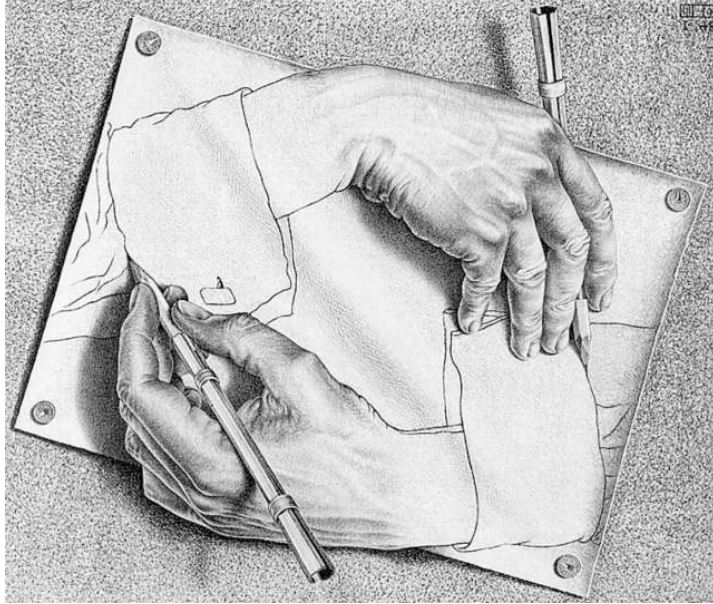# Journalism

Dr. Bob Bednar

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COM 75-624-51

Summer 2022

CONTACT INFORMATION: bednarb@southwestern.edu
OFFICE HOURS: by appointment, by phone
CLASS MEETINGS: M-Th 9:00-11:30 On Google Meet; see schedule for details

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This writing-attentive course considers the character, purposes, and subject matter of journalistic nonfiction narrative writing, with a special emphasis on the production of magazine, newspaper, and online feature stories that use reporting and narrative techniques also prevalent in long-from feature journalism, documentary film, radio, and podcasts. While much of our in-class work will be collaborative in nature, most of your reporting and writing work outside of class will be individual. Given that the class will involve not only doing assigned readings but scheduling and doing extensive reporting as well as doing a significant amount of writing and revision, you should expect to spend at least 24 hours a week working on this class in addition to regular class time. You also should expect this work to be both substantial and challenging intellectually, creatively, and logistically—especially because we are doing it within the frame of a short online summer course and in a pandemic. Finally, the regular critique workshops add another critical dimension to the class that will teach you the reflective and reflexive skills necessary to critique your own work and the work of your colleagues in the class.

For the most part, this is a hands-on course emphasizing active student involvement in the processes of reporting, writing, critiquing, and revising long-form nonfiction narratives, but there are significant critical components to the class as well. We will always engage contemporary journalism not only as something you *do*, but as a certain kind of cultural technology embedded within a discursive formation that *does something* within the culture: produces subjects, objects, practices, and regimes of truth. The class discussions of the readings and documentary films thus will focus on analyzing the particular narrative techniques authors and filmmakers use as well as the specific circumstances of production and consumption that

characterize journalism and documentary more generally in contemporary American society. And as we engage the problem of perceiving, knowing, and representing "the actual," we will also wrestle with larger questions of epistemology and ontology.

   We will collect the best work from each author in the class and publish it in an existing collection of student journalism articles at the course's *Fear and Loathing on the San Gabriel* web site <www.southwestern.edu/~bednarb/journalism.htm>, and I will encourage you to submit your articles to the *Megaphone* and other appropriate newspapers and magazines.

REQUIRED TEXTS:
Ira Glass (ed.), ***The New Kings of Nonfiction*** (2007)
Jack Hart, ***Story Craft: The Complete Guide to Writing Narrative Nonfiction*** (2021)
Mark Kramer & Wendy Call (eds.), ***Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide*** (2007)
Course PDF Readings available at the course website:
   http://people.southwestern.edu/~bednarb/journalism/
Documentary Film Screenings, including *Spellbound*, *Grizzly Man*, *Behind the Curve*, *Time*, and *Fast, Cheap & Out of Control*

GRADING:
   I design my classes with a number of different kinds of low stakes and high stakes assignments focusing on different communicative forms and assignment formats to make sure that each student has maximum potential to demonstrate and extend existing skills and knowledge while developing new ones. I go into every class, every assignment, and every student encounter with a growth mindset--the belief that every student is capable of both succeeding and improving--and see that my responsibility is to give you the tools you need to succeed and improve while also being clear about my expectations and evaluations.

   Grades are given a lot of power in dominant culture, but it is important to remember that grades are not a reflection of your worth as a person but a reflection of your performance under a certain set of defined constraints. To level the playing field and fight against a scarcity model of grading, which reinforces unearned advantages and inherited cultural power, I do not grade on a bell curve to place your graded assignments or final grade into a pre-determined grade distribution, where only a certain number of students can get an A, B, C, D, or F. The grades I assign reflect my evaluation of your performance within the constraints outlined in the syllabus and in assignment handout rubrics. Grades for particular assignments thus measure your performance on that assignment relative to the requirements of the assignment, not relative to other students, and final course grades measure your performance in the class overall.

