS	
15	MONDAY November 27	<b>Small is Beautiful</b>  <b>Writing Tools Quiz</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ READ stories in Week 13 folder</li> <li>▪ READ and COMMENT on stories and student story</li> <li>▪ READ Writing Tools 40-45</li> <li>▪ PRESENTER</li> </ul>
15	WEDNESDAY November 29	The Ethics of Finding and Telling the Truth in Feature Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• READ stories in Week 13 folder</li> <li>• READ and COMMENT on student story</li> <li>• READ Writing Tools 40-45</li> <li>• PRESENTER</li> </ul>

16	MONDAY December 4	<b>InClass Edits on Your Final Project: Bring TWO COPIES</b>	BRING YOUR BEST FIRST DRAFT and Let YOUR EDITING TEAM HELP!!
16	WEDNESDAY December 6	That Voice Thing (and how AI can help)  LAST CLASS!!!!!!!	
FINAL	MONDAY December 11	TBA Local	TURN IN FINAL PROJECT IN SAKAI! By MIDNIGHT