

J320: Depth Reporting Spring 2003

Tuesday 3:30-6:45 Sort No. 14531

Professor Tom Johnson [tom@jtjohnson.com]

Points of contact:

My office is: HUM 525

My office hours are: Mon. 1-2; 3:45-5 p.m.; Tues 2:30-3:30 p.m.; by appt. is best

My office phone is: 338-7431 (but I'm rarely there. My cell phone is better: 505-577-6482

My home phone is: 415-824-3521 (Please do not call before 9 a.m. or after midnight)

My e-mail is: tom@jtjohnson.com

My web page is: <http://www.jtjohnson.com>

Class web site is:

Prerequisites:

To be enrolled in J320: Depth Reporting, you must have completed J221 and J300 with grades of "C" or better.

The Course

Working premise: Democracy only exists by the will and action of an informed citizenry. Ergo, citizens need to know:

- The state of their society if they are to make informed decisions about what their government should be doing
- What the government is doing
- What the government plans to do
- How well the government is performing relative to: its own standards, the expectations of citizens, similar institutions around the nation.

The fundamental questions underlying all of this are:

- How does the city get, use, communicate data/information?
- How does the citizen get and use that data?

Many, perhaps most, beginning reporters enter the profession by covering the doings of small town government. This semester we will examine in depth how well the government of the City and County of San Francisco is meeting the needs of its citizens. What you learn about governmental organization, policy making, performance measurement and data/information management will be directly transferable to those cities and towns you will be covering on your first job.

Texts

- Join IRE (to get IRE journal & tipsheets)
- Wickham, Kathleen. *Math Tools For Journalists* (bookstore)
- Bass, Frank. *The Associated Press Guide to Internet Research and Reporting*. (Buy online via www.amazon.com)

- Online subscription to *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* (Subscribing to the online version here: <http://www.apstylebook.com>. For \$20/year, you get access to a very slick online version of the stylebook, with advanced search features, customization, etc. You also might want to purchase the hard copy version in the bookstore, but for a variety of reasons, the online version is better.)
- Student subscription to *The New York Times* <http://online.sfsu.edu/~jjohnson/Courses&Syllabi/nyt-SFSTATE.pdf>
- Sign-up for a free subscription to <http://www.govtech.net/magazine/subscriptions/>

Completing BICR or OASIS:

You must submit evidence of completion of the Basic Information Competence Requirement (BICR) by Feb. 18. Students who have not yet completed OASIS (Online Advancement of Student Information Skills) can do so on line at <http://oasis.sfsu.edu/> When you have successfully completed OASIS, the results show up on the web site with your university-related records.

Course Objectives

- Achieve a fundamental, employable understanding of online search and retrieval methods and relevant tools
- Recognition of a variety of databases and file and data types applicable in contemporary journalism research, reporting, analysis and writing.
- Applicable knowledge of data/information management tools, spreadsheets, databases and GIS programs and tools
- Applicable knowledge of journalism listservs and organizations used in contemporary journalism
- An elementary knowledge of statistical analysis
- An applicable knowledge of municipal government organization and performance measurement
- An applicable knowledge of the role of information management in government and public administration

Digital Technology

- Get broadband
- Always bring 3.5 floppy or Zip disk to class

Must-have Software

As journalists, we work with a variety of software tools. Here is the beginning list of programs you probably will be using during the course of the semester. These are all Windows programs, though some will run on a Mac. (If you are using a Mac, then please remind me to show you how to save your files so the rest of the world can see/use them.) Make sure you download and install these applications now. (It really, REALLY helps to have a broadband connection for this sort of thing.)

- MS Office (**Not** Works) A cheap one-year license available via the SFSU bookstore
 - Word
 - Excel
 - PowerPoint

- Outlook (or some similar mail-handling program, e.g. Eudora)
- Internet Explorer 6.0
- Adobe Acrobat
- Some anti-virus program (either Norton or MacAfee)
- RAR or WinZip archiving application

Possibly...

- DjVu Browser Plug-in <http://www.wmfshow.com/home/downloadLink.cfm>
- Cartagio Pro browser and info. mgmt tool <http://www.missiontrek.com/products/>
- AskSam, a free-text database application (installed on the dept's PCs) <http://www.asksam.com/products.asp>

Navigating the Course

The Digital Revolution of the past 15-20 years has brought and is bringing changes to journalism and all forms of communications, the likes of which we haven't seen in 5,000 years. It is important that we all learn — can continue to learn — how to survive in this new information environment.

My goal is to never give you a piece of paper after the first class meeting. Much of our out-of-class communication will take place via e-mail or through the website at Blackboard <http://sfsu.blackboard.com>. Go to one of these appropriate links within the next few hours and spend a fair amount of time exploring it. That's where you will find your assignments, your grades, news about the course and your support group via the chat and listserv components. Generally, all of the content will be in HTML format, so everyone can read it, download and print the various files. I advise doing so. If you need help with navigating Blackboard, go to <http://online.sfsu.edu/onlinetrouble.htm>

In addition to doing this through lectures and assignments that require the use of the technical skills of gathering information, interviewing, and writing, this course also will include discussion of ethical and legal issues that confront the journalist and discussion of the journalist's freedoms and responsibilities.

