

# News, Narrative, & Design

## *Master Syllabus Template*

### **PREFACE**

What you have here is a template for building your own syllabus based on the principles, exercises, and assignments used by Journalism + Design professors.

You can also look at examples of specific syllabi adapted from the work of professors including Kia Gregory, Blake Eskin, Andrew Meier, and Heather Chaplin.

Course descriptions, learning outcomes, and policies are the same throughout.

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# News, Narrative, & Design Master Syllabus Template

## Course Description

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## Learning Outcomes

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## Course Schedule

TOPIC	EXERCISE/ASSIGNMENT
Milestone 1	
Milestone 2	
Milestone 3	

## Course Materials

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## Policies

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# News, Narrative, & Design I

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is the first course in a three-course sequence that introduces students to journalism and its crucial role in democratic society. Through real-world, project-based work, you will research, report, and present news stories while considering how to best engage your audience and have impact. You will use human-centered design practices, when appropriate, to identify the informational needs and concerns of the community being served. You will also be introduced to the complexity and competitiveness of the 21st-century media ecosystem.

You will work hard. You will make mistakes. You will be nervous, sometimes even afraid. You will also intensify your sense of curiosity and feel the rush of gathering news. You will learn how to sift good information from bad, conduct interviews, collect evidence, and make sense of data. Most of all, you will learn to embrace the first and most essential element of journalism: the absolute obligation to the truth.

Cooperation and collaboration are integral to this course. Reporters do not work alone. Your classmates are your partners; you will help shape each other's work.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the successful completion of this course, you will:

- learn fundamental journalistic values and principles, including distinguishing fact from fiction, verifying assertions, identifying sources, and understanding journalism's role in a democratic society
- demonstrate competence in deep listening and community engagement
- gain experience with research, observation, and interviewing
- craft ledes and headlines, collect quotations, and learn that a story is more than an idea
- develop competence in generating and synthesizing ideas
- explore the contemporary news ecosystem: how news gets made, shared, and consumed
- begin to think about the reader experience
- get exposed to the basics of what makes a good data story, where to find data, and elementary uses of spreadsheets

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Version A: Beat (Gentrification)

*This approach focuses students on a particular beat, while introducing them to visual storytelling, data reporting, and listening critically and with empathy to their sources. Students work their way up from short vignettes about their beat, then write multiple versions of three news articles: one about an event, one about a person, and one about a problem. This syllabus was adapted from Kia Gregory's News, Narrative & Design I class, which ran in fall 2017 and spring 2018.*

WEEK	TOPIC	IN-CLASS EXERCISES	ASSIGNMENT
1	Course Review. What it means to be a good journalist. Introductions. Syllabus review. Covering a beat. What is news. What makes a good story.		
2	<b>Beat Vignette 1 due.</b> Reporting and writing news. Interviewing, observations, and taking notes		
3	<b>Beat Vignette 2 due.</b> Story structures, ledes, and nut graphs		
4	Finding and using data in your reporting		
5	Thinking critically and with empathy in your reporting. Story structures, ledes, and nutgraphs. Working reporter as guest.		
6	Sources, attribution, style, and why every word matters. Libel, ethics, and privacy		
7	Community meeting story due, after reporting, crafting, and writing. Using social media to report and share stories		
8	<b>Story 1 pitch due.</b> Getting interviews and information. Doing more with data. Telling visual stories.		
9	<b>Story 1 due.</b> Midway check-in. Guest speaker.		
10	Writing profiles.		
11	The art of interviewing. Writing tips.		
12	<b>Story 2 due.</b> Reaching your audience. Feature stories		
13	<b>Story 3 pitch due</b>		
14	Reporting and writing workshop		
15	Reporting and writing workshop. <b>Story 3 draft due and visual story assigned.</b>		

WEEK	TOPIC	IN-CLASS EXERCISES	ASSIGNMENT
16	<b>Story 3 final and Google drives due.</b> <b>Story 3 presentations.</b> Final writing assignment.		

