

**Writing seminar I \_MC 295  
ID 02558**

Fall 2010

Class meets: Mon, 8:00

Room 321, main building

Instructor: Gulnura Toralieva, M.A.

Credit value

Assessment: Coursework portfolio

You will learn how to write a news story clearly, crisply, accurately and to a deadline. This will involve reporting speeches, press-conferences, official and public meetings, writing stories from documents and press releases; handling figures, and finding and developing off-diary stories.

You will also:

master interviewing techniques both face to face and on the telephone; learn to present orally: journalists are used to explaining themselves in writing; they must also know how to present ideas to editors; to impress potential interviewees and conduct successful interviews; understand news values, why some stories are "spiked" and others published. You are expected to read newspapers critically and understand the way in which they are marketed to appeal to sections of the population. You should begin to develop your own news agenda; get to know a locality: develop contacts and get to know a local borough; develop your knowledge of current affairs; develop good working practices (punctuality, politeness, empathy, enthusiasm) and the ability to work in a team.

### Interviewing

Interviewing is an art. There are basic rules and practice makes perfect. There is a difference between face to face and telephone interviewing and you are expected to do both.

Some face-to-face interviews will be conducted in front of the rest of the class, who can thus learn through observation. Everyone will write up the interviews and/or provide feedback to those conducting the interviews.

The interviewers will be responsible for researching their material and ensuring that overlap is avoided. They will also be expected to provide research notes for the rest of the group.

### Diary and Off-diary

Diary stories are the routine work of every Journalism outlet. They include such things as public meetings, court hearings, public inquiries and PR handouts and other planned events such as press conferences.

News editors value reporters who find their own stories "off diary", not those who wait each day to be told what to do. News editors expect reporters to keep their eyes and ears open even when they are off duty. They cherish the ones who come up with their own stories.

Off-diary work demonstrates that the potential for news is all around us. Reporters should be alert and cultivate the ability to talk to people. Students on off-diary work must look beyond obvious news producers such as the council, courts, police, fire station, hospitals or schools.

### Patch

You will be assigned a "patch" or subject area to cultivate during Term 1, as a key part of your reporting activity, covering both diary and off-diary stories. You are expected to get to know the subject and its people, and what goes on within your subject, developing contacts and ideas for news and features. By the end of Term 1, you will complete a dossier showing the work you have done, including background information gathered, interviews, completed news stories (Diary and Off-Diary), ideas for further news and feature articles, and contacts made in the subject area.

### Features

You will learn key points such as the importance of:

ideas and where to find them; research techniques which enable the ideas to be developed; structure and style of writing to suit the subject and the publication; understanding the spectrum of features from news backgrounders and analysis to colour writing and gossip about pop stars. You will be asked to write a variety of features, including a news feature, a profile, a news-linked issue feature, and a first-person article.

Professional ethics, codes of practice and law issues is another part of the syllabus. Guest-lecturers will help you to understand the main principles of what you can publish and what can not.

### Marking Scheme

The marking system is not ideal for evaluating pieces of journalism, where there is necessarily a strong subjective element in any judgment. As a rough guide the instructor uses the following criteria for coursework in Practical Journalism (banded by per cent):

70 to 100: a fully competent, professional piece of work that fully meets its brief and could be published in an appropriate medium with little or no further work; an original approach; excellent sources; fresh, illuminating information; exceptional writing; smooth to read and accurate.

60 to 70: a piece of work that could be published, as above, but only after some light rewriting/editing; competent, professional work, with a reasonably original approach, good range of sources and clear writing.

50 to 60: a piece of work that could be published, as above, but only after either substantial rewriting/editing, or further research.

0 to 49: a piece of work that is not of acceptable standard for publication, or which contains a serious inaccuracy or libel, or which for some other reason fails to meet its brief.

### Grading

A : 90-100 %  
 A-: 80-89 %  
 B+: 75-79 %  
 B : 70-74 %  
 B-: 65-69 %  
 C+: 60-64 %  
 C : 55-59 %  
 C-: 50-54 %  
 D+: 45-49 %  
 D-: 40-44 %  
 F: 0-43 %

**Home assignments – 50 %**

**Patch file – 50 %**

Assessment criteria

In a news story or feature:

Intro paragraph/s: does this identify the main angle and set the appropriate tone? Is it written as economically as possible and in a lively manner?

Structure: is the thematic structure of the piece clear and logical?

Use of quotations: is the punctuation correct? Is reported speech handled correctly? Are the quotes well sourced?

Factual accuracy: have vague generalisations been avoided? Have specific details been identified? Are names, titles, figures correct?

Grammar, spelling, house style: have elaborate sentence constructions, slang, jargon etc been avoided?

Is the story written to the set length and did it meet the deadline?

**Tentative class schedule**

If any changes, you will be informed through email-- so, make sure to check your accounts.

Date	Topic
Week 1: Aug 26	Introduction. News quiz
Week 2: Sept 2	How to pitch the idea? What is news? Assessing news value. On-diary and off-diary stories.
Week 3: Sept 9	News and feature writing. Structure. Inverted pyramid. Lead. <i>Home assignment: to find ideas for news stories.</i>
Week 4: Sept 16	Analysis of ideas for news stories. Gathering the news. <i>Home assignment: to write</i>

	<i>a news story (250-300w.)</i>
Week 5: Sept 23	Interviewing techniques. Preparation. Background. Reluctant people.
	Interviewing techniques. Q&A. Exercise in class. <i>Home assignment: to do interview with an expert in the field. (800-1000w.)</i>
Week 6: Sept 30	Reporting the government and parliament. History of parliamentary reporting in Kyrgyzstan. <i>Home assignment: to prepare for the test on public administration</i>
Week 7: Oct 7	Test
Week 8: Oct 14	Off-diary feature research <i>Home assignment: to write a feature article (1200-1500 w.)</i>
Week 9: Oct 21	Professional ethics of journalists. Code of practice. Guest speaker.
Week 10: Oct 28	What is newspaper? Dealing with editors. Guest speaker.
Week 11: Nov 4	Sub-editing techniques.
Week 12: Nov 11	Feedback on home assignments. Writing problems.
Week 13: Nov 18	Discussing patch research
Week 14: Dec 2	Patch research
Week 15: Dec 9	Patch research. Individual tutorials on patch files
Week 16: Dec 16 Final meeting	Course evaluation. Handing patch files.