In discussions of fairness, there will be an emphasis on the importance of not demeaning story subjects by using stereotypes and unsupported assumptions.

All assignments must be submitted via e-mail as attached files **and** must be handed in as ink-on-paper copy on deadline, usually the beginning of class. **If a story is not submitted by the deadline, it will be an automatic "F." If a ny individual's name is misspelled, the story receives an automatic "F."**

The instructor may or may not critique late stories for you, depending on how much time he has. The format for the submissions must follow these exact instructions: ·

- You must use the exact story slug (i.e. assignment name or number) as given to you by the instructor. This must also be the name of the file. If it is not, your work gets lost and you lose credit.
- You must submit the story in the **MS Word RTF (Rich Text Format)** file type. If you don't know how to use Word, [click here](http://spider.georgetowncollege.edu/wsr/csc120/Wp97.htm) to reach <http://spider.georgetowncollege.edu/wsr/csc120/Wp97.htm> for the tutorial.
- The story must be submitted as an "attachment" to an e-mail message sent to the instructor.

- The subject line for that e-mail message must be:

J320-01StorySlug-??? Example: **J320-01Budget-JTJ**

This slug, i.e. **J320-01Budget-JTJ.rtf** should also be the filename of your story and what you will send to me as an attachment. Furthermore, it should be the **SUBJECT** line in your e-mail to me when you submit this particular story.

If you use some other subject line, the assignment will get lost in the 100-150 e-mail messages I receive each day and you will not get a grade. ·

The page format should be the following:

FORMAT FOR ASSIGNMENTS: [[Top](#)]

Some assignments will be in the form of memo-to-editor (learn how to use the "templates" in Word.) Others will be typical stories.

As you will learn, each assignment should have a slug only a word or two. Something a short as **budget**. So, when opening a file for a story, give it a file name so your editor/instructor can find it. But usually YOU do not create the slug, an editor/instructor does. And if you don't use the same slug as assigned, your work gets lost in cyberspace.

For example, if J. T. Johnson were filing assignment #10, he would call it:
J320-01Budget-JTJ

Ergo, the top left corner of the first page of your assignments should like this:

Yourlastname, Yourfirstname
Your e-mail address
Word Count =
J320-01Budget-JTJ

(Of course you change the file name to reflect the section number of your Newswriting class, either J320-03 or J320-04)

Your assignments must be submitted only **Courier New 12pt bold type**, double spaced and, of course, well-written and devoid of spelling and grammatical errors.

Your assignments should clearly indicate the sources for all your work, paragraph-by-paragraph, by using the endnote function or with the "comment" function found in most word processing programs. I suggest also learning how to use the footnote/endnote function of any word processor.

Here is the style you should use to format your assignments: ·

- Set both left and right margins at 1.5 inches
- The body text should be 1.25 inches from the top of the page; bottom margins should be 1.25 inches from the bottom.

- Use a header to show the slug, author and page number.
- Submit the file in a Word RTF format.
- Avoid fancy type or inserting graphics unless they are necessary to make your point.
- I encourage you to learn how to create, and use, a properly formatted template to easily and quickly get going with your stories.

NB: Be sure to keep multiple copies of your story, electronic and an I-o-P (ink-on-paper) version. If the story is lost, I'm not responsible. I'll ask you to send me another copy and it's up to you to be able to do so.

The instructor will comment on and grade the stories, then typically return them to you via e-mail or on the hard copy. Sometimes those critiques will use MS Word's "comment" feature, so learn how to use, and read and maybe print, those comments.

In addition to the grading standards attached, instructors will evaluate all stories for precision in the following areas:

- | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|
| • Punctuation | • Adequacy of research |
| • Grammar | • Accuracy |
| • Spelling | • Clear writing |
| • News judgment | • Overall organization |
| • Lead or nut graf writing | • AP style. |

If a person's name is misspelled, the story is an automatic "F."

Class attendance is mandatory. Make-up work may be done only with permission of the instructor and must be completed within one week after the student's return to class. Copies of students' stories may be distributed in class or posted to the class web site for discussion, but grades usually will not be identified.

Observation of the press is important in this course. Students must read regularly at least one local and The New York Times every day. Current events quizzes may be given.

Self-education, quantitative analysis and spreadsheets

I am not a "sage on the stage," pouring knowledge into minds. My goal is to coach you in learning how to learn, which will be a life-long skill and activity, so let's begin now.

Journalism is no longer a refuge for the mathematically phobic. Roughly 50 percent of all news stories involve quantities of some sort: a reporter must know how to analyze that data and convey the results of that analysis. One of the analytic tools every reporter must be familiar with is a spreadsheet. We will be writing some stories that will require you to use a spreadsheet for analysis and, quite possibly, presentation of charts and graphs. But this is a class about thinking and writing, not spreadsheets. Yet, in a couple weeks you will be using spreadsheets for some stories. Therefore, you need to learn what they are and how to use them, albeit in an elementary way.