   Based on my goal to both minimize grade focus/anxiety while also teaching you to be independent thinkers and self-advocates, I do not post grades that are calculated in real-time throughout the semester. Increasingly, students are being trained to expect real-time grades computed as courses unfold, which creates an unbalanced extrapolation of a snapshot of your performance, treating your current performance as a predictor of your final grade. I myself do not compute your grades until the very end of the semester unless I see a major concern emerge or a student requests it. Because the work we do continues to build to higher and higher stakes over the course of the semester, I see grades on smaller assignments along the way as signals about what to do in the future, not an accurate prediction of what your final grade will be. The only way they become predictive is if you ignore the feedback you are getting along the way or do not take it as a stimulus for growth.

   If you ever want to compute your emerging overall grade average yourself at

any point during the semester, here is what you need to know to compute grades yourself in this class. Final course grades are assigned a final letter grade based on a range of averages for individual assignments based on a 100-point scale. For example, a final average of 88-89% would be recorded as a B+; a final average of 83-87% would be recorded as a B; and 80-82% would be recorded as a B- (extrapolate from there if it is higher or lower than a B). For the purposes of averaging individual project letter grades into a final grade, I use the following system to assign a numerical grade based on a letter grade on an assignment: B+=88%; B=85%, and B-=82% (and so on). For example, if you got a B- on an assignment that was weighted 25% of the final grade, you would receive 20.5 points for that assignment (or *lose the possibility of getting* 4.5 points overall). The only exception for that is if you achieve an A+ on an individual assignment, where it will score as a 100% of the available points, where in this example you would receive the full 25 points.

At any point along the way, if you are curious, you can see how your grade is tracking: multiply the score of an individual assignment grade by the percentage it is weighted and that will reveal the total points you have earned for that assignment grade; add it to other determined grades; and then divide it by the highest potential scores for all the completed assignments combined. For grades that are composite, such as graded Classwork, you can calculate it the same way to track your ongoing composite score. If Classwork is determined by completion grades instead of through scoring, you can average that score based on the number of assignments you have completed divided by the ones you have not. Please note that I do not compute cumulative class participation grades until the very end of the semester, so if you want to get a sense of where this score is tracking before that, you will need to discuss it with me. Finally, if you have absences in excess of the stated policy or a pattern of late submissions, you will need to factor them in as well. If you have questions about this grading system at any time, please consult me.

Here is how each assignment or set of assignments is weighted in this class:

Article 1: Personal Experience Narrative (5-7pp)	15%
Article 2: Profile Narrative I (5-7pp)	15%
Article 3: Profile Narrative II (5-7pp)	20%
Article 4: Comprehensive Nonfiction Narrative (9-10pp)	30%
Classwork/Class Participation	20%

PROCEDURES AND POLICIES:
We will discuss more specific guidelines for the class assignments as the course progresses, but here is a short outline to help orient you at the outset:

• **ARTICLES**: You will produce four nonfiction narrative articles in the course. Article 1: Personal Experience Narrative, will be 5-7 pages long and will explore themes and ideas about your identity rooted in an event you have experienced personally. Article 2: Profile Narrative I, will be 5-7 pages long and will feature a condensed narrative portrait of one of your classmates. Article 3: Profile Narrative II, will be 5-7 pages long and will feature a condensed narrative portrait of someone outside of class. Article 4: Comprehensive Nonfiction Narrative will be 9-10 pages long and will use a profile narrative to locate and provide a foundation for the exploration of a subculture or a larger social, cultural, and/or political issue anchored to a particular place. The format for this final article will be comprehensive (meaning that it should show that you have mastered all of the preceding forms and know when and how to use them) but it will also be more loose and open to your own

decisions on form and content. Handouts for each of these assignments are attached to this syllabus.   All of the Articles will be critiqued before being evaluated on an A-F, plus/minus system.

- **CLASSWORK/CLASS PARTICIPATION**: Even though we are using a remote learning model for this class, this course revolves around group discussion and collaborative workshops, so good Classwork and daily Class Participation are vital. This is true in all of my classes, but especially in Journalism, where your constant engagement is central to the functioning of the class, as we will all be working on deadlines for critiques that involve the entire class, not just the writer and me. We will be working from different locations, but we still have to rely on each other's feedback to keep every writer's work moving forward. Given the online format and given that we are still working within a tense public health situation that will keep all of our work under the threat of disruption, I know that all of us will be tuning into the course from a fluid and distracted emotional and mental space as well as physical space. I expect that to translate into more fluid attendance and engagement, but I also expect that you will do whatever you can to meet us all in the middle to make this work for all of us. Because we are scheduled to work in a synchronous format, I expect that you will do whatever you can to join the scheduled video conference. Classwork/Class Participation will be evaluated on a 10-point system.

