BEGINNING REPORTING

A class designed to introduce you to the world of journalism

Be prepared to work very hard

Prepared by

Jan Shaw

San Jose State University
School of Journalism and Mass Communications

AJEEP
BEGINNING REPORTING

Prof. Jan Shaw
San Jose State University
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SYLLABUS

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AJEEP
Journalism Jargon

Attribution – Citing the source of information.

Background – This is used when a source does not want to be identified but wants the reporter to more details about a story. The reporter can use the information but not the source’s name.

Off the record - Information that must not be disclosed.

Byline – the writer’s name at the top of the story under the headline.

Quote, direct – A person’s or a document’s exact words with quotation marks around them.

Quote, indirect – No quote marks because it’s not exactly what was said. The reporter paraphrases.

Lead (or lede) – In a news story, it’s the first sentence with a summary of the most important facts, usually 30 words or less. In a feature, the lead is also at the top of the story but it’s not a summary. Instead it is an anecdote or a description or something that hints at or draws the reader into the story.

Graph – Short for paragraph. Can also be a chart.

Breaking news - Surprise events requiring immediate attention and the reordering of the what was going to go on the front page. What is known also is immediately posted on the publication’s website.

Nut graf or graph - Paragraph fairly high up in the story that indicates the impact of the story or clearly states the point of the story. Often journalists often say this is the paragraph that tells readers why they should care about the story.

Draft – A reporter’s first version of a story before it’s been edited or rewritten.

Caption/cutline – This is the information printed underneath a photograph or other visual element that identifies what is happening and identifies the people in the photo. The photographer’s or designer’s name is included.

Header - a special indicator that the story is part of a larger series

FYI – Stands ‘for your information.’

Infographic - a designed illustration that accompanies the story and gives information in a visual way. This can include charts, graphs and other similar things.
Course Description

Sometimes rumors, lies and exaggerations rule the day. In journalism, the reporter brings facts and truth to readers. This is known as “Getting the Story RIGHT,” and there is no better goal for an aspiring journalist.

In beginning reporting, student reporters start to think of their readers first. What does a reader need to know to understand this event or issue? How do I find the facts for them? What do I need to help them understand what is going on?

And that’s where three basic reporting tools are important: Direct observation, interviews and research as you try to answer the basic questions of an event or issue: Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How?

With beginning reporting, much of the information the reporter collects centers on “What happened?” and “What is happening now?”

Interviews with officials can help inform or clarify the facts for your readers, interviews with those impacted can help readers understand the situation, research focused on facts, history and statistics can help bring perspective to your readers, and your direct observations can put the readers at the scene, seeing it through your words.

And that, students, is what we are doing in beginning reporting.

You will turn in summaries of your reporting. I will give you 0 to 10 points for each report.

However, you can rewrite the summary reports after you’ve done more reporting and/or interviewing and turn them in again for more points. If you do that, staple the rewritten summary to the original summary. More points are not guaranteed. Significant improvement in content is required.

Rewrites are only allowed for content, not for formatting mistakes or factual errors. For those, you must get it right the first time.
In this hands-on reporting class, students will:

- Use direct observation, research and interviews in their reporting.
- Adhere to the journalistic standard of fact-based truth.
- Verify all facts.
- Source all facts immediately. The attributions are folded into each sentence.
- Keep their personal opinions and comments out of the story.
- Use precise, specific facts and details in your stories rather than generalizations.
- Understand they are not scribes who simply take notes and include all assertions of facts in stories without verifying the truthfulness of the assertions. As reporters, students will bring their critical thinking to bear as they ascertain what are facts and what are not, what is true and what is not. If reporters can’t verify someone else’s assertion of fact, it needs to be left out of the story. Readers depend on reporters for truth, not just a reiteration of someone else’s false assertions as truth.
- Continue to improve grammar and vocabulary.


This reporting class is taught as reporting is practiced professionally in the United States, and, as stated before, it is a hands-on class.

Students will begin reporting on the first day of class covering a simple news story that will involve observation, interviews and research.

Students will work on this throughout the six sessions. Sessions will include interviewing, research for statistics, history and facts, and direct observation. Grammar and spelling issues will be addressed daily and in the edits of student assignments.

Each day, the instructor will listen to the students’ reporting experiences and make suggestions. The instructor will explain the best practices for reporting.

Outside of class, students will read the handouts, research, interview, observe, write reports, read and write summaries of handouts, and write a story based on their observations, interviews and research.

In the process of doing this, students learn

- To get the story right.
- To give their readers correct, factual information about events or issues that impact or interest them.
- To cite the sources of the information, which is called attribution.
- To keep their opinions, conclusions and comments out of the story.
- That interviewing people impacted by a policy, an event, an issue or a problem is critical. This step is extremely important and must not be omitted.
As with all reporting, we do this through

- Research
- Direct observation
- Interviews with knowledgeable people,
- Interviews with people who witnessed or attended an event
- Interviews with people who are impacted by a policy, an event, an issue or a problem

This reporting process holds true whether a reporter is covering a meeting or a war, a party or a fire, an art exhibit or a crime scene, a concert or an election, an issue of local importance or an issue of national importance.

Again, in this class, there is no first person (I, me, my, we, our, etc.) in the finished story. The first person is not used in stories because the job of a reporter is to find fact-based truth, not give opinions on it. There is plenty of room in the media for opinions, but not in professional, fact-based journalism where there are standards.

The reporter and the reporter’s editor do, however, decide what stories to report, investigate or dig into more deeply. After that, the content of the story is based NOT on what the reporter or editor thinks but on verifiable facts and research, interviews with knowledgeable people and direct observation of events. In direct observation, you describe what you saw/heard/smelled so that, essentially, you put the reader at the scene. The reader can see it all though your words. You leave out the “I” and concentrate on content in direct observation. Again, reporters must keep themselves and their opinions out of any stories they do for this class and for news outlets that follow journalistic standards. The third-person form is easily learnable.

Once more: As a reporter, you must bring truth to your readers.

**Course Goals and Student Learning Objectives**

By practicing reporting and receiving instructor feedback each day, you will learn how:

1. To think of your readers and what information they will need to understand an event or issue.
2. To gather facts and material for your stories through direct observation, interviews and research in order to give your readers correct, factual information about events or issues that impact or interest them.
3. To begin to learn where to find the facts, statistics and history you need.
4. To verify assertions of fact made by others and to discard them if not verifiable.
5. To report stories accurately and truthfully – to get the story RIGHT.
6. To understand the process by which reporters attempt to make their final stories and reports as objective as possible.
7. To cite your sources of the information in the same sentence in which they appear, which is called attribution.
8. To keep your opinions, conclusions and comments out of the story.
9. To know that interviewing people impacted by a policy, event, issue or problem is critical. This step is extremely important and must not be omitted.

**Course Content Learning Outcomes**
Through hands-on reporting via research, observation and interviews, reporters are expected to achieve the following.

By the end of the course, it is expected that students will
1. Understand and practice how to find out the facts of a situation so that your readers will better understand the truth of what is happening after having a series of exercises doing so.
2. Understand the three main elements of reporting – observation, interviews and research by doing so in search of the facts of a story.
3. Understand the fundamentals of how to report in a non-biased way after having attributed every fact in the story to its source, attributed all opinions to specific interviewees and after having checked the final reports to remove any unattributed material unless it’s factual observation.
4. Learn to verify assertions made by others and not take them as automatically true after researching the facts to ascertain their truthfulness and not using them if they are false. (Again, you are not a scribe who simply takes notes. As a reporter, you bring your critical thinking to bear as you ascertain what are facts and what are not, what is true and what is not. Your readers depend on you for truth, not just a reiteration of someone else’s thoughts.) The instructor will not accept any less.
5. Understand that interviews can add depth, perspective and a human face – the human impact – to the report of an event. This turns a report into a story.
6. Understand that research gives readers facts, statistics, history, context and perspective and is often the backbone of the story but that facts alone are not enough. That’s why interviews of those affected are always included in your reporting and your story – as it will be in this class – to add the human face and the human impact to the statistics.

**Final Project:** The final project is a folder containing all the final summary reports both original and rewritten of the student’s reporting – research, interviews and observations – and the story it led to. Zero to 10 points for this final project graded on accuracy, clarity, thoroughness and assignment requirements. Of those points, 90 percent will be based on reporting and 10 percent on the story.

**Required Readings:**
Textbook: None required at this time
Handouts:
1. On-the-street interviewing
2. Observation tips
3. Interviewing excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer
4. Writing tips
5. Instructions for leads: Inverted pyramid (plus more writing tips)
6. Story template
7. Quotations
8. Writing excerpts from “Writing Across the Media” by Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, and David Nimmer.
9. Partial checklist for stories
10. Format for interviewing and research summaries
11. Proofreading marks used by instructor
12. Major project instructions
13. Proofreading symbols used by the professor to help students understand professor’s edits. A complete list can be found at: [http://www.merriam-webster.com/mw/table/proofrea.htm](http://www.merriam-webster.com/mw/table/proofrea.htm)

**Other Readings: Suggested readings for the future**

The Word, an Associated Press Guide to Good News Writing by Rene J. Cappon. You'll have to hunt for this book. It will help you with your print writing and reporting for most of your careers. There's a 1980s first edition and an early 1990s second edition. You can find used copies on Amazon.com and probably bookfinder.com – maybe e-Bay, half.com or other sites. It takes your writing beyond the basics into new levels of sophistication, and the book makes it fairly easy to understand how to do that.

Another out-of-print but excellent book is Writing Across the Media, which covers print, broadcast and advertising writing. The lead author is Kristie Bunton. Ignore the online chapter in the book because it’s outdated. The rest is excellent information on writing.

The Elements of Journalism by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. This book addresses the principles and fundamentals that define journalism as a profession and a calling. It captures, as one critic said, "the shortcomings, subtleties and possibilities of modern journalism." Some chapters are better than others.

Blur: How to Know What's True in the Age of Information Overload by Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel. The title explains it. Again, some chapters are more relevant than others.

**For superb reporting and writing:**

A San Francisco Chronicle series called “The Shame of the City.” San Francisco has one of the nation's worst problems with hard-core homelessness. Thousands of people are without shelter, and as many as 5,000 spend virtually all their time on the street. Chronicle reporter Kevin Fagan and photographer Brant Ward spent four months among the homeless and those who deal with them. In this series, they explored how one of the nation's wealthiest cities came to have so many people living on its streets. The first part, “Homeless Island,” is particularly gripping. It's the best combination of reporting and writing that I've read. Go to sfgate.com and hunt for “Shame for the City.”

**SHAME OF THE CITY series, San Francisco Chronicle:**

Part 1: Homeless Island
Infographic: Goes with First in the series – Data:

Part 2: Family in van:

Part 3: A Rugged Refuge / Many homeless men would rather sleep on the street than in San Francisco's most notorious shelter, calling it a dangerous drug haven:


Other Equipment/Material Requirements: A notebook or paper and pencils. It would help to have access to a voice recorder for the first class and a computer outside of class, but that is not required. People have taken notes and written stories by hand for decades and it works. It just takes longer.

Assignments, points and grading policy

Grading: Grades in this course will be figured on a straight percentage basis. That means your final grade is based on the percentage of the total points you earn. The grading will follow this scale:

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<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>100 - 93%</td>
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<td>92 - 90%</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<td>89 - 87%</td>
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<td>72 - 70%</td>
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<td>D+</td>
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<td>66 - 63%</td>
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<td>62 - 60%</td>
<td>D-</td>
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<td>Below 60%</td>
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Assignments and Points:

- Attendance: 2 points each day, 1 point if late, 0 if absent
- Summaries of readings: 0 to 2 points and graded on accuracy and meeting the assignment’s instructions
• Report of interviews: 0 to 10 points and graded on fulfilling the assignment correctly including the name, major and year in school of each interviewee, the proper format, a cogent, brief summary of the interview and not treating an interview as if it were a survey.

• Report of research: 0 to 10 points and graded on depth, variety of sources, cogent summarizing and if the research actually relates to and could be used in the story.

• Report of observations: 0 to 5 points and graded on the accuracy and pertinence of the observations to help readers understand the story by putting readers at the scene through your words.

• An exercise in observation: 0 to 5 points and graded on the accuracy and pertinence of the observations to help readers understand the story by putting readers at the scene through your words.

• A straightforward news story: 0 to 10 points and graded on clarity, accuracy, thoroughness, adherence to professional standards of journalism, adherence to the template and the correct use of research, interviews and observations to help readers understand what happened.

• The final project: This is a folder containing all the final summary reports both original and rewritten of the your reporting – research, interviews and observations – and the story it led to. Zero to 10 points graded on accuracy, clarity, thoroughness and assignment requirements. Of those final points, 90 percent will be based on reporting and 10 percent on the story.

• Any additional assignments will have points that fit within these parameters.

• Assignments and points are subject to change and will be announced in class and, if all students have email, will be emailed to everyone.

All of the course objectives and outcomes will be based on students reporting on an issue. You will be graded primarily on the quality of your reporting. Your story is not weighted as heavily in the final grade because this is a reporting class, not a writing class. Students will put into practice the readings and lectures, and they will practice and experience interviewing, researching, observing and a small amount of time crafting a story.