Your instructor also assumes that you have reasonable proficiency in searching for, and

downloading, data on the internet and are relatively sophisticated in using a word processor like MS Word. If you need to brush up on your skills, SFSU offers a lot of free workshops. See <http://oi.sfsu.edu/cgi-bin/student/training.htm> for the calendar. If you don't know how to use a spreadsheet, then go to this [Excel tutorial](#) before Feb. 15 and learn how.

Grading

Each quiz, assigned story or exercise will be worth a specific percentage of your grade - generally 1 or 2 percent during the first couple weeks, then 3 or 4 percent each. The midterm counts 10 percent and the final 30 percent of your grade. To grade someone's writing is a difficult and inexact task, but over time, the relative quality of a student's work becomes apparent. This is how I will try to do it:

A -- The news story is exceptionally well written and free of errors. The lead is clear, concise and interesting. The story reflects an impressive amount of insightful research, reporting and analysis by the writer. The story is well organized and contains effective transitions, quotations, descriptions and anecdotes. Because of the story's obvious merit, any newspaper or magazine would be eager to publish it. Essentially, this story is ready to go straight into *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* or the *Mercury-News* as is.

B -- Any newspaper could publish the news story after minimal editing. The story contains only a few minor errors of style. The lead clearly summarizes the story, and the following paragraphs present all the information necessary for a comprehensive news story. The information is presented in a cohesive, well-organized manner. The story is not as detailed, descriptive or interesting as an "A" story. It could appear with little work in a better-than-average daily or trade magazine.

C -- The news story is superficial or could be published only after heavy editing. The lead may be too wordy and fail to clearly emphasize the latest, most interesting or most important aspects of the story. The story tends to be disorganized and contains many minor errors. A few sentences or paragraphs may have to be rewritten because they are repetitious, awkward or confusing.

D -- The news story contains all the necessary facts, but those facts are presented so ineffectively that they would have to be rewritten before the story could be published. The story also may contain an unacceptable number of stylistic, spelling or grammatical errors.

F -- The news story could not be published by a newspaper and is so incomplete, confusing or erroneous that the facts in the story could not be rewritten and published.

Here's what the university bulletin says about the question "Should grades represent quality and a level of accomplishment? Or effort? Or progress?"

"A. Grades are assumed to reflect the instructor's judgment of the

quality of the student's performance. Grades should not merely be awarded for effort, attendance, native ability, etc., notwithstanding the fact that all of these may affect performance and become part of the evaluation.

"B. Students may not be guaranteed 'at least a "C" or "B,"' etc. in advance or by a contract related solely to the quantity of assignment completed, as evaluation is a post-performance function rather than a pre-performance contract."

Class attendance is mandatory. Makeup work may be done only with permission of the instructor and must be completed within one week after the student's return to class. Copies of students' stories may be distributed in class or posted to the class web site for discussion, but grades usually will not be identified.

The grades will NOT be posted in the class web site. It's up to you to keep track of your grades, but feel free to ask me any time about your progress.

	Memo assignments	25 percent
Misc. assigned tasks (e.g. bkmark tool, OASIS, etc.)		10 percent
	Class and online participation	5 percent
	Four stories	60 percent

ADDITIONAL ESSENTIALS

* **ALWAYS KEEP MULTIPLE COPIES OF YOUR STORIES.** Never hand in a story without keeping a printed copy and a computer disk copy of it. Your instructor is not quite perfect and could lose your original. In fact, he probably will from time to time. Your file copy will save both of us from going 'round the bend, over the hill or wherever.

* **MEET DEADLINES.** Learning to meet deadlines is an important part of being a professional journalist.

* **WHEN STORIES ARE DUE.** The deadline for all stories is the beginning of the class on the due date.

* **DON'T BE LATE FOR CLASS.** Not only is it rude to walk into class late, it also means you might miss important information. Announcements about assignments, including changes, usually are made at the beginning of class.

Plagiarism [[Top](#)]

It is, of course, permissible to use material from other sources, but those sources must be fully identified or cited. That's why I require that you cite your sources for each paragraph. But plagiarism is considered a most serious issue in any university. SFSU has a web site that will help you understand it better.
<http://cet.sfsu.edu/academicintegrity/plagiarism.html>

Here are some additional sources related to plagiarism:

- "Academic Integrity" - Philip Pecorino, Social Sciences Department, Queensborough Community College, CUNY -- http://12.20.25.5/ppecorino/academic_integrity.html
- What is Plagiarism? Guidelines from the Georgetown University Honor Council. www.georgetown.edu/honor/plagiarism.html
- Avoiding Plagiarism: Guidelines from the Office of Student Judicial Affairs at the University of California, Davis. sja.ucdavis.edu/avoid.htm
- Carnegie Mellon University- Discussion and Guide http://www.studentaffairs.cmu.edu/acad_integ/acad_int.html

[[Top](#)]