Your **Classwork grade** will be determined by your level of involvement in the critique workshops as well as your performance on periodic in-class writing assignments. Missing a Critique Workshop will have a significant impact on your Classwork grade, but will also have significant impact on your revision process. **Good Class Participation** means more than merely tuning in to attend class video conferences, which is a given; it means actively contributing to the class discussion by talking not only to me about the materials, but to your classmates as well. We are a small, dispersed writing community, where it is every student's responsibility to keep the discussion of the day's material both lively and useful. Finally, given that I will need to be managing the flow of the class electronically, reading and responding to email from me and your classmates regularly is part of class participation.

The bottom line is that I understand that doing this class remotely during a pandemic will be challenging, but I still expect you to be accountable not only to me but to each other. Of course, if one of you succumbs to the virus, you and I will need to negotiate how to complete the course. The same is true if I succumb to the virus, but that is highly unlikely as I have been fully vaccinated.

- **ATTENDANCE**: I will expect you to be prepared and on the video conference every day that we meet synchronously. Given that many of us are in situations that are beyond our control, I will not enforce a pre-determined penalty for absences, but you are accountable for making up whatever work you miss due to an absence. See more details about the implications of missing class in the Classwork/Class Participation section above. Of course, if one of you succumbs to the virus, you and I will need to negotiate how to complete the course.

- **READING ASSIGNMENTS**: All reading assignments must be completed before class on the day scheduled for discussion of the readings.

- **DEADLINES:** Partly because we are working with a compressed summer school schedule with precise turn-around time constraints and partly because this is a class in journalism, where deadlines (and page constraints) must be treated very seriously even as the world swirls around us, I will not accept late papers for this class. Electronic submissions of drafts and final revisions are due on the days and

times indicated in the schedule. Given the volatility of our lives right now, I consider a paper late if it is not submitted within 6 hours of these deadlines. I will neither evaluate workshop drafts that are turned in late nor post them at the website for others to read for the critique workshops. This is a serious structural disadvantage, because even though you will be required to do detailed critiques of the drafts submitted by the other members of your workgroup, your late draft will not be critiqued in workshop, so your final draft will be your only draft. I simply will not grade final revisions that are turned in late, so if you do not submit a final revised article within 8 hours of the deadline, you will receive a zero on that assignment. Given the pace of the class, if you fall sick to COVID-19 during the term and thus have a medical reason for not being able to keep up with our workflow, we will most likely need to arrange for a medical Incomplete for the class.

- **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**: It is your responsibility to understand and live by the Honor System, so it will be a good idea to review the policies and procedures outlined in the SU *Student Handbook*. All in-class and out-of-class assignments are subject to the Honor Code; therefore, I will assume that everything you turn in that is not accompanied by a full statement of the Pledge and your signature will indicate that you have witnessed an Honor Code violation and wish to pursue it. All collaborative work must be accompanied by an explicit delineation of specific acknowledgements of any assistance you received in the production of your work. For verification purposes, all pledge statements in this particular class must also contain contact information for the people you have represented in your articles. See also the separate statement below regarding Public/Private Communication. Students who violate University policies on Academic Dishonesty by representing another's work as their own are subject to review by the Student Judiciary, which includes the possibility of disciplinary penalties.

- **ETHICALLY DISTINGUISHING PRIVATE/PUBLIC COMMUNICATION**: A Journalism class is a great place to learn about the ethics around private vs. public communication; a Journalism class conducted online will provide us with even more learning opportunities around this. Journalists generally only write about what they witness personally or what their informants say they have witnessed, but if they are doing their job correctly, they will witness or hear about things that they or their informants would not like to make public. When reporting is done in person, this is usually something journalists negotiate up front with the people they are writing about, working out ground rules about what will be recorded and what will not, as well as what will be shared and what will not. Given that we may be doing some of our reporting remotely, the possibility to passively record conversations and actions without consent is implicit in the technologies we will use, so we will need to establish a new set of ground rules around this. You will need to establish these expectations with the people you interview, but we also need to establish them for the work we do in this class together.

Journalists have longstanding practices that pertain to this, such as the distinction between "on-the-record" and "off-the-record" as well as the even more nuanced distinction between information that is to attributed to the speaker in the form of a direct quote and information that is for background. Moreover, journalists have ethical obligations to three main constituencies: their editors (or, in this case, teacher), their audience, and the people they write about. Balancing obligations to all three is very difficult, particularly in regards to the problematic boundary between public and private communication.

