

**Department of Communication, Illinois State University**  
**COM 285-001 – Spring 2023**  
**News and Feature Online Production**  
**12:35-1:50 p.m. Tuesday and Thursday**  
**Fell Hall 108**

**Instructor:** Kevin Capie (kbcapie@ilstu.edu)  
**Office Location:** Fell Hall 406 (Tu-Th)/Vidette Building (M/W)  
**Office Phone:** 309-438-7668  
**Twitter:** @KevinCapie  
**Class hashtag:** #ilstucom285  
**Office Hours:** Tu 10-11:30 a.m.  
Other times by appointment scheduled through [calendly.com/kevincapie](https://calendly.com/kevincapie)

*“Today, people come to work for me, and organizations like this, they are not meat cleavers. They are Swiss army knives. They have all those tools... and more. You may not use them every day. You may not use them but once a year. But if you use that toothpick, or that screwdriver, or that rasp, you know what? It’s there. Anybody who comes into journalism today has got to be a Swiss army knife.” – Evan Smith, CEO and Editor-in-Chief, Texas Tribune*

It is no longer enough to just be able to write well and have solid reporting. Journalists today have to be able to tell stories in multiple formats over a variety of media, especially social media. Like Smith says above, a journalist may only make one audio slideshow a year but he or she has to be able to have the knowledge to do that.

This goal of this course is not only to teach you to use the tools that should be at your disposal – video, social media, slideshows, blogs, podcasts, etc. – but also how they can tie together and complement each other to tell compelling, well-rounded stories.

## **Course Description**

Students will produce an online magazine, gaining experience in writing, editing, illustrating and laying out news and feature articles. Prerequisites: COM 165.

## **Goals and objectives**

By the end of the semester you will:

- Have an understanding of the current media landscape including how technology helps journalists do their jobs.
- Be able to identify and develop stories and related content for online media.
- Have developed your technical skills to gather, produce and distribute news content.
- Be comfortable in engaging online audiences.
- Have improved your skills as a writer and reporter.
- Be able to evaluate the effectiveness of mobile and social media strategies and policies in news gathering organizations.
- Show how technological issues affect news gathering, delivery and journalistic ethics.

## Related Materials

### Required

- Readings and media assigned throughout the semester and/or posted to Canvas.
- Daily access to print/TV/online news – i.e. Bloomington Pantagraph, Peoria Journal Star, Chicago Tribune, Google News, etc.
- COM 285-01 Canvas site
- Illinois State University e-mail account (preferably checked daily)
- A personal blog or website
- Word processing program
- Twitter, YouTube and other social media accounts.
- A digital video camera
- Audio recorder (see above)
- A video editing program (iMovie or Adobe Premiere)
- An audio editing program (Audacity, GarageBand or Adobe)

## Policies & Procedures

### Attendance

As class participation is part of your grade attendance is strongly advised. You get three free absences, no questions asked. For each unexcused absence after the third, 15 points will be deducted from your point total for the semester (coming first from the class participation grade, then additional points if necessary). If you know in advance that you are going to miss class (i.e. religious holiday, university-sanctioned event, wedding, etc.) arrangements can be made for any in-class assignments or quizzes that may be missed, if approved by the instructor. It is the student's responsibility to in order to make up the quiz or in-class work if the student elects to do so (see Grading below).

### Classroom culture

Learning how to take notes the “old-fashioned way” with pen and paper will not only help you learn and understand what we are discussing better, but it is also the predominant way of note-taking in the profession. Cell phones will be turned off and there will be no need to be on Facebook, YouTube and the like. Violating this policy will result in points being deducted (see Grading/Class Participation).

### Communication

The best way to reach me is by email ([kbcapie@ilstu.edu](mailto:kbcapie@ilstu.edu), if you missed it above). Please allow 24-48 hours for a reply, although it will likely be sooner. When corresponding by email please include the Course No. in the subject line followed by the topic (i.e. COM 285 – Story No. 1). This will expedite a response.

I can also be reached by phone (again, 309-438-7668), but this is much more scattershot when it comes to making contact so if you need/want a reply, the best way to reach me is by email. If there are questions or concerns about a project or assignment do not wait until the last minute to bring them up.

Do not hesitate to stop by during the posted office hours (see above) or make an appointment if those are not convenient. I am also willing to conference via Zoom by appointment if that is necessary.

