

# JOUR 613: Literary Journalism

Summer 2026

## Instructor Information

Dr. Adam J. [Kuban](#)

Art & Journalism Building (Office #385)  
Ball State University, Muncie, IN

### *Office Hours:*

Please contact me so we can arrange a (digital) appointment.  
I'm happy to meet with you.

## General Course Information

This online graduate seminar/workshop will expose you to the practice of literary journalism, including basic qualitative methods whose analysis often leads to broader themes and/or takeaways. We will also read and examine a few integral examples of literary journalism.

**Please note that this course will require copious reading and writing;** the capstone product is a 2,500-word essay that applies literary-journalism techniques. Thus, the learning curve might be steeper for some than others. If you've previously taken a journalism class — and not just an English class! — then you *\*might\** grasp and apply the aforementioned techniques more quickly than others. Regardless, you may discover that you need to spend more time and effort than anticipated to achieve the letter grade you desire in this course.

*"In any kind of literary journalism, you have to build a bond of trust. You have to get people to let their hair down when you're around, to be willing to forget about you as a reporter, and to say things."*  
-- Joe Nocera, author as cited in Sims & Kramer (1995)

Moreover, as reproduced from Norman Sims & Mark Kramer (1995):

The liveliness of literary journalism ... comes from combining this personal engagement with perspectives from sociology and anthropology, memoir writing, fiction, history, and standard (journalistic) reporting (p. 19).

The point of literary journalists' long immersions is to comprehend subjects at a level Henry James termed "felt life" — the frank, unidealized level that includes individual difference, frailty, tenderness, nastiness, vanity, generosity, pomposity, humility — all in proper proportion (p. 23).

Literary journalism couples cold fact and personal event, in the author's humane company. And that broadens readers' scans, allows them to behold others' lives, often set within far clearer contexts than we can bring to our own. The process moves readers and writers toward realization, compassion, and, in the best of cases, wisdom (p. 34).

## Required Texts and Materials

You should invest in the following texts for this online graduate seminar/workshop:

- **[“In Cold Blood”](#) by Truman Capote (ISBN: 9780679745587)**

On November 15, 1959, in the small town of Holcomb, Kansas, four members of the Clutter family were savagely murdered by blasts from a shotgun held a few inches from their faces. There was no apparent motive for the crime, and there were almost no clues. In one of the first non-fiction novels ever written, Truman Capote reconstructs the murder and the investigation that led to the capture, trial, and execution of the killers, generating both mesmerizing suspense and astonishing empathy. *In Cold Blood* is a work that transcends its moment, yielding poignant insights into the nature of American violence.

- **[“Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers”](#) by Johnny Saldana (ISBN: 9781529731743)**

This invaluable manual from world-renowned expert Johnny Saldaña illuminates the process of qualitative coding and provides clear, insightful guidance for qualitative researchers at all levels. It remains the only book that looks specifically at coding qualitative data as a core but often neglected skill that researchers and students alike need to effectively make sense of their data and to identify patterns before they can analyze the material.

- **[“Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes”](#) by Robert Emerson (ISBN: 9780226206837)**

In *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Robert M. Emerson, Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw present a series of guidelines, suggestions, and practical advice for creating useful fieldnotes in a variety of settings, demystifying a process that is often assumed to be intuitive and impossible to teach. Using actual unfinished notes as examples, the authors illustrate options for composing, reviewing, and working fieldnotes into finished texts. They discuss different organizational and descriptive strategies and show how transforming direct observations into vivid descriptions results not simply from good memory but from learning to envision scenes as written.

You will have several reading ‘checks’ throughout the summer associated with these required texts. Additionally, you will view supplemental online texts and resources via links in Canvas.

You should have access to personal storage space. There are numerous options: Google Drive, Dropbox, Microsoft OneDrive, external devices, etc. You should get in the habit of saving your work in multiple locations in the event of computer hard-drive failure.

Finally, as this is a writing-centric, graduate-level course, you’re expected to have access to and familiarity with a TBD literary style to guide mechanical protocols in your written work. Due to the abbreviated duration of this summer course, I am willing to let you choose any of these 4 literary styles: Chicago (Turabian), American Psychological Association (APA), Modern Language Association (MLA), or Associated Press (AP). My preference would be for you to adopt and use literary protocols associated with either Chicago (Turabian) or AP since those look and read less like a research paper as compared to either APA or MLA.

