

JOU 4313 SPORTS REPORTING

Adj. Prof. Zach Abolverdi

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Office Hours: Tuesday, 1-3 PM. Please call/text (352) 283-3253.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

This course drills down on interview and writing techniques, with an emphasis on writing quickly and vibrantly across multiple media platforms. Includes game and press conference coverage, interviewing techniques and content creation. This course is designed to broaden and deepen a student's understanding of effective sports reporting and to sharpen and develop the student's writing, reporting and other skills required in today's industry.

COURSE GOALS

- To expose you to multiple forms of sports reporting and improve your skill set.
- To learn techniques used by sports reporters and apply them to your career.
- To produce original content of professional quality across various genres.

COURSE TOPICS

Techniques

Understanding audiences
Reporting/developing sources
Asking questions, getting quotes
Developing your voice, style
Creating story ideas, content plans
Working on deadline

Genres

Game coverage (previews, recaps, sidebars)
New coverages (original vs. aggregation)
Commentary and analysis
Writing features, profiles
Multimedia: Video, podcasts
Alternative story types

READING

- The Associated Press StyleBook; recommended
- National and local sports coverage. Stay on top of news, especially UF athletics and the NFL.

GRADING

You will be graded on a 1,500-point scale:

A: 93-100%	(1,395–1,500)	C: 73-76.9%	(1,095–1,154)
A-: 90-92.9%	(1,350–1,394)	C-: 70-72.9%	(1,050–1,094)
B+: 87-89.9%	(1,305–1,349)	D+: 67-69.9%	(1,005–1,049)
B: 83-86.9%	(1,245–1,304)	D: 63-66.9%	(945-1,004)
B-: 80-82.9%	(1,200–1,244)	D-: 60-62.9%	(900-944)
C+: 77-79.9%	(1,155-1,199)	F: 59.9%	(Below 899)

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 – Introduction: Overview of the course and syllabus.

Week 2 – Understanding audience; What makes a good sports story?; Leads to stories. (*CLASS ASSIGNMENT 1*)

Week 3 – Game coverage; Gamers for today’s readers; Traditional stories (recaps/sidebars), Social media (live), multimedia (video/audio).

Week 4 – No Lecture ... Live event coverage: Florida volleyball vs. FSU on Sept. 17. (*LIVE ASSIGNMENT 1*)

Week 5 – Breaking news, deadline writing and building sources; Aggregation and attribution. (*CLASS ASSIGNMENT 2*)

Week 6 – Covering a press conference; Q&A techniques; Getting (and using) quotes; What’s a good quote? (*CLASS ASSIGNMENT 3*)

Week 7 – Before the game (previews, analysis); Sports betting coverage and impact. (*LIVE ASSIGNMENT 2*)

Week 8 – Social media: Live tweeting, Reaching audiences and developing your own brand (*LIVE ASSIGNMENT 3*)

Week 9 – Beat coverage: Developing ideas, prioritizing stories and content planning (*LIVE ASSIGNMENT 4*)

Week 10 – Class Guest. Reported storytelling: short features, profiles, longform; working with editors; Alternative story examples: listicles, trend and explanatory pieces.

Week 11 – Sports commentary/analysis. Column writing (event/opinion columns); Pitching stories. (*CLASS ASSIGNMENT 4*)

Week 12 – No Lecture ... Live event coverage: Florida men’s basketball vs. FSU on Nov. 15. (*LIVE ASSIGNMENT 5*)

Week 13 – Reporting on serious issues (injuries, concussions, legal and ethics); FOIA requests and contract releases. (*CLASS ASSIGNMENT 5*)

Week 14 – No Class ... Thanksgiving Week

Week 15 – No Lecture ... Individual meetings to review your assignments and final project.

ASSIGNMENT BREAKDOWN (1,500 points)

500 points: Live Assignments

500 points: Class Assignments

250 points: Final Project

150 points: Midterm Project

100 points: Participation/Attendance/Professionalism

Class Assignments (500 points)

We will have five in-class assignments designed to sharpen a skill for sports reporting, including AP Style, proper writing practices/techniques, sports knowledge, breaking news and commentary/analysis. One assignment will involve covering a press conference from class, transcribing the audio as a group and writing on deadline. Details will be provided before each assignment.

Class Assignment 1: Proper writing practices/techniques (Week 2)

Class Assignment 2: Breaking news on deadline (Week 5)

Class Assignment 3: Covering a mock press conference (Week 6)

Class Assignment 4: Writing a column or analysis (Week 11)

Class Assignment 5: FOIA requests and contract releases (Week 13)

Live Assignments (500 points)

We will cover topics, games and events as a class, both off TV/live streams and in person. There will be a minimum of two games we cover as a class, where students will be assigned various tasks. We also will introduce elements that are commonplace for every beat reporter, such as game previews, live social media coverage and content planning.

Note: There will be times the class covers a live game/event outside of class hours. During those weeks, the Tuesday class lectures will be shorter or canceled entirely.

Midterm Project (150 points)

An in-depth feature/profile or enterprise story. Minimum 1,000 words. You must have a minimum of two sources you *personally* interviewed. (Attributed quotes do not count.)

Professor will review, discuss drafts with each student at a selected scheduled time. More specific details on the assignment to come later in the semester. Midterm due Nov. 1.

