

# ***J310: Writing, Reporting & Ethics III***

## ***Syllabus***

## ***Fall 2009***

- Section 10753 Th 7-9:45 p.m. MZ 361

**INSTRUCTOR:** Henrietta E. Charles

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**OFFICE HOURS:** 6-7 p.m. Th; noon-1 p.m. Sat

### **ONLINE RESOURCES**

**CLASS PAGE:** <http://whatswrite.wordpress.com> \*  
(Mobile: 2021812748)

**ONLINE JOURNAL:** <http://www.livejournal.com/>

**JOURNALISM DEPARTMENT:** <http://www.csun.edu/journalism/>

**J-DEPARTMENT SYLLABI:** <http://www.csun.edu/journalism/resources/syllabi.html>

**BOOK CLUB:** <http://jbookclub.weebly.com> (Extra Credit)

### **THE COURSE:**

This class is designed to introduce you to the basics of feature writing and specialty journalism. You will also learn in-depth reporting skills and review the various ethical issues pertaining to long-form journalism.

There will be weekly lectures/presentations and in-class exercises on such topics as research, interviewing, story organization skills and using descriptive language and lively quotes. In addition, we will study various magazine and newspaper markets, how to develop story ideas and how to pitch these ideas to newspaper and magazine editors on a freelance basis.

In addition, you will be required to keep a weekly online journal to practice your creative writing and become more familiar with (constructively) expressing yourself on the Internet.

However, the heart and soul of this class will be your research and writing for three feature-length articles -- a special interest piece, a personality profile and a community news-feature article, which will be the equivalent of a final exam.

Please note, the research and writing for your three main assignments will be done

on your own time. So, what you get out of this class will largely depend on how much time and effort you invest in your assignments.

**PREREQUISITES:**

- A “C” or better in Journalism 210
- Basic English/grammar and typing skills

**PLEASE REMEMBER:** This is *your* class. If you don’t understand something, ask. If something you are interested in is not being discussed or otherwise dealt with, let me know.

**TEXTS/SUPPLIES:**

1. **Feature and Magazine Writing: Action, Angle and Anecdotes**, by David E. Sumner, Holly G. Miller

2. **Shaking the Foundations: 200 Years of Investigative Journalism in America** by Bruce Shapiro (Editor)

*(For In-Class Book Review)*

3. **Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law**, recent edition

4. A recent edition dictionary.

6. A portable USB drive or other means of saving your in-class work.

7. You are required to pay a \$5 lab fee by no later than the third week of class or your records will be encumbered and you will owe an additional \$10 Business Obligation Fee.

**OPTIONAL (But strongly recommended):**

1. **Writer’s Market**, recent edition

2. **The Elements of Style**, by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White

**COPY PREPARATION:**

1. All assignments must include your name and the due date

Example: Henrietta E. Charles  
8-27-09 or Aug. 27, 2009

2. All assignments *must* be typed and double-spaced with paragraphs indented at least five spaces. Stories that don’t meet these criteria will be returned **ungraded**.

3. All spelling/typing errors **must** be corrected and you **must** adhere to AP Style. Your grade on each assignment will be lowered significantly if the article contains spelling and/or news style errors. (Also see grades section.)

**ATTENDANCE:**

Attendance will be monitored by keeping tabs on your weekly in-class assignments since you will have one every week. Three or more unexcused absences, missed assignments and/or underdeveloped writing skills due to absenteeism **will significantly lower your grade**. For example, an "A" student's grade could drop to a "B" or lower due to excessive absences.

University policy defines an excused absence as illness/injury, family death/emergency, religious holiday, jury duty/other government obligation or a CSUN-sanctioned activity. You must **submit verifiable proof** to have an absence excused.

You will **not** be able to make up missed in-class assignments.

**CLASS CONDUCT**

- Computers **must be off** during class except when noted by instructor. Students Caught using their computers during class will receive a lower grade for all assignments submitted that evening. **No exceptions.**
- Cell phones and pagers **must be** on **silent** alert.
- Private conversations are not permitted during lectures.
- Questions are strongly encouraged, but please be courteous to your fellow students by raising your hand.

