

MEJO 356.2  
Feature Writing  
Carroll Hall- Room 128-Hall of Fame  
Monday/Wednesday  
11:00 am-12:15 pm

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**THERE IS NO SAKAI or CANVAS SITE FOR THIS COURSE.**

### **Feature Stories:**

Excellent Feature Stories are difficult and challenging stories to report and write because they are so much more demanding than the regular news story. They require more of the journalist. The journalist must remain a highly skilled reporter but also equally be a wonderful and engaging storyteller.

Long-form stories, or feature stories, use excellent reporting as the foundation of the story. Facts matter to the feature story. Collecting documents, facts, interviewing sources, quoting sources, all go into creating an excellent feature. In addition, feature writers then must use literary techniques to tell their stories and engage their audiences using observational reporting, experiential reporting, descriptive writing, foreshadowing, tone, mood, dialogue, and narrative techniques.

People still want to read good non-fiction stories. We know this from the multi-billion market that exists for non-scripted content whether in film, television, or the news, or writing.

### **The Challenge:**

Many students love this class because it allows them to write about subjects and issues that otherwise could not be told in traditional news stories in traditional journalism classes. Here, the challenge is to remain an excellent reporter while now also becoming accomplished writer. Here you will tell deeper stories and ones that hold the audiences' attention for a longer period. Your tools are excellent reporting techniques now combined with strong storytelling skills. How you tell the story is now equally as important as what you found out about the story.

## **The Course:**

This course deals with great reporting and excellent writing for all media. A great story is a great story in any medium. The course will stress professionalism, the importance of good and accurate writing, the role of revision and entrepreneurialism.

Your objective in this course is to do your best reporting and writing and to do good storytelling techniques. The emphasis will be on training you to write the feature, the long-form, the narrative in a non-fiction story. And this course will also help you to pitch your story ideas and stories to publications or media outlets in any form.

In order to do this, you will be reading, listening, seeing...a lot of stories. But the readings will be current, interesting and you can get involved in your reading with me by making suggestions of interesting or provocative feature stories for the class to share in and learn about. Great storytelling begins with the spoken word and telling stories to people around you. So, conversation, storytelling, long-form radio, film, and other mediums are also very important to this task. One thing that many writers fail to recognize is that speaking, reading aloud is very important to storytelling and crafting the best story possible. So, reading is important and reading aloud is extremely important.

## **What You Will Learn from this Class:**

You will learn how to better compose and finish a long-form story or feature.

You will learn how to open a long-form story that attracts a reader or editor.

You will learn how to better craft a nut graph that informs the reader and editor what the story is all about.

You will learn how to better characterize sources, characters in your stories, describe them, judge them, capture them and convey that to readers.

You will learn how to “show” more and “tell” less in your writing.

You will learn different styles of features and crafting them for certain publications.

You will learn how to better structure a long-form story, organize it, and have it engage a reader’s interest over a longer period of time.

You will learn how to become a better writer and reporter.

## **Discussions:**

Among some of the topics that we will cover are:

Story Ideas: Where to find them  
Feature Writing Structure and Leads  
Writing Nut Graphs and why  
Sections and Endings  
Seven Feature Types  
How to Write an Excellent Query Letter and Land a Paid Assignment  
Writing in the First Person  
Storytelling and Narrative Non-Fiction  
Interviewing for the Narrative  
Reporting for Narrative  
Researching for Narrative  
Participatory Journalism  
Visual Writing  
Transportation: Taking the Reader to a New Place  
Transformation: Characters, Story, and Readers Transformed  
Reworking a story.  
Freelance reporting & writing

## **Reading Material:**

We will be reading and consuming current and timely feature stories from legacy news sites, websites, podcasts, book excerpts, and films. Current reading assignments will be assigned during the beginning of the week for review later. Students can suggest feature stories as well. In addition to the current material we will also be exploring established feature, narrative writers and storytellers.

