

COMM 260-01W-Kendall

Environmental Journalism (Lecture)

Monday, Wednesday and Friday 10:25AM - 11:15AM
Mundelein Center - Room 520

Introduction and Course Description *(Daily Schedule follows below)*

Peter Kendall, instructor

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Course Description, Goals and Outcomes

This course will both introduce you to the discipline of environmental journalism and help you become a better writer.

Environmental journalism, as the name suggests, is journalism. It is not activism. It should conform to all the tenets of good journalism, including fairness, accuracy, and a dedication to telling a story fully and with appropriate objectivity.

Often, environmental journalism requires facility for science, which forms the basis for much of the reporting in the field. For that reason, understanding the best practices of good science reporting and explanatory writing is essential. But environmental reporting can also require an understanding of economics, business, international diplomacy or social justice.

This is a Writing Intensive course, and we will focus on developing newswriting skills. With their emphasis on clarity, brevity and relevance, these skills can be applicable to any kind of writing in any field.

We will also spend time working on other basic journalism skills, including story organization, AP style, grammar and punctuation. You will produce three articles where you get feedback and a grade on a first draft before producing a final

version and getting a second grade. This drafting/editing/revising process is not unlike the way reporters and editors work together in a newsroom.

You will find I focus considerable attention on the lede – the first sentence of a news article – as learning to write a good one develops the skills of synthesis, distillation and critical thinking required for expert journalistic writing.

All the methods of great journalism can be found in environment writing, from investigative reporting to narrative storytelling to short fact boxes. To get an understanding of the different forms, we will explore examples of many kinds of work through the semester.

This is a discussion-driven class. We all have a shared responsibility to participate, sharing ideas and questions. This will also form part of your grade.

By learning how to report and write on the environment, you will also become a more discerning and insightful consumer of all kinds of news, something that will serve you for a lifetime in whatever professions you pursue.

Class Structure

This class meets in person for 50 minutes on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays from 10:25 a.m. to 11:15 a.m. in Room 520 of the Mundelein Center on the Lake Shore Campus.

Occasionally, a will be held remotely to facilitate an interview via Zoom, and it is also possible a small number of classes will be remote for reasons we cannot currently foresee. I expect everyone to have their camera on during any remote class, unless they need to break away for a moment.

Each week will be organized as a unit and loaded into Sakai about 10 days prior to the start of the week. This will allow us to shape the course around our progress and current events but still permit students to make plans and read ahead if they wish. The first weeks will be loaded into Sakai before the semester begins.

These lessons in Sakai are organized with a quick summary (“What to expect this week”) followed by a lesson plan for each of the three days we meet (“Day by day”). The readings appear in the “day by day” section and are not listed separately elsewhere. If there is an assignment, it will be listed at the bottom of that week’s lesson page.

This class does not have a textbook, although you do need the AP Stylebook (more on that below). We will read examples of journalism – mostly great ones but some not-so-great ones – that explore environmental issues in an enlightening way. For that reason, you are expected to have digital subscriptions to some news sites (more on that below, too).

Class Attendance

I expect students to arrive on time and be engaged in the class for the full period, which includes participating in discussions. This will be part of your grade.

While I expect you to be in class, I do understand that every student’s situation is different, and that illnesses and emergencies arise. For most isolated absences, as long as I know ahead of time that you will not be able to attend a class, there will be no points deducted.

Major Writing Assignments and Grading

Your grade will be determined by scores on three major writing assignments, several shorter writing assignments and in-class workshops, as well as class participation.

Each of the three major writing assignments will be graded in two steps: a first draft (where you will receive feedback and edits) and a final version.

The three major writing assignments include:

- Sea Star Extinction: This project will be based on a journal article and other published material. We will map out the story and workshop the

lede as a class. **(20 percent of grade;** first draft 10 percent, final version 10 percent) (600-650 words each draft)

- Mercury in the Great Lakes: This story is based on published research and an interview with the lead researcher. **(20 percent of grade;** first draft 10 percent, final version 10 percent) (700-800 words each draft)
- Final Project: You choose the topic. You will be required to find a topic in the field of environmental journalism and conduct interviews for this. **(30 percent of grade;** first draft 10 percent, final version 20 percent) (1,200 words each draft)

In-class writing workshops, shorter assignments, Discussions (formerly Forums in Sakai) and quizzes: **10 percent of grade**

Class participation: **20 percent of grade**

Instructor bio

Peter Kendall is a veteran Chicago journalist who has worked at every level of the profession, from covering overnight cops to managing the largest newsroom in the Midwest.

