

**Western Front  
Journalism 214 Syllabus  
Fall quarter, 2013**

**Course reference number:** 41835 **Credits:** 3

**Classroom:** SL110 **Class time:** 2-3:20 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays

**Adviser:** Jack Keith

**Office:** CF259 **Contact:** 650-6244 or [jack.keith@wwu.edu](mailto:jack.keith@wwu.edu)

**Office hours:** 11 a.m.-noon Monday, 1-2 p.m. Tuesday, 11 a.m.-noon

Wednesday, 1-2 p.m. Thursday, or by appointment.

**Send all stories to:** [jackkeithfront@gmail.com](mailto:jackkeithfront@gmail.com)

**WELCOME TO THE WESTERN FRONT**

Working on the campus newspaper can be challenging and stressful, but when your story appears in print or online, it's hard to match the sense of accomplishment you feel. You'll have the opportunity and the responsibility to report and write the news for our campus community and experience some of the thrills -- and frustrations -- of life as a reporter.

You're now part of a team, and every team member needs to work together to put out a good newspaper twice each week and keep the Front website fresh and worth reading. You'll need to have a positive, professional attitude, exemplary ethics and show respect for other reporters, the photographers, the editors and the newsroom. When you are covering a story or just talking/texting socially with friends, you represent not only yourself, but the entire newspaper and its traditions and reputation, and by extension, the journalism department.

How the class works: You'll write stories every week for print and the Front website. Some of you will write blogs, take photos or try alternative story forms. There are no tests -- but consider every story a final exam in which you must prove to readers your work is professional, accurate, fair.

Course goal: The goal of this course is to provide you with an understanding of reporting skills -- finding news, interviewing sources, writing and revising stories -- in a real-world newsroom environment, where deadline pressure mixes with a high volume of stories and the need for accurate, clear news and information for readers.

Learning objectives: After completing this course, you should be able to:

- Quickly report and write a news story for print and the Web.
- Report with accuracy, balance and fairness using multiple sources.
- Add context and clarity to every story.
- Understand the legal, ethical and conflict-of-interest issues of journalism.

Computers and phones: We meet twice a week to discuss good writing, reporting and editing techniques and journalism issues. When class begins, log off your computer and silence your phone. No texting during class.

**Required:**

--“The Associated Press Stylebook,” most recent edition available.

--“The Western Front Style Guide” available on Canvas.

**Optional/recommended books:**

--A grammar guide: “Working with Words,” by Brooks, Pinson, Wilson or “When Words Collide” by Kessler and McDonald.

--A dictionary, such as Random House/Webster’s “Concise Dictionary.” (Webster’s New World College Dictionary is the basis for AP style and is used by most news people.)

**Suggested reading:** Reading helps your writing. Learn from these:

--“Writing Tools,” Roy Peter Clark.

--“On Writing Well,” William Zinsser.

--Newspapers and magazines. Besides Wilson Library, the journalism department’s resource library, CF274, offers publications such as Time, Sports Illustrated, The New Yorker, Mother Jones, News Photographer, The Atlantic, Wired and journalism industry magazines. It’s a nice, quiet spot with soft chairs, tables and computers – great for in-between classes.

**FOUR KEY THINGS TO KNOW:**

**1. Plagiarism:** Taking someone else’s work and passing it off as your own is an extremely serious offense, and the consequences may include a failing grade. In terms of the Front, plagiarism includes making up quotes or facts, fabricating sources or using material from other news outlets without attribution. For more on plagiarism, see the Western website.

**2. Freebies:** Taking gifts such as baked goods, flowers, meals, event tickets and other items is not allowed. They compromise journalistic integrity and allow readers to think your reporting might have been influenced by favors.

**3. Grading:** Your grade will depend on both the *quality AND quantity* of the stories you write. You’ll also have the chance to write shorter items, such as “Viking Voices” student interviews and photos, online news briefs and other assigned articles. And you will earn points for providing weekly story ideas and taking weekly copy editing quizzes.

In addition, you’ll earn “professional points” based on your ability to meet deadlines, turn in clean copy and work well as part of the news team.

**4. Communication and feedback:** I want to help you succeed. If you have questions/problems, need more feedback or want to discuss an assignment, talk to me via email or set up a meeting. I’ll make time for you.