You will see how this plays out in your own reporting and writing, but it also pertains to the everyday work we do in the class. Journalists need a safe space among other journalists and editors to discuss information that they learn through

the reporting process that editors and writers must collaboratively decide whether and how to communicate to readers. We will see exactly how sensitive this is when we do our first two assignments, where you will be sharing your own embodied experiences and those of your classmates, and you will always know more than you will share with your publics. But the same is true of the last two assignments, which are about people outside of class, where privacy will be even more ethically fraught. In both sets of assignments, we will be discussing behind-the-scenes information about ourselves and the people we report on, and we will need to establish and maintain a strict line between what we say and what we share outside our group.

To ensure that this information stays private and within our group, I will consider it an honor code violation for a student to share any private information they learn through the reporting and workshop process that we decide will stay private. More specifically, it is an honor code violation to electronically record and distribute our video conferences and/or phone calls without the express consent of everyone involved.

COURSE STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

The Learning Outcomes for this course focus on developing proficiency in writing, research, and collaborative revision.

By the end of the course, students will demonstrate:

- Proficiency in producing creative nonfiction narrative writing that honors the complexity of actual lived experience while having a clearly communicated framing Idea and a vivid, well-developed Story.
- Proficiency in collaborating in a live critique workshop environment, where peers critique your work with you and you critique their work in a community of writers.
- Proficiency in negotiating feedback from the instructor and from peers in revising your work for public communication.
- Proficiency in grammar usage, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, and mechanics.
- Proficiency in critically engaging nonfiction writing published in magazines, newspapers, online journalism outlets, and documentary film.
- Proficiency in developing effective research strategies for identifying interview sources as well as published primary and secondary sources necessary to contextualize nonfiction narratives in public discourse.
- Proficiency in understanding how journalism functions as a professional and cultural practice.
- Proficiency in understanding and portraying how characters in nonfiction narratives construct community, identity, and mobility in relation to place.

COURSE PDF READING CITATIONS

Earley, Pete, "Missing Alice," in Walt Harrington (ed.), *Intimate Journalism: The Art and Craft of Reporting Everyday Life* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), pp. 109-121.

Finkel, David, "The Last Housewife in America," in Walt Harrington (ed.), *Intimate Journalism: The Art and Craft of Reporting Everyday Life* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), pp. 59-76.

Finkel, David, Excerpt from *Thank You for Your Service* (New York: Sara

Crichton/Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2013), pp. 3-21.

Shaer, Matthew, "When the Virus Came for the American Dream," *New York Times Magazine*, November, 8, 2020, pp. 32-37, 46, 49.

Smith, Gary, "The Man Who Couldn't Read," in Walt Harrington (ed.), *Intimate Journalism: The Art and Craft of Reporting Everyday Life* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), pp. 1-17.

Streep, Abe, "What the Arlee Warriors Were Playing For," *New York Times Magazine*, April 6, 2018, pp. 30-41, 61.

PLANNED SCHEDULE

Week One

May   11:   Introduction to Writing Nonfiction Narrative

May   12:   Writing the Self

Webpage PDF Reading: Earley, "Missing Alice"
***New Kings* Readings:** Introduction; Buford, "Among the Thugs"
***TTS* Readings:** xv-xvii, 10-16, 70, 78-83, 100-103, 158-159, 228-230

Week Two

May   16:   Profile Narratives

Webpage PDF Readings: Smith, "The Man Who Couldn't Read"
***New Kings* Readings:** Orlean, "The American Man at Age Ten"
***Story Craft* Readings:** Ch 1, 2, 4

May   17:   Profile Narratives, Continued

***New Kings* Reading:** Lewis, "Jonathan Lebed's Extracurricular Activities"
***Story Craft* Readings:** Ch 5, 10
***TTS* Readings:** 19-24, 28-33, 39-45, 71-74, 128-129, 170-172, 177-178, 235-239

May   18:   Screen and Discuss *Fast, Cheap & Out of Control*

Due: Article 1 and Author's Note [electronic, by 8:30am]

May   19:   Article 1 Critique Workshop

Week Three

May   23:   Editorial Consultations

Due: Article 1 Revision [electronic, by noon]

May   24:   Screen and Discuss *Spellbound*

Due: Article 2 and Author's Note [electronic, by 8:30am] and Proposal for Article 3 [email by 2:30pm]

May   25:   Article 2 Critique Workshop

May   26:   Comprehensive Nonfiction Narratives
            Webpage PDFs: Finkel, "The Last Housewife in America"; Finkel, Excerpt from *Thank You for Your Service*
            ***Story Craft* Readings:** Ch 9
            Due: Article 2 Revision [electronic, by 8:30am]

Week Four

May   30:   No Class—Memorial Day
May   31:   Comprehensive Nonfiction Narratives, Continued
            Webpage PDFs: Streep, "What the Arlee Warriors Were Playing For"; Shaer, "When the Virus Came for the American Dream"
            ***Story Craft* Readings:** Ch 3
June 1:   Comprehensive Nonfiction Narratives, Continued
            ***Story Craft* Readings:** Ch 6, 7, 8
            ***TTS* Readings:** 35-39, 59-62, 89-91, 129-148, 172-176, 178-183, 239-243, 284-287
            Due: Proposal for Article 4 [email by 2:30pm]
June 2:   Screen and Discuss *Time*