### Discussion

You are responsible to have read the the assigned material before class. Each class meeting will be a mixture of lecture that reinforces and goes beyond the textbook and discussion. Because of this it is important to come to class prepared to participate.

During lectures and discussions do not be afraid to speak up. You do not have to raise your hand to ask a question. However, you must be respectful of whomever is speaking by not rudely interrupting or attempting to talk over the speaker.

We also will be discussing each other's work. So, please be helpful with the comments you make and do not take anything said in critique of your work personally, nor should you make your critique personal. Everything said in these critiques is with the goal of making you better writers. In a real newsroom, editors seldom mince words.

## **Canvas**

This course is divided into Weeks, as listed in the Lessons tool. Each week will include some or all of the following:

- material for you to read, watch, and explore;
- graded assignments and quizzes to allow you to work with the concepts and resources (sometimes individually, sometimes together).

## **Reporting and Sourcing**

When working on assignments or stories that require reporting you must identify yourself as an Illinois State University journalism student and the work may be used publicly in multiple platforms. Do not allow sources to review or approve your story although you may do additional fact checking or allow them to check they are quoted accurately.

Do not use friends, family or colleagues as source material. The purpose of these assignments is to prepare you to function in a professional environment. It is extremely rare in which you would use someone close to you as a source in a straight news story.

## **Ethics/Plagiarism/Academic Honesty**

The definition of plagiarism is "to steal and pass off the ideas or words of another as one's own." Students (or groups) are expected to do their own work. Do not borrow or steal from the work of others. This includes press releases, quotes from other news stories and the Internet. When in doubt cite your source material.

Do not use the same works for multiple classes. You may submit stories to *The Scout* only after they have been turned in for a class assignment.

Do not make up any quotes or facts.

If you do any of the above you will fail the assignment and quite possibly the course.

## **Reasonable Accommodations**

Any student needing to arrange a reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, (309) 438-5853, or visit the website at [StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu](http://StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu).

## **Health and well-being**

The most important thing you need to do is take care of yourself, physically and mentally. If you're feeling stressed, overwhelmed, lost, anxious, depressed or are struggling with personal issues, do not hesitate to call or visit [Student Counseling Services](#) (SCS). These services are free and completely confidential. SCS is located at 320 Student Services Building, [\(309\) 438-3655](tel:3094383655).

## Grading

### Nuts and bolts

Grades will be based on accumulated points out of 1000 possible at the end of the semester from the following: You can also earn five extra credit points for emailing the answer to this question by Jan. 24: What is your favorite binge watch?

The breakdown is as follows:

• Multimedia package (1x200)	200
• Single stories (3x100)	300
• Social Media Policy/Analysis Group Project	100
• Social Media Activity/Portfolio	100
• Blog Posts (10x15)	150
• Teaching Moment	100
• Class/Forum participation (25x2)	<u>50</u>
	1000

The corresponding letter grades are:

A = 92 percent (920 points)

B = 84 percent (840 points)

C = 75 percent (750 points)

D = 65 percent (650 points)

F = 64.9 percent or less (649 points or less)

### Deadlines

Since writing for the media exists in a deadline-driven environment, **ALL** deadlines will be met as assigned. For each 24-hour period an assignment is late 25 percent of the value of the assignment will be deducted.

### Multimedia Packages

You will produce a multimedia news story which will be posted to your blog/website. You will be responsible for producing a text piece along with one other supplemental element (video, slideshow, photo package, other audio element, etc.). Specific details will be available at a later date.

### Other stories

You will produce three other stories on your own – one feature story, one news story and the third of your choosing. These stories will feature multiple storytelling and SM concepts we will discuss in class.

### Social Media Policy/Strategy Analysis Project

This is a group presentation assignment due at the end of the semester. Your group will assess the social media usage of a new organization. In your critique describe how the news organization as a whole and two of its journalists use social media for both distribution and engagement. Be sure to provide examples in your presentation and also evaluate what can be learned from them.

### Social Media Portfolio

You will develop your own professional social media portfolio during this class. It will include your blog as well as profiles and engagement on social media sites. Be sure to consistently engage on social media with users in regards to your beat, class and the journalism industry. We will use analytics to measure your effectiveness.

## **Blog Posts**

You will be responsible for 10 blog postings on Canvas. I will post the topic and due dates as an announcement/email. The topics will range from reaction to something we discussed in class to commentary or opinion from something on your beat.