To that end, here are the assignments that will be covered in this class. These are subject to change and the instructor will inform you in class and, if you have email, by email.
# Beginning News Reporting

Schedule to be announced

(Subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and by email to those who have email.)

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<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines</th>
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| 1     | To Be Announced (TBA) | **Topics:** Interviewing, observation and story template review. 

**Readings:** Handouts on interviewing, reporting, templates required for course reports, assignment list, and common proofreading marks as used by the instructor. 

**Day’s content:** Instructor takes roll, introduces himself or herself, discusses interviewing and observations, reviews story template so students know what they need to do in reporting their observations and interviews, hands out reading material and assignments, and takes the class out onto the campus to begin reporting a story using 10 or more interviews and multiple observations. The instructor reminds students to ask for detail and stories/anecdotes/memories from their interviewees. Interviews will likely be a mix of long, medium, short and non-existent. Instructor accompanies them but stays in the background. 

**Assignments due next class:** Students will read and summarize the handouts, write a summary report on their interviews, following the template, and write a summary report on their observations, following instructions.

| 2     | TBA           | **Topics:** Expanded introduction, Interviews, observations, research and story structure. Instructor answers questions and offers suggestions. 

**Readings:** Template for writing a simple event story, template for research report, and additional writing tips. 

**Day’s content:** Instructor answers questions regarding interviewing and observations and makes suggestions. Students read each other’s interviewing and observation summaries as instructor goes from person to person scanning the material and making suggestions. 

Instructor collects papers. 

Instructor discusses research. Students go online in class to research their topic, preparing a one-page Word document of their research to be printed out and, if possible, emailed to themselves.
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<td><strong>Assignments due next class:</strong></td>
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<td>1. Summary of the research, one tightly written page. Worth 0 to 10 points when completed (two sessions) depending on reliability of sources, thoroughness and meeting the requirements of the assignment.</td>
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<td>2. A first draft of the story using a summary lead, following Who, What, When, Where and maybe Why and How. Follow the template, and organize the interviews, observations, facts and statistics into a simple event story. Zero to 10 points possible, depending on effort and meeting the requirements of the assignment. Double-spaced, one sentence per paragraph, every sentence attributed/sourced unless it is an observation. No first person.</td>
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<td>Remember, a factual error means no credit for that assignment.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td><strong>Topics:</strong> Instructor discusses common mistakes in the observation and interviewing assignments and suggests improvements. Instructor takes questions. Instructor will discuss story structure.</td>
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<td><strong>Readings:</strong> Handouts on xxx</td>
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<td><strong>Day’s content:</strong> Take roll. Instructor hands back summary reports on interviews and observations. Students break into small groups for comment. Instructor goes from group to group making suggestions. As issues and common mistakes become apparent, the instructor lectures the class on these and on how to improve the stories to better meet professional standards. This should take about half the class.</td>
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<td>Instructor collects the stories. Last-minute hand-written corrections are encouraged.</td>
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<td>Then students go to the computers and begin adding to their research. They print and, if possible, email the work to themselves. Email your finished or partially finished stories to yourself. Print out a copy and take it home.</td>
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<td><strong>Assignments due next class:</strong></td>
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<td>A. Students finish the research summary as per the template and bring it to the next class, including the original research summary.</td>
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|       |      | B. Work on correcting the edited assignments that were handed back. The corrected reports will be part of the final project.  
C. Handouts: Rewriting, no summary due.  
Remember, a factual error means no credit for that assignment. |
| 4     | TBA  | Topic: Observations and descriptive writing.  
Readings: Examples of clear and meaningful descriptions.  
Day’s content: Take roll. Instructor hands back corrected and edited assignments, collects today’s assignments, hands out examples of good descriptive use in a story and briefly lectures on firsthand observation and its role in informing the reader. Next, take the students out onto the campus and find an event or something that is happening – if nothing is happening, take them to the cafeteria. Demonstrate how to describe factual events in the third person based on what they see. Give them verbal examples of how to do it right and how not to do it. If they are like most beginning reporters, they will have trouble differentiating between their personal conclusions and opinions and fact-based description. Emphasize the difference.  
Assignments due next class:  
A. A fact-based, specific, third-person description based on that day’s class exercise. Not more than two pages. Add a half page on problems, if any, you encountered trying to do the assignment. Zero to 5 points. Grade based on thoroughness, effort and meeting the requirements of the assignment.  
B. Students must compile everything they have written, rewritten and reported for this class. Put it all in a folder. Bring to the next class. |
| 5     | TBA  | Topics: Discovering and filling in reporting gaps. Instruction for the final project due at the next class.  
Readings: Instructions on final project. No summary due.  
Day’s content: Take roll. Discuss final project. Students will spend most of the class filling in and completing their reporting summaries and, if time, making |
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<td>corrections to their stories.</td>
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<td><strong>Assignment due next class:</strong> FINAL PROJECT.</td>
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<td>Remember, a factual error means no credit for that assignment.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>TBA</td>
<td><strong>Topic:</strong> Review the ethics of reporting, review the class</td>
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<td><strong>Readings:</strong> None</td>
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<td><strong>Day’s content:</strong> Briefly meet in small groups to review final projects. Students can make last-minute corrections by hand.</td>
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<td>• Hand in final projects.</td>
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<td>• Review the basics of beginning reporting.</td>
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<td>• Review the class: Instructor goes over the class point by point, assignment by assignment, asking what worked and what didn’t.</td>
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<td><strong>Assignment:</strong> Get the Instructor a mailing address so that the final project can be returned.</td>
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**Note from the professor:**

As reporters, you can bring depth and breadth to your stories by finding and interviewing the right people, by digging deeply into facts, statistics and history, and by finding and highlighting the human element in it all.

One key is verification of all details so that you GET THE STORY RIGHT. You don’t pass on half-truths, exaggerations and outright lies as the whole truth. You owe your readers the truth and nothing but the truth.
You need to realize that ethics are bound up in practically every decision a journalist makes. The stories you cover. The way you cover them. The way you handle sources. The honest or dishonest ways in which you approach people.

For instance, when you are dealing with experienced officialdom, they know the ropes of off-the-record and on-the-record and deep background.

When you are dealing with the general public, they don’t. You ask them questions and unless a camera is trained on them, they don’t realize that you will actually put their names and thoughts into a story for everyone to see.

SO YOU MUST MAKE IT CLEAR. YOU MUST NOT TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR NAIVETE. You need to protect them, especially if there is danger associated with the story or a chance they could get in trouble or a chance they could lose their jobs.

On a more prosaic level, if word gets around that you don’t protect your sources, no one will talk to you and other journalists will think you’re pond scum. And word always gets around.

And then there is the question of confidentiality of sources. Do you go off the record in the first place? It depends. Is someone in danger? Are you just trying to get a sense of the story and don’t need them on the record? And how do you protect your sources?

Meanwhile, when you are first getting started, be aware that people may use the off-the-record or background interview to get at others or promote their own interests through you and your story. You get better at spotting this as you become more experienced.

And ask yourself – always – did I get the story right? Should I make more calls, do more digging so that readers have a better picture and I am a better journalist?

END of SYLLABUS for BEGINNING REPORTING
Beginning Reporting

Day-by-Day Instructor Information

By Jan Shaw

Before class every day, write on the board:

Who? What? When? Where? Why? and How? These are called the 5W’s and H. They are the questions that need to be answered in the leads and stories of basic reporting. Also write out that day’s assignments and/or activities.
SESSION 1 SUMMARY: Welcome, brief explanation of that day’s activities, hand out reading assignments and take the class out onto the campus to report a simple event story. Skip introductions and any in-depth explanations until Session 2.

(Note to instructor: The event your students will cover today will be something happening on campus such as a student fair where there are activities, a purpose and students to interview. You will tell them where it is and generally what it is about. If there is no campus event to attend, take them out to answer the question, “What do you think of San Jose State and do you like it?” or whatever university it is, in preparation for a simple story on student attitudes toward the university.)

1. Take roll.
2. Briefly welcome students to the class.
3. Tell them today’s in-class and out-of-class assignments will be reading and summarizing the handouts, interviewing students and making observations for a story that is going to be the major project in the class.
4. Distribute handouts on
   - Interviewing, including the use of voice recorders and a written-out introduction
   - Reporting, including verifying information and not being a scribe
   - Template for writing up summaries of interviews including how to punctuate direct quotes and indirect quotes
   - Common proofreading marks as used by the instructor

4. Brief introduction example: “Hello, I’m Professor Jan Shaw and I will be your instructor for the six sessions of beginning reporting. It is going to be a fast-paced class with a lot of outside work, but I will be here before and after class to answer your questions and help you if needed.”

5. Quick lecture example before taking them in teams onto the campus:"

"Starting today, you will begin your final project for this class. We’ll be going onto the campus and you will be (1) interviewing at least 10 students and (2) noting what you see. The second part – the observations – allows readers who weren’t there to see it through your eyes. You will also look for an official or an organizer to whom you can speak.

“At the next class you will give me a summary of your observations and a summary of your interviews and a summary of your readings. Interviewing and observing are important. They are two elements every reporter must learn. The third leg of reporting is research, which we will do in the next class. Each summary is worth 10 points.

“This is, basically, immersion learning and gives you context for the rest of the sessions.

INTERVIEWING TIPS: (Note: Read the dialogue aloud and have students look at the handout as you do.)
“When you approach a student or an official, smile and politely introduce yourself along these lines:

‘Hello, I’m ___________ and I’m doing a story for my reporting class on this event. Would you have a minute to tell me why you are here and what you think of it?’ Or ‘learning from it’ or whatever verb is germane.

’Would you give me your name and the correct spelling? The story isn’t going to be published but the professor wants us to source everything.’

“Get their first and last names, majors and their year in school. You must have these or the interview won’t count.

“If an interviewee does not want to share his or her name, thank them for their time and move on. No full name, no credit for the interview.

“Then ask them questions about what is happening, listen to the answers and write them down. Use the answers to help formulate the next questions.

“If you are using a voice recorder, ask permission to do so.

“If you are not, jot down the notes the best you can. As soon as the interview is finished, step aside and immediately fill in your notes from memory while they are fresh.

“Also, if something is especially interesting, you can stop the interviewee, read back what you wrote down, and see if you can get them to expand on their thoughts. You keep writing it down until you have it correct and exact in your notes. It does, however, interrupt the flow of the interview.

“And take a look at the note on biased questioning.”

(Hold up the handout that includes ‘Biased Questioning.’ In summary it says: ‘For instance, the question, ‘What are the speaker’s strengths?’ is biased. It assumes the speaker has strengths. So the interviewees try to answer your question and your bias gets into their answers. Instead, phrase it like this: ‘Does the speaker have any strengths?’ If the answer is ‘yes,’ then you can ask what they are.)

“You will do these interviews during and after class and write up summaries to hand in at the next class.

(Hold up the interviewing report sample template.)

“Summarize your interviews this way but hold on to your original notes. Those are what you will use to write your story. See the assignment sheet for details.
Observations: No first or second person. Stay away from conclusions. First person: No “I, me, my, we, us, our.” Second person: No “you, your.” Demonstrate in class:

“There will be no first- or second-person in your observations and no conclusions. No ‘I saw’ or ‘you will see.’

“and NO conclusions. I will explain more later but, for now, I’ll demonstrate what I mean by a conclusion.

“See this table?”

(Instructor points to a table or desk or chair or whatever is in the room.)

“Is it dull? You might think so. But in reporting, the reporter will never say ‘dull’ because that is a conclusion. It’s a quick reference and judgment on what you are seeing but only YOU know what you are talking about. There is no information for the reader.

“So, describe it. A metal table, dark gray on the top and light gray on the sides and legs. About 4 feet by 8 feet. Some stains and scratching.

“Now the reader has an idea of what you are seeing, and you let them come to their own conclusions.

“And that’s what you will do in the observation assignment today – describe.”

(ASSIGNMENTS)

“Look over today’s assignment sheet – do you see everything that needs to be done before the next class? Are there any questions? You can also email me with any questions that arise.”

(Hold up the assignment sheet so they know to which handout you are referring. You are trying to make the first day’s lectures as brief as possible. That means you can defer answering some questions until the next session. Just tell them why.)

“In addition to these assignments, bring in any questions that may arise regarding interviewing and observing. I’ll answer them the best I can.

“Take your notebooks or paper and pen or pencil. Anyone not have paper and pencil?”

(Give them paper from the printer if they haven’t any. Have some pencils to loan them if they didn’t bring their own.)

(Then form teams of two to three, tell them to take everything with them because they won’t be returning to the classroom today. You will go with them but stay in the background because you are there to answer questions, not participate in the interviewing.)
“Let’s go. Remember, both observations AND interviews – during and after class.”

**Assignments due next class:** Students write a summary report on their interviews, following the template, write a summary report on their observations, and read and summarize the handouts.

