

COMM 260W News Writing and Reporting — Spring 2021

Section 009

Wednesdays: 8:00 to 9:15 a.m., Patterson 304

<https://psu.zoom.us/j/93653023030>)

Fridays: Asynchronous activities

Instructor: Karlin Andersen, kja30@psu.edu**Office hours:** Mondays, noon to 2:00 p.m. via Zoom (<https://psu.zoom.us/j/95929819505>)
and by appointment**Overview****COMM 260 is a skills-based course with a “flipped” classroom.**

What that means:

- Not structured as a lecture-based class with multiple tests and a final.
- Class-time is devoted to writing and reporting activities that supplement the skills introduced in Canvas modules.
- Each week will introduce new skills to help you build on throughout the semester.
- For this “flipped” classroom, COMM 260W students will learn concepts outside of the classroom through online instruction and then put those concepts into practice in a lab. It’s **your responsibility** to learn the material *prior* to the writing labs on Wednesday. **Labs, also known as class, are designed to reinforce material, not reintroduce it.**

Mixed-mode instruction:

- During weeks 1-4, all material will be delivered online asynchronously.
- In-person lab meetings starting week 5 will be held once a week, on Wednesday, at our schedule time and location.
- During the lab meetings on Friday you are expected to complete the items listed in the syllabus for that given day and/or use the time to complete writing assignments for the course.
- Some weeks we will not meet at all. During those weeks you are expected to work independently on your story assignments, complete peer reviews, or virtually meet with the instructor one-on-one.

COMM 260W learning objectives, after the course, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the importance of accurate, thorough and fair news writing.
- Write concise, well-organized stories with effective leads that get the reader's attention and tell the most important news.
- Gather information through the use of interviews, documents and basic reference materials.
- Generate story ideas that reflect an understanding of the elements of newsworthiness (timeliness, prominence, proximity, conflict, novelty and impact).
- Critically evaluate your own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.

- Understand the legal, ethical and historical principles underlying journalism, including the role of journalists in society (to serve the "public interest").
- Appreciate the joy and importance of being well-informed.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate to the contemporary newsroom.
- Demonstrate an understanding of cultural diversity in a global society in relationship to journalism.
- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and the press.

Required Materials

“The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law” 2020 edition:

The text should be brought with you to all class meetings. You will learn how to search and reference the stylebook. You will need this stylebook in all future communications courses and in your careers, therefore, it is suggested that you purchase a copy rather than rent.

Recorder and headphones:

You will need to record and transcribe interviews for every assignment. Bring your recording device and headphones to every class meeting. iPhones and other smartphones include a built-in recorder. However, those devices can be unreliable and may stop recording if you receive a phone call mid-interview. Try to backup or save an additional copy of your interviews. You can also purchase a recorder online (a nice luxury but not necessary for this course).

Notepad:

All reporters should carry a notepad and reliable pen for easy and quick notetaking. Pocket-sized or smaller notebooks are suggested. You never know when you'll need to write something down. A notepad or notebook is also suggested for taking notes in lab and participating in activities.

Personal computer:

All assignments need to be typed and turned in through Canvas. We will be meeting in a general-purpose classroom meaning there will not be access to computers in our classroom. Plan to bring a personal computer to every lab session. Computers and tablets are available for rent through the library at <https://libraries.psu.edu/services/technology-equipment>. Contact the instructor with any questions about securing a computer for the semester.

Graded activities

Your final grade will be made up of four categories:

Lesson Quizzes:

- A mix of multiple-choice and true-false questions, will stem from the weekly online modules. They will be completed on Canvas.
- Quizzes are timed and “open-book” (allowing students to consult the lesson notes).
- See schedule for deadlines
- Students will have 10 minutes to complete Lesson Quiz 1 (five questions) and 18 minutes for the remaining 10-question Lesson Quizzes. The timer starts once you open the quiz.

AP Style Quizzes:

- There will be 13 AP Style Quizzes, each with 10 multiple-choice questions, beginning Week 3. All quizzes will be taken on Canvas and are worth 15 points.
- AP Style Quizzes are timed, and students can use their AP Stylebooks.
- Students will have 24 minutes to complete the first AP Quiz and 18 minutes for the remaining ones. The timer starts once you open the quiz.
- The lowest AP Quiz score will be dropped when your final grade is calculated in LionPATH.

