

# Introduction to Journalism

College of the Atlantic, Winter 2008

Instructor: Earl D. Brechlin, Editor, *Mount Desert Islander*

Speaker schedules subject to change.

For class and assignment info go to: [westardfarm.com/coa.htm](http://westardfarm.com/coa.htm)

## Goals

*To give students an introduction to news writing style, approach and execution; primarily for print but also for radio, television and public relations. To provide exposure to the broader issues facing the journalism profession with an emphasis on ethics and avoiding legal entanglements.*

**January 7** *Mama don't let your babies grow up to be journalists.* Opening remarks, course outline, prelim info, assignments, expectations. What do journalists do? Why do they do it? The First Amendment. The three great lights of journalism — good reporting, writing, and decision-making. Can ethical journalists get a big story? How to be a critical reader/viewer/listener.

**January 10** *Elementary Dear Watson,* powers of observation, interrogation, interview techniques, police, press relations. Guest, FBI academy graduate Nate Young, Bar Harbor Police Chief.

**January 14** *Who, What, When and Why goes where?* Basic news writing. Leads, the inverted pyramid, fairness, denials. Headlines and captions. You Make the Call! Ethics discussion on photo journalism.

**January 17** *To tape or not to tape; that is the question.* Interview techniques, getting quotes, and printing them, identifying yourself, protecting a source. You Make the Call! Ethics discussion on Privacy.

**January 21** *The mix of writing.* Options include news, reviews, features, columns, editorials, obituaries etc. Where are your strengths? When is it okay to express an opinion? How to label it as such. You Make the Call! Ethics Discussion on Diversity.

**January 24** *Using and abusing your editor.* Every writer has one. How to make the best of yours. What to do when you disagree. Editing exercises. Ethics discussion — reporter-source relationships.

**January 28** *You may be liable if you commit libel.* What every journalist needs to know about libel, slander, public figures, and invasion of privacy. We'll also briefly discuss copyright laws. Test on this subject will be given on Jan. 31.

**January 31** Libel and invasion of privacy exam. You Make the Call! — Ethics discussion on accuracy and fairness. Peer review of student writings.

**February 4** *How to avoid being the best of the worst.* By now, everyone will have acquired many bad news writing habits. Topics include incorrect word choices, redundancies, excess verbiage. We'll talk about how to avoid them. You Make the Call! Ethics discussion on when to name names.

**February 7** Nuts, bolts and the fine print of writing. A guest lecturer will go over how to research, manage information, documenting and crediting sources, footnotes etc. From *Rules for Writers* by Diana Hacker.

**February 11** Mid-course correction. Investigative reporting. Everyone wants to be a Woodward or Bernstein. How to sink your teeth into an in-depth investigative story. Ethics discussion on Deception.

**February 14** Freedom of information laws in Maine, the nation. How to go about finding what you need. What proceedings and documents are public. What special rights do journalists have? How to file an FOI request. Also "Fun in the sun; on an expense account!" How writing for magazines or books is different. How that business works.

**February 18** Spin control. How marketers, public relations hacks, governmental officials and spinmeisters try to affect what you see and hear. How to write a press release and get your information out in print and on the air. You Make the Call! You Make the Call! Ethics discussion on Conflicts of interest.

**February 21** PR in the real world. The Jackson Laboratory Media Relations guru Joyce Peterson will speak to the class about the other side of getting the word out. Spin control scenarios.

**February 25** *The shocking truth! Journalism is a business.* Advertising is the necessary evil. A primer on how it actually works and how it is supposed to work. Wink, wink. The "Chinese Wall" between editorial and advertising.

**February 28** Math for reporters. As Deep Throat once said "Follow the money." What is a mill rate? How to calculate percentage increase and decrease. How to read a municipal or non-profit budget spreadsheet. Guest: Bar Harbor Town Manager Dana Reed.

**March 3** Donna Gormley, news director and recent 6 o'clock anchor at WLBZ, Channel 2 in Bangor will talk about television writing, and reporting.

**March 6** Special guest Erwin Gratz, the morning news voice of Maine Public Radio and national president of the Society of Professional Journalists will discuss writing and reporting for radio and national media and access issues.

**March 10** *Is the pen mightier than the sword?* The role of journalist in society. How the job stacks up against other professions we love to hate. What journalists can do to change societal attitudes about themselves. The class will put journalism on trial and prepare for the prosecution and the defense.

**March 13** Deadline for final portfolio work, wrap up, open for questions. Final evaluation. What is a journalist? How has your perception, pre-conception changed? Anyone want to be one?