You’ll need to make your decision regarding which literary style you’ll use **by/before Week 4.**

## Intended Course Outcomes

Our primary curricular goals over the next 10 weeks are to (in no particular order):

1. Read noteworthy examples of literary journalism, articulating what you’ve learned as a way to develop a working definition or distinction of literary journalism;
2. Apply best practices for qualitative methods typically aligned with literary-journalism endeavors;

3. Strengthen your writing skills / process through individual reflexive exercises and discussions with and/or feedback from peer(s) and from me;
4. Compose a working essay that follows norms and principles associated with literary journalism.

### **School of Journalism & Strategic Communication Policies**

**Setup:** This graduate course functions as an online-based, asynchronous workshop. As such, we will NOT have a required meeting day/time as that defeats the flexible nature of online pedagogy; however, you are encouraged to seek individual consultation with me via digital (Zoom, etc.) means as necessary. **This is YOUR education — Own. It.**

Moreover, you'll be aligned with a writing partner with whom you'll meet on weekly basis and via TBD platform(s) in order to discuss and improve your writing. Alignments will occur early in the term.

**NOTICE!** An online, asynchronous course demands strict discipline; therefore, I strongly recommend that you stay on-schedule with assigned readings and exercises.

**Prerequisites:** Enrollment in a graduate program of study. And the desire to learn and engage!

**Writing Statement:** The School of Journalism & Strategic Communication regards writing proficiency as essential to the satisfactory completion of all journalism courses. Therefore, School instructors must monitor writing performance and language proficiency in all courses. Student grades must reflect both criteria. This means you will be graded on your spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.

Please note: This is a writing-centric, graduate-level course, so \*mechanics count\* — grammar, syntax, punctuation, literary-style protocols ... all contribute to overall quality of written work. If you are coming into this course without having prior accountability in this regard, i.e., you don't have a writing (or journalism) undergraduate degree or professional background, then the learning curve may be steeper for you, and I encourage you to allow extra time to proofread any/all written assignments or drafts.

### **University Policies & Resources**

**Academic Integrity:** Honesty, trust, and personal responsibility are fundamental attributes of the university community. Academic dishonesty and other forms of academic misconduct threaten the foundation of an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and will not be tolerated. To maintain its credibility and reputation, and to equitably assign evaluations of scholastic and creative performance, Ball State University is committed to maintaining a climate that upholds and values the highest standards of academic integrity.

Academic integrity violations include giving or receiving an unfair academic advantage (cheating), presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own (plagiarism), and falsifying academic records. **Unless otherwise indicated, you must work independently by yourself.**

Check with me if you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty. Examples of academic-integrity violations include but are not limited to:

- Using resources not authorized by me / the faculty member (including devices, AI tools, hidden notes, and open books)
- Using commercial study websites to find answers to graded assignments (e.g., Chegg, Course Hero, StudyPool, OneClass, etc.).
- Without the instructor's written permission — giving away, buying, or selling: graded assignments, class notes, exams, study guides, or other course materials to other students or to third-party vendors (e.g., Course Hero, Chegg, 24HourAnswers, etc.).
- Working with another person on any assignment other than authorized group projects.
- Sharing or allowing others to access your files, whether done with permission or not.
- Reusing your own work from another semester, course, or section.
- Sharing answers with others during exams (e.g., passing notes, texting, whispering, gesturing)
- Discussing exam questions and answers with students who have not taken the exam.
- Soliciting others to complete work for you.

You're strongly encouraged to read the [Student Academic Ethics Policy](#) for more information.

As you work on and submit your assignments this semester, please know that using generative AI tools to complete your assignments can be a violation of Ball State's Academic Ethics Policy — unless the AI use is explicitly approved by the faculty member. **In this course, students may NOT submit any work generated by an AI program (such as ChatGPT, etc.) as their own.** Doing so is considered plagiarism. For any assignment(s) where AI use is permitted, I will have guidelines for that use. Work created outside of those guidelines will be considered an Academic Ethics Policy violation. If a student's grade is adversely affected by an academic ethics violation, faculty are required to report the violation to the Office of the Vice Provost for Academic Affairs who oversees the Student Academic Ethics policy and maintains records of its violations.

More information about the reporting process is available [here](#).

***BSU & Disability Statement:*** We are committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State University and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact me / the instructor of record as soon as possible. Ball State's Disability Services Office coordinates services for students with disabilities; **documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided.** Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or [dsd@bsu.edu](mailto:dsd@bsu.edu).