Writing Assignments:

- Assignments will be explained through individual handouts. See course schedule for due dates.
- Submit all assignments through the corresponding Canvas drop box.
- All interviews should ideally take place in-person but can occur over the phone or video chat. Email or any form of text-based chat should only be used to follow up or clarify information after a face-to-face interview. See interview requirements and COVID-19 related information for interviews on Canvas.

Homework & Class Activities:

- This can include practice interviews, writing exercises, practice AP quizzes, and other research or reporting exercises in-class.
- Peer Reviews: You will complete a peer review for most of the major writing assignments. Details will be provided for each assignment.

Attendance and participation

- Students consistent attendance and participation are critical elements of this course.
- Each student will be required to attend the instructor's virtual office hours at least four times during the semester to discuss their stories and work in the class. Office hour meetings will be required for four major stories, see schedule for details.
- This will make up roughly 100 points of your final grade.
- Absences are discussed further in the "Course Policies" section.

Determining your final grade

Students can earn roughly 1,000 points for the semester (not counting potential extra credit) and their final grade will be based on the following point-based standards:

930-1,000	A
900-920	A-
870-890	B+
830-860	B
800-820	B-
770-790	C+
700-760	C
600-690	D

0-590

F

The point breakdown is as follows:

- Lessons Quizzes: 135 points possible
- AP Style Quizzes: 180 points possible, with lowest quiz score dropped
- Homework / Class Activities: 175 points possible
- Writing Assignments: 410 points possible
- Attendance & Participation: 100 points (minimum, extra credit may be offered)

COMM 260W course policies**COVID-19 Policies:**

We know from existing scientific data that wearing a mask in public can help prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the community (Lyu and Wehby, 2020; CDC, 2020; Johns Hopkins Medicine, 2020). Just as you're expected to wear a shirt and shoes to class every day, everyone -- including the instructor and TAs -- are required to wear a face mask in University buildings, including classrooms and labs. You **MUST** wear a mask appropriately (i.e., covering both your mouth and nose) in the building if you are attending class in person. Masks have been provided for students, faculty, and staff, and everyone is expected to wear one while on campus or out in the community.

All students, faculty and staff are expected to maintain social distancing (i.e., maintain at least six feet of space between individuals) when possible. Seating patterns and attendance patterns, including assigned seating and closed-off desks/chairs/room sections, have been established to help allow for this distance for your safety. It is also important to follow related guidance communicated by the University and via public postings/signage related to directional traffic flow and maximum occupancy of spaces.

You are not permitted to consume food or drink in classrooms, except for water. If you must drink water, please be especially conscious of maintaining social distancing and minimizing the time your mask is moved aside. Or, better yet, use a straw. Cooperation from **EVERYONE** will help control the spread of the virus and help us get back to the previous version of campus life as quickly as possible.

Students with conditions that make it difficult to wear a mask or who choose not to wear a mask may participate in class remotely but may not attend class in person. This is to protect your health and safety as well as the health and safety of your classmates, instructor and the University community. Anyone attending class in person without a mask will be asked to put one on or leave. Refusal to comply with University policies is a violation of the Student Code of Conduct. Students who refuse to wear masks appropriately may face disciplinary action for Code of Conduct violations. See details here: <https://studentaffairs.psu.edu/support-safetyconduct/student-conduct/code-conduct>

Attendance & Participation:

Students who consistently arrive late, depart early, are disengaged (i.e. sleeping, messing around on social media, doing work for another class, using their personal or Penn State-owned

technology for non-class related purposes, etc.) will be penalized at the discretion of the instructor.

Life happens. Students are allowed three excused absences for ANY reason. Notify the instructor (kja30@psu.edu) if you plan to be absent. Students who need to miss class due to Penn State-sponsored activities will need to notify the instructor as soon as possible and provide documentation. Those absences will not count as one of your three excused absences.

Absences do not excuse students from, or alter the deadlines of, in-class activities or assigned homework. Students should consult the syllabus, Canvas, and contact a classmate to learn what happened in class. If you need further details, reach out to the instructor. As a mixed-mode section of Comm260W, **attending through Zoom does not count as an absence but please notify the instructor at least 24 hours before class begins if you plant to attend virtually.**

Students who are experiencing COVID-19 related symptoms, or are generally feeling unwell, may not attend class in person and should instead participate over Zoom. Anyone feeling sick is encouraged to contact a health care provider. If you become sick contact the instructor as soon as possible to make arrangements that prioritize your health but ensure you do not fall behind in class.