Week Five
June 6:   Editorial Consultations
            Due: Article 3 and Author's Note [electronic, by 8:30am]
June 7:   Article 3 Critique Workshop
June 8:   Editorial Consultations
            Due: Article 3 Revision [electronic, by noon]
June 9:   Screen and Discuss *Grizzly Man*
            ***TTS* Readings:** 48-59, 98-100, 103-121, 148-149, 205-216

Week Six
June 13:   Screen and Discuss *Behind the Curve*
            Due: Article 4 and Author's Note [electronic, by 8:30am]
June 14:   Article 4 Critique Workshop
June 15:   Editorial Consultations
June 16:   Editorial Consultations
            Due: revised Article 4 [electronic, by 5pm]
June 17:   No Class meeting
            Due: revised article for the *Fear & Loathing* Collection [electronic submission, single-spaced + new Author's Note (by noon)]

Bob Bednar

Pronouns and Possessives:

its = possessive pronoun
> e.g. the essay's point of view => its point of view

it's = contraction of it + is
> e.g. It is a fine day => It's a fine day

their = possessive pronoun
> e.g. Hondo and Jo Jo's dog roams the neighborhood => Their dog roams the neighborhood

there = adverb indicating place
> e.g. It usually leaves its mark on that tree over there.

they're = contraction of they + are
> e.g. Hondo and Jo Jo are looking for their dog = > They're looking for their dog.

Punctuation/Sentence Structure Problems:

awkward (AWK)
An awkward sentence stumbles over itself as it tries to communicate its point, rendering the writing confused/confusing. Often the fix is to "write to the point" more directly.

fragment (frag)
A fragment is an incomplete sentence that lacks a subject, a verb, or both.
> e.g. Washing the car. (no subject, incomplete verb, and incomplete thought)

comma splice (cs)
A comma cannot, on its own, join two independent clauses.
> e.g. Jo Jo likes barbecue, Hondo prefers tofu   => Jo Jo likes barbecue; Hondo prefers tofu.
>   => Jo Jo likes barbecue, but Hondo prefers tofu.
>   => Jo Jo likes barbecue. Hondo prefers tofu.

fused sentence (fs)
A fused sentence lacks the punctuation necessary to separate two independent clauses.
> e.g. Jo Jo likes barbecue Hondo prefers tofu   => see comma splice corrections above

semicolon errors
A semicolon can only be used in an extensive series or to separate two independent clauses.
> e.g. Hondo stumbled; washing the car   => Hondo stumbled; he was washing the car.
>   => While he was washing the car, Hondo stumbled.

run-on
A run-on sentence proliferates verbs and subjects and objects without attention to grammatical structure.

using the word "however"
The word "however" is not an interchangeable synonym for the word "but" or "although." It cannot be used to indicate contradiction unless you use punctuation to interrupt the flow of the sentence. If a sentence begins with the word, it must be followed by a comma; if a sentence ends with the word, it must be preceded with a comma. If it is used in the middle of a sentence, it must be set apart either with a set of commas before and after it or with a semicolon and a comma (see **fs**, **cs**, and **run-ons**).
> e.g. Jo Jo says she does not know how their dog gets out; however, I know that she does.
> e.g. Jo Jo says she does not know how their dog gets out. However, I know that she does.
> e.g. Jo Jo says she does not know how their dog gets out. I know that she does, however.
> e.g. Jo Jo says she does not know how their dog gets out. I know, however, that she does.

Apostrophes:

A singular noun that does not end in " s " takes " 's " to indicate possession.
> e.g. the woman's dog   (the dog belongs to one woman)

A plural noun that already ends in " s " takes an " ' " only to indicate possession.
> e.g. the boys' dog   (the dog belongs to more than one boy)
> e.g. the ladies' coat   (the coat belongs to more than one lady)

A plural noun that does not end in " s " takes " 's " to indicate possession.
> e.g. the children's dog   (the dog belongs to all the children)
> e.g. the women's coats   (the coats belong to the women)

A singular noun that ends in " s " takes either " ' " or " 's " to indicate possession.
> e.g. Charles' spaniel <u>or</u> Charles's spaniel   (the spaniel belongs to Charles)

Punctuating quotes and dialogue:

In American English grammar, all commas and periods go inside the quotation marks. Any other punctuation mark, unless it is part of the quoted material, belongs outside the quotation marks.
> e.g. "I can't figure it out," Jo Jo says. "How does the dog keep getting out?"
> e.g. "How does the dog keep getting out?" Jo Jo asks. "I can't figure it out."
> e.g. Did she say, "I can't figure it out"? She knows, but she likes to "act ignorant."