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Version B: Product (Email Newsletter)

*This approach takes students through the process of creating an email newsletter, a powerful way to package information and deliver it to readers. Students create a newsletter on a topic they care about, learning through iterating on their design. The final project is an installment of the newsletter led by an original reported story. This syllabus was adapted from Blake Eskin's News Narrative, & Design I class, which ran in fall 2017 and spring 2018.*

WEEK	TOPIC	IN-CLASS EXERCISES	ASSIGNMENT
1	Welcome and introductions. Why Journalism + Design. A history lesson. Introduction to AP Style and email newsletters.		
2	What is news? Anatomy of a news story: lede, nutgraf, kicker. Covering an event. New User Experience.		
3	Types of news stories. What makes a good story? Research. Observation. Note-taking.		
4	Interviewing. Profiles. The design process. Attribution. Start AP Style Presentations (1 per class)		
5	Looking for stories in data. Annotation and aggregation. What problem am I trying to solve?		
6	Wireframes and email newsletter design. Peer review of Profiles. Twitter for journalists.		
7	Audiences: Mass vs. Niche; Global vs. Local; Casual vs. Fanatical <b>Newsletter Prototype 1 Due.</b>		
8	Audio. Visual Storytelling. How to deliver and receive critique. <b>Newsletter prototype 2 due.</b>		
9	Video. Storyboarding.		
10	Data and visualization. GIFs. Mid-semester check-in. <b>Iterate on Newsletter</b>		
11	Infographics. More on email newsletters. One-question interviews.		
12	Algorithmic news. Fact-checking. <b>Second issue of newsletter due.</b>		
13	Typography. BuzzFeed Style Guide.		
14	Distribution: Display Text, Newsletters, Social Media. <b>Third issue of newsletter</b>		

WEEK	TOPIC	IN-CLASS EXERCISES	ASSIGNMENT
15	Newsletter workshop. Ethics, privacy, libel.		
16	Guest Speaker. Collaboration and the newsroom. Course evaluations. <b>Final issue of newsletters due.</b> <b>Presentation and critique.</b>		

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Version C: Open

*This approach lets students make decisions about what they want to cover and how they want to cover it, emphasizing principles of human-centered design and following the forces that lead to events in the news. It is adapted from syllabi created by Heather Chaplin and Irwin Chen, fall 2014 and spring 2015.*

WEEK	TOPIC	IN-CLASS EXERCISES	ASSIGNMENT
1	Who are you? Who am I? What is journalism? Where do you find your journalism? What have we decided journalism is? Our values. Our goals. Where do we, as journalists, fit in?		
2	Why design? What is design methodology? Why is it useful for journalists?  What is our research/reporting approach going to be?  Cafeteria: Observing, listening, documenting		
3	Synthesis: What did we learn? Capture/cluster. Chaos map Assumptions and questions. Why chains; what people say vs. what they do <b>Determine Milestone 1.</b> Break into teams		
4	Review collaboration Initial findings		
5	Polish and refine sketches.		
6	<b>Milestone 1.</b> Critique/review. What went right? What went wrong?  Loops/cause-effect-cause		
7	Iterate on projects: refine or pivot.		
8	What is data reporting? What data is available for this story?		
9	<b>Milestone 2.</b> Critique/reflect. What went right? What went wrong? Collaboration feedback: I like, I wish		
10	Decide on final project		
11	Data		
12	Present work toward final project.		
13	<b>Milestone 3,</b> Critique/reflect.		
14	How do we take the project farther?		
15	Take it farther!		
16	<b>Final presentation and critique</b>		

# Exercises & Assignments

*The following is a sampling of in-class exercises and assignments meant to be done outside of class, taken from various News, Narrative, & Design syllabi. We have marked each with a suggested Level (1-3), indicating whether it is for beginning, intermediate, or advanced students, as well as various tags which describe the methodology and/or area of focus.*

## ASSIGNMENT

### Journalism or Not?

LEVEL: 1

TAGS: Ethics, Journalism, Reflect

Ask students to bring in one example of journalism and one example of something that isn't journalism. Don't elaborate. The point is for students to think about what makes something journalism and to uncover, as a class, assumptions and ideas about this. Tell students they're going to have to share their examples in a two-minute presentation, giving at least three factors as to why something is or isn't journalism.

Have a few volunteer students present their examples. As they talk, write the factors on sticky notes and stick them to either a board or big piece of paper taped to wall. Themes should start to emerge. Lead conversation about what makes something journalism, and be open about how sometimes it can be hard to tell. Try to draw out any connections between this conversation and the preceding conversation as to whether people's sense of what is journalism is influenced by the mode of delivery.