Wellness Days:

Wednesday, April 7 has been designated as a Wellness Day. No class meeting will happen, either in person or remotely, for that day, and no assignments will be due on that day. Students are encouraged to use the day to focus on their physical and mental health. Please see wellnessdays.psu.edu for university sponsored events focusing on wellness that may be of interest to you. See Canvas and the course syllabus for any work that may be due before the next class meeting.

Accuracy:

Accuracy is the foundation of good journalism. This class is no exception. A major factual error in a writing exercise will result in **a 1 point deduction for every occurrence** in the piece. Major factual errors include, but are not limited to: misspelling or misidentifying the subject of a news story, incorrectly reporting the results of an action (writing the football team lost when it won, reporting a measure was voted down when it passed, etc.) or errors that significantly alter the meaning of a story. Minor fact errors or violations of AP style will carry lesser penalties. Read and re-read your assignments!

Conflict of interest:

Modern journalism attempts to provide an impartial account of topical events. Complete objectivity is impossible. However, this class expects students to complete fair and balanced stories. Students are not allowed to cover an event, organization, person, etc. with which they have a personal connection.

A “personal connection” is defined as: any event sponsored or staged by an organization, group, or community in which you play a significant role; immediate family members; current

employers or coworkers; friends; roommates; girlfriends, boyfriends, spouses or partners, etc.; current professors, Comm 260W students in any section.

If in doubt, ask before you write.

Students cannot use a guest speaker appearing in one of their other classes for a graded COMM 260W assignment. Nor can you use someone who appears at a non-public event you are required to attend because of your membership in an organization. COMM 260 students should go out into the community to find newsworthy events to cover.

Of special note to student journalists: Students cannot submit a story to satisfy a COMM 260W requirement that you've completed for publication by another media outlet. Students can, however, use contacts made as part of those assignments as the basis of a separate story for COMM 260W. Say, for example, you're covering a high school soccer match as an intern for the CDT. You cannot submit the same story for COMM 260W. You could, however, decide to profile the soccer coach you met while covering the game. Check with the instructor prior to deadline if you have questions about this.

Completing assignments:

You will be required to attend and cover events that occur outside of normal course hours and will be given advance notice. Many of these events you will choose on your own. You must immediately notify the instructor—with at least a week of notice—if the event conflicts with your course schedule or another University-sanctioned event to identify an alternative assignment. Failure to notify the instructor a week in advance to schedule an alternative event will result in a grade of zero for the assignment.

Contacting the instructor:

The best way to contact the instructor is by email at kja30@psu.edu. If you email after 5:00 p.m., do not expect a response until the following morning. Make it a habit to check the course Canvas page and your Canvas mailbox for important updates. Due to COVID-19, the College is requiring all office hours to be held remotely. Weekly office hours will be held Mondays from noon to 2:00 p.m. at this reoccurring Zoom link: <https://psu.zoom.us/j/95929819505>. Or, email me to schedule an appointment.

You will never be penalized for asking questions in class or contacting the instructor. If something doesn't make sense, you need help, you don't understand an edit or a grade, just ask. If you're having trouble with the course, let me know as soon as possible. Do not wait until the last week of class. Nothing bad will ever come from asking for help or consulting the instructor.

Writing assignment deadlines & format:

The ability to meet a deadline is vital in any workplace, and especially so for journalists. Any late writing assignment will be immediately subjected to a 20 percent late penalty. The penalty will increase by 10 percent for each additional day the assignment is late. No assignment will be accepted more than two days beyond the original due date unless arrangements have been made PRIOR to the original deadline. Any assignment not received by that date will receive a grade of zero.

All assignments and supporting material should be turned in through the corresponding Canvas drop box. Your submission should include interviews, any process work including peer reviews, and research. Deadlines for all assignments are listed in the course schedule. Assignments should be double spaced, 1-inch margins, written in a clear 12-pt. font and include a header with your family name and page number beyond the first page.

Begin each assignment with the heading:

Your first and family name

Comm260W

Word count:

Suggested headline for your story:

Class courtesy:

The class will maintain a respectful and welcoming atmosphere. Mean, harmful, or deeming language or actions will not be tolerated.

When we're examining the work of classmates it will be done in a polite and professional manner. Journalists must be comfortable sharing their work with large audiences and this is not meant to embarrass or ridicule. Remember, we're critiquing the story not the person.

Once the class starts, students should use the equipment only to produce work for the course. Don't let technology (including your own phone) become a distraction. Additionally, the College of Communications restricts eating and drinking in the labs.