A. **Summary of the interviews** conducted following the form of the template. Try for at least 10 interviews, more is better. You MUST include the FULL name, major and year in school of each interviewee and a brief summary of what each said. Some interviews will be better than others. Keep your notes. All that you will give the instructor is a summary following the template.
   • Interview summary will be no more than two pages. Keep your original notes because you will use those for full-length quotes.
   • The interviewing summary will receive 0 to 10 points, depending on thoroughness and the requirements of the assignment.
   • Don’t forget, full name, major, year in school, first reference use both names, after that just use the LAST name.

B. **Write out your observation of the event** keeping in mind that the point is to help your reader be there and get a better sense of the event – at least one page and not more than two. Zero to five points possible, depending on thoroughness and the requirements of the assignment.
   • No first or second person.
   • Write down what you saw using facts, not opinion.

C. **Write a brief summary of readings** not to exceed a page. Zero to one point possible and graded on whether or not it appears you read and understood the salient points of the handouts.

D. **Bring the assignments to the next class. Be on time.**

**HANDOUTS FOR FIRST DAY:**
   • Interviewing, including the use of voice recorders
   • Reporting
   • Template for writing up summaries of interviews including how to punctuate direct quotes and indirect quotes
   • That day’s assignment sheet

Next, the instructor must edit, grade and record the papers turned in that day and return them next class. This is an important step in learning, especially if you have them rewrite the assignments. Correct punctuation and grammar.
Assignments due next class at the second session:

Students write a summary report on their interviews, following the template, write a summary report on their observations, and read and summarize the handouts.

A. **Summary of the interviews** conducted following the form of the template. Try for at least 10 interviews, more is better. You MUST include the FULL name, major and year in school of each interviewee and a brief summary of what each said. Some interviews will be better than others. Keep your notes. All that you will give the instructor is a summary following the template.
   - Interview summary will be no more than two pages. Keep your original notes because you will use those for full-length quotes.
   - The interviewing summary will receive 0 to 10 points, depending on thoroughness and the requirements of the assignment.
   - Don’t forget, full name, major, year in school, first reference use both names, after that just use the LAST name.

B. **Write out your observation of the event** keeping in mind that the point is to help your reader be there and get a better sense of the event – at least one page and not more than two. Zero to five points possible, depending on thoroughness and the requirements of the assignment.
   - No first or second person.
   - Write down what you saw using facts, not opinion.

C. **Write a brief summary of readings** not to exceed a page. Zero to one point possible and graded on whether or not it appears you read and understood the salient points of the handouts.

D. **Bring the assignments to the next class. Be on time.**

HANDOUTS FOR FIRST DAY:
   - Interviewing, including the use of voice recorders
   - Reporting
   - Template for writing up summaries of interviews including how to punctuate direct quotes and indirect quotes
   - That day’s assignment sheet
Handouts for Beginning Reporting

- On-the-street interviewing
- Observation tips
- Writing tips
- Instructions for leads: Inverted pyramid (plus more writing tips)
- Story template
- Quotations
- Partial checklist for stories
- Formats for summaries of interviews and research
- Proofreading marks used by instructor
- Format for major project

On-the-street Interviewing

(Note: If you are using a voice recorder, ask if they mind being recorded and tell them you use the recorder to make certain the quotes are accurate. If they object, politely turn it off or put it away and take notes. By law in the United States, you must have permission. Check your batteries.)

In preparation: Ask yourself, what do you and your readers need to know? What might your readers like to know? What about this story might pique their interest and what is it that is important for them to know? As a reporter, you are often making these kinds of decisions.

Jot down pertinent questions so you don’t go blank in the middle of an interview. Keep these by you. But be careful – some of the most interesting anecdotes and quotes come from questions that developed talking to someone – not from your list.
Ask interviewees for detail and for stories, anecdotes and memories. Interviews will likely be a mix of long, medium, short and non-existent. (The latter when someone declines to talk to you.)

On-the-street interviews differ from sit-down-and-talk interviews. When you are on the street, notebook and recorder in hand, the questions and answers tend to be shorter, quicker and less in-depth and that’s if you can get anyone to talk to you. They are off-the-cuff: No appointment was set up, no background work completed, no biographies read.

So, for you first time out, follow these suggestions. As you get more comfortable doing this, you will develop your own way of street interviewing.

For this story you are looking for:
1. Opinions and thoughts
2. Anecdotes and stories
3. Attitude
4. Background information
5. The critical ‘why’ questions -- what led them to having these opinions of SJSU
6. Don’t forget: Full name correctly spelled, year in school and major
7. And at the end always ask something along the line of "And do you have any other thoughts?? Anything I haven't asked you about?"
8. Then thank them

TRY FOR AT LEAST 10 INTERVIEWS, PREFER 14.

When you approach a potential interviewee, smile and politely introduce yourself along these lines:

‘Hello, I’m __________ and I’m doing a story for my reporting class on student attitudes toward San Jose State.

“Would you have a minute to talk to me? Maybe tell me why you are here and what you think of it?’

“And could you give me your name? Correct spelling? The story isn’t going to be published but the professor wants us to source everything.”

Get their first and last names, majors and their year in school. You must have these or the interview won’t count.

If they don’t want to tell you, politely thank them and move on to the next subject. For this assignment, no one gets to be unidentified. You can’t use them in your stories.

1. And begin your interviews.
   • “So, what brings you here to SJSU?
• “Has it been worthwhile?
• “Anything you don’t like especially?
• “Or do like?
• “Have you gotten to know people?
• “Do you live on campus or nearby or commute?
• “When you first came onto the campus, what was your reaction?”
• And so on until you think you have enough to work with. Don’t inadvertently spend all your time with just a few interviewees – go for 10.

2. And so on. DO NOT ASK THESE QUESTIONS LIKE IT’S A SURVEY. Try to turn it all into a conversation. In your stories, you can use individual answers but you can’t draw conclusions. For example, you can’t say, “Students like SJSU.” That’s a conclusion and can’t be verified because you spoke with maybe 10 students and there are 26,000 or so with whom you haven’t spoken.

3. You need to move beyond questions that can be answered with a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ or one-word response to questions that require a fuller response. You are not conducting a survey, you are conducting an interview with live, real people and you are trying to elicit from them experiences, thoughts and opinions. That way, you have human material for your story. The backbone of a story can be it’s facts and statistics but interviews turn it from a report into a story with a human face. So dig into the “why’s” and “how’s” … not just the “what.”

4. As soon as you are done, start filling in your notes while your memory is still fresh, even if you are using a voice recorder. Your own memory will supply you with what you sense is most important. If you rely only on the recording, suddenly everything seems of equal importance. So, don’t skip the “filling in the notes” step if at all possible.

5. Also, if during an on-the-street interview something is especially interesting, you can stop the interviewee, read back what you wrote down, and see if you can get them to expand on their thoughts. You keep writing it down and reading it back to them until you have it correct and exact in your notes. It does, however, interrupt the flow of the interview.

6. KEEP YOUR OPINIONS TO YOURSELF, for the most part. The dangers are that you (a) bias the interview, or (b) end up boring everyone to death by rattling on and ruining what is supposed to be interviews of other people’s opinions.

7. Biased Questioning: A big no-no. Example: “What do you like about San Jose State?” is biased. It assumes the student likes something about the place. So the interviewees try to answer your question and your bias gets into their answers. Instead, phrase it like this: “Is there anything you like about San Jose State?” If the answer is ‘yes,’ THEN you can say something like “Oh, tell me about that.”

8. Voice recorders: There used to be some debate on their use – now there isn’t. If you can, use them. Just check the batteries and get permission.
Formats

I. INTERVIEWS: Format for the report summarizing your interviews – use your original notes to write the story:
1. Name of interviewee (first and last names)
   • Major and year in school
   • Brief summary of the person said, no more than five lines.
2. Name of interviewee (first and last names)
   • Major and year in school
   • Brief summary of the person said, no more than five lines.
3. Name of interviewee (first and last names)
   • Major and year in school
   • Brief summary of the person said, no more than five lines.

(Follow this format for each of your interviewees – at least 10, prefer 14 or more.)

II. RESEARCH: This is the format for the report summarizing your online and/or print research that is pertinent enough to be used in your story. This is simply a summary for the instructor. When writing your stories, use your original notes. This does help you organize those notes into usable form.
   • Generally, use bullets for the various pieces of information you found.
   • Don’t include everything, just the facts that could actually be used in your story.
   • For the purposes of this summary, don’t use more than eight sources even though you might use more than that in an actual story. If you don’t have eight, list what you do have. You need a minimum of three.

1. First source: Name of organization that published the information, in detail, underlined. As a reporter, it is your obligation to verify the legitimacy of the source. Explain legitimacy of the source in two or fewer sentences.
   A. Name of report or a title for the information, year published, if applicable.
   B. List facts, statistics, history, etc., you found at this site or document:
      • Fact, statistics or history:
      • Fact, statistics or history:
      • Fact, statistics or history:

2. Second source: Name of organization that published the information, in detail, underlined. As a reporter, it is your obligation to verify the legitimacy of the source. Explain legitimacy of the source in two or fewer sentences.
   A. Name of report or a title for the information, year published, if applicable.
   B. List facts, statistics, history, etc., you found at this site or document:
      • Fact, statistics or history:
      • Fact, statistics or history:
      • Fact, statistics or history:

And repeat this format for all your sources
Quotations

I. Using Quotes:

It boils down to this:

To use direct quotation marks, the quote must be EXACTLY what the person said.

Close or almost?? No. Use a partial quote or paraphrase the quote if it’s not exact.

Exact: “We have a real problem with the financing of the new arena,” said Patricia Nguyen, who is heading up fundraising.

Partial quote: Head fundraiser Patricia Nguyen said there’s a “real problem” with the new arena’s financing.

Paraphrase: Financing troubles have surfaced at the new arena, said Patricia Nguyen, the chief fundraiser.

DON’T EVER CHANGE THE MEANING OF A QUOTE.

DON’T EVER LET YOUR EDITORS CHANGE THE MEANING OF A QUOTE IN YOUR STORY.

BE PREPARED TO FIGHT FOR THIS – YOUR INTEGRITY AND REPUTATION ARE AT STAKE. YOUR JOB MAY BE AS WELL.

II. Punctuating quotes:

“It looks as if it’s going to rain today,” said Danny Freitas, a computer major.

“The drought is over.”

Freitas, who is in his first year at SJSU, said the area “badly needed” rain.

“The only problem,” Freitas continued, “is that it’s a very light rain. It’s almost nothing.

“I think what we really need is about two weeks of steady rain – not this drizzle.”

Some punctuation rules:

1. Use “said.” Don’t use anything else in this class – don’t say ‘mentioned’ and don’t say ‘explained.’
2. In this class, tuck the “said” at the end of the sentence or in the middle of the sentence unless the veracity of the statement is at stake or if there could be some
confusion about who is speaking. Then place the “(Name) said” at the beginning of the sentence.

**Exceptions:**

- For instance, if someone says the city is going bankrupt, it makes a difference who is saying that. If it’s the mayor, attribute the statement to the mayor at the beginning of the sentence. If it’s some guy down the block, the name goes last or in the middle.
- To avoid confusion – sometimes someone else was talking in the preceding sentence and you don’t want readers to think the same person is still speaking.
- Or you left out the name in the first reference to the person. In summary news leads, we usually don’t use unknown names so a lead might read “The head of the Jefferson School district will leave that post in two weeks….” And the next paragraph will start, “Superintendent Amelia Hart, who has ……”
- The only other general exception to putting attributions in the middle or the end of sentences is if the person is so prominent, he or she needs to be introduced to readers immediately.

3. Next, if the actual attribution is three words or less, put the “said” AFTER the person’s name. “The election is nearing,” Ray Jones said.

4. If the attribution is longer than three words, put the “said” IN FRONT OF the person’s name. “The election is nearing,” said Ray Jones, who is in charge of the ballots in Santa Clara County.

5. Commas and periods go INSIDE the closing quote mark.

6. If a quote is a complete sentence, you capitalize the first letter even if it’s not the actual beginning of the sentence: Freitas said, “If we do have storms, though, I hope it’s not during the football game.”

7. Give direct quotes their own paragraphs.

8. Partial quotes: The football game was “just awful,” the coach said.
Observation and Descriptive Writing instructions

BY JAN SHAW

First You Have to See

The idea is to put the reader at the scene through your eyes and your words. To do this, you must really look at the scene and the people. Look closely, almost as if you were doing a painting. A glance isn’t good enough. Write out what you see. Smells can also be described as well as sounds, if they are pertinent to the story.

In writing what they see, many novice reporters have trouble differentiating between their personal conclusions or opinions and fact-based description.

The problem often centers on using the first and second person and using words that have no meaning for readers but a lot of meaning to the reporter. Novices will also likely want to comment. Don’t.

Instead, focus on the specifics of what you actually see.

For example, you are covering a big nighttime fire. You look at the scene and you think to yourself, ‘This is awful.’ Note that there is no information in that conclusion for the reader. It’s only your reaction so keep it out of your story. Your job is to describe the scene so that readers come to their own conclusions.