## **Magazine Articles:**

Gay Talese: Frank Sinatra Has a Cold—Esquire Magazine  
Truman Capote: In Cold Blood, first chapter. The New Yorker  
Ta-Nehisi Coates: The Case for Reparations—The Atlantic  
Alma Guillermoprieto: A Hundred Women—The New Yorker  
Current Articles by week

## **Book Excerpts:**

John McPhee Reader: Travels in Georgia  
Dava Sobel: Longitude  
Isabel Wilkerson: The Warmth of Other Suns--  
<https://eddierockerz.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/the-warmth-of-other-suns-the-epic-story-of-americas-great-migration-pdfdrive-.pdf>  
Paul Cuadros: A Home on the Field

## **Podcasts:**

Gimlet Media: Crimetown: Mayor Buddy Cianci, Parts 1-4

Gimlet Media: Mogul: The Life and Death of Chris Lighty, Parts 1-3

The Moth Radio Hour: You select the stories for class to listen.

## **Assignments and Writings:**

We begin with small features and warm up in style and format and writing. We will share these collages in class and read them to each other for feedback and response.

### **SHORT NEWS FEATURE 1 (20 PERCENT OF GRADE)**

One 800 word NEWS FEATURE story that will include a more news, reporting style with a main character that aligns with the issue of the story, description of the issue, and a nut graph at the end to close the opening. You must speak to THREE HUMAN SOURCES and list them at end of story with contact information.

### **NEWS FEATURE 2 (20 PERCENT OF GRADE)**

One 1,200 NEWS FEATURE of the topic of your choice. We will workshop the opening of the feature to ensure it's on track. You must speak to FOUR HUMAN SOURCES and list them at the end of the story with contact information.

### **PROFILE FEATURE 3 (20 PERCENT OF GRADE)**

1. One 1,200-1,500 PROFILE FEATURE STORY on the subject of your choice. We will workshop the opening. You must speak to FOUR HUMAN SOURCES and list them at the end of the story with contact information.

### **FINAL EMBEDDED STORY (40 PERCENT OF GRADE)**

1. Your final story told from a narrative embedded experience from you. You either shadow a main character to be able to narrate that person and tell their story or the issue through them, or you are experiencing what you are writing about from within and narrative your experiences and thoughts. The length of this final embedded narrative story is 2,000 words. You must speak to SIX HUMAN SOURCES.

## **FORMAT FOR ALL STORIES:**

All stories must focus on a topic, person or theme OUTSIDE the university. This means NO stories on fraternities, sororities, student organizations, student events, student shows or performances, and NO PROFILES involving STUDENTS. No stories on family members unless

cleared by the instructor. No stories on students traveling abroad, their volunteer work, etc. Topics that touch on the university must be cleared PRIOR to being turned in. No exceptions.

All stories must adhere to the word count and not exceed it. Hit your target. Be professional.

All stories must meet the MINIMUM REQUIRED SOURCES that you have SPOKEN to or INTERVIEWED, and a SOURCE LIST provided at the end.

Please place your name, due date, and the category of your feature in the upper left-hand corner of the page. Put the approximate number of words in the upper right-hand corner.

All stories are double-spaced. Margins are one inch or more.

All stories are written in the AP STYLE and HUSSMAN STYLE format.

The final feature is a more comprehensive feature story and is written in the NARRATIVE NON-FICTION style from within the story or experience of the sources. You must set up a time to shadow a source or experience what it is they do. Reporting for this story is crucial. Access is key, so an early start is best. Again, topics and themes should focus on something OUTSIDE the university. The format is the same as a regular feature except the word length is 2,000 words. A required SIX HUMAN SOURCES are REQUIRED for the final feature. Points will be deducted if you fail to include the source list with contact information.

## GRADING STANDARDS AND SYSTEM

Students are graded on their reporting and writing skills. Writing with careless punctuation and grammar errors could receive a mediocre or failing grade. Students also will be rewarded for difficult-to-get or highly important sources and thorough reporting.

The grades will indicate where you need to pay attention in researching and writing your stories.

Stories are due during the lab period. Students have until the following lecture session to turn in a late, missed assignment. It will, however, be docked as noted above in the deadline section of this syllabus.

If you are to be late with an assignment, you need to notify the instructor in advance and explain why. Events do happen that could interfere with completing a story, such as illness or a death in the family. Be aware, however, that being untruthful to the instructor as to the reason for your missing deadline is an HONOR CODE offense and could lead to your dismissal from the university.