**GRADES:**

**First two feature stories, 40 % (20% each); In-class assignments; Weekly Journals, 10%; MidFinal + In-Class Book Review Exam, 20%; Final story, 30%.**

<b>Grade Scale</b>			
<b>A=</b>	<b>95-100</b>	<b>C =</b>	<b>73-77</b>
<b>A- =</b>	<b>90-94</b>	<b>C- =</b>	<b>70-72</b>
<b>B+ =</b>	<b>87-89</b>	<b>D+ =</b>	<b>67-69</b>
<b>B =</b>	<b>83-87</b>	<b>D =</b>	<b>63-67</b>
<b>B- =</b>	<b>80-82</b>	<b>D -</b>	<b>60-62</b>
<b>C+ =</b>	<b>77-79</b>	<b>F =</b>	<b>50 - 0</b>

Your writing assignments will be graded for style, punctuation, grammar, spelling, accuracy, organization, clarity and content. Some in-class assignments will be graded on a credit/no credit

basis.

You will have an opportunity to rewrite and/or revise your three primary articles before they are graded.

All stories submitted for this class **MUST** be based on original reporting done this semester, not research or work done for another class or employer.

Grading on your in-class assignments will vary. Some will be for credit (100 points) rather than a grade. Graded written assignments all start with an “A.” Your grade is then dropped accordingly for spelling/style errors, inaccuracy, poor story organization, lax reporting, inadequate sources, etc. For example, an otherwise well-written article could still be dropped to an “A-,” “B+” or lower due to spelling/typing errors. But you would drop from an “A” to a “B,” possibly lower, for significant errors of accuracy, etc.

- **You will drop one full grade for the semester for each of the required stories that you fail to complete.**
- **You will drop one full grade for each day a required assignment is late unless the delay has been agreed to in advance.**

#### **OTHER POLICIES:**

**Honesty** — The Journalism Department of California State University, Northridge is committed to the highest standards of academic excellence and integrity. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating will not be tolerated. Anyone caught cheating will be reported to the Dean of Students possible action and will receive a failing grade in the class. For a further explanation of the behavior defined as academic dishonesty, and a more detailed discussion of disciplinary procedures, consult pages 536-538 of the 2006-2008 CSUN catalog.

Also, please remember that most the information posted on the Internet is protected by U.S. copyright laws. Passing this information off as your own is a violation of CSUN's plagiarism policy and carries the penalties outlined above.

**PUT ANOTHER WAY: All of your written work for this class should be in your own words, not copied from a book/magazine/newspaper or the Internet. When words/work from other sources are used, the information should be credited to the proper source.**

**Diversity** — Students in this course are strongly encouraged to broaden their journalistic experiences, with the instructor's help, by including sources and subjects from a variety of ethnic, racial and religious backgrounds; senior citizens; the disabled and poor; gay men and lesbians; and similar groups. The intent is to ensure that your work reflects the diversity of the community.

**Course Outcome** — Upon completion of this class, students should possess the skills necessary to write and report basic feature stories, a working knowledge of how to submit feature ideas and articles to the Associated Press Stylebook and newswriting style, a general understanding of the news industry and a commitment to fair, balanced and accurate reporting.

**Your Contract** – This syllabus clearly outlines the conditions and parameters of this class.

Please review it carefully and keep a copy for reference. Acknowledgement of its contents implies an agreement by you to abide by the standards set forth within.

## **COURSE OUTLINE:**

(Weekly scheduling may be changed/adjusted to accommodate unforeseen circumstances and/or faculty furlough days, which are pending approval.)

## **WORKLOAD:**

- **Weekly Journal:** Each week you will be required to post 100 to 150 words about anything that is of interest to you: how your week was, an unusual experience you've had, something you're excited about, frustrations, etc.  
The goal is simply for you to write.  
You will not be graded on what you say. You will be graded for (or lose points for not) simply sitting down for a few minutes each week and writing.  
To get the required class credit for this exercise, you will need to print out a copy of Your latest journal entry and turn it in to me each week.

Three 1,500-word (about 6 pages) feature-style articles are required for this class:

- **Special Interest:** A story on a specialty topic such as fitness, culture, travel, business, religion, fashion, music. This article must include at least two live sources (interviews).
- **Profile:** An in-depth word portrait of an interesting person. At least two other people besides the person being profiled, must be interviewed.
- **News-Feature:** A story with a clearly defined news peg about an aspect of city or local government, the law/legal proceedings or a general community issue. This story must include at least four live sources (interviews). In addition, you will need to submit a Query Letter (to be discussed later) with both the draft and the completed version of this article.

**FYI: All reading assignments from the textbook Feature and Magazine Writing**

### Overview

<b>Week 1 /Aug. 27</b>	Introduction/Review Syllabus; class survey Create online journal; first journal entry = personal essay <b>Homework</b> – Chapter 15; Bring a magazine for class
<b>Week 2/Sept. 3</b>	<b>Weekly Journal #1</b> Class discussion: Magazines Class Exercise: Magazine Analysis <b>Homework</b> – Chapters 2 & 3
<b>Week 3/Sept. 10</b>	<b>Weekly Journal #2</b> Story ideas; Query letters Class Exercise <b>Homework</b> – Chapter 14

**Week 4/Sept. 17**

**Weekly Journal #3**

Writing Special Interests; Review assignment guidelines

Keeping it legal: legal, copyright and ethical issues.