Things to discuss: Was there enough evidence? Diversity of sources, quotes, relevance, timely? Assumptions baked in? From whom's perspective? Who's missing? What are the biases (obvious or subtle)? Does it feel trustworthy? Why? What makes you trust a news outlet?

Class together creates its own statement of what makes something news and what makes a news outlet trustworthy; agrees to adhere to this for the semester.

## EXERCISE

### Where Do You Get Your News

LEVEL: 1

TAGS: Media, Reporting, Data, Capture and Cluster

Give students three minutes to write down on sticky notes where they get their news – both news outlets and modes of delivery. (For example: Facebook, the New York Times, my phone, my friend tells me, Jezebel, etc.) Tell them to write clearly because other people are going to need to be able to read them.

When they're done, have them come and post on either the board or a big piece of paper taped to the wall. They should say aloud what they've written as they post them. They can also say their names to continue getting to know one another. It's okay if the same things comes up more than once, just have the students put them next to each other on the board.

Once they're all up, ask one or two people to come up and help you cluster the sticky notes into categories. The first cluster should be modes of delivery: print, digital publication,

social media, verbal; and within that subcategories like computer, phone, Facebook, Snapchat, magazine, newsletter, newspaper, etc.

This facilitates conversation about all the different ways people get their news today and what a change this is to the past. It also opens up conversation about different experiences of consuming the news. You can ask them to compare their habits to their parents or their friends. This exercise also often opens up conversation about the different ways different outlets cover events, or different styles; and if the news hits differently based on how it was consumed.

#### EXERCISE

### **Active Listening and Empathy**

LEVEL:1

TAGS: Active Listening, Empathy, Reporting

Split students up into pairs. Ask them to think of a story of a disappointment in their lives. In each pair, have one student tell their story of disappointment. The other student should make eye contact, give the first student their full attention, and summarize and paraphrase what the first student said and the emotions they expressed. Then the students switch.

After this, each student writes down something they assumed about this student beforehand that was shown otherwise by the story they told.

#### ASSIGNMENT

### **Make a Map, Talk to Strangers**

LEVEL: 1

TAGS: Mapping, Interviewing, Reporting

Send students out somewhere for 40 minutes (varied depending on how far they're going). At the New School, we use Union Square a lot, because it's nearby and there's always a lot going on. If you're not on a city campus, you could send students to the cafeteria, or any other space where things are likely to be happening (people coming and going, etc.).

Have students draw a map of what they see. They also have to talk to two people they don't know, returning with that person's full name (spelled properly), contact information and having discussed and taken notes on how that person came to be in that location (in college, getting a book out of the library, selling fruit at Union Square, etc).

The purpose of the map is to get students observing and realizing how the act of observation reveals previously unseen layers. The purpose of the interviews is to introduce students to the concept of speaking with strangers, something we've noticed has become much harder since the advent of social media.

This can also be an opportunity for the professor to talk about the benefits of in-person conversations. It also introduces students to the basic points of collecting contact information and taking notes. The professor should acknowledge how hard these things can be and lead a discussion about why, having students talk about how they felt doing it and what tricks they used to overcome their fears.

#### ASSIGNMENT

## Fairy Tale Ledes

LEVEL: 1

TAGS: Synthesize

Hand out three fairy tales: short versions of Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs, and Goldilocks. Give students eight minutes to write a news lede based upon one of them. Tell them they have no evidence other than the what is in the story. Have students read their ledes aloud. Evaluate based on accurate representation: whether it hit the who, what, where, whether it was possible to have a why based on the evidence.

Things that will likely emerge: details that were not in the fairy tale. From whose perspective was it told (the wolf community or the pig community)? How it's sometimes hard to determine what information is most important – and how everyone sees that differently. (Likely, different students will have emphasized different things.)

#### ASSIGNMENT

## Chain Restaurant Data Collection

LEVEL: 1

TAGS: Data, Reporting

For homework, send students to a Chipotle Mexican Grill. Tell them to write down the orders of five customers dining alone. Then send students to the [Chipotle Nutrition Calculator](#) and have them figure out how many calories were in each of the meals they recorded. (If there is no Chipotle nearby, other chain restaurants and [coffee chains](#) have nutrition calculators too.)

