

How This Class Works

Learning to be a reporter: a hands-on model

I've set up this class to be as close to possible to a "real" reporting lab, but with a lot of guidance along the way. Hands-on experience is the best way to learn to be a reporter, but it needs to be done in a way that is not overwhelming. I have come up with a learning model that incorporates my own reporting experience as well as experience I have gained from training at the National Institute on Computer Assisted Reporting, The Poynter Institute and the Associated Press Managing Editors NewsTrain program.

The Neighborhood Report is designed to be a treasure hunt of sorts, familiarizing you with public records and human sources. You will learn what kind of paper documents can help you develop story ideas and provide context for your stories. You will learn how to find the "power brokers" on your beat and cultivate them as sources. You will learn the basics of finding which elected officials are in charge of what and how that affects your neighborhood. Figuring out the lay of the land is a crucial skill for reporters. This is where that process starts. The Neighborhood Report is divided into three sections, each with a different focus. Don't view this assignment as a standalone. It's meant to intertwine with your Listening Post.

The Listening Post is at the heart of reporting. It involves getting beyond the talking heads to find out what "real people" are thinking and talking about. Too often, journalists rely on elected officials or people in power to define the public agenda or speak on behalf of citizens. Taking journalism back to the streets will help you develop the type of authentic, compelling, untold stories with which readers connect deeply. Your Neighborhood Report will help you determine possible locations and topics of discussion for your Listening Posts. Your Listening Posts, in turn, will generate story ideas.

The Story is exactly what you know it to be. We'll work on enhancing your interviewing, writing and organization skills. In the old days (before the Internet), publishing the story was the end of the reporting process. Now, publishing the story is the beginning of the news cycle because it gives the public the opportunity to comment. Demands for online material and interactivity mean reporters need to know how to blog.

The Blog Post is the next step after your story. Blog posts will often, but not always, follow up on or develop a different angle from your story. Sometimes, a blog post might lead you to a story. You might ask readers to weigh in on a topic, then write about it. Knowing how to blog as a reporter is essential in today's newsrooms.

Multimedia elements come last on this list, but should not be an afterthought. Neighborhood Reports might help you find original documents to post on your news site. You might choose to gather audio or take photos during a Listening Post and add that to your news site. You might make a quick Google map to show where things are located. During each step of this process, always be thinking in terms of multimedia elements. Make it a habit. Soon enough, it will feel like something you have always done. You'll be comfortable coming up with multimedia ideas and they'll no longer feel like something "extra." Really, they are a key part of the process.