As an independent journalist, he has written most recently for the Washington Post on topics ranging from the closure of a [Wisconsin paper mill](#) to voter sentiment prior to the [2020 presidential election](#), and from [wolf hunting](#) to a [college student's unique pursuit of justice](#).

He also writes medical-related articles and books for the Mayo Clinic.

At Loyola, he has taught COMM 260: Environmental Journalism and COMM 362: Journalism Research Methods.

He spent more than 30 years at the Chicago Tribune, including five years as managing editor and seven years at Metro editor, overseeing all aspects of local news coverage. He was also an enterprise editor, where he supervised the Tribune's science coverage. As a reporter, he specialized in environment writing

and science reporting and also spent many years on general assignment in the city and suburbs.

He [left the Tribune in 2020](#) shortly after a hedge fund assumed control of the newspaper and its parent company.

He began his journalism career at the City News Bureau of Chicago, a storied training ground for reporters for more than a century.

He has a master's degree in journalism from the University of Illinois and a bachelor's degree in English from Reed College.

A lifelong Illinois resident, he lives in the northern suburbs with his wife, Alison. Both of their children recently graduated from college and are living in Brooklyn, N.Y.

Required Materials

1.
 1. **AP Stylebook** You can buy the book, but an online subscription, which costs \$29 per year, gives you an edition that is always up to date and offers more features. I have both the book and a subscription but find I never use the book.
 2. **Chicago Tribune digital subscription** A deal being offered now would allow you to subscribe for the semester for less than \$10.
 3. **Washington Post digital subscription** There is an Academic Rate available to college students for \$1 per month.

You will also need access to the **New York Times**, which you should have through Loyola. Other readings should be available online free of charge.

Assignment Requirements

All assignments must be submitted on the Assignment page both as text pasted into the student submission window and as attached Word documents. Please do **not** file PDFs. (Please contact me if this is an issue for you.)

Assignments must be turned in on time. Any late assignments can be reduced by up to 10 percentage points unless there is a valid reason for the delay. Please contact me **prior** to the deadline if you will not be able to turn in the assignment on time.

Office Hours

I do not have an office, but that need not stop us from meeting.

Generally, I consider myself to be available at any time, weekday, weeknight or weekend.

I do not have a class immediately before or after this one, so I will be able to have shorter conversations then. I am also eager to talk with you by phone, Zoom or email about issues large or small. My contact information is at the top of the syllabus.

More on Grading

The standard in the School of Communications is generally that a news story be publishable for it to receive an A grade. That is a high standard. A publishable story should be clear and compelling, free of errors, and well organized. If the story is not all these things, it will not receive an A.

Many issues can make a story “not publishable” and lead to points being deducted.

- An error of fact
- A lede that is not complete or compelling
- Missing information, or a hole in the story
- Shortcomings in organization, including less important facts coming before more important facts
- Imprecise phrasing
- Dull writing
- Incomplete attribution
- Spelling errors

- Grammatical errors
- AP style errors

Grading criteria for assignments involving writing:

- A: Publishable work with no spelling, grammatical, punctuation or AP style errors and the proper information and sources written in a lively, well-organized manner.
- B: Minimal spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP style errors. Minimal missing information and sources; minimal problems with the lede and organization.
- C: Notable number of spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP style errors. Noticeable missing information and sources; problems with the lede and organization.
- D: Significant number of spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP style errors. Significant missing information and sources. Significant problems with the lead and organization.
- F: Misspelling of proper names. Other major spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP style errors. Almost total lack of information and sources. Severe problems with the lede and organization.

Grading Scale:

- Minimum percentage for each grade: A 94%; A- 90%; B+ 87%; B 84%; B- 80%; C+ 77%; C 74%; C- 70%; D+ 67%; D 60%; F 0%.

Personal Safety Practices

We will be meeting during an ongoing, though waning pandemic. The class is mask-optional, though of course conditions could change. All students will be required to follow the current guidance from the university about meeting in classrooms.

Privacy Statement

Assuring privacy among faculty and students engaged in online and face-to-face instructional activities helps promote open and robust conversations and mitigates concerns that comments made within the context of the class will be shared beyond the classroom. As such, recordings of instructional activities occurring in online or face-to-face classes may be used solely for internal class purposes by the faculty member and students registered for the course, and only during the period in which the course is offered. Instructors who wish to make subsequent use of recordings that include student activity may do so only with informed written consent of the students involved or if all student activity is removed from the recording.

SPJ Code of Ethics

This is a journalism class, so we will follow the guidelines of the Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics. In summary, the SPJ Code of Ethics supports honesty, objectivity, independence and transparency in reporting and telling news stories. It prohibits falsifying information, making up sources, plagiarism and conflicts of interest.