Final Project (250 Points)

Your final project is to cover a live sporting event in person as if you were a beat writer covering a team.

You may choose any spring sport, but it must be a team from UF or a local community college/high school near you. Pro games will not work unless you can get credentialed.

Final due by Dec. 13. You will be responsible for three elements about the game:

* Game Story: Minimum of 600 words. You must include at least two quotes from the postgame press conference or media scrum. (100 points)

* Multimedia Video: A video standup postgame that complements your game story. Must be between 1-2 minutes in length. (100 points)

* Live Tweeting (50 points)

Participation/Professionalism (100 points)

You are expected to attend class on time. You are allowed one unexcused absence. After that, 20 points are deducted for each class missed. Points will also be deducted at the instructor's discretion for chronic lateness, being disengaged in class, and failure to participate in class and/or in online discussions.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- Directly email me your submission for midterm and final projects.

DEDUCTIONS

Journalism is a deadline business. This course is designed to mirror the expected behavior of a professional newsroom. They're called deadlines for a reason.

Failure to meet assignment deadlines will result in a 20-point deduction in the first 24-hour period it's late. Late assignments beyond 24 hours may not be accepted, and could be graded as a zero, unless an emergency can be documented. If an illness or a personal emergency prevents you from completing an assignment on time, advance notice and written documentation will be required. If advance notice is not possible because of a true emergency, written documentation will be required ASAP.

Fact errors – misspelled names, incorrect stats, wrong titles, inaccurate information – will result in a significant deduction at instructor’s discretion, depending on the scope of the error(s) and assignment. At a minimum, any fact error is at least a 15-point deduction. Check the names in your story. Then double check them.

COURSE GUESTS

The class will include guest speakers. In the interest of honest and frank discussions, my lectures and comments of guest speakers are strictly off-the-record. This means that they may not be published in any format, either in a print publication or on a web site, personal blog or social media.

A NOTE ABOUT AI

Does AI belong in journalism? In this class, it does not. You are here to learn, improve and get more reps, so my No. 1 expectation for you is to simply do your own work. Don’t take the easy way out.

In the real world, you would be fired (or be forced to resign) if you turned in a piece of work to your editors with your name on it that was written or had significant elements generated by AI. Major companies have been embarrassed by using AI and passing it off as human work. And jobs have been eliminated across the industry.

In this class, I will randomly pick certain stories over the course of the semester and run them through multiple AI checkers. If assignments are flagged as generated by AI by each detector (over a percentage determined by your instructor), the assignment will not be accepted. You may receive a 0 for assignment plus a half-letter grade deduction from your final grade.

Using AI is akin to plagiarism. And that is one of the biggest sins in journalism. Do your own work. If you have any degree of uncertainty, please ask.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY/HONOR CODE

Additionally, academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Violations of the honor code include plagiarizing material from other sources, fabricating material or using any work done by another person for a class assignment. See the Department of Journalism website, as well as UF guidelines, for specific outline of honor code violations.

UF Student Honor Code: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

Any violations of this code will be reported to the Dean of Students. Failure to comply with this commitment will result in disciplinary action compliant with the UF Student Honor Code Procedures.

PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT

This is a workshop-style class in which we will all contribute ideas and critiques of others’ work and ideas. Please use professional courtesy. Turn cell phones off. No texting (or checking your phone) in class. If you need to use your phone, please leave the room to do so. Bring laptops to class.

CLASSROOM NEEDS

Students requesting special classroom needs must first register with the Dean of Students Office, which will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide the documentation to the instructor.

EVALUATIONS

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional, respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

The University of Florida's College of Journalism and Communications Department embraces a commitment toward an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions, including race, ethnicity and national origins, gender and gender identity, sexuality, class and religion. We expect each of our journalism courses to help foster an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter that must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this process as early as possible in the semester. Course Evaluations Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on a minimum of 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last three weeks of the semester, but announcements will be made giving specific times when they are open. Summary results of these evaluations are available to students at the evaluations website URL above. Course Grading Students will be graded in accordance with UF policies for assigning grade points as articulated in the link that follows. <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

U MATTER, WE CARE

Your well-being is important to the University of Florida. The U Matter, We Care initiative is committed to creating a culture of care on our campus by encouraging members of our community to look out for one another and to reach out for help if a member of our community is in need. If you or a friend is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu so that the U Matter, We Care Team can reach out to the student in distress. A nighttime and weekend crisis counselor is available by phone at 352-392-1575. The U Matter, We Care Team can help connect students to the many other helping resources available including, but not limited to, Victim Advocates, Housing staff, and the Counseling and Wellness Center. Please remember that asking for help is a sign of strength. In case of emergency, call 9-1-1.

THE INSTRUCTOR

Zach Abolverdi is the *Gators Online* Senior Writer for On3.com and Sports Reporting Adjunct Professor at the University of Florida. Orlando born but Gainesville raised, he grew up on college football during the Steve Spurrier era and started his sports journalism career in 2010 prior to Urban Meyer's final season with the Gators. Zach has won an APSE Award and a Hearst Award. He graduated from University of Florida's College of Journalism in 2014 and spent a total of seven years at the Gainesville Sun (2010-15, 2021), along with stops at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, the Lake City Reporter and Rivals. Zach enjoys spending time with family and kayaking. SEC football, March Madness and NBA hoops provide his sports fix.