



Text Review: Writing and Reporting News: A Coaching Method (Seventh Edition)

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Every two years, it's the same: Five to 10 new editions of news writing texts are stacked on my office floor, each of them a replacement (maybe) for the one used in our basic journalism courses.

And every two years, I pick *Writing and Reporting News: A Coaching Method* by Carole Rich, published by Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

The reason goes beyond the comfort and ease of using the same text year after year, where the content and the online extras are familiar. Rich's text provides a solid overview for students who want to learn more about journalism—even if they don't plan to go into the field.

Yes, there are lots of other books out there, and many of them are terrific. There's *News Reporting and Writing* by The Missouri Group, a well-rounded text that seems to get better with each edition. Each chapter seamlessly integrates changes in the media in an easy-to-read format. (If I were to switch, it would be to this newest edition.)

Melvin Mencher's *News Reporting and Writing* is considered a classic by many, providing information ranging from writing a lead to journalism ethics to beat coverage and the law. It's a solid text but not the right fit for our small program, where journalism is a minor. Students looking to learn more about journalism, but not go into news, may find this text too dense. It may be more appropriate for larger programs.

Inside Reporting: A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism by Tim Harrower has some meat to it, but the layout is too busy and distracting. The format worked for his excellent design book, *The Newspaper Designer's Handbook*, but not with this one. I've had

students examine texts, and many said they found Harrower's interesting but the layout too cartoonish.

All the News: Writing and Reporting for Convergent Media by Thom Lieb is a nice, short textbook covering the basics of writing and covering stories in print, for audio and for video. This may be better for a subsequent journalism course that uses more multi-media.

Unfortunately, too many other books are slow to adapt to the changes in the news business. Chapters are dropped in, using the term "convergence" as a way to update texts. Web writing is segmented rather than woven into chapters. The backbone of many texts still appears to be traditional newspaper writing with quick inserts of "new media"—a term now decades old.

Texts from some smaller publishers provide the basics for news writing that could be helpful for a high school program, but many are too simplistic and lack the depth needed for college-level courses.

As we know, the clear line dividing print, broadcasting, Web, photojournalism and video production no longer exists. Print journalists shoot video, television videographers and reporters write Web stories and shoot stills, those in public relations are creating "news" sites for clients where journalism skills are valued. A journalism text today needs to recognize this philosophy, not just slip in chapters on "convergence" for a new edition.

Finding that perfect book is tough. An entry-level course needs to stress basic newswriting and AP style. However, web writing, how to frame a shot and the importance of web video also need to be included

in a way that doesn't overwhelm or discourage students.

The Rich text isn't perfect, but it hits the points we need for our program—at least for now. This easy-to-understand text helps students understand news and feature writing for print, broadcast and online. It shows students the nuts and bolts of basic journalism, such as how to write leads and nut graphs, but also examines responsible use of social media, how to find sources, how to interview people, public relations writing and media law.

Issues on ethics, social media and convergence are blended into each chapter, forcing students to look at the whole media picture, not just segments. How to use different formats to tell an easy-to-understand story is detailed throughout the chapters, much like in the Missouri Group book.

Rich provides clear examples of good and bad writing in a just-as-clear design layout. The simple things detailed in the book—such as when to use “says” or “said” and how to listen—also provide students with concrete, usable advice for the field. Students say they find the book easy to read and understand.

The workbook, if you are looking for one, provides good exercises to reinforce book and classroom lessons, similar to supplements for other texts. But it is the NewsScene online program some may find the

most helpful. NewsScene provides 13 “real life” scenarios, complete with on-screen recorded interviews, to give students a good taste of what news reporting is all about. The scenarios include a bank robbery, fire, a civil trial complete with witness testimony, a municipal meeting and material for a feature story. Several editions ago, NewsScene was bundled with a disc. Now, it is online through a bundle and runs much smoother with fewer playback glitches. While I've been using other videos I've shot specifically for class in recent years, the NewsScene program is an excellent resource in any news writing course.

Our journalism students wind up working in a wide range of media jobs, such as in marketing, public relations, web writing, broadcasting, specialty magazines, advertising and newspapers. The different topics covered in Rich's book help provide our students with a foundation in these media areas, even though the text focus technically is journalism. So, every two years, after I flip through new editions of reporting and writing texts to see what is new, what old stuff is being repackaged, and whether the time has come to finally switch to a new book, Carole Rich's wins out. At least for now.

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