Bednar   *Preparing Article #1: Personal Experience Narrative*
COM 75-624: Journalism

Assignment: Think of a SINGLE personal experience that has been particularly significant to you and use it as the focus of a narrative that not only shows us the experience, but also shows and tells us something about you perform your identity and the general contexts in which this experience is meaningful for you (and meaningful, hopefully, to us). Length: 5-7pp double spaced, 12-point type (approx. 2,500 words). At the end of the article include a 200-400 word "Author's Note" that discusses the process of reporting and writing the article.

Your most central job here is to use narrative to show us who you are. To do this, your article will need to revolve around a narration of ONE specific event/experience, but it should also "digress" to explore how this event may help characterize your identity, personality, experiences, point of view, etc., in general, and show how this one example fits into the more general context of your other experiences--both everyday and extraordinary. In order to re-create the experience for your readers and "place the reader into the scene," you will need not only to carefully describe and narrate the experience, but also explore and develop some *ideas* and even a more central IDEA that you want the reader to draw from your experience. The best way to do this is to make your ideas grow out of the narrative details and images and vice-versa. As Mark Kramer writes, "Clean, lucid language draws readers toward experiencing the immediacy of scenes, and the force of ideas." You have to balance narrative and exposition (showing and telling) to have a strong STORY *and* a strong IDEA.

As you choose the story you will write, remember that this is a journalism class, not a journaling class. Therefore, your article must be a public document written for an audience--it must "meet the reader half way." To do that, you must do more than simply therapeutically convey a story that is important to you --something that may be cathartic and personally satisfying to you as the writer but not necessarily satisfying or meaningful to your readers. Unlike a journal, which is written for the writer, journalism is a form of public communication written to make a connection between the writer and the reader and to communicate ideas, emotions, and information that are (or should be) socially, politically, and/or culturally important. Moving towards answering the "so what?" question will give readers some space in your article to imagine what your search for meaning may mean *for them as readers* as well as *for you as a writer*.

By the time you turn in your article, you will have encountered a few models for writing about and with personal experience--Pete Earley's "Missing Alice" and the excerpt from Bill Buford's *Among the Thugs*. *Story Craft* and the readings in *Telling True Stories* also offer helpful advice. Feel free to borrow/"learn" from them different ways to handle the challenges of the form; feel free as well to "learn" from any other public nonfiction personal experience narrative articles you have read or heard on podcasts, etc. outside of class. As we will talk about in our discussions of our readings, you don't have to beat us over the head with a linear argument to make your article have a point to it (what in other writing contexts we would call a thesis). The challenge of this assignment is to find effective ways of giving us vivid details about the characters, places, and events in your story *and* drawing them together into a central IDEA that you want your readers to take away from your article. The key is to constantly move in between representing detail, building scenes, and exploring meaning. Whether you decide to answer the questions you are asking/exploring *within* the article, it at least must be clear that you are consciously working in that direction--trying to find meaning in details even if you don't quite get there. In other words, write the article in such a way that you provide all the details readers will need to understand not only what happened and how it happened, but also what it meant to you when it happened, what it means to you now, and what it might mean to those of us who are learning of your experience only from your article.

With this article as well as others in this class, remember this: as you work to "find your voice" and experiment with form, do so consciously, knowing that you are breaking the rules when you break the rules. Remember that readers have certain expectations about the conventions of grammar and mechanics (especially spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure). If you break these conventions, it must be clear from the article that you are doing so consciously and that you are seeking to train readers to see things in new ways; otherwise, readers will assume that you are simply being ignorant or sloppy. I have outlined the most common grammar and mechanics errors I see in student writing in the "Crash Course on Grammar and Mechanics" sheet included in the syllabus. Make sure you know what they are and how (and why?) to avoid them. To show me that you know the rules and that you know when you are breaking them, please write in grammatically functional sentences for this first assignment. This applies even when you are trying to represent your voice or the rhythm of someone's speech.   In later assignments, if you find that you must break the rules to accurately represent "voice" or "style," you must show me that you know which rule you are breaking in a footnote.   Here's the bottom line: show me that you know the conventions so that we can both work on ways of stretching them and ultimately breaking them. As film director Francis Ford Coppola once said to one of his actors, "You have to learn your lines so that you can forget them."

Assignment: **Observe and interview face-to-face a person multiple times using whatever technological means possible. Use the in-depth, recursive interviews and your experiences observing and interacting with the person to develop a narrative-based "round" characterization of the person that uses both direct and indirect characterization. As with Article 1, your goal here is to tell a specific story that characterize a person's identity. Article 2 represents a classmate; Article 3 represents someone outside of class. Both articles are 5-7pp double spaced, 12-point type (approx. 2,500 words). At the end of the article include a 200-400 word "Author's Note".**

Profile narratives draw a general picture of a person by showing them doing, saying, or thinking specific things that are characteristic of them. Often the profiles we see in magazines and newspapers are of public figures, but as you can see with the examples we are reading, the form is well suited for telling the stories of the everyday lives of "ordinary people" that readers only meet because of their mediated portraits.