Have students enter their findings in a shared Google Sheet or via a Google Form. Ask them to figure out the most caloric meal and average calories per meal, both for the meals they recorded and for everyone in the class.

In class, use this exercise as an opportunity to review how to use spreadsheets and also basic math as well as the human messiness of gathering data. Student errors are opportunities to discuss the need for consistent methodology when collaborating.

You might also have them read [At Chipotle, How Many Calories Do People Really Eat?](#) and talk about how some of the things they learned from collecting and calculating make them ask questions about the assumptions behind this story.

## EXERCISE

### **Collaborative Communication**

LEVEL:1

TAGS: Collaboration

Draw on the board a horizontal line. One end is the highest fidelity mode of communication (highest signal to noise ratio) and on the other end is the lowest. Lead a discussion with your class trying to tease out all of the various modes of communication (from email to SMS to face-to-face) and where they belong on this scale.

Choose a mode of communication (email, group chat, Slack, LMS discussion board) that you plan to use for the semester. Ask students to sign in and start chatting with one another (and also maybe with you) for 10 minutes. Ask them for examples of when someone responded (or didn't respond) in ways they didn't expect. Have students talk about a specific interaction and how it made them feel.

Have students propose rules for how the class should use this form of communication. Dos and don'ts; protocols, when it's appropriate to use emoji. Introduce your own rules so they understand your expectations.

And be upfront with students about what you're looking for in terms of collaboration: respecting each other's time, putting the good of the project ahead of self, accuracy, etc.

## EXERCISE

### **Capture and Cluster, Chaos Mapping**

LEVEL: 1

TAGS: Systems Thinking, Forces, Capture and Cluster

Have the students list a couple of topics that emerged from Make A Map. (If you didn't do that exercise, ask your students to generate a couple of issues they care about, like migration, the environment, the food prices in the cafeteria, why freshman feel lonely, etc.). Write that problem in the middle of the board. Then ask the students to think of the forces that might cause that problem, be affected by that problem, or have some impact on the size or severity of the problem. Give them sticky notes and sharpies, and tell them to write down as many forces as they can think of, one per sticky note, in five or ten minutes.

Invite students to come and put their sticky notes on the board or large piece of paper on the wall, one at a time, saying out loud their force as they do so.

Ask one or two students to come to the board and help you cluster the sticky notes by theme. Encourage all students to participate by shouting out their suggestions for categorizing. You should think out loud about what you're doing so that everyone feels included in the process.

Invite two other students to come up and help you draw lines between forces that seem connected. These forces can be far apart on the board or together. The idea is to begin to see how even disparate forces can be part of the same problem space.

Do check-ins throughout to make sure students are following.

You can repeat this exercise with different topics, until students feel confident.

At the end, if the topics that came from their Make a Map exercise, and you're planning on that area being the focus of the class (the cafeteria, a nearby park, etc.), you can encourage students to pick a connection they've uncovered to begin exploring for their semester-long work.

#### EXERCISE

### Reverse Wireframing

LEVEL: 2

TAGS: Wireframing, Design, Structure

Have students choose a news website. Wireframes are usually used to create websites, but in this case a "reverse wireframe" distills a finished site into a rough sketch that focuses attention on structure, hierarchies, the relationship between text and image, and the relationship between editorial and advertising. This exercise is about understanding structure, not about drawing well.

Have them do a reverse wireframe of the homepage and an article page. Then have them identify three aspects of the site structure and how it helps reinforce (or works against) the purpose of the site,

The goal of this assignment is to have students become aware of structure so they can change and control it for a purpose.

#### EXERCISE

### Reverse Storyboarding

LEVEL: 2

TAGS: Wireframing, Design, Structure

Much like the reverse wireframe. Watch a news video. Pick something short – it could be social video on Facebook or Snapchat, horizontal or vertical. Have students create a reverse storyboard: a rough sketch (stick figures are fine) that reveals how the composition and variation of images helps tell the story, or works against the goals of the story.

#### EXERCISE

### Notice What You Notice

LEVEL: 2

TAGS: Wireframing, Design, Structure

Go to a public place with a notebook and a pen or pencil.

Write down the date, time, and location. Set a timer for 20 minutes. Then put your smartphone away.

Make a list of things you see, phrases and sounds you hear, gestures, smells, anything else you notice.