Academic integrity:

Short form:

Don't cheat, don't plagiarize someone else's work, don't grab quotes from the Internet or make up quotes from interviews that didn't happen, don't collaborate on quizzes or share answers. Any of the above will result in an F for the assignment and Penn State's academic integrity office will be contacted.

Long form:

Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly and creative activity in an open, honest and responsible manner, free from fraud and deception, and is an educational objective of the College of Communications and the University. Cheating – including plagiarism, falsification of research data, using the same assignment for more than one class, turning in someone else's work, or passively allowing others to copy your work – will result in academic penalties at the discretion of the instructor. In serious cases, it could also result in suspension or dismissal from the University or in the assignment of an "XF" grade (failed for academic dishonesty).

As students studying communications, you should understand and avoid plagiarism (presenting the work of others as your own.) A discussion of plagiarism, with examples, can be found at <http://tlt.psu.edu/plagiarism/student-tutorial/>.

Except for certain designated team or group projects, students are expected to work independently on all COMM 260 assignments. Collaboration on any of these types of assignments would be considered a violation of the Academic Integrity policies.

Students are expected to work independently on the AP Style and Lesson quizzes. Collaboration is considering cheating and a violation of the university's Academic Integrity policies (see below). Be aware that Canvas software now includes a tracking function that allows instructors to detect collaboration by students.

The rules and policies regarding academic integrity should be reviewed by every student, and can be found online at: <http://senate.psu.edu/policies-and-rules-for-undergraduate-students/47-00-48-00-and-49-00-grades/#49-20> and in the College of Communications document, "Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures." Any student with a question about academic integrity or plagiarism is strongly encouraged to discuss it with his or her instructor.

Reporting Bias:

Consistent with University Policy AD29, students who believe they have experienced or observed a hate crime, an act of intolerance, discrimination, or harassment that occurs at Penn State are urged to report these incidents as outlined on the University's Report Bias webpage (<http://equity.psu.edu/reportbias/>)

Disabilities Services:

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. Every Penn State campus has an office for students with disabilities. Student Disability Resources (SDR) website provides contact information for every Penn State campus (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/disability-coordinator>). For further information, please visit Student Disability Resources website (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/>).

In order to receive consideration for reasonable accommodations, you must contact the appropriate disability services office at the campus where you are officially enrolled, participate in an intake interview, and provide documentation: See documentation guidelines (<http://equity.psu.edu/sdr/guidelines>). If the documentation supports your request for reasonable accommodations, your campus disability services office will provide you with an accommodation letter. Please share this letter with your instructors and discuss the accommodations with them as early as possible. You must follow this process for every semester that you request accommodations.

Counseling and Psychological Services:

Many students at Penn State face personal challenges or have psychological needs that may interfere with their academic progress, social development, or emotional wellbeing. The university offers a variety of confidential services to help you through difficult times, including individual and group counseling, crisis intervention, consultations, online chats, and mental health screenings. These services are provided by staff who welcome all students and embrace a philosophy respectful of clients' cultural and religious backgrounds, and sensitive to differences in race, ability, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Counseling and Psychological Services at University Park (CAPS): 814-863-0395
Penn State Crisis Line (24 hours/7 days/week): 877-229-6400
Crisis Text Line (24 hours/7 days/week): Text LIONS to 741741

COURSE SCHEDULE (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

Asynchronous Class Structure

Week 1 Lesson Module: Introduction

1/20-1/22: Complete Week 1 module on Canvas; watch course introduction video and review course policies; introduce Conversation with a Classmate

Assignment:

- Inauguration Coverage extra credit due by January 21 at 11:59 p.m.
- Complete Lesson 1 Quiz, due January 22 at 8:00 a.m.

Week 2 Lesson Module: Anatomy of a News Story

1/27-1/29: Elements of a news story, introduction to AP style

Assignment:

- Complete Lesson 2 Quiz by January 27 at 8:00 a.m.
- Submit resume by January 29 at 11:59 p.m.