## **WRITING STORIES**

Keep original copies: You **MUST** keep an original copy of every story and item you write this quarter. Those raw copies can be used to replace a missing file, to assist in the reconstruction of an edited story or to help resolve differences with me on how many assignments have been turned in.

**Stories and points:** You should aim to write one regular-length story each week or more. The more stories you write, the more points you can earn.

You **MUST** write a full-length story each of the last two weeks of the quarter, unless you get approval from me. But you cannot load up on stories at the end of the course: No more than three stories over the last two weeks without adviser approval.

We require some online reporting or social media work, and we welcome photography contributions. But at least half your point total must be from stories for the print edition of the Front.

**All stories count:** Stories do not have to be published in print or online to earn points. Only your unedited copy will be graded, not the one that appears in the Front or on its website. Editors decide if a story runs. Email your original draft copy of each story to me at **jackkeithfront@gmail.com**.

**Sources:** Each regular-length story should have **AT LEAST THREE** human sources, with few exceptions (get permission). Your sources should all be listed at the beginning or end of the story; include contact information, especially phone numbers where the source can be reached after work hours. During editing, editors will call sources to fact-check.

**Interviews:** Conduct interviews in person, if at all possible. That improves the quality of conversation dramatically and helps avoid accuracy problems. Next best option: by phone. Avoid full email interviews unless you consult first with an editor; emails are a stilted, much less spontaneous method.

Anonymous sources are not permitted except in rare cases and must be approved by the adviser and the editor-in-chief.

## **JOURNALISM ISSUES:**

**Conflict of interest:** Be transparent with editors: Let them know if you're involved in an organization that you're assigned to cover; they'll get another reporter. We prefer you not work with Klipsun, Planet, AS Review, KUGS or University Communications while you are a Front staffer. If you do, talk to your editors or me.

**Appearance of fairness:** Do not interview friends, relatives, co-workers, employers, etc. Stories that include a conflict of interest or an appearance of fairness could lose all points and may be subject to the university's academic dishonesty policy. Talk to me or your editor to resolve any issues.

**Accuracy, accuracy, accuracy:** Careful writing and reporting is essential to keeping a reader's trust. A completed assignment with a misspelled name or a major fact error will get a severe point penalty; any items containing libel or potential libel may lose all points.

### **GRADING AND POINTS**

--**In-class copy quizzes** (8 @ 5 points each) – These quick, once-a-week quizzes test your AP style and grammar skills. Be on time: The quizzes are given to start the class each Wednesday and may not be made up if you are late or absent.

--**Story idea memos** (10 @ 6 points each) – Each week, you'll provide your editors with a memo listing THREE strong, briefly researched story ideas. Story memos are due at the beginning of class on Mondays. If you don't turn in story ideas this quarter, you may get a points penalty.

--**Professional points** (60 points possible) -- Given twice, once at the midpoint and again at the end of the quarter (30 points possible each time, 60 total). Professional points are awarded by the editors. Criteria include making deadlines, turning in clean copy, showing professional, ethical conduct. Students who drop assigned stories may lose professional points.

--**Class attendance bonus** (10 points possible) – I take attendance every class. If you are absent, send me a note of explanation. Up to 10 points awarded at the end of the quarter.

### **STORY POINTS**

Most Front stories fit into one of these three broad categories:

--**Event story** (up to 50 points each) – News-focused coverage of a meeting/speech/sports event/time-sensitive story, with at least three human sources. Should have clear news peg or tie-in to the campus or region. Also, include a short Web version and/or Web component, such as times and dates of related event. If you cannot make deadline, call/text your editor.

--**Feature/issue story** (up to 75 points each) – Broader focus with multiple interviews that tells readers about trends, people, campus life. Use at least four sources. Typically, these stories are not tied to a specific event or date. Also, include a news- or information-focused Web component.

--**Short event/feature story** (up to 30 points each) – Abbreviated coverage of event or feature using just one or two sources. Typically around two pages or fewer. Again, add a Web summary or component.

### **Other ways to earn story points:**

--**Print extras** (most worth 10 points each) – These short reporting assignments for print (also may be used online) include Viking Voices, cops box, news briefs and breaking news updates.