Or, you might think, ‘This is chaotic.’ Chaotic is a good descriptive word but it’s also a conclusion of what the scene looks like based on your observations. Again, the reader can’t see anything.

So back yourself up. What did you see or are you seeing that led to that conclusion? That’s where the details come in, details that let readers see what you see.

Example, continued. At the fire scene, the details that led you to the word ‘chaotic’ could include:

- Flames shooting into the air from the windows and the rooftop
- Three buildings burning, all of them five stories high
- Hundreds of fire hoses strewn around the scene
- Residents in their night clothes huddled on corners
- 40 or 50 firefighters sweating and swearing
- Fire trucks parked at all angles blocking the streets
- Lights of fire trucks, police cars and ambulances flashing and throwing a counterpoint light to the yellow, black, red and orange flames and smoke
- Small groups of police officers trying to keep back spectators
Be aware that almost any physical description can contain elements that may be accurate but unhelpful to the reader.

For example: “A long line of students.” It’s accurate, but not very informative. Better to say, “a line of 45 students ….” That way, the reader isn’t imagining a long line to mean 2,000 students.

Or, a “crowded room.” Accurate but, again, not helpful. ‘The auditorium was crowded with 7,500 people filling every seat.’ ‘The classroom was crowded with 50 students for only 30 seats.’ ‘There were 25,000 people in the stadium stands but there were 60,000 seats.’

Specifics – precise specifics – are informative and FAR MORE POWERFUL.

The same goes for descriptions of people. Don’t generalize – be specific. Describe to the reader what you saw that led you to your conclusion. Let the readers draw their own conclusions.

AGAIN, LET THE READERS DRAW THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS. DON’T DO IT FOR THEM.

Words such as ‘pretty, proud, handsome, fun, happy, sad, etc.’ have no information in them and only mean something to you – not anyone reading them.

Again. Pay attention to your own conclusions. Then ask yourself, ‘What am I seeing that led me to that conclusion?’ And that’s what you write down – not the conclusion.

So description and observation assignments in this class must comprise real details and actions and ABSOLUTELY NO FIRST OR SECOND PERSON. DON’T say, “I saw…” “I observed…” Or “You will see…”

- First person singular: I, me, my.
- First person plural: We, us, our.
- Second person singular: You.
- Second person possessive: Your.

NO conclusions. By that I mean, again, no shorthand descriptions that you understand but your readers don’t.

Another example of a conclusion: Look at the floor.

Is it boring? You might think so. But in reporting, the reporter will never say ‘boring’ because that is a conclusion. It’s a quick reference and judgment on what you are seeing but only YOU know what you’re referring to. There is no information for the reader.
So, describe it. Is it wood (or metal or linoleum or vinyl or tile)? What color? Is it polished? Not polished? Scuffs? Spotless? Dirt streaks? Tire marks? Shoe marks?

Then there are Smells. Smells are tough to describe. But do the best you can. Usually the specifics will have to carry you. Pineapple has a smell. Frying hamburgers have a smell. Air fresheners have a smell. Just be as specific as you can and you do that by paying attention, by concentrating on what you are seeing or smelling or hearing.

Air is another tough one. You can say it’s stuffy or hot or icy or whatever it is. If it isn’t anything, leave it out.


Visuals: What are you seeing? Be specific. Draw the readers a word picture. Don’t say “colorful.” Again, you know what that means but the reader doesn’t. What did you see that led you to that conclusion? THAT’s what you show the reader.

You’ll hear the word “SHOW” in most writing classes: “Show, don’t tell.” You “show” with specifics. “Telling” is when you start using conclusions that have no information in them for the readers. You and you alone will know whereof you speak.

With the right writing, readers have an idea of what you are seeing, and you are letting them come to their own conclusions. You can immerse them in a scene. Your words bring it alive and make it real for your readers.

And that’s what you will do in the observation assignment – describe.
INTERVIEWING

FROM “WRITING ACROSS THE MEDIA”
Interviews

In addition to gathering information from commercial databases and Internet sources, media writers depend on interviewing as a primary way of finding information on a topic. They must be able to ask the right questions, at the right time, in the right way — with a touch of self-assurance tempered by a hint of self-consciousness. The art of interviewing is not easily mastered. It is a skill that is developed through diligence and practice. Some media writers approach the interview like Doberman pinschers, snapping out questions and demanding answers from subjects. Others are more like cocker spaniels, nudging, coaxing and cajoling.

Whatever the style or manner, interviewing depends on having the guts to ask questions — even seemingly dumb ones. For instance, while Carole Rich was a cub reporter for the former Philadelphia Bulletin, she was assigned to cover a meeting of the Philadelphia School Board. She knew nothing about the board or its business, but she
noticed this little item on the agenda: "Approves token losses of $30,000." After the meeting, she got up the courage to ask a school auditor the obvious question: How can $30,000 be a token loss? He told her it was $30,000 worth of lost bus tokens that the school district sold to students to use on the city's public transit system. Rich, in turn, asked more questions of other officials, eventually learning that a major theft of tokens had occurred at one of the schools and that the procedure for selling tokens varied from one school to another. The auditor, who did not want to be quoted, supplied Rich with facts and figures about previous years' losses. Rich explains what happened next:

I returned to the newspaper and told my editor about the tokens, the only item that really interested me in what seemed like an otherwise boring meeting.

"Write it," he said. And he told me to put the rest of the board's news in a separate story.

The next morning, I awoke to find my token story stripped across the front page. And the next day the school board announced that it would devise a uniform policy for selling the tokens at all its schools. After that, I was assigned to cover the education beat, one of the best beats on any newspaper.\(^8\)

What Carole Rich got by asking the right questions, at the right time, in the right way, was a good story and a promotion. Not all media writers can expect such dramatic results, but they can expect the answers to good questions to make good stories easier to write.

**Locating Interview Sources.** The key to getting good answers to good questions is finding the right person to ask: one who has the knowledge, time and inclination to talk about your topic. Sometimes, the media writer needs only facts, perhaps about an influenza virus attacking grade-schoolers; here, the task is finding the appropriate agency, such as a city or state public health department, and a specialist in the communicable diseases division. Other times, the media writer searches for the answer to a policy question, such as why clinics did not have adequate flu vaccine supplies for everyone in the community; here, the writer needs to find someone higher up the administrative ladder who can speak for the agency or department. The secret is in
finding a bureaucrat who is important enough to be unafraid to talk but not so important as to be unavailable.

Putting together the best story, however, requires more than quotes from public officials. A story about a flu outbreak would be a pale imitation of real life if it did not have a few quotes from a child with an aching head, upset stomach and sweaty brow. The child’s mother also might have a strong quote or two about what a virus can do to a household routine. Good interviewers, then, get the official statement about a situation and go on to explore its colorful consequences for ordinary people. For instance, after talking with the academic dean about a college’s new grading policy, the interviewer will want to find the students who are suffering its effects.

The best interviewers are honest and straightforward. They state the purpose of the interview, identify the information they seek and describe its role in the story they plan to write. They also respect their sources’ time, avoiding unnecessarily long interview sessions and keeping appointments that have been set aside for interviewing.

**Identifying Types of Interviews.** Interviewing — the art of seeking information from people through questioning — is a lot like living life: Sometimes it is hard, sometimes it is easy and sometimes the fear is worse than the reality. How a particular interview goes depends on the skill of the interviewer and the attitude of the subject. It also depends on the kind of interview and the circumstances surrounding it.

Media writers can expect to encounter several types of interviews in their work. These include the informational, situational, confrontational, personal and professional types of interviews.

**The Informational Interview.** The most simple and straightforward type of interview situation is the informational interview. Here, the interviewer seeks information (such as facts and figures) about a program, policy, product, procedure or point of view from an expert who is willing to share his or her knowledge with the interviewer. Most print and broadcast reporters spend a part of each working day seeking to be informed and educated by experts who have more knowledge than they do about the subjects of their stories. Similarly, public relations writers turn to company executives and managers for the details of a new policy or program they are writing about in a news release or an in-house newsletter. And advertising copywriters attend meetings
WRITING TIPS

USING QUOTATIONS EFFECTIVELY

Interviews are a rich source of quotations. In a print or television news story, an advertisement or a press release, quotations can add zest and color to the writer's words and give readers or viewers a break from the usual pace and structure of the story. A good quotation functions like a verbal snapshot, explaining or expanding upon some element of the story.

The following guidelines will help you use quotations effectively in your writing:

1. Use quotations in complete sentences. Quotations that appear as full sentences are easier to read and understand. Taking good notes during interviews will help you develop an ear for good quotations and the skill of recording them in full-sentence format.

2. Choose quotes carefully. Cluttering a story with mediocre quotes will diminish the power of the effective quotations in a story.

3. Highlight an especially strong quotation by presenting it in a separate paragraph.

4. Avoid "stacking" quotes. These are quotations from two different speakers stacked in back-to-back paragraphs. Introduce the second speaker with a new paragraph by paraphrasing, for example, something he or she has to say.

5. Give the attribution at the end of a quotation for stories that will appear in print. For example:

   "The information is often more important than the name of the person who relayed it," she said.

When the quotation is two or more sentences in length, place the attribution after the first sentence:

   "I like ice cream better than frozen yogurt," John Smith said. "But I'd rather have frozen yogurt than no dessert at all."
6. Word the attribution according to the context in which it is used. Usually, *said* comes after the person’s name or the referring pronoun, as in the two preceding examples. However, note that *said* comes before the name or pronoun when you describe the person being quoted:

“I like ice cream better than frozen yogurt,” said Jim Smith, who owns a chain of ice cream stores. “But I’d rather have frozen yogurt than no dessert at all.”

7. Use *said* or *says* consistently in the attributions given throughout a story, avoiding inappropriate shifts in tense. The present-tense *says* is sometimes used in feature stories. Also avoid substituting the neutral attribution word *said* or *says* with a non-neutral word such as *exclaimed*, *announced* or *sighed*.

with agency marketing and research experts to get information about consumer tastes, product qualities and brand loyalties.

When television reporter David Wildermuth seeks information through interviews, he says he casts the net as far and as wide as possible, even including people he thinks might not have relevant information. In 1995, for example, Wildermuth was sweating a deadline as he put together a story about a TV photographer who claimed he was roughed up by the chief of Minnesota Vikings security and an off-duty police officer during the halftime of a “Monday Night Football” game. “When you get a story like this and don’t have much time, you have to figure out who the players are and what you need to make the story flow,” Wildermuth says. “And then you have to make phone calls and ask questions.” The reporter called the Minnesota Vikings first, and as he recalls, got a predictable nonresponse. Next, he interviewed the police officer to get his version of the scuffle. Wildermuth learned that the photographer was being verbally abusive and “acting like a jerk,” according to the officer. The interview was short, and it was not conducted on camera. But the few words from the police officer added some needed perspective to the story. “You can never assume someone won’t talk,” Wildermuth says. “You might be surprised. I’ve been turned around on stories. I suspect things are one way, and then somebody puts a nugget in my head. I say, ‘I can see that point, too,’ and the story takes another turn.”
The Situational Interview. Situational interviews are typically initiated and governed by the immediate circumstances, requiring the interviewer to think and act quickly, with subtlety and sensitivity. Media writers are most likely to conduct a situational interview at the scene of an accident, a murder or a fire, or in the aftermath of a natural disaster such as a hurricane or a flood.

Many beginning media writers may dread having to interview a victim’s family or the survivors of a tragedy. This type of interview can be intrusive and invasive, delving into a person’s private life. In some cases, it is best for the reporter to avoid asking questions and for the photographer to put down the camera. At other times, however, a thoughtful questioner can elicit answers without asking sensitive questions directly.

Consider, for instance, how one rookie reporter working the night shift for a Sacramento television station handled a situational interview with the family of a young woman who had been murdered. Upon arriving at the family’s home, Joann Lee identified herself, apologized for intruding and asked to speak with a family member. She was escorted by the victim’s uncle into the living room where about two dozen people — aunts, uncles, siblings, friends and parents — were gathered in silence. But soon they began to talk, and as they did, the pieces of Lee’s story began to take shape. Gradually, the victim became much more than a statistic in a police report. She was an 18-year-old woman with dreams and aspirations and a loving family. Her family, too stunned, angry and hurt to talk about the crime, wanted to talk about her in positive terms so that when the young woman’s name was broadcast on the evening news, she would be portrayed not only as a victim of a brutal crime but also as a person with a life, a family, a future. The photographer shot the victim’s graduation picture, the family sitting in the living room and the uncle talking about the victim’s hopes and plans. And Lee got her story without having to ask those dread questions.

Public relations writers also have to perform situational interviews. In a crisis situation, for example, the PR person for a company interviews the people involved in the accident, fire or other crisis. The information is then passed on to inquiring reporters, company employees or people who live near the company.

The Confrontational Interview. A confrontational interview has the hardest edge and the biggest stakes for the interviewer and interviewee alike. Its purpose is to ask specific questions and to get specific answers, but media writers can find themselves on either side of the
questions, asking or answering them. A public relations vice president may be responding to a reporter’s question about a sexual harassment complaint filed by several employees. Or a police reporter might be asking the chief why less than 5 percent of reported allegations of police brutality are substantiated by department investigators.