Another note on plagiarism: I will use Turnitin, a program in the Assignment tab that automatically detects when a student's words closely mimic work published elsewhere.

Please read the entire SPJ Code of Ethics: <https://www.spj.org/pdf/spj-code-of-ethics.pdf>

Student Accessibility

Any student who needs a special accommodation during assignments, exams or class periods should provide documentation from the Student Accessibility Center (<https://www.luc.edu/sac/>) confidentially to the instructor. The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints

of course content and processes. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.

Student Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

As Loyola's mission statement holds, "We are Chicago's Jesuit, Catholic University—a diverse community seeking God in all things." Together, as a community rich in diversity, we are called to "expand knowledge in the service of humanity through learning, justice and faith."

Recognizing and appreciating the diverse collection of identities, experiences, perspectives, and abilities of the students, faculty, staff, and community partners with whom we collaborate, the School of Communication commits itself to enriching academic experiences through the advancement of diversity, equity, inclusion, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive practices.

The true mission of journalism is to be fair, objective and inclusive. Journalists strive to provide a forum to people of all backgrounds. Giving a "voice to the voiceless" can sometimes correct inequities that exist in society. Responsible journalists should strive to cover stories that reflect the broad diversity of the community, and seek out sources that represent that diversity.

School of Communication Academic Dishonesty Policy

Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, such acts as:

- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled examination without the consent of the teacher;
- Providing information to another student during an examination;
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an examination;

- Using any material or equipment during an examination without consent of the instructor, or in a manner which is not authorized by the instructor;
- Attempting to change answers after the examination has been submitted;
- Unauthorized collaboration, or the use in whole or part of another student's work, on homework, lab reports, programming assignments, and any other course work which is completed outside of the classroom;
- Falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines; or
- Any other action that, by omission or commission, compromises the integrity of the academic evaluation process.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty.

Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, language, work, or intellectual property of another, either by intent or by negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express all thoughts. Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of specific words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources, and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Submitting as one's own material copied from a published source, such as Internet, print, audio, video, etc.;
- Submitting as one's own another person's unpublished work or examination material;
- Allowing another or paying another to write or research a paper for one's own benefit; or

- Purchasing, acquiring, and using for course credit a pre-written paper.

The above list is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is both an act of personal, professional courtesy and of intellectual honesty. Any failure to do so, whether by intent or by neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism. A more detailed description of this issue can be found at <http://luc.edu/english/writing.shtml#source> .

In addition, a student may not submit the same paper or other work for credit in two or more classes. This applies even if the student is enrolled in the classes during different semesters. If a student plans to submit work with similar or overlapping content for credit in two or more classes, the student should consult with all instructors prior to submission of the work to make certain that such submission will not violate this standard.

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor's assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. The instructor may impose a more severe sanction, including a grade of "F" in the course. All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the appropriate area head and to the office of the Dean of the School of Communication.

A complete description of the School of Communication Academic Integrity Policy can be found at: <http://www.luc.edu/soc/Policy.shtml>

Daily Schedule

Major assignment milestones, including due dates, are highlighted in yellow. (Additional weekly assignments, including Discussions questions on readings, are not listed here, but will be presented each week in the Lessons pages in Sakai.)

Week 1

Monday, Jan. 16 No class – MLK Day

Wednesday, Jan. 18 We'll introduce ourselves, do a quick review of the syllabus, and talk about our expectations for the class.

Friday, Jan. 20 I'll take you through the reporting and writing of one news story, beginning our discussions about journalism in general, and environmental journalism in particular.

Week 2

Monday, Jan. 23 An introduction to the lede in newswriting and what makes a good one. We'll also discuss grammar and AP style.

Wednesday, Jan. 25 We will spend some time ripping apart ledes, and we'll toss in a little grammar, just for kicks. I will also explain Friday's assignment.

Friday, Jan 27 REMOTE You will complete an in-class assignment, writing a lede. You may do this from anywhere and need not come to the classroom. However, the assignment must be started and finished during the class time Friday.

Week 3

Monday, Jan. 30 We will begin discussing Rachel Carson's seminal work, "Silent Spring." We will also explore the history of environmental journalism and how Carson fits into that. We will also spend part of the hour going over the in-class writing assignment from Friday.

Wednesday, Feb. 1 We continue our discussion of "Silent Spring," including the themes of journalistic objectivity versus activism and advocacy.

Friday, Feb. 3 We will begin talking about research on a crisis facing the population of sea stars in the Pacific Ocean. This will be the foundation of your first major writing assignment. **Sea star story assigned.**

Week 4

Monday, Feb. 6 Going beyond the lede, we will discuss broader fundamentals of newswriting.