## **Teaching Moment**

Each of you will do a 10-minute presentation/discussion about a current topic related to mobile and social media journalism. Weekly course readings and e-newsletter content will provide you with ideas. Topics might include ethical issues related to SM and journalism, or how new tools could be used by journalists.

## **Class participation**

This is the only category where points cannot be earned, only deducted. Violating any of the above policies on classroom culture and discussion decorum will result in points being deducted. The other way to lose points is to be so woefully unprepared to participate in a discussion by not doing the readings or classmate critique.

You will be graded with 25 points at the midterm and 25 at the end of the semester so you can judge your progress and if you are on target for the full semester.

## **Expectations**

Major fact errors, numerical mistakes, misspelled proper names and misidentified sources will reduce your grade on the assignment by 50 percent. Your copy is expected to use correct grammar and Associated Press Style and be free from typos and general sloppiness. Those also will lower your grade by a point for each mistake.

A rough breakdown of what the grade will be based on the quality of assignment (we will go over these in more detail for each assignment):

- A – Could be published immediately with only minor line-editing
- B – Could be published with more line-editing and minor content tweaks
- C – Could be published after editing for content as well as line-editing
- D – Could be published after partial rewrite for content, grammar and style
- F – Unpublishable.

## Schedule

Here is a very tentative schedule subject to change with major assignment due dates (which are unlikely to change). The assigned readings for each date are to be done before class. The readings are subject to change. I will also be posting weekly to-do lists in the forums with the other assignments and blog post due dates. You will see a number of lab periods. These will allow us to catch up if we get behind. Or, if we stay on schedule, give you opportunities to work in class on upcoming projects. These are to be treated as a normal class period and you must attend. If the schedule does change I will let you know in class, on Canvas and/or by email. If nothing else, this lays out the anticipated order of progression to the course.

### Week 1

**Jan. 18** – Course Introduction: What is Digital Journalism?

### Week 2

**Jan. 23** – The Audience: The Forces at the Gate

**Readings:** “The Audience In the Mind’s Eye” (Canvas)  
“Journalism Needs an Audience...” (Canvas)

**Jan. 25** – Navigating Change: The Mobile-First Newsroom

**Readings:** “Does Journalism Have a Future?” (Canvas)  
“Twitter and Facebook are Platforms Not Publisher” (Canvas)

### Week 3

**Jan. 30** – Your Social Media Brand: Who Do You Want to Be?

**Readings:** TBA

**Feb. 1** – News Platform Analysis

**Readings:** TBA

### Week 4

**Feb. 6** – Social Newsgathering

**Readings:** TBA

**Feb. 8** – The Mobile Journalist

**Readings:** TBA

### Week 5

**Feb. 13** – Reporting Assignments/Writing Mobile Friendly Stories

**Readings:** TBA

**Feb. 15** – No class

### Week 6

**Feb. 20** – Storytelling Context and Tone

**Readings:** Storytelling and Design Thinkings (Canvas)

**Feb. 22** – Building and Packaging Stories

**Readings:** TBA

## **Week 7**

**Feb. 27** – Social Media Engagement and audience analytics

**Readings:** TBA

**Feb. 29** – Data Journalism I

**Readings:** Data Journalism Handbook: Introduction and Understanding Data (Canvas)

## **Week 8**

**March 5** – Data Journalism II

**Readings:** Data Journalism Handbook: Getting Data (Canvas)

**March 7** – Data Journalism III

**Readings:** DJH: Delivering Data (Canvas)

**DUE:** Story No. 1

## **Week 9**

**March 13-15** – Spring Break

## **Week 10**

**March 19** – Teaching Moment I

**March 21** – Teaching Moment II

**DUE:** Story No. 2

## **Week 11**

**March 26** – Teaching Moment III

**March 28** – Teaching Moment IV

## **Week 12**

**April 2** – TBA

**April 4** – TBA

**DUE:** Story No. 3

## **Week 13**

**April 9** – Social Media Ethics and Policies

**Readings:** TBA

**April 11** – The Spread of Fake News

**Readings:** TBA

## **Week 15**

**April 16** – Lab/Workshop

**April 18** – Lab/Workshop

**Multimedia Package Due**

**Week 16**

**April 23** – TBA

**Readings:** TBA

**April 25** – Mobile and Social Media in Your Journalism Career

**Readings:** TBA

**Social Media Portfolio Due**

**Week 17**

**April 30** – Lab/Workshop

**May 2** – Lab/Workshop

**Social Media Analysis presentations**

**TBA**