For Teresa McFarland, director of public relations at Mall of America, the nation’s largest indoor shopping and entertainment complex, asking questions is a crucial part of her job, particularly when she expects to be confronted by reporters. “As a public relations person, I do a lot of seeking answers — to questions that I expect reporters to ask,” McFarland says. While preparing a news conference to announce Mall of America’s parental escort policy for children under age 16, for example, McFarland thought about all the questions reporters might ask, and then she turned to mall executives and merchants for the answers. As she explains, “The press conference went very well. I don’t think the reporters asked a single question that we hadn’t anticipated. A good PR person always has to put on a reporter’s hat. That’s what I did — put on my reporter’s hat. I try to be skeptical and ask the toughest questions I can think of.”

The people involved in a confrontational interview need to be especially well prepared as well as thoughtful in how they ask and answer questions. They also may need to be assertive. Consider Barbara Walters, who has been described as “the best-known woman journalist on TV chiefly because of her tough approach to interviewing.”

After Walters asked Mamie Eisenhower if she was aware of the longstanding rumor that she was a dipsomaniac, friends asked the interviewer “How could you have asked?” Says Walters: “I find very often people like to confront rumors. It depends on how much they trust you. And you have to have a line between what is tasteful and what isn’t.” (In the case of Mamie Eisenhower, it turned out the former First Lady had an inner-ear infection that made her appear woozy on occasion.)

The Personal Interview. The personal interview is the foundation of the personality profile, wherein the interviewee is the focus of the story. The writer wants to evoke feelings and emotions with the interview questions and thereby gain insight into the character’s personality. The profile could be a newspaper feature about a local baseball team’s public address announcer who happens to be blind, or it could
be a cover story about a new CEO for a company magazine. Whomever it is about, the profile should brim with colorful anecdotes, revealing observations and lively quotations gleaned from the interview. But before media writers can conduct a personal interview they need to do some research into the subject’s life and work.

In 1993, for instance, reporter Renee K. Gadoua was assigned to write a profile of Ellen Tarry, an 88-year-old African American writer and activist. Before Gadoua prepared the questions she would ask Tarry, she read Tarry’s autobiography, tracked down articles she wrote and found references to the writer in several books on the Harlem Renaissance. As the reporter explains, the research she conducted gave her a rich picture of her subject’s life and accomplishments:

As my notes piled up, a fascinating story began to emerge. Ellen Tarry was born in Birmingham, Alabama, and was raised a Congregationalist. Her parents, both of mixed blood, sent her to a Catholic boarding school in Virginia, sparking an interest in Roman Catholicism that led to her conversion and baptism in 1922 at the age of seventeen.

During Tarry’s career as a journalist, her writings frequently decried injustice and segregation. She later moved to New York City, where she found herself in the midst of the Harlem Renaissance, the revival of black culture and literature. Among her friends were the celebrated poets Claude McKay and Langston Hughes.14

By the time Gadoua hopped on a train to New York to interview Tarry, she knew enough about her subject to ask the kinds of questions that would reveal Tarry’s character and conscience. Her preparation paid off. Gadoua describes the payoffs in this way: “I had expected [Ellen Tarry] to spare an hour — two at the most — to talk to me. Instead, the interview lasted all afternoon and included poring over scrapbooks and family pictures.”15

The Professional Interview. The professional interview differs from other types of interviews in that it takes place in front of an audience, rather than in a one-on-one private setting. Examples include interviews conducted on a television newscast or talk show, at an annual stockholders’ meeting or with a focus group for marketing executives. The interviewer — whether on camera, at the podium or at the head
of the table — attempts to do several tasks simultaneously: to ask precise questions, elicit informative answers, interrupt or redirect subjects whose responses are long-winded or off-topic, control the focus of the conversation, keep an eye on the clock and come up with a good get-away line when it is time to end the interview. The idea is not to bore audience members but to ask questions they want answered.

Professional interviews often rely on open-ended questions. Such questions, designed to prevent subjects from giving simple yes/no responses, aim to keep the conversation flowing. The interviewer wants subjects to talk at length about the topic at hand, whether it is an accident they witnessed, a controversial bill they proposed or a breakfast cereal they sampled.

**Observe General Guidelines for Interviewing.** No set of techniques will guarantee a successful interview. However, by observing the following guidelines you can increase your chances of conducting fruitful, productive interviews, whether you are a veteran reporter talking to a savvy city council president or a public relations writer drafting a speech for a company vice president.

*Treat the interview seriously.* Remember, the interview should focus not on casual conversation but on extracting the details you need to write the story.

*Prepare for the interview.* At times, you may have only a few minutes to gather your thoughts before talking with the owner whose store is burning, for example. Use every minute you do have to prepare for the interview. Lack of preparation can terminate the interview, leaving you with nothing to write about. Consider this example:

When Vivien Leigh arrived in Atlanta for the premiere of the reissue of "Gone with the Wind," a reporter asked her what part she had played in the film. Scarlett informed the writer that she did not care to be interviewed by such an ignoramus.16

*Establish a relationship with the subject.* This does not mean becoming best friends. But it may mean asking the subject about the family pictures on the desk. The point is simple: People will talk more candidly if they like you, or if they think they might like you if given the time.

Sports columnist Mitch Albom of the Detroit Free Press tells us how he established a friendly relationship with his subject, Mel Bridgman, a hockey player from Philadelphia who came to Detroit.
“First thing I said to him was, ‘You’re from Philly?’ And he said, ‘Yeah.’ I said, ‘Soft pretzels.’ And he said, ‘Yeahhhh.’ Then we traded thoughts about where the best pretzels were sold on the street in Philadelphia. By the time I got around to start interviewing the guy, we were chums. You take a little fact like that into an interview and you can open a hundred doors.”

*Clarify* the ground rules for the interview. If the entire interview is to be on the record, make that clear to the source *before* asking the first question. The understanding between the interviewer and the source may, and has, become the focus of lawsuits.

*Ask brief and specific questions,* not long-winded or vague ones. You want to get answers, not hear yourself talk. Avoid asking multipart questions: They can easily confuse your subject and prevent you from getting the information you need.

*Give the interview subject enough time to reply.* Allow time for silence, if necessary. For some subjects, silence may precede a thoughtful, emotional answer.

*Listen to those answers.* Although you have prepared a set of interview questions, you need not stick doggedly to the game plan. When your subject replies to a query with a surprising declaration, avoid plowing ahead to the next question instead of reacting to the subject’s last answer. Try to be as flexible as possible, as Tom Wheeler was in his interview with B.B. King (see pp. 77–78). Startling information can often emerge from an interview that is allowed to take its own course.

*Follow up on vague answers.* Ask your subject for more evidence, more details, more candor. Read back the answers to be sure your subjects understand what you think they have said.

*Encourage your subjects to express themselves freely,* especially those who are not experienced in dealing with the media. You should neither suggest a response nor offer an opinion.

*Use a mix of open-ended and closed-ended questions.* Each type of question has its place in an interview. The closed-ended question asks of the council president: “Will there be a property tax increase?” The open-ended question asks: “Why?”

**Observation**

In addition to being successful information gatherers and interviewers, good media writers are keen observers. At a campaign rally, a news reporter looks for candidates’ actions he or she can describe to
Reporting and Research

The three main elements of reporting are interviews, research and observations.

My general guidelines: Reporters are not scribes who simply take notes of what people say or documents state and publish them without verifying the truth of the assertions. Verify. Verify. Verify. That’s your job and your obligation to your readers and to the larger society.

If reporters can’t verify someone else’s assertion of fact, it needs to be left out of the story. Again, readers depend on reporters for truth, not just a reiteration of someone else’s false assertions.

Minton’s text follows for research
Reporting/Research

Excerpts from “Writing Across the Media”

Authors: Kristie Bunton, Thomas B. Connery, Stacey Frank
         Kanihan, Mark Neuzil, David Nimmer
TAILORING THE INFORMATION SEARCH

Before conducting an interview or surfing the Internet for sources, media writers should ask themselves four questions to help focus their search for information. Shirley Biagi offers the following advice in her book “Interviews That Work.”

First, the writer asks a practical question: How much time do I have to track down information? A TV reporter whose news director has just bellowed out an order to get over to the city’s airport and interview an arriving diplomat will not have time to conduct an extended information search. If the reporter is a well-read follower of current events, he or she will be able to think of questions on the spur of the moment. However, a public relations writer assigned to work on his or her company’s annual report has several weeks to track down information that will help him or her understand the ins and outs of the company’s financial position. To write an annual report, he or she must conduct an extended search for information.
Second, the writer asks: *What do I need to know?* An advertising copywriter who needs the phone number of a discount store to insert in a newspaper advertisement has no reason to waste time on a documentary search: He should get a telephone book. But a university public relations writer preparing a fact sheet for AIDS Awareness Week on campus may need to know how many Americans are living with HIV; she should seek documentary sources, such as the Statistical Abstract of the United States and the Web site of the Centers for Disease Control.

Third, the writer asks: *How will I use this information?* If the information is critical to the news release, the writer can launch an extensive search for the statistics on HIV patients. But if the focus is on campus plans for making students aware of AIDS, the writer can make a quick sweep of sources and waste little time trolling for tangential information.

Finally, the writer asks: *Who is the audience for this information?* If the information is to be used to form questions for an interview with a scientific researcher whose work is developing new HIV-fighting drugs, the writer should spend several hours learning about the properties of the drugs and becoming familiar with the relevant scientific terms. But if the information is to be used to provide a supporting paragraph in a fact sheet, the writer should spend time looking for translations of scientific jargon into everyday language for the journalists who will receive the AIDS Awareness Week media kit.

**Using a Variety of Information Sources**

Decisions as to how best to gather information will depend on the writer, the subject and the time available. But all media writers need solid information before they can begin writing. Advertising legend Leo Burnett “has said that in addition to a facility for putting words together, ‘organizing facts and finding things that were interesting to people’ contributed to his success.”

Knowledgeable media writers find facts and information in a variety of documentary sources. A common source of public documents and other information is the government. But numerous other places to look include the local library, the Internet, businesses, nonprofit and other media publications and broadcasts. When a media writer wants
to know about a person, the list of possible sources is lengthy and always changing. Think about yourself as a student and a citizen, and the number of cards you carry around in your wallet or purse: your driver’s license, college ID card, voter registration card, Social Security card, club membership card and perhaps, a visa or passport. Many of these cards are connected to public documents that are available to anyone wanting to look. Depending on your state of residence, for example, driver’s license records are fairly easily obtained, complete with name, age, address, physical description and driving record. A reporter investigating a traffic accident might find this information useful.

In their book “Search Strategies in Mass Communication,” authors Jean Ward and Kathleen Hansen identify what they call “potential contributors” to a mass media message. Ward and Hansen divide these contributors or sources of information into three categories. Informal sources include observation, casual reading, and networks of friends and co-workers. Institutional sources are the traditional tools of the journalist’s trade: government documents, colleges, interest groups and businesses. Information and data tools are the various libraries, commercial databases, Internet resources and data files available through a computer-generated search.

A listing of all the possible places to locate information would be endless, but we can identify the types of sources that tend to be most useful to media writers. These sources include commercial databases, Internet sources, government documents, interviews and observation.

**Commercial Database Services**

Most writers begin researching a subject by finding out what others have written about the topic. The quickest and easiest way to locate such information is through a commercial database service. Databases have been around in computer form since the late 1970s, and in printed versions for much longer. “The Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature,” for example, is a well-known source of information published on general topics.

Nora Paul, library director at the Poynter Institute for Media Studies in St. Petersburg, Fla., describes commercial database services as “information malls.” Each service offers a specific kind of information, such as bibliographies, articles, books, government documents, photographs or telephone numbers. An advertising copywriter about
to embark on a campaign for a new cancer drug could look for information in the Cancerlit database, which contains citations to cancer studies, articles and treatment reports dating back to 1963. A public relations writer organizing a campaign to promote a new model of personal watercraft, such as a Jet-Ski, would need to know about the competition. One place to look would be the Thomas Register, which contains information on who makes personal watercraft (and thousands of other products), where they are manufactured and how they are designed. A magazine writer traveling to Slovakia would be wise to search a news database such as VuText or DataTimes for the latest news stories on the country.

Internet Sources

The World Wide Web. The Internet has been described as the world’s largest library, except that all the books and periodicals are piled in the middle of a room in cyberspace in no particular order. The primary way government agencies, many businesses, nonprofit groups and news organizations publish information electronically is on the part of the Internet known as the World Wide Web. The Web has become the vehicle of choice because of its multimedia characteristics: Sound, text and video can be integrated into one package. Web
Any information acquired from the Internet, whether from a Web site, newsgroup, bulletin board or listserv, must be verified for accuracy and reliability.

**Government Documents**

Government documents are another useful source of information, and accessing them has become easier since the advent of the World Wide Web. There are nearly as many government document databases as there are government agencies, covering everything from patents to pollutants. Finding the right agency takes time and talent, but you should keep this guideline in mind: The information you seek exists somewhere. Keep digging until you find it.