Week 3 Lesson Module: Ledes, AP Style and Press Releases

2/3-2/5: AP style and press releases; work on Conversation with a Classmate story

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 3 Quiz by 8 a.m. February 3
- Complete Lesson 3 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. February 3
- Interview for Conversation with a Classmate due by 11:59 p.m. February 5

Week 4 Lesson Module: Interviewing

2/10-2/12: Interviewing and Reporting techniques

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 4 Quiz by 8 a.m. February 10
- Complete Lesson 4 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. February 10
- Conversation with a Classmate due by 11:59 p.m. February 12
- First required office hours meeting completed by February 12

RETURN TO IN-PERSON FORMAT

Week 5 Lesson Module: Person on the Street assignment

2/17: Quotes in stories; POTS assignment introduction; introduce event coverage assignment

2/19: Work on POTS; read POTS assignment and examples at

<https://www.humansofnewyork.com/tagged/syrian-americans>

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 5 Quiz by 8 a.m. February 17
- Complete Lesson 5 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. February 17

Week 6 Lesson Module: Social Media in journalism; fact vs. opinion

2/24: Social media and journalism, in-class interviews, introduce Crisis Reporting assignment

2/26: Work on POTS assignment and peer review

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 6 Quiz by 8 a.m. February 24
- Complete Lesson 6 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. February 24
- POTS peer review completed by 11:59 p.m. February 26
- POTS 1 due by 11:59 p.m. March 1

Week 7 Lesson Module: Covering speeches & live events

3/3: Crisis Reporting activity; introduce Podcast/Radio Story

3/5: Finish Crisis Reporting story

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 7 Quiz by 8 a.m. March 3
- Complete Lesson 7 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. March 3
- Crisis Reporting story due by 8 a.m. March 5

Week 8 Lesson Module: Research techniques

3/10-3/12: **No class meeting**; complete Research Exercise on Canvas and work on Podcast/Radio Story pitch

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 8 Quiz by 8 a.m. March 10
- Complete Lesson 8 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. March 10
- Complete Research Exercise by March 12

Week 9 Lesson Module: Covering events and source selection

3/17: Pitch Podcast/Radio Story; selecting sources and covering events

3/19: Submit final Podcast/Radio Story pitch

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 9 Quiz by 8 a.m. March 17
- Complete Lesson 9 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. March 17
- Podcast/Radio Story pitch due by March 19 11:59 p.m.

Week 10 Lesson Module: Access to information; rights and responsibilities of journalists

3/24: Research and access to information; guest speaker (TBA)

3/26: Peer review Podcast/Radio Story

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 10 Quiz by 8 a.m. March 24
- Complete Lesson 10 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. March 24
- Second required office hours meeting completed by March 26
- Podcast/Radio Story Peer Review due by March 26, 11:59 p.m.

Week 11 Lesson Module: Developing enterprise reporting

3/31: Introduce enterprise story

4/2: Research enterprise story ideas and draft proposal; complete Event Coverage peer review

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 11 Quiz by 8 a.m. March 31
- Complete Lesson 11 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. March 31

- Podcast/Radio Story due by 11:59 p.m. March 31
- Event Coverage peer review due by 11:59 p.m. April 2
- Event Coverage story due by 11:59 p.m. April 5

Week 12 Lesson Module: Numbers and math for journalists

4/7: **Wellness Day, no class meeting or activities**

4/9: Submit Enterprise Story pitch; review Canvas module; receive feedback for Podcast/Radio Story

Assignments:

- Event Coverage story due by 11:59 p.m. April 5
- Complete Lesson 12 Quiz by 8 a.m. April 9
- Complete Lesson 12 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. April 9
- Enterprise Story proposal due by 11:59 p.m. April 9
- Third required office hours meeting completed by April 9

Week 13 Lesson Module: Writing techniques and tips

4/14: Review of writing tips and quotes in stories; receive feedback on Enterprise Proposals

4/16: Work on revised Podcast/Radio Story; receive feedback on Event Coverage

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 13 Quiz by 8 a.m. April 14
- Complete Lesson 13 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. April 14
- Revised Podcast/Radio Story due 11:59 p.m. on April 16

Week 14 Lesson Module: Introduction to journalism ethics

4/21: **No class meeting, office hours meetings to discuss Enterprise story**

4/23: Work on Enterprise Story; review Canvas module

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 14 Quiz by 8 a.m. April 21
- Complete Lesson 14 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. April 21
- Revised Event Coverage Story due 11:59 p.m. April 21
- Fourth required office hours meeting completed by April 23
- Rough draft of Enterprise Writing assignment due by 11:59 p.m. April 23

Week 15 Lesson Module: Wrapping up the course

4/28: Using your skills in internships and jobs, complete SRTEs

4/30: Enterprise Story peer review

Course discussion

- Using your skills in internships and jobs
- SRTEs

Assignments:

- Complete Lesson 15 AP Style Quiz by 8 a.m. on April 28
- Complete Enterprise Story peer review by 11:59 p.m. April 30
- Complete SRTEs

Finals Week: Enterprise Story due by Wednesday, April 5 at 11:59 p.m.