When the alarm sounds, find a place to sit down (if you're not already). Spend five minutes (timer again) drawing a picture of what you saw. Don't worry about how good the picture is.

When the alarm sounds, write a caption no longer than 10 words.

#### ASSIGNMENT

## Daily Observation

LEVEL: 2

TAGS: Data, Observation

Pick something that you can observe every day and document your observation by taking a photograph, or writing down a sentence or a number. It should be something you can observe every day – and something that's about the world around you, not just about you. Some examples: a photograph of the garbage outside my house; a photograph of an orange construction cone; a screenshot of a headline that made me angry.

Collect your observations on Tumblr or another platform. Halfway through the semester, ask students to pitch a story based on their daily observation. Have other students offer critique on the pitch. Or pitch a story based on someone else's daily observation project.

Your final project for the class is a story that grows out of the daily observation exercise. So the garbage outside the house could lead to a story on sanitation policy, or a profile of a person who digs through the garbage, or why people use mint-flavored garbage bags, or any number of other things.

This is an exercise in close observation, in data collection, and in finding stories in data.

#### EXERCISE

## How to Give and Take Feedback

LEVEL: 2

TAGS: Collaboration

Review stories. Engage students in critiquing each other's work. What will likely emerge is what is useful in a critique and how to take criticism well without getting defensive. This is worth spending a bit of time on because these lessons, though in part based on emotions, will serve them well all their lives.

#### ASSIGNMENT

## Data: School Attendance

LEVEL: 3

TAGS: Data

This Google Drive folder has New York City public school attendance figures in January 2012.

Using the spreadsheet, and some additional research, answer the following questions:  
Which three schools have the most students overall?

What was the citywide attendance rate overall for the month of January?

Calculate the daily attendance rate for each school.

On January 23, how many schools had an attendance rate lower than 40%?

Why do you think attendance was so low on that particular day for those particular schools?

The answer to the last question is: Lunar New Year, which is celebrated by Chinese American and other Asian American students.

#### EXERCISE

### **Design and Inclusion**

LEVEL: 3

TAGS: Collaboration

Listen to the Engaging Online panel from the Design and Exclusion remote conference. The panel, hosted by Aminatou Sow, starts about 1:55 p.m. and runs about 35 minutes.

In 200 words or less, describe a hostile online conversation that either involved you or that you witnessed – and write about how design intensified that interaction or could have mitigated it.

#### ASSIGNMENT

### **Design a News Product**

LEVEL: 3

TAGS: Design

Choose a relatively new gadget. In 2018 this might be VR goggles or smart speakers, such as the Amazon Echo or the Google home.

Run a brainstorming exercise, having students come up with as many possible uses for these technologies as they can in 5 minutes. Don't worry about how feasible. Have someone write each idea on a sticky note. Have the students put all the sticky notes on a whiteboard or wall, then create clusters of similar ideas.

Break the class into teams of three or four. Have each team choose a cluster and spend 30 minutes coming up with an idea for a product or service that involves news gathering and/or delivery. Have them draw or write down their idea.

Then each group presents their idea to the class. Ask the group to identify one thing that works about their idea and something that makes it infeasible.

#### ASSIGNMENT

### **Profile: What Really Matters**

LEVEL: 3

TAGS: Collaboration, Empathy

Read Oliver Sacks' article about him learning he has terminal cancer:

There is no time for anything inessential. I must focus on myself, my work and my friends. I shall no longer look at "NewsHour" every night. I shall no longer pay any attention to politics or arguments about global warming.

Find an older stranger. Interview this stranger about their life, the stranger's relationship to news and how it has changed over the years, and what the stranger really considers to be important. Write a draft of ~750 words. The goal is a profile that gives insight into a stranger and his or her sense of what matters.

This is a writing assignment, an exercise in empathy, and an exercise in needs-finding. It can also include a collaborative brainstorm: have the class come up with a list of prompts and questions that they would ask.

ASSIGNMENT

## **Media Criticism Tweetstorm**

LEVEL: 3

TAGS: Media, Twitter

Find an article, or a pattern you've noticed in journalism, that you want to critique. Write a tweetstorm (min 12 tweets, max 24 tweets) that makes a productive critical argument about some element of how journalism is done today and proposes or considers solutions for how you think it should be done differently.