Freelance writer and activist Bonnie Hayaske, for example, dug through a number of government Web sites to find documents on the dangers of glue-sniffing. Among the sites she visited online were the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration. She used the documents she found to show the toxic properties of toluene, an active ingredient in glue manufactured by H.B. Fuller Co. and sold in Latin America, where street children sniff it as a narcotic.7

**Interviews**

In addition to gathering information from commercial databases and Internet sources, media writers depend on interviewing as a primary way of finding information on a topic. They must be able to ask the right questions, at the right time, in the right way — with a touch of self-assurance tempered by a hint of self-consciousness. The art of interviewing is not easily mastered. It is a skill that is developed through diligence and practice. Some media writers approach the interview like Doberman pinschers, snapping out questions and demanding answers from subjects. Others are more like cocker spaniels, nudging, coaxing and cajoling.

Whatever the style or manner, interviewing depends on having the guts to ask questions — even seemingly dumb ones. For instance, while Carole Rich was a cub reporter for the former Philadelphia Bulletin, she was assigned to cover a meeting of the Philadelphia School Board. She knew nothing about the board or its business, but she
noticed this little item on the agenda: "Approves token losses of $30,000." After the meeting, she got up the courage to ask a school auditor the obvious question: How can $30,000 be a token loss? He told her it was $30,000 worth of lost bus tokens that the school district sold to students to use on the city's public transit system. Rich, in turn, asked more questions of other officials, eventually learning that a major theft of tokens had occurred at one of the schools and that the procedure for selling tokens varied from one school to another. The auditor, who did not want to be quoted, supplied Rich with facts and figures about previous years' losses. Rich explains what happened next:

I returned to the newspaper and told my editor about the tokens, the only item that really interested me in what seemed like an otherwise boring meeting.

"Write it," he said. And he told me to put the rest of the board's news in a separate story.

The next morning, I awoke to find my token story stripped across the front page. And the next day the school board announced that it would devise a uniform policy for selling the tokens at all its schools. After that, I was assigned to cover the education beat, one of the best beats on any newspaper.²

What Carole Rich got by asking the right questions, at the right time, in the right way, was a good story and a promotion. Not all media writers can expect such dramatic results, but they can expect the answers to good questions to make good stories easier to write.

Locating Interview Sources. The key to getting good answers to good questions is finding the right person to ask: one who has the knowledge, time and inclination to talk about your topic. Sometimes, the media writer needs only facts, perhaps about an influenza virus attacking grade-schoolers; here, the task is finding the appropriate agency, such as a city or state public health department, and a specialist in the communicable diseases division. Other times, the media writer searches for the answer to a policy question, such as why clinics did not have adequate flu vaccine supplies for everyone in the community; here, the writer needs to find someone higher up the administrative ladder who can speak for the agency or department. The secret is in
SESSION 2 SUMMARY: Fuller introduction of yourself and the purpose of the class, discuss interviewing experiences, small groups to read summaries so that students can see what others did with the assignment. The instructor goes from group to group scanning the material and making suggestions. Collect the papers after students add any handwritten corrections. Go to the computers for online research in class for facts, statistics, history and general information on the topic – the third leg of beginning reporting.

On the board, write out these two links: http://www.bing.com and http://www.google.com for use in their online research in addition to the 5Ws and H and assignments.

Take them back to yesterday’s assignments on interviewing and observing and ask them how it went. Be prepared to offer suggestions to improve their reporting. Some questions will likely be framed along the line of “What do I do when …?”

1. Take roll.

2. Tell them today’s in-class and out-of-class assignments are researching your story and writing the story.

3. Handouts for second session:
   - Research template
   - Story template
   - Writing tips

4. Tell students about your background and/or interest in journalism. For example:

“I was a reporter for 20 years and now I’ve been an instructor for 20 more. I’m passionate about journalism, about teaching and about meeting professional standards in the practice of journalism. That will reflect in everything we do in this class.

“Our focus is on informing our readers of the truth – fact-based truth. That is your obligation as journalists. Journalists play a role in society of getting information to their readers that no one else will supply. You are the only thing standing between your readers and exaggerations, lies and half-truths. It is a big responsibility, and this class will begin to give you the tools to achieve that. So let us begin.”

Instructor verbally lists the assignments due at the next class, especially the draft story.

Assignments:
- 600-word draft story based on your interviews, research and observations that follows the story template and using a summary lead that is 30 words or less. (See assignment sheet.)
- Summary of your research

Suggested comments:
“Today we will briefly discuss your interviewing and observing experiences and the draft story. Next we will break into groups so you can see how others went about the assignment. I’ll collect your papers. And then we will go online to research facts, history, statistics and general information on your topic. This reporting will be used in your story.”

4. Then instructor listens as students briefly relate their interviewing experiences. As issues arise, offer suggestions and tips for better interviews.

5. Students break into small groups to read each others’ summaries. Instructor goes briefly from person to person, group to group, making suggestions to the person and to the class. Any small corrections that can be made quickly are made by hand on the papers and all assignments turned in.

5. Collect the papers.

6. Suggested instructions before students move to the computers to begin their research.

“Facts, history, statistics and recent studies can contribute context and perspective to a story.

“For example, if you have someone asserting that the campus is safe, you can’t simply accept that as fact. You must find the crime statistics on campus and give them to the reader.

“It’s the factual context within which interviews and interviewees opinions make sense. The rest of the class time will be spent at the computers researching online for facts, history, information, and statistics relating to the story.


“In the white space, type in SJSU and (whatever the event is), hit ‘return’ and let’s see what comes up.”

“You must find reliable sources and try for at least two. I’m having you go to SJSU first because that is a reliable source. I’ll see how everyone is doing on that and help out where I can.”

Students spend almost the rest of the class researching, taking notes, pasting pertinent information into a Word document and listening to the instructor’s suggestions as the instructor goes from student to student and addresses the whole class on common problems. If time, begin organizing their research into the template format.

Have everyone print their documents about 10 minutes before the class ends. At home, they will use this research as part of a roughly 600-word story and a one- to two-page report summarizing the research, both to be turned in at the next class. (See assignment sheet and templates.)
While the students wait for the printouts, talk to them about the assignments for the next class, including the story.

Suggested comment on the story:

“At the first class, you did interviewing and observations. Today you did research. That is basic reporting.

“Now you are going to weave your interviews, your observations and your research into a story. Follow the story template. If you haven’t done this before, don’t worry. Do the best you can and remember this is a reporting class, not a writing class. Your story will be graded on accuracy, clarity and the completeness of the information. Ask yourself, ‘Will your reader know what happened?’

“Go to the story template. (Hold it up.) You will write the opening paragraph – called a summary lead – using 30 words or less and telling the reader Who, What, When, Where and maybe the Why and How of the event. That will be followed by a quote that relates to the lead, and then more information. Follow the template as best you can. It’s OK to vary from it a bit if you have more quotes or more observations to help inform the reader.

“Again, remember, this is a learning exercise. Email it to yourself when done, if possible, and bring your story and your research report to the next class.”

Then have the students go to the printer and pick up their research and take it home.

**Assignments due next class in more detail:**

A. First summary of the research, one page, tightly written. Can be longer but no more than two pages. Worth 0 to 10 points when completed (two sessions) depending on reliability of sources, thoroughness and meeting the requirements of the assignment.

B. A first draft of the story using a summary lead, following Who, What, When, Where and maybe Why and How. Your interviews, observations, facts and statistics will be organized into this simple event story following the template. 600 words. Zero to 5 points possible, depending on effort and meeting the requirements of the assignment. Double-spaced, one sentence per paragraph, every sentence attributed/sourced unless it is an observation. No first person.

**STORY FORMAT:** Stories are to be

- Double-spaced
- One sentence per paragraph
- Unless it is an observation, every sentence must be attributed/sourced often at the end of the sentence
- No first or second person – no “I, me, my, mine, us, our, we, you, your”
- Remember to follow the template and put your information in descending order of importance with a summary lead that is 30 or fewer words
Note: Read your stories aloud to check for errors. Ask yourself, will your readers be thoroughly informed about this event after reading your story?

C. Remember, a factual error means no credit for that assignment.
D. Handouts – no summaries due:
   • Story template
   • Research template
   • Writing tips

Next, the instructor must edit, grade and record all the assignments. This includes correcting grammar and punctuation. Return them at the next class. These edits are very important for student learning.
Assignments due next class at the third session:

A. First summary of the research, one page, tightly written. Can be longer but no more than two pages. Worth 0 to 10 points when completed (two sessions) depending on reliability of sources, thoroughness and meeting the requirements of the assignment.

B. A first draft of the story using a summary lead, following Who, What, When, Where and maybe Why and How. Your interviews, observations, facts and statistics will be organized into this simple event story following the template. 600 words. Zero to 5 points possible, depending on effort and meeting the requirements of the assignment. Double-spaced, one sentence per paragraph, every sentence attributed/sourced unless it is an observation. No first person.

STORY FORMAT: Stories are to be
- Double-spaced
- One sentence per paragraph
- Unless it is an observation, every sentence must be attributed/sourced often at the end of the sentence
- No first or second person – no “I, me, my, mine, us, our, we, you, your”
- Remember to follow the template and put your information in descending order of importance with a summary lead that is 30 or fewer words

Note: Read your stories aloud to check for errors. Ask yourself, will your readers be thoroughly informed about this event after reading your story?

C. Remember, a factual error means no credit for that assignment.

D. Handouts – no summaries due:
   - Story template
   - Research template
   - Writing tips

Next, the instructor must edit, grade and record all the assignments. This includes correcting grammar and punctuation. Return them at the next class. These edits are very important for student learning.
Basic Inverted Pyramid Story Template

BY JAN SHAW

DESCENDING ORDER OF IMPORTANCE:


2. Second paragraph: quote from someone that relates to and supports the lead. Double spaced and indented. Must have full name or can’t use. Include major and year in school.


4. Fourth paragraph: A description maybe of security, if applicable. One sentence, double-spaced, indented. The description may take two paragraphs. If no description is applicable, add more sourced information or a quote here.

5. Fifth paragraph: More information, one sentence. Put your source at the end of the sentence. (, according to ______.) Double spaced and indented.


7. Seventh paragraph: A quote from a different person. Double spaced and indented.

8. Eighth paragraph: More information, one sentence, sourced at end of sentence and indented.

9. Another quote.

10. Continue to weave together facts, interviews and observations following this basic order and format. Feel free to add more facts or more quotes than is called for here – just stick to the rules.

Follow this format for up to 600 words or until you run out of information. When you run out of information, stop writing. If that bothers you too much, end with a quote if, and only if, it fits smoothly into the story.

If you don’t have enough information, go back and do more interviewing and/or reporting. PUT WORD COUNT UNDER YOUR NAME.

Remember – descending order of importance.
WRITING TIPS
BY JAN SHAW

1. Use the subject-verb sentence structure. It’s bright, lively, uses the active voice and helps with clarity. Begin the sentence with the subject followed by the verb: “Students gathered ….” The word ‘students’ is the subject and ‘gathered’ is the verb. Getting the verb into the beginning of the sentence can also help long sentences to be clear.

2. Place the most important information of the sentence at the beginning of the sentence just like the inverted pyramid style. It too places the most important information first and you do the same thing, when possible, in your sentences.

3. Attributions often go at the end of a sentence. They are required but not always interesting so when not interesting in themselves put them last. Again, this follows the “most important or interesting information first” guideline. In most sentences, information tends to be more interesting than sources. Sometimes, the source is more interesting. If President Obama told you something, you might put the attribution first.

4. With difficult or complicated information, use simple, short sentences and paragraphs. This helps readers absorb the information. You build the information slowly so that it makes sense to readers unfamiliar with it.

5. Use precise words. Avoid generalizations. This is a key to great news writing.

Don’t say, “Students feel safe on campus.” For starters, you’ve talked to maybe 15 students and there are 26,000 of them on campus. If you use the sweeping generalization, it will be considered a factual error because you have not done the research to back it up. You concluded on almost no information that students feel safe. Don’t do that. Give your readers the same information you uncovered and stay away from conclusions.

Instead of saying, ‘Student say they feel safe,’ you say, something like:

Sophomore James Lee says he feels the campus is quite safe.

The computer science major says he does, however, worry about the area immediately surrounding the campus.

“When it gets dark, I really don’t like walking off campus,” he said. “It feels dangerous.”

It’s specific. It has the added benefit of being true as opposed to ‘students feel safe.’

6. Use words that are information heavy. Inexperienced writers use words such as “happy” or “proud” or “dull” or “stylish.” Those words are the conclusion of the writer, not a description. YOU know what those words mean to you but your readers don’t. Again, be specific and don’t be judgmental. What did you see that led you to the conclusion that the person was happy? Describe THAT to the reader. “… he said, laughing.”
Same with physical descriptions of people or scenes or action. Don’t hand the readers your conclusions, such as “the scene was confusing.” “The person looked unhappy.” “The action was thrilling.” There is no information in those words for people who weren’t there. You need to figure out what you saw and then show the reader. Be specific. No one cares if you think someone is happy or the action is thrilling. Describe what you saw that led you to that conclusion. That helps the reader see what you saw. Your conclusions are useless to them.