As the writer of the profile narrative, your job is to make that person feel alive, real, believable, and significant to your readers. In this, it is no different than the personal experience narrative: you write in scenes and you draw ideas from the scenes, and your article as a whole focuses on defining images, tensions, paradoxes, conflicts, and/or significant events/moments. Likewise, if you were to think of your profile as a subtle argument—as you did with Article 1--your "angle" on the person and your general IDEA about who the person is would be equivalent to a thesis, and the narrative details, dialogue, and scenes would be equivalent to evidence. The difference is that you are now working with representing the experience of another person, which brings in new challenges.

With the personal narrative, the challenge is to give form to your own experience, which (because it is yours and you have lived it and lived with it) will always seem richer to you than what readers see on the page. With the profile narrative, this challenge remains, but it is easier to overlook it--easier to satisfy yourself that you "know the story" when the person you are profiling may think you have just scratched the surface. Thus the most important challenge inherent in the profile form is that the person you profile also has an interest in narrating their experience. Sometimes this can lead to conflict, so be aware of it.

Excellent profile narratives are built from *immersion* in a person's life, which raises the issue of access. You will need to work out a productive balance between respecting the time of the other person and spending as much time with them as you can. When you are with them, try to think of the interviews more as conversations. Better yet, spend enough time hanging out with the other person so that *both* of you feel that you are having conversations instead of some kind of rigid Q & A session. An added bonus of spending more time with the person is that you will also inevitably get to see them interact with the other people in their lives, which can add important dimensions to your understanding of the person. Go into each encounter with the person with the assumption that "Everything Counts." If you use all your senses when you are reporting, and you record those sense impressions as well as the dialogue and thoughts you have while you are reporting, you will have all the sensory details you need to build scenes for your reader.

However, it is important also to remember that no amount of interviewing and no amount of time spent will guarantee that you *know* the other person intimately. We can never know exactly what other people are thinking and feeling, and we definitely do not know what it is to *be* them. What we strive for is what I call "critical empathy": a kind of empathy that is open and nonjudgmental enough to see people how they see themselves (from their perspective, from the inside out) but also is true to your own experience of the person as a reporter and writer (from your perspective, from the outside in). Remember: People are complex; they do not fit into neat boxes--of your making *or* their own. You are not trying to come up with the final word on who the person is in some absolute sense; you are trying to create an empathetic picture of them that not only *is* fair and accurate but also *feels* accurate and fair. Keeping this goal in mind, we can create profiles that make readers feel as though they understand who the person is and what it means to be them, even as they understand the profile is *your* narrative, and thus is partial, partisan, and problematic. Your goal should be to work as hard as you can to understand who the person is and understand the world they inhabit as they experience it, but ultimately you have to remember that this is your narrative. Your job is to balance critical thinking *and* empathy.

Finally: One of the basic choices you will need to make is whether the narrative arc of your profile is built from scenes that you observed personally while you were with the person (an observational narrative, such as Susan Orlean's "The American Man at Age Ten"), or reconstructed by you based on reporting you did to have the person share with you the details an experience you did not witness yourself (a reconstructed narrative, such as Gary Smith's "The Man Who Couldn't Read"). In either form, you have an additional choice of whether you yourself are a character in the narrative or not. If you do include yourself in the narrative, remember that you are a character (not a disembodied tape recorder) and the narrative must tell a story that functions as a profile, not just a list of things that happened while you were there (in Malcolm Gladwell's words, strive for a "signature," not a "sample" (*TTS*, 74)). Your experience of the interviews is an important part of the potential material for the narrative, but a profile narrative is never simply a transcript of your interviews. Build narrative-based profiles, not transcripts.

Bednar
COM 75-624: Journalism

Preparing Article #4: Comprehensive Nonfiction Narrative

<u>Assignment</u>**: Write a nonfiction narrative that creatively develops a form appropriate to your subject matter while also applying elements of all of the assignments we have studied and worked on so far in the class. To do this, you must develop a narrative that uses a central profile or small set of profiles to vividly locate, illuminate, explore, and provide a foundation for the analysis of a subculture or a larger social, cultural, and/or political issue. Your main challenge is to find effective ways of building an intimate nonfiction narrative that takes a specific angle on a general phenomenon by focusing on the lived experience of someone involved in the phenomenon. Length: 9-10 pp., double spaced, 12-point type (approx. 4,000 words). At the end of the article include a 200-400 word "Author's Note" that discusses the process of reporting and writing the article.**

This article assignment builds on skills we have been developing with the two previous assignments, so consult *Story Craft* and the many useful readings from *Telling True Stories*, and the handouts for Articles 1 and 2 & 3 for more general guidance on writing nonfiction narratives. The crucial distinction for this article is that it not only uses in-depth, recursive interviewing but also requires outside research to build a deeper and wider story by combining "published sources" and "live sources" to tell a vivid story of someone's lived experience that opens into a larger framework. Thinking about the narratives we have studied this semester—the articles in the *New Kings of Nonfiction* book, the Course PDFs, the movies, and your classmates' articles --should help you identify your options. The "Self-Guided Workshop Exercise for Article # 4" included at the end of this handout should help you decide your general subject matter.