Class Exercise

**Homework** – Chapters 7 & 22

**Skills Building**

**Week 5/Sept. 24**

**Weekly Journal #4**

Learning to lead; exploring options for writing feature leads.

Class Exercise

**Homework** – Chapter 9

**Week 6/Oct. 1**

**Weekly Journal #5**

**(Draft) Article No. 1 Due: Special Interest w/ Query Letter**

Organizing your story

Class Exercise

**Homework** – Chapter 5

**Week 7/Oct. 8**

**Weekly Journal #6**

Interviewing: getting great information for your feature story.

Class Exercise.

**Homework** – Chapter 12

**Feature Stories**

**Week 8/Oct. 15**

**Weekly Journal #7**

**(Final) Article No. 1 Due: Special Interest w/ Query Letter**

People Profiling: creating a memorable portrait of a person.

Review assignment guidelines

Class Exercise.

**Homework** – Chapter 10

**Week 9/Oct. 22**

**Weekly Journal #8**

Grammar; Style

Class Exercise

**Homework** – Chapters 1 & 8

**Week 10/Oct. 29**

**Weekly Journal #9**

**(Draft) Article No. 2 Due: Profile w/ Query Letter**

Using Language to bring your story to life.

Class Exercise

**Homework** – Study for the Exam

<b>Week 11/Nov. 5</b>	<b>Weekly Journal #10</b> <b>MidFinal Exam</b>
<b>Week 12/Nov. 12</b>	<b>Weekly Journal #11</b> <b>(Final) Article No.2 Due: Profile w/ Query Letter</b> Review/Re-entry Covering community; Review assignment guidelines Finding your Nut Graph; Class Exercise <b>Homework</b> – Chapter 16
<b>Week 13/Nov. 19</b>	<b>Weekly Journal #12</b> Express Yourself; Writing opinion pieces Class Exercise <b>Homework</b> – Finish reading “Writing War”
<b>Week 14/Nov. 26</b>	<b>HAPPY THANKSGIVING ☺</b>
<b>Week 15/Dec. 3</b>	<b>Weekly Journal #13</b> You be the judge: reviewing books, plays, films, etc. <b>In Class Book Review: “Writing War”</b>
	<b>LAST CLASS</b>
<b>Final/Dec. 10</b>	No exam ☺ but, your Final Article (the news feature) is due

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\* **GUIDE TO THE CLASS WEB PAGE:** [www.whatswrite.wordpress.com](http://www.whatswrite.wordpress.com)

- **Main Page Blog:** Class updates, tips, other information with an emphasis on the magazine industry. Usually updated weekly. (**Can be monitored by direct link, news reader, email or handheld device.**)
- **About:** General description
- **Class Calendar:** Important dates, scheduling. (**Will include Furlough/Budget-Related adjustments**)
- **Class Materials:** Handouts, Examples for writing assignments
- **Common Reading:** Background on the department book for this semester “Shaking the Foundations: 200 Years of Investigative Journalism”
- **Class Forum:** Post your stories and other work for comments, suggestions, peer review. Share other links, information, etc. with your classmates. (Receive Extra Credit for participation: 100 points per month – September, October, November, December)

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\*\* **Email Policy:** Please use the email address posted on Page 1. If you have to email assignments, attach Word or WordPerfect documents AND post the text in the body of your email.

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***About the Professor:***

**Henrietta Charles** has taught at Cal State Northridge on a full- and/or part-time basis since September 1991 and is a former adviser to the *Daily Sundial* and *Scene Magazine*. She has also taught newswriting, feature writing and mass communication classes on a full- and/or part-time basis at Cal State Long Beach, Santa Monica College and Long Beach City College.

Charles is also a substitute editor for the *City News Service* in West Los Angeles.

She has more than 16 years experience as a newspaper reporter/editor covering general news stories, courts, education, diversity issues and labor at several small and medium-sized newspapers. These include the *Reno Evening Gazette/Nevada State Journal* in Reno, Nevada; the *Fresno Bee* in Fresno, Calif.; the *Long Beach Press-Telegram* in Long Beach, Calif. and the community news division of the *Los Angeles Times*.

**Education:** bachelor's degree in Journalism; master's degree in Professional (Creative) Writing, both from USC.