7. Consider varying your sentence lengths as you begin to develop rhythm in your writing. Writers vary length for rhythm, impact and to interest their readers. Short, long and in-between. They all work so long as the sentence structure is clear and the sentences uncluttered. Rid all sentences of unnecessary words.

8. Be sparing with the use of adjectives and adverbs. When you do use them, they must really add to the information. For instance, ‘collapsed’ is a good, specific verb. If you add ‘slowly collapsed’ you’ve added information that is helpful to the reader. Adverbs and adjectives can add so much to your writing but they must be specific and precise.

9. Rid your sentences of unnecessary words.

10. NEVER use exclamation points.

11. Think of your readers.

Again, in this class, there is no first person (I, me, my, we, our, etc.) in the finished story. The first person is not used in stories because the job of a reporter is to find fact-based truth, not give opinions on it. There is plenty of room in the media for opinions, but generally not in professional, fact-based journalism where there are standards.

The reporter and the reporter’s editor do, however, decide what stories to report, investigate or dig into more deeply.

After that, the content of the story is based NOT on what the reporter or editor thinks but on verifiable facts and research, interviews with people impacted by an event, knowledgeable people or experts and direct observation of events.

Again, in direct observation, you describe what you saw/heard/smelled so that, essentially, you put the reader at the scene. The reader can see it all through your words.

You leave out the “I” and concentrate on content in direct observation.

Again, reporters must keep themselves and their opinions out of any stories they do for this class and for news outlets that follow journalistic standards. The third-person form is easily learnable.

Once more: Sometimes rumors, lies and exaggerations rule the day. As a reporter, you must bring truth to the matter.
Instructions for leads: Inverted pyramid (plus MORE writing tips)

BY JAN SHAW

Beginning News Writing: Some rules about summary leads for the inverted pyramid and some suggestions on writing your stories.

In the inverted pyramid style, the lead (or lede) is the first paragraph of the story and summarizes what happened.

The writer aims to answer the overriding question of “What Happened?” and is designed to both summarize and interest the reader in the story.

Ask yourself what about the story is most interesting and fold that into your summary lead.

The lead needs to answer the following questions in 30 words or less: Who? What? When? Where? And sometimes “How?” and “Why.”

There is no introduction in this non-academic style of writing. You IMMEDIATELY get to the point. If your readers had no more information than your lead, they would still know what happened from your summary of the story’s most important elements.

A good lead is usually in the active voice.

For the purposes of this class, do not start the story with a direct quote or a question. (And do not use questions as set-ups anywhere in a story.) Those types of leads can be used occasionally. The problem: It’s often not the best lead. Instead, it’s the only lead a novice reporter can think of. Once you develop your abilities to write leads, then the question or quote lead is simply one more way to best start that particular the story – not a desperate move because the writer is drawing a blank.

Don’t use the first or second person. Use the third person.

In the inverted pyramid style, don’t use names that are unfamiliar to your readers – replace with a descriptor.

For example:
Correct: A bystander leapt to the aid of an injured woman today when ….
Not Correct: David Freitas leapt to the aid of an injured woman today when ….

The reason: What happened is most interesting. The name is distracting. So you name him in the second paragraph: David Freitas had just left work when he spotted a car aimed … , he said.
Sum up the facts: Think to yourself, what would the reader find most interesting and/or important?

If you don’t like your lead, try rearranging the order of the facts or perhaps bring up some other element that you were going to use in the second or third paragraph and see if you like that.

Experiment.

If worse comes to worse, live with the lead you don’t like, write your story and then go back to the lead. When inspiration completely fails, just make the lead clear and accurate and hope the topic is enough to interest readers. Maybe you’ll think of lively verbs and perfect nouns later. Or not. It happens. A lot.

There are many other styles of leads and structures for stories, but the summary lead is the basic one for news stories.

Once your lead is written, try to find a good quote that supports and relates to the lead.

Then the writer adds essential details that didn’t fit in the lead. This sometimes occurs in the second paragraph with the quote following in the third.

Then more quotes, anecdotes, details and facts all related to the story. Don’t let yourself get sidetracked by something that interests you but is beside the point of the article. Write a different story or a sidebar to go with your main story if it’s interesting enough.

In the inverted pyramid style, the writer structures the quotes, anecdotes, observations, facts and statistics in diminishing order of importance until the end, where the writer throws in the remaining information that isn’t all that important or wouldn’t fit anywhere else.

Then you stop writing.

In the inverted pyramid style, there is no need for a close. If you feel you absolutely have to have a close, use a quote.

The story we are doing is not a pure hard news event such as a fire, a vote, a fight, a train derailment. That’s where the inverted pyramid style can really shine with its tight rhythms and pell-mell pace.

Instead, our story is more of an issue story but written in the event style. This is so that if you need more interviews, you can get them.

In your writing, try to practice some basics: Use good strong verbs, the active voice, vivid details and interesting quotes. These add spark to your stories. If your first stories seem lackluster or dull, don’t worry. Writing is a craft that can be learned. The more you write and think about it and read, the better you become. Be patient with yourself.
Remember: Specifics and precision are powerful. Generalities are not. So try not to backslide into boring generalities that aren’t informative and risk being too broad to be true. Overreaching for a reporter can be enormously embarrassing as well as get you fired.

Remember: You must always be clear. You don’t want to confuse your readers with muddled writing.

In trying to keep readers interested, reporters can also vary sentence lengths – short and punchy, long and interesting, medium and informative. When done correctly, that is another tool to create rhythm in your writing, along with subject-verb sentences and parallel construction, which we are not going to address in this class.
Research Summaries: Format

**RESEARCH:** This is the format for the report summarizing your online and/or print research that is pertinent enough to be used in your story. This is simply a summary for the instructor. When writing your stories, use your original notes. This does help you organize those notes into usable form.

- Generally, use bullets for the various pieces of information you found.
- Don’t include everything, just the facts that could actually be used in your story.
- For the purposes of this summary, don’t use more than eight sources even though you might use more than that in an actual story. If you don’t have eight, list what you do have. You need a minimum of three.

1. **First source:**
   A. Name of organization that published the information, in detail, underlined. As a reporter, it is your obligation to verify the legitimacy of the source. Explain legitimacy of the source in two or fewer sentences.
   B. Name of report or a title for the information, year published, if applicable.
   C. List facts, statistics, history, etc., you found at this site or document:
      - Fact, statistics or history:
      - Fact, statistics or history:
      - Fact, statistics or history:

2. **Second source:**
   A. Name of organization that published the information, in detail, underlined. As a reporter, it is your obligation to verify the legitimacy of the source. Explain legitimacy of the source in two or fewer sentences.
   B. Name of report or a title for the information, year published, if applicable.
   C. List facts, statistics, history, etc., you found at this site or document:
      - Fact, statistics or history:
      - Fact, statistics or history:
      - Fact, statistics or history:

3. **Third source:**
   A. Name of organization that published the information, in detail, underlined. As a reporter, it is your obligation to verify the legitimacy of the source. Explain legitimacy of the source in two or fewer sentences.
   B. Name of report or a title for the information, year published, if applicable.
   C. List facts, statistics, history, etc., you found at this site or document:
      - Fact, statistics or history:
      - Fact, statistics or history:
      - Fact, statistics or history:

Repeat this format for all your sources
SESSION 3 SUMMARY: Take roll. Instructor hands back edited summaries. Students get out their stories and summaries, break into small groups and begin reading each others’ work. Instructor goes from group to group scanning the material and making suggestions. As issues and common mistakes become apparent, the instructor lectures the class on these and on how to improve both the stories and the research to better meet professional standards. This should take about half the class. Students spend the rest of the class at the computers improving their research.

1. Take roll
2. Answer questions and ask how the story and research went. Problems?
   Anything interesting?
3. Break into small groups
4. Collect stories and have them keep today’s research assignment. They will expand the information in today’s class and turn it all in at the next class
5. Students work on research

Students go to the computers to search for more information based on the needs of their stories, comments from the instructor, feedback from students that is corroborated by the instructor and suggestions made to the entire class.

The instructor goes from student to student discussing their research and addressing the whole class when needed. Students print out the research and email it to themselves, if possible. (Everyone may not have email.)

Assignments due next class:
A. Students finish the research summary as per the template and bring it to the next class, including the original research summary. Also, email it to themselves, if possible.
B. Work on correcting the edited assignments that were handed back to you. The corrected reports will be part of the final project.
C. Handouts: Rewriting, no summary due

Remember, a factual error means no credit for that assignment.

Next, the instructor must edit, grade and record all the assignments. This includes correcting grammar and punctuation. Return them at the next class. These edits are very important for student learning.
Assignments due next class, session 4:

1. Students finish the research summary as per the template and bring it to the next class, including the original research summary.

2. Work on correcting the edited assignments that were handed back to you. The corrected reports will be part of the final project.

3. Handouts: Rewriting, no summary due. This is in anticipation of rewriting the stories.
REWRITING

Check your story for redundant and needless words. Read it aloud. If you are stumbling through a sentence, the readers probably are too.

Have you used the subject-verb sentence-verb structure whenever possible? Look carefully at your sentence structure.

Are your words precise? Have you used five words trying to say something when one precise, specific work would be clearer? Those words don’t always come to mind immediately, so think on it.

A PARTIAL CHECKLIST FOR NEWS STORIES

BY JAN SHAW

STORY:
- Is accurate, clear and complete with all facts checked and verified
- Includes interviews with people likely to be affected by the topic of the story
- Uses specific examples and anecdotes
- Uses active voice

LEAD:
- 30 words or less
- Consists of one sentence that emphasizes the most important of the 5 Ws and the H (Who, What, When, Where, How)
- Interesting information
- Avoids unfamiliar names
- Contains a strong, precise verb

BODY:
- In this class, the lead is followed by a direct quote in the second paragraph that directly relates to and supports the lead – a continuation of the lead in many respects
- The next most important or interesting information is presented. And that continues with a descending order of importance to the end. At the end are usually are bits of information you have that could help the readers but are not particularly significant. Then stop writing. For the inverted pyramid style, a close is not needed.
- Sentences generally begin with the subject followed by good specific verbs
- Interesting direct and indirect quotations are sprinkled through the story
- Includes students, observations and research
- All facts and statements are sourced/attribution except direct observations
- Descriptions are clear and relate to the story
SESSION 4 SUMMARY: Observation and descriptive writing. Take students out to the campus for an observation and descriptive writing exercise.

Specifics:
1. Take roll
2. Collect assignments
3. Hand back the edited and graded assignments, including grammar and punctuation
4. Hand out examples of good use of description and observation in a story
5. Lecture on firsthand observation and its role in informing the reader
6. Take students to the cafeteria or an event on campus where they can sit and really observe their surrounding and what is happening. They will write a fact-based descriptive or mood piece, more than one page, no less than three. No first or second person.

Suggested introduction: First You Have to See

“You must really look at the scene and the people. Look closely, almost as if you were doing a painting. A glance isn’t good enough.

“Start writing down the details: Third person descriptions of what you see, smell and hear. Don’t use the first or second person – no ‘I, me, my, our, we, us, you, your.’

“In writing what they see, many novice reporters have trouble differentiating between their personal conclusions or opinions and fact-based description.

“The problem often centers on using the first and second person and using words that have no meaning for readers but a lot of meaning to the reporter. Novices will also likely want to comment. No comments.

“Instead, focus on the specifics of what you actually see.

“For example, you are covering a big nighttime fire. You look at the scene and you think to yourself, ‘This is awful.’ Note that there is no information in that conclusion for the reader. It’s only your reactions so keep it out of your story. Your job is to describe the scene so that readers come to their own conclusions, not yours.

Or, you might think, ‘This is chaotic.’ Chaotic is a good descriptive word but it’s also a conclusion of what the scene looks like based on your observations.

“So back yourself up. What did you see that led to that conclusion? That’s where the details come in, details that let readers see what you see.

“At the fire scene, the details that led you to the word ‘chaotic’ could include:

- Flames shooting into the air from the windows and the rooftop
- Three buildings burning, all of them five stories high
- Hundreds of fire hoses strewn around the scene
• Residents in their night clothes huddled on corners
• 40 or 50 firefighters sweating and swearing
• Fire trucks parked at all angles blocking the streets
• Lights of fire trucks, police cars and ambulances flashing and throwing a counterpoint light to the yellow, black, red and orange flames and smoke
• Small groups of police officers trying to keep back spectators

“Almost any physical description can contain elements that are accurate but unhelpful to the reader.

“For example: “A long line of students.” It’s accurate, but not very informative. Better to say, “a line of 45 students ….” That way, the reader isn’t imagining a long line to mean 2,000 students.

“Or, a “crowded room.” Accurate but, again, not helpful. ‘The auditorium was crowded with 7,500 people filling every seat.’ ‘The classroom was crowded with 50 students for only 30 seats.’