Viking Voices is a “man-on-the-street” feature where reporters ask students to respond to the question of the day, with mugshot photos taken by the reporter.

Sign up to do Viking Voices, the cops box, the events calendar and other quick hits.

**Online writing (REQUIRED):**

Each reporter is required to do some online reporting as part of this course. Most online material is worth 10 to 30 points, although some stories have higher values. You can earn points in a variety of ways, including:

--Cover a time-sensitive story for the Front’s website. For example, you might report on an event that occurs Tuesday or Wednesday and write it up immediately, so the story can be posted the same day or the next day on the Front website, well in advance of the next print issue.

--Contribute to a blog. We encourage first-person writing about topics readers care about, which might include such things as local music, Vikings sports teams, intramurals, campus fashion tips or kayaking.

--Use Twitter. Cover an important sports or news event with a series of tweets that give quick coverage notes to your audience.

--In addition, each print story you turn in should include a short online version of the story editors can provide for Web readers. Remember: The Web reaches lots of non-local readers, so you’ll need to give more details about everyday things that students already know. For example, use the full name of Western Washington University, explain what Red Square is, what Old Main is, etc.

**To get additional reporting points:**

--**Cover a campus or community meeting** (15 points possible): You can earn up to 15 points even if the meeting lacks news and does not result in a story being written. But you must send me and your editor an email summarizing what happened, possible future story coverage ideas, key action taken or discussed, etc.

--**Breakout textbox** (5 points possible): With your print story, you can add an at-a-glance summary of facts, figures or details. Readers love these quick shots that provide nitty-gritty information on a key aspect; editors use them as a design element to break up the text. In most cases, provide supplemental info; don’t repeat what’s already in the story.

--**Sidebar** (up to 20): Short story accompanying mainbar that focuses on related element, issue, background. Discuss in advance with editor.

--**Web extras** (most are worth 10 points) – Quick-hit Web-only story – 3-5 paragraphs of very short sentences – on campus and regional news, such as breaking news, sports results, campus actions/changes.

--**Blog posts** (worth 10-30 points): Short, casual Web posts about news, features, trends. Usually written in first person. Pre-arrange with editors. NOTE: Blogs are one exception to the rule that all stories, published or not, will count toward your grade: Only blogs posted on the Front website will count. Reporters are limited to 40 blogging points per week.

--**Twitter event coverage** (worth up to 20 points): At news event, send out a series of tweets giving highlights of a game, meeting or speech.

--**Photos/video/graphics/etc.** (150 maximum for entire quarter) – Reporters may shoot their own photos but must pre-arrange with the photo editor.

--Mugshot: 5 points (does not include Viking Voices mugshots)

--Blog photos: 5 points maximum per blog

--B roll (photos that run inside the print edition or back up dominant art), small infographics: 10

--Dominant art or stand-alone infographic: 20 or higher

--Video/website slide show/photo essay/full-page graphic: 30-75 points.

### **STORY PENALTIES**

You can also incur penalties that take away points. Some examples: misspelled names or inaccurate facts, late stories, no photo request form.

### **J214 POINTS FOR GRADES**

**A: 675 or more**

**B: 600-674**

**C: 525-599**

**D: 450-524**

**F: Below 450**

**Here's a typical 214 student's workload for the 11-week fall quarter:**

--**Stories:** Aim for 9-11 stories. For example, three 30-point stories, five 50-point stories and two 75-point stories would offer 490 possible points.

--**Reporters MUST earn a minimum of 65 online-focused points.** Those can come from Front website stories, blogs, videos, tweets, etc.

**Other possible points:**

--8 quizzes (40 possible points)

--10 story idea memos (60 possible points)

--Professional points (60 possible points), plus attendance (10 possible).

--Some short extras, such as Viking Voices, a Q&A, perhaps some photos, etc. (perhaps 50 points)

A total of about 750 or more points would be an excellent showing in this class. If you get 90 percent of that total, you'd get around 675 points, an A.

If you score 80 percent, you'd get around 600 points, a B.

Write each week: Pacing yourself is essential; don't get behind. The final date you can turn in stories for points is Friday, Dec. 6.