Grading for this class is as follows:

A = 93 or above	B+ = 88-89	C+ = 78-79	D+ = 68-69
A- = 90-92	B = 83-87	C = 73-77	D = 63-67
	B- = 80-82	C- = 70-72	

Honor Code: The University's Honor Code is in effect in MEJO 253 as in all other courses. Student may be allowed to work together on some stories. The instructor will explain and clarify under which particular, limited circumstances such cooperation will be appropriate and acceptable in the course. On all other assignments, you are expected to do your own work and abide by the Honor Code of the University. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <http://instrument.unc.edu/basicframe.html>.

Plagiarism is an increasing problem on this and other college campuses. You are to cite your sources appropriately and according to the assignment. The Code of Student Conduct states that expulsion or suspension can result from "(a)cademic cheating, including (but not limited to) unauthorized copying, collaboration or use of notes or books on examinations, and plagiarism (defined as the intentional representation of another person's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own). If you have questions, ask your instructor.

Students are reminded that their failure to do all of their own interviews, research, note-taking, documentation, writing and reporting is a violation of the University Honor Code and could result in disciplinary action by the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

For more information on plagiarism, go to The Writing Center's Plagiarism site at: <http://sja.ucdavis.edu/avoid.html>.

Keep in mind that the instructors in this class are veteran news reporters who spent their careers finding cheats and liars in the political world. Don't try your luck.

Below is a grading guide to three main areas the instructor will consider in deducting or adding points to your stories. NOTE: Many of these plus and minus points may be applied to the same story for recurring errors or for continual superior performance.

## **REPORTING:**

Students are expected to use a variety of appropriate sources, interview techniques, and to be complete in information. This means asking the right questions to be thorough and not to leave any doubt or questions in the readers' minds. More importantly, students' stories must be clear and not present any lingering questions in the mind of the reader or editor.

+ or -5 to 10 for any questions brought up by the reporting in the story. These occur when the reporting has not been thorough enough and leave questions or confusion in the minds of the readers.

+ or - 5 to 10 for source selection—quality and number of sources used; appropriateness of individual sources for the topic, including the level of expertise or authority involved. Using student sources as experts will always result in deductions.

+ or - 5 to 20 for thoroughness of story; development of significant angles; inclusion of needed detail; points will be deducted for loose ends, holes, or unanswered questions

+ or – 5 to 15 for story backgrounding—research necessary to make the story complete or to provide needed explanations; preparation for interviews or meetings; understanding by the reporter of the general topic.

+ or – 20 for legal errors, such as libel, violation of legal right of privacy, or copyright violation

-10 points for failure to list sources at the end of your story

-5 to -10 points for using redundant sources in follow up stories

+ or -20 for story topic as appropriate to the beat and development of the story topic

## **WRITING:**

In evaluating writing, the instructor considers the quality of the lead, use of language, conciseness, completeness, readability, organization of material and transition, among other factors.

-5 to -10 for an ineffective lead that needs work or for lack of supporting material for a lead

-15 to -20 for missing the lead entirely or burying it

-2 for ineffective or missing transition or induction of material.

-2 to -10 for ineffective organization or treatment of material, including but not limited to, wordiness; use of jargon or clichés; inclusion of unnecessary, non-newsworthy or obvious information; repetition, redundancy, inappropriate choice or use of quoted material; incorrect word choice.

-2 to –5 for overly long quotes. When presented with a long quote paraphrase is best

-2 for overly long quote from a report. These should be paraphrased.

-2 for missing the Dateline.

+5 for an exceptionally effective lead and supporting material

+5 for exceptionally effective organization and treatment of material

+2 to +10 for excellence in quality of information gathered and used

## **GRAMMAR & STYLE**

-1 for a form error, such as failure to mark a paragraph for indenting or failing to show an end mark at the end of a story.

