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JOUR 270.02: Beginning Reporting

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REPORTING CLASS PROMISES THRILLS, HARD WORK STUDENTS STUNNED BY THREAT OF AUTOMATIC Fs

Reporting J 270

MWF 10:10-11 a.m., J 211 and J212

Michael Downs (mdowns@selway.umt.edu)
Phones: 243-6720 (o) and 327-0207 (h)

Office: J 303B

Office Hours: T 2:30-4:30 p.m.
Th 9-11 a.m.
F 2-4 p.m.

OBJECTIVES and EXPECTATIONS

In one week, a good journalist might cover a forest fire, the death of a child in an auto accident, a city's celebration of a national collegiate football championship, the opening of a new business or the failure of an old business.

The work is never boring as long as you believe that the world is never boring. Bring to this class a robust curiosity. Enjoy asking questions; be nosy. Be prepared to take all the world has to offer, then write about it in a hurry.

In turn, you will leave this class with an introduction to the skills needed to work as a journalist. We will learn about the parts of a newspaper, about news values, about how to write a lead, conduct an interview, take notes, use quotations and attribution, anticipate and answer readers' questions, observe detail and write background. We will talk about how to root out hard-to-find information. We will wrestle with the kinds of ethical problems journalists face. We will learn the importance of accuracy.

Which brings us to our headline. A journalist is only as good as he or she is accurate: Blow a detail and you've blown your credibility and injured that of the profession. A misspelled word of any sort makes your newspaper or magazine or TV broadcast look foolish. The misspelling of a word is the worst. Any assignment in which a person's name is misspelled will earn an F. People will trust you with their stories and the facts of their lives. **DOUBLE CHECK THE SPELLING OF ALL NAMES.**

In a democracy, the journalist enjoys a privileged role. Respect the profession. Give it your best effort.

DEADLINES AND CLASS ATTENDANCE

No matter how good your story, it will not make it in the newspaper or magazine or on the broadcast if it is late. Deadlines are essential. In this class, **assignments need not be turned in after deadline** (they have already failed by having missed deadline) unless you have notified me in advance by phone or in person prior to the deadline (five minutes before deadline doesn't count). Treat this class as if it were a job. If you can't make it to work, notify me in advance by telephone. In-class assignments cannot be made up unless prior arrangements have been made.

GRADING

Reporting/writing assignments	50 percent
Quizzes (current events, style)	30 percent
Exercises and other assignments	20 percent

NOTE: Writing grades in the second half of the semester count twice as much as those in the first half. Also, writing assignments can be revised for a better grade, taken from the average of the first draft and the second.

NOTE #2: Don't forget: **Misspell a name or turn in your story after deadline, and you will have earned an F.**

TEXTS

Required

"Beginning Reporting Stylebook," available in the journalism school office.

The Missoulian and the Kaimin, every day. Be prepared for spot quizzes on current events – local, state, national and international.

Recommended

A good dictionary, preferably a recent edition of Webster's New World Dictionary

A FINAL NOTE

Maybe you're
asking yourself,
"What have I
done?"

It's a fair question.

Reporting is hard
work, and the writing
is unlike any other
done in school. In this
class, you may suffer
through some of the worst grades you've ever received. **DON'T GIVE UP!** Stick to it. Try harder. Ask questions. Remember, journalism is the best job you'll ever hate, and the worst job you'll ever love.