Wednesday, Feb. 8 We'll discuss the epoch of extinction we have entered. This is an important issue in its own right, but will also give you the background you need to add context to your sea star story.

Thursday, Feb. 9 Sea star story ledes are due at 5 p.m. Thursday.

Friday, Feb. 10 We'll spend the period going over your sea star ledes. We'll also review some newswriting fundamentals that you should keep in mind as you complete your first draft.

Week 5

Monday, Feb. 13 First draft of sea star story is due Monday at 5 p.m. During class, there will be an open-book/open-internet quiz on grammar and style. You should get to know how to use the "Associated Press Stylebook" prior to the 45-minute quiz. **Bring your laptop to class!**

Wednesday, Feb. 15 We begin a two-day discussion of GMOs, or bioengineered foods. On this day, we'll look mostly at the science.

Friday, Feb. 17 More on GMOs: Today, we'll focus on the distinction between advocacy and journalistic objectivity. Sea star drafts returned.

Week 6

Monday, Feb. 20 We'll discuss the drafts of your sea star stories. We will then look at research about an ongoing mercury pollution issue in the Great Lakes. This will form the basis for another writing assignment. Mercury story assigned.

Wednesday, Feb. 22 We'll explore interview techniques journalists use and map out our upcoming interview with a prominent Great Lakes mercury researcher.

Friday, Feb. 24 Remote via Zoom to facilitate the interview We will interview the mercury researcher via Zoom. This class will be remote to better accommodate

the Zoom call. Please have your cameras on and be prepared to ask questions.

Sea star final draft due at 9 a.m. Friday

Week 7

Monday, Feb. 27 We will discuss some pieces by former Tribune reporter Morgan Greene, who writes about the environment.

Wednesday, March 1 We'll have a visit from Morgan Greene.

Friday, March 3 **First draft of mercury story due at 9 a.m. Friday.** A look at regulators, including the U.S. EPA, its history and mission. We'll also discuss EurekaAlert! and begin talking about the final project. **Bring your laptop to class!**
Final project assigned.

Week 8 *Spring break*

Monday, March 6 – No class

Wednesday, March 8 – No class

Friday, March 10 – No class

Week 9

Monday, March 13 We will discuss work by the Chicago Tribune's Michael Hawthorne that exposed a carcinogen in the western suburbs. **Mercury drafts returned.**

Wednesday, March 15 **Monday, Oct. 24** Lead in Chicago's drinking water

Friday, March 17 We will discuss the Flint water crisis, the nation's most notorious example of lead contamination.

Week 10

Monday, March 20 **The revised draft of the mercury story is due at 5 p.m.**

Monday We'll look at a creative reporting project in Philadelphia that showed children were being exposed to dangerous substances. We'll also talk about the final project again.

Wednesday, March 22 History of the environmental justice movement, which has roots in Chicago. Also, a current Chicago case.

Friday, March 24 Some Great Lakes issues, including invasive carp.

Week 11

Monday, March 27 **Your final project topic is due at 9 a.m.** Please come prepared to discuss it with the class.

Wednesday, March 29 Coverage of invasive species, using what we have learned about journal articles to talk about reporters' approaches to stories.

Friday, March 31 Day 1 of nuclear power: The waste problem

Week 12

Monday, April 3 Day 2 of nuclear power: Is it green?

Wednesday, April 5 **A lede and second paragraph for your final project are due at 9 a.m.** Come to class prepared to workshop your lede with classmates.

Friday, April 7 – No class

Week 13

Monday, April 10 – No class

Wednesday, April 12 I will explain Explainers.

Thursday, April 13 **First draft final project due at 5 p.m. Thursday**

Friday, April 14 In-class writing assignment. You will have 45 minutes to write a short Explainer. **Bring your laptops to class!**

Week 14

Monday, April 17 **Conferences – class does not meet!** There will be **no class** Monday or Wednesday as I meet with each of you to discuss your final project

drafts. There will be a few sign-up spots available during the class period, and others will be available at other times on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday.

Wednesday, April 19 Conferences – class does not meet!

Friday, April 21 A look at how broadcast newswriting differs from print.

Week 15

Monday, April 24 We return to the tensions between advocacy and journalism and revisit a question we asked at the beginning of the semester: Is environmental journalism advocacy?

Wednesday, April 26 Revised final projects are due at 9 a.m. You will each make a 2-minute presentation to the class on your final project.

Friday, April 28 Last class. We wrap up.

Week X

This is a remote, asynchronous class in case needed

Remote, Asynchronous Class Class will not meet. Watch a video where Kaarin Tisue, an ace editor at the Tribune, discusses science writing and editing. There is a short Assignment based on questions about the video interview with her. This can easily be finished in its entirety in a 50-minute class period.