

JCOM 202: HOW STORIES WORK

4 credits; CRN: 16553

Fall 2024

Allen 140

Tuesday/Thursday, 4 to 5