***Freedom of Expression:*** In this course, we are committed to fostering a learning environment that values intellectual diversity, encourages free expression, and promotes open inquiry. As members of the Ball State Community, we treat each person in the Ball State University community with civility, courtesy, compassion, and dignity and respect, and we learn from differences in people, ideas, and opinions. Please review Ball State University's [Statement on](#)

[Freedom of Expression](#), the resources on Ball State’s [Freedom of Expression webpage](#), and [Ball State’s Beneficence Pledge](#).

**Learning Center:** The Learning Center offers free tutoring for many courses. We also provide writing and study skills tutoring. Students can make appointments for virtual (Zoom) or in-person (NQ 350) appointments. To make an appointment, visit [my.bsu.edu](http://my.bsu.edu) and click on “Navigate” in the Additional Tools section or just download the [Navigate Student app](#). For more information, visit the [site](#), call 765-285-1006 or send an email: [learncenter@bsu.edu](mailto:learncenter@bsu.edu).

**Counseling Center:** The Ball State University Counseling Center offers free and confidential services to all students. The Counseling Center is located in Lucina Hall, Room 320. To schedule an appointment, call 765-285-1736. Ball State also offers a 24/7 Crisis Line, which can be reached at 765-285-HOPE (4673). The Crisis Line is a mental health resource for those who are struggling with any mental health concerns, including thoughts of self-harm and/or suicide.

The Ball State Counseling Center sees students for a variety of reasons, some of which include homesickness, relationship concerns, anxiety, and depression. At your first appointment, you will work with a therapist to create a plan that will connect you with resources that best fit your needs. All Ball State students also have access to several on-demand, self-help resources through a variety of different platforms. All of these resources, including a direct link to the website, can be found [here](#).

**Add/Drop or Withdrawal:** According to Ball State University policy, registration matters and/or withdrawal from a course remains your responsibility.

Dropping or withdrawing from the course may affect your financial aid. Please visit the [Scheduling & Registration](#) web page for additional information.

**Grade Disputes:** A student who wishes to dispute a final course grade must first try to resolve the matter with me. Per university protocol, I must have your request in writing. I have five business days to respond to you, and if we ultimately cannot resolve the issue, then the student may dispute the grade — again, in writing — with the School director. The student must provide a substantive “supporting argument.” Please view [Section 6.7](#) of the Student Rights and Community Standards Code for supplemental information.

**Student Rights:** It is your responsibility to be familiar with your rights and responsibilities as a student at Ball State. Please visit the links embedded within this syllabus and the [Student Code](#) to keep yourself informed and knowledgeable. This code includes appendices that contain Ball State's policies on academic dishonesty, policy and procedures for appealing final grades, student leaves for funerals, etc.

## Evaluation

- 10% Aggregate points from completed reading ‘checks’ (Capote, Saldana, Emerson + other online sources as assigned)

- 10% Reflexive assignments such as (although there may be others):
- A writer you admire & why
  - Progress updates with your writing partner
  - Personal bracketing (i.e., acknowledgment) of potential biases and/or assumptions
  - Articulation of analysis process from interview(s), focus group(s), fieldnotes
- 45% Literary Journalism writing project *\*process\** — all components except actual essay drafts, which can include but may not be limited to:
- Identification of your topic, protagonist(s), related context, goal(s)
  - 10 sources that demonstrate adequate research + evaluation of your source materials
  - Your introduction (or “lead/lede”) to the essay
  - Formulation of relevant interview / focus-group questions
  - Transcription of any/all interview(s) or focus group(s)
  - Evidence of fieldnotes
- 15% Literary Journalism *\*product\** / essay — First Draft
- 12.5% Literary Journalism *\*product\** / essay — Final Draft
- 7.5% Final Synthesis Paper

**Specific point values will be made known in Canvas.** This graduate course will be graded on a +/- basis, and I will utilize the university grade scale shown below to calculate final grades.

		100-94%	A	93-90%	A-
89-87%	B+	86-84%	B	83-80%	B-
79-77%	C+	76-74%	C	73-70%	C-
69-67%	D+	66-64%	D	63-60%	D-

### **Evaluation Component Descriptions**

The descriptions below represent an honest effort to inform you of what you will complete in the course in order to achieve the intended course outcomes. Parameters may change as the term progresses based on class needs and/or time constraints.

A reminder of the intended course outcomes:

1. Read noteworthy examples of literary journalism, articulating what you’ve learned as a way to develop a working definition or distinction of literary journalism;
2. Apply best practices for qualitative methods typically aligned with literary-journalism endeavors;
3. Strengthen your writing skills / process through individual reflexive exercises and discussions with and/or feedback from peer(s) and from me;
4. Compose a working essay that follows norms and principles associated with literary journalism.