“Specifics – precise specifics – are more informative and FAR MORE POWERFUL.

“The same goes for descriptions of people. Don’t generalize – be specific. Describe to the reader what you saw that led you to your conclusion. Let the readers draw their own conclusions.

“AGAIN, LET THE READERS DRAW THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS. DON’T DO IT FOR THEM.

“Words such as ‘pretty, proud, handsome, fun, happy, sad, etc.’ have no information in them and only mean something to you – not anyone reading them.

“Again. Pay attention to your own conclusions. Then ask yourself, ‘What am I seeing that led me to that conclusion?’ And that’s what you write down – not the conclusion.

“So today’s descriptions have to be of real details and actions.”

Have the class spend the rest of the hour sitting down at a scene and writing out a fact-based, specific description of what they see, hear and smell. It is to be turned in at the next class. They will not return to the classroom that day. ABSOLUTELY NO FIRST OR SECOND PERSON.

Assignments:

1. A fact-based, specific, third-person descriptive writing assignment based on that day’s class exercise. More than one page, less than three. Include a half page on problems, if any, you ran into trying to do that assignment. Zero to 5 points. Will be graded on meeting the goal of the of the assignment.
2. **Gather up everything you have written, rewritten and reported** for this class. Put it in a folder. Bring it all to the next class. (Students will spend the next session fine-tuning their stories. For this class, news writing takes precedence over reporting.)

3. Handouts: Descriptive writing handouts. No summary due but the information will help you with your descriptive writing assignments.

Next, the instructor must edit, grade and record all the assignments. This includes correcting grammar and punctuation. Return them at the next class. These edits are very important for student learning.
Assignments due next class, session 5:

1. A fact-based, specific, third-person descriptive writing assignment based on that day’s class exercise. More than one page, less than three. Include a half page on problems, if any, you ran into trying to do that assignment. Zero to 5 points. Will be graded on meeting the goal of the assignment.

2. Gather up everything you have written, rewritten and reported for this class. Put it in a folder. Bring it all to the next class. (Students will spend the next session fine-tuning their stories. For this class, news writing takes precedence over reporting.)

3. Handouts: Descriptive writing handouts. No summary due but the information will help you with your descriptive writing assignments.

Next, the instructor must edit, grade and record all the assignments. This includes correcting grammar and punctuation. Return them at the next class. These edits are very important for student learning.
Instructions and Format for Major Project

Editing and rewriting:

1. See if any pertinent information is missing in your summaries and reports, find said information if possible and add it in for final corrections or rewrites. If the corrections or additions are small, just handwrite them. If they are not small, rewrite and, if you have a computer, reprint.

2. Go through your writing and see if you can edit for clarity or wordiness or just a better sentence structure.

3. See if there are any edits you overlooked. If so, fix as per the edit.

4. If there is anything in your story or assignments that you don’t understand or don’t like, mention it to the instructor during this class.

5. If you have time, work on improving your stories but remember that this is a reporting class and the grade is weighted toward the reporting assignments.

6. Once you’ve finished and repaired the assignments, you need to assemble it all in a folder.

Assembly:

The final project should be neat, tidy, legible, well organized and reflect professional journalism standards. In a folder, you will compile all your graded, edited and rewritten assignments:

• For beginning reporting, that includes all summaries, research reports original and rewritten, observation, and a story.
• If you have updated, improved, or rewritten assignments, staple them on top of the original, edited pieces and put them in the file.
• Put the stapled (or not stapled) reports and summaries in chronological order and put the story last.
• INCLUDE AN INDEX
• Include your name and address so instructor can mail your final projects to you.

1. The folders are due at the last class session.

2. Be on time.
Observation and Descriptive Writing instructions

BY JAN SHAW

First You Have to See

The idea is to put the reader at the scene through your eyes and your words. To do this, you must really look at the scene and the people. Look closely, almost as if you were doing a painting. A glance isn’t good enough. Write out what you see. Smells can also be described as well as sounds, if they are pertinent to the story.

In writing what they see, many novice reporters have trouble differentiating between their personal conclusions or opinions and fact-based description.

The problem often centers on using the first and second person and using words that have no meaning for readers but a lot of meaning to the reporter. Novices will also likely want to comment. Don’t.

Instead, focus on the specifics of what you actually see.

For example, you are covering a big nighttime fire. You look at the scene and you think to yourself, ‘This is awful.’ Note that there is no information in that conclusion for the reader. It’s only your reaction so keep it out of your story. Your job is to describe the scene so that readers come to their own conclusions.

Or, you might think, ‘This is chaotic.’ Chaotic is a good descriptive word but it’s also a conclusion of what the scene looks like based on your observations. Again, the reader can’t see anything.

So back yourself up. What did you see or are you seeing that led to that conclusion? That’s where the details come in, details that let readers see what you see.

Example, continued. At the fire scene, the details that led you to the word ‘chaotic’ could include:

- Flames shooting into the air from the windows and the rooftop
- Three buildings burning, all of them five stories high
- Hundreds of fire hoses strewn around the scene
- Residents in their night clothes huddled on corners
- 40 or 50 firefighters sweating and swearing
- Fire trucks parked at all angles blocking the streets
- Lights of fire trucks, police cars and ambulances flashing and throwing a counterpoint light to the yellow, black, red and orange flames and smoke
- Small groups of police officers trying to keep back spectators
Be aware that almost any physical description can contain elements that may be accurate but unhelpful to the reader.

For example: “A long line of students.” It’s accurate, but not very informative. Better to say, “a line of 45 students …. ” That way, the reader isn’t imagining a long line to mean 2,000 students.

Or, a “crowded room.” Accurate but, again, not helpful. ‘The auditorium was crowded with 7,500 people filling every seat.’ ‘The classroom was crowded with 50 students for only 30 seats.’ ‘There were 25,000 people in the stadium stands but there were 60,000 seats.’

Specifics – precise specifics – are informative and FAR MORE POWERFUL.

The same goes for descriptions of people. Don’t generalize – be specific. Describe to the reader what you saw that led you to your conclusion. Let the readers draw their own conclusions.

AGAIN, LET THE READERS DRAW THEIR OWN CONCLUSIONS. DON’T DO IT FOR THEM.

Words such as ‘pretty, proud, handsome, fun, happy, sad, etc.’ have no information in them and only mean something to you – not anyone reading them.

Again. Pay attention to your own conclusions. Then ask yourself, ‘What am I seeing that led me to that conclusion?’ And that’s what you write down – not the conclusion.

So description and observation assignments in this class must comprise real details and actions and ABSOLUTELY NO FIRST OR SECOND PERSON. DON’T say, “I saw…” “I observed...” Or “You will see...”

- First person singular: I, me, my.
- First person plural: We, us, our.
- Second person singular: You.
- Second person possessive: Your.

NO conclusions. By that I mean, again, no shorthand descriptions that you understand but your readers don’t.

Another example of a conclusion: Look at the floor.

Is it boring? You might think so. But in reporting, the reporter will never say ‘boring’ because that is a conclusion. It’s a quick reference and judgment on what you are seeing but only YOU know what you're referring to. There is no information for the reader.
So, describe it. Is it wood (or metal or linoleum or vinyl or tile)? What color? Is it polished? Not polished? Scuffs? Spotless? Dirt streaks? Tire marks? Shoe marks?

Then there are Smells. Smells are tough to describe. But do the best you can. Usually the specifics will have to carry you. Pineapple has a smell. Frying hamburgers have a smell. Air fresheners have a smell. Just be as specific as you can and you do that by paying attention, by concentrating on what you are seeing or smelling or hearing.

Air is another tough one. You can say it’s stuffy or hot or icy or whatever it is. If it isn’t anything, leave it out.


Visuals: What are you seeing? Be specific. Draw the readers a word picture. Don’t say “colorful.” Again, you know what that means but the reader doesn’t. What did you see that led you to that conclusion? THAT’s what you show the reader.

You’ll hear the word “SHOW” in most writing classes: “Show, don’t tell.” You “show” with specifics. “Telling” is when you start using conclusions that have no information in them for the readers. You and you alone will know whereof you speak.

With the right writing, readers have an idea of what you are seeing, and you are letting them come to their own conclusions. You can immerse them in a scene. Your words bring it alive and make it real for your readers.

And that’s what you will do in the observation assignment – describe.
SESSION 5 SUMMARY: Students fine-tune the assignments that will be handed in at the final class period.

INSTRUCTIONS: The idea is to see what pertinent information is missing in the stories, find said information if possible and add it to the reporting summaries. Additional information will be written onto a new page, identified as new information and stapled to the top of the original report – unless you are fixing errors. Those can be fixed on the paper.

HOWEVER, if you have an error-laden report that has too many errors for simple handwritten corrections, you will rewrite the whole report and staple it to the top of the old report. (Note: Except for today’s class, the rewrites are not mandatory but they are strongly encouraged.)

The improved and/or completed work MUST BE STAPLED TO THE ORIGINALS so that the instructor can see what work you have completed and if there have been improvements.

If/when all the reports are complete or rewritten, the students will further integrate their reporting into their stories using the computers in class. They can also be handwritten.

A. Take roll.
B. Collect assignments,
C. Hand back graded and edited assignments
D. Go the computers for more research
E. Work on correcting and improving your research.
F. Work on correcting and improving your stories, if there is time. For this class, the reporting is more important than the story.

Instructor goes from student to student, making certain they are using the right formats and then looking at the substance of the content for problems.

Students will email the additional research or the stories to themselves, if possible, as well as printing when necessary.

Assignments:
1. Be on time to the next class.
2. In a folder, you will compile all your graded, edited and rewritten reporting summaries: Interviews, research and observations. If you have updated, improved, or rewritten reports, staple them to the original, edited pieces and put them in the file. Put the reports first and the story last. Handout: Instructions for organizing your final project.

Reminder of grading: Grades in this course will be figured on a straight percentage basis. That means your final grade is based on the percentage of the total points you earn. The grading will follow this scale:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>100 - 93%</td>
<td>A</td>
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<td>92 - 90%</td>
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SESSION 6: LAST CLASS

A. Take roll.
B. Briefly break into groups so students can look at each other’s final projects and make any last-minute hand-written corrections.
C. Collect the final projects.
D. Then review the basics of beginning reporting: Observations, interviews, and research. Explain how those three elements are the key to finding fact-based truth for their readers so that the stories you give to your readers are true in every detail. Again, journalists must get the story right – their readers depend on them.
E. Review the obligations of journalists: You are not a scribe. You do not simply pass on assertions of fact without verifying them. If what someone said is true, isn’t, leave it out – but you must find out.
F. Talk about keeping readers foremost in mind.
G. Then talk to the class about what elements of the class were most useful to them in beginning to understand basic reporting. Go through the elements of the class one by one looking for some individual comments and a general class sense of that assignments usefulness or and if there is a way it could be improved. Explain that the assignments can change based on their feedback and, for the next round of students, do they have any suggestions? Use that feedback to improve the class.
H. Assignment: Get the Instructor a mailing address so that the final project can be returned.

Reminder of assignments, points and grading policy:

Points:
- Attendance: 2 points each day, 1 point if late, 0 if absent
- Summaries of readings: 0 to 2 points each and graded on accuracy, clarity, grammar and punctuation.
- Report of project interviews: 0 to 10 points and graded on fulfilling the assignment correctly including the name, major and year in school of each interviewee, the proper format, a cogent, brief summary of the interview and not treating an interview as if it is a survey. Can be rewritten for more points but must show significant improvement.
- Report of project research: 0 to 10 points and graded on depth, assignment accuracy, variety of sources, cogent summarizing and if the research actually relates to and could be used in the story. Can be rewritten for more points but must show significant improvement or no additional points are credited.
- Report of project observations: 0 to 10 points and graded on the accuracy and pertinence of the observations to help readers understand the story. The idea is to put readers at the scene through your words.
- A straightforward news story: 0 to 10 points and graded on clarity, accuracy, thoroughness, adherence to professional standards of journalism, adherence to the
template, adherence to the assignment and the correct use of research, interviews and observations to help readers understand what happened.

- Observation report regarding major reporting project: 0 to 5 points, depending on effort, completeness and adherence to the assignment’s instructions.
- Observation exercise: 0 to 5 points, depending on effort, completeness and adherence to the assignment’s instructions.
- The final project: This is a folder containing all the final summary reports both original and rewritten of your reporting – research, interviews and observations – and the story it led to. Zero to 10 points graded on accuracy, clarity, thoroughness and assignment requirements. Of those points, 85 percent will be based on reporting and 15 percent on the story.
- Any additional assignments will have points that fit within these parameters.
- Assignments and points are subject to change and will be announced in class and, if students have email, will be emailed.

Grades in this course will be figured on a straight percentage basis. That means your final grade is based on the percentage of the total points you earn. The grading will follow this scale:

100 - 93%  A
92 - 90%  A-
89 - 87%  B+
86 - 83%  B
82 - 80%  B-
79 - 77%  C+
76 - 73%  C
72 - 70%  C-
69 - 67%  D+
66 - 63%  D
62 - 60%  D-
Below 60%