There are two main ways to address this assignment; each approach works towards the same shared goal from opposite directions. Either (1), choose one intriguing and engaging person to interview and work over the course of several interviews and observations to identify ways to connect their personal experience/involvement with a more general cultural/social/political issue that has direct impact on their everyday lives, or (2), choose an issue, lifestyle, or subculture you are drawn to reporting and writing about, and then identify and interview one or more interested and interesting people who are directly involved in dealing with it in their daily lives. Whichever way you go, your article must reach towards a thesis/IDEA, it must revolve around participant observation and extensive interviews conducted with the person(s), and it must include some outside "library research" to help you establish your background for the story.

In most cases, published articles using the form we are working with here do not include endnotes or lists of references as we do in scholarly writing; instead, precise source information is always included with the manuscript draft so that the editor can check facts. Therefore, your Article must include a separate "Sources" page that documents your sources in alphabetical order according to some consistent documentation style (such as MLA, Chicago, or Harvard). The Sources page is also where you need to list specific contact information for the people you interviewed for the story. If you quote a published source in your text, you need to incorporate the author's name and source title into your narrative (almost as if the authors are characters in your story), but place detailed citations and page number(s) for specific quotes in footnotes, which are easy to edit out for the final revision.

There is a lot of room for you to maneuver as you complete Article # 4, but here are the "MUSTS."
Your article must:

• Be preceded by an informal proposal that identifies the issues, lifestyles, and/or subcultures and people involved in your article and details your preliminary plans for reporting and writing the story
• Be a nonfiction narrative that combines story and explanatory narrative techniques to represent a larger subculture or lifestyle or a larger social, cultural, and/or political issue rooted in intimate profiles of people who you do not already know intimately --<u>outside of the SU campus community if at all possible</u>
• Be built from participant observation and multiple interviews with one or more people over a significantly longer span of time and in a larger span of contexts than the other two articles in the class ("Quality time," access, and good working relationships are ESSENTIAL)
• Show that you have done outside research into published sources on the issue(s) and include a "Sources" page
• Be 9-10 pages long and include an "Author's Note"

Bednar
COM 75-624: Journalism

Self-Guided Workshop Exercise for Article # 4

Most people think that it is easier to write when they care about what they are writing about and when they know something about what they are writing about. But it is important to see that this observation about "writing what you know" holds true even for articles like this. The point is not that you should write only about things that you already know about, but instead that if you want to write about something you don't know much about, get out there and research it first, so it *will be* something you know and care about when it comes down to writing about it. This will be the key to producing a successful narrative for Article 3, which demands that you move farther and farther away from your "comfort zone" and start reporting on topics you need to research and people who you do not know (or at least do not know very well).

However, before you can decide on a specific way to approach your topic, you must of course first *have* a topic. With this in mind, I have designed the following exercise to get you thinking more specifically about which issue(s), subcultures, and/or lifestyles you may want to research and who you may want to profile in constructing Article # 4. This exercise is something I want you to do on your own time and for yourself (i.e., I will not ask to see it), but I want to emphasize that it has proven quite useful for students in the past as they headed into researched assignments like this, so taking it seriously is in your best interest.

Workshop Exercise:
Finding an Issue or Subculture to Focus on and a Person to Profile

(1). For five minutes, brainstorm a list of specific and potentially controversial personal, social, political, and/or cultural issues that you know something about--things that you are involved in and might even consider yourself an authority on.

(2). For five minutes, brainstorm a list of specific lifestyles and subcultures that you know something about—especially things that you are involved in and might even consider yourself an authority on.

(3). Now, take five minutes to list one to three social, political, and/or cultural concerns that have been on your mind a lot in the last few weeks, concerns that feel critically important to you right now.

(4). Now for five minutes brainstorm a list of specific social, political, and/or cultural issues and or subcultures you'd like to learn more about. Don't worry if something here appears on the other lists as well.

(5). Now for five minutes brainstorm a list of specific people you are curious to know more about—someone you don't already know well, someone you have heard about or know tangentially (friend of a friend, word of mouth, etc.). Keep in mind the pragmatics of face-to-face access.

(6). Now look at all five lists. Circle one item from each list that you want to take a closer look at. Spend ten minutes considering the larger social and/or cultural issues that these items reflect and freewriting a list of questions that you'd like to be able to answer for each of the things you circled. Then spend ten more minutes making a list of sources/places you might look to research the larger social/cultural contexts involved and jotting down some names of people or types of people you could interview to help you vividly locate your thinking about these concerns.

(7). Now take another ten minutes to free-associate and free-write about any connections you see among the different concerns, concentrating on the connections between specific individuals and the larger social and/or cultural contexts within which they circulate.