**Reading Checks — outcomes #1, #3:** For some reading assignments, I may ask you to complete a 1-page document, noting the text’s main thesis along with what you learned as well as what you don’t understand. These may facilitate your discussions with your writing partner(s), and

collectively, these ‘checks’ are meant to help you remember what you’ve read and why it mattered, which will become useful toward the end of the summer term for the synthesis paper.

***Reflexive Assignments*** — ***outcomes #2, #3***: Details for each will be shared in advance via Canvas. Similarly, these could facilitate discussions with your writing partner(s), and they should help you focus on the process rather than just the product.

***Literary Journalism Writing Project (process + product)*** — ***outcomes #2, #3, #4***: Exact dates and expectations remain TBD, but this represents your capstone endeavor, so as an overarching outline: You will first need to identify a topic that you wish to pursue along with key protagonist(s) (or eventual interviewees), some relevant context, and what you hope the essay will achieve. **You are strongly encouraged to pick a topic already familiar to you, i.e., you have abundant access to places and people, and you can fully immerse yourself in that environment as often and as deeply as needed.**

*Remember*: Literary journalism as a craft is meant to embody “felt life.” It requires immersion, structure, voice, and accuracy — and a responsibility to your subjects / protagonists in your search for the underlying meaning and holistic understanding of that topic.

I may adjust this requirement at a later time, but so you can plan ahead: I anticipate that this literary-journalism essay will necessitate a minimum of 2 in-person interviews (or 1 focus group with multiple people in that session) and 2 site visits, which may or may not occur at the same time when you conduct an interview or a focus group session. These minimum requirements along with your copious (literary) research into this topic will consume considerable time.

I’m reluctant to give an anticipated word count because I find that the focus shifts to that rather than the story itself. So just know that this is a very rough estimate and could change — but to help you plan ahead: I suspect that your essay will hover around 2,500 words, which would equate to about 5 pages of single-spaced text or 10 pages of double-spaced text. (Orwell’s “Marrakech” essay is approximately 2,509 words for a more concrete example. See Week 1 in Canvas.) I may opt to give you a word-count range so you have more “cushion” to tell the story.

***Final Synthesis Paper*** — ***outcomes #1, #2, #3***: This final written synthesis paper will assess your ability to comprehensively coalesce all course materials from the term. Details will be shared at a later time via Canvas.

### **Graduate Seminar Schedule**

What follows is a *tentative* schedule of content for the course. I have provided this information to merely give you an idea of the material that will be presented and its approximate placing.

We will make adjustments to this schedule. As such, **you should follow the content order & deadlines listed in the weekly modules in our Canvas site.**

## Tentative Schedule

	Read / View:	Topic(s):	TO DO (by Sunday PM EDT...)
Week 1 M, 05/11 – Su, 05/17	Links / PDFs	Introduction To Literary Journalism Examples From Past LJ Essays What Makes For ‘Good’ Writing	(check Canvas for specifics)
Week 2 M, 05/18 – Su, 05/24	“In Cold Blood” Part I (p. 1-74)	Formative Feedback  Setting / Describing A Scene	(check Canvas for specifics)
Week 3 M, 05/25 – Su, 05/31	“In Cold Blood” Part II (p. 75-155)	Access — Picking A Topic / Subject  Structure	(check Canvas for specifics)
Week 4 M, 06/01 – Su, 06/07	“In Cold Blood” Part III (p. 157-248)	Bracketing  Research Tools / Strategies	(check Canvas for specifics)
Week 5 M, 06/08 – Su, 06/14	“In Cold Blood” Part IV (p. 249-End)  (Saldana) TBD	Interviews / Focus Groups — Best Practices	(check Canvas for specifics)
Week 6 M, 06/15 – Su, 06/21	(Emerson) Chapter 2  (Saldana) TBD	Direct / Participant Observations — Best Practices	(check Canvas for specifics)
Week 7 M, 06/22 – Su, 06/28	(Emerson) Chapter 3  (Saldana) TBD	Transcribing Qualitative Content — Best Practices	(check Canvas for specifics)
Week 8 M, 06/29 – Su, 07/05	(Emerson) Chapter 5  (Saldana) TBD	Coding / Analyzing Qualitative Content — Best Practices	(check Canvas for specifics)
Week 9 M, 07/06 – Su, 07/12	(Emerson) Chapter 6  (Saldana) TBD	Coding / Analyzing Qualitative Content — Best Practices	(check Canvas for specifics)
Week 10 M, 07/13 – F, 07/17	TBD	Looking Ahead...	(check Canvas for specifics)