-2 for each error or inconsistency in Associate Press or UNC-CH style

- 2 to -5 for excessively long or complicated sentences or paragraphs
- 5 for each spelling error, and a typographical is considered a spelling error
- 5 for each punctuation error, such as incorrect use of a comma, semicolon or dash
- 5 for each grammatical error, such as improper subject-verb agreement, misplaced modifier or noun-pronoun disagreement
- 10 for a minor factual error, such as an inaccurate street address or the time element if the effect on the story is relatively insignificant
- 50 for a misspelled name of a person, business, agency or institution on first reference, a misquote or other major factual error. Writing School of Journalism and Mass Communications would be -50 because there is no “s” on the end of Communication.
- 25 for misspelling a place such as Lake Taho for Lake Tahoe
- 10 for misspelling a person’s name on second or later references (e.g. Brown on first reference, Brwon on second reference)

**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 provide your approach on the course syllabus.*

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.

### **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.

### **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](https://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.

### Accreditation:

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here: <http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address a number of the values and competencies in the link above and bullet points below with a special emphasis on the last seven bullet points.

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;

- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

MEJO 356 Feature Writing Calendar Fall 2023

MON	AUG 21—LECTURE: FIRST DAY OF CLASS—STORY IDEAS; Read Frank Sinatra Has a Cold—Talese.
WED	AUG 23— Discuss Frank Sinatra Has a Cold. Format. Read Truman Capote: In Cold Blood excerpt The New Yorker
MON	AUG 28— LECTURE: AUDIENCES
WED	AUG 30— Discuss In Cold Blood. True Crime. BEGIN John McPhee—Travels in Georgia.
MON	SEPT 4—LABOR DAY—NO CLASS
WED	SEPT 6— Discuss Travels in Georgia. BEGIN Ta-Neishi Coates: The Case for Reparations
MON	SEPT 11— LECTURE: OPENING LEADS
WED	SEPT 13— WORKSHOP. FIRST SHORT FEATURE 1 DUE.
MON	SEPT 18—ONE ON ONE EDITORIAL MEETINGS. PROGRESS REPORT
WED	SEPT 20— LECTURE: NUT GRAPHS; LISTEN CRIMETOWN PARTS 1-4.
MON	SEPT 25—WELL-BEING DAY. NO CLASS
WED	SEPT 27— DISCUSS CRIMETOWN PARTS 1-4 PODCAST. LISTEN TO MOGUL: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CHRIS LIGHTY.
MON	OCT 2— LECTURE: CHARACTERIZATIONS
WED	OCT 4—WORKSHOP. NEWS FEATURE 2 DUE.
MON	OCT 9— ONE-ON-ONE EDITORIAL MEETING
WED	OCT 11— DISCUSS MOTH RADIO HOUR AND STORYTELLING. READ ALMA GUILLERMOPRIETO: ONE HUNDRED WOMEN. THE NEW YORKER

MEJO 356 Feature Writing Calendar Fall 2023

MON	OCT 16— LECTURE: UNDERSTANDING SOURCES
WED	OCT 18—DISCUSS ONE HUNDRED WOMEN. READ DAVA SOBEL: LONGITUDE
MON	OCT 23— LECTURE: WRITING THE QUERY LETTER
WED	OCT 25—WORKSHOP; PROFILE FEATURE DUE
MON	OCT 30— ONE ON ONE EDITORIAL MEETING
WED	NOV 1—DISCUSS LONGITUDE. HISTORICAL NON-FICTION.
MON	NOV 6—LECTURE: NARRATIVE WRITING AND REPORTING READ A HOME ON THE FIELD
WED	NOV 8—LECTURE: FREELANCE LIFE
MON	NOV 13—ONE ON ONE EDITORIAL MEETING—NARRATIVE FEATURE IDEAS
WED	NOV 15—DISCUSS A HOME ON THE FIELD. WATCH LOS JETS TELEVISION DOCUMENTARY
MON	NOV 20—LECTURE: BOOK PROPOSALS. PUBLISHING
WED	NOV 22— THANKSGIVING HOLIDAY
MON	NOV 27—EDITORIAL MEETINGS ONE ON ONE
WED	NOV 29—LECTURE: NARRATIVE EMBEDDED JOURNALISM
MON	DEC 4—LECTURE: SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM
WED	DEC 6—LAST DAY OF CLASS—FINAL EMBEDDED STORY DUE
FRI	DEC 15—EXAM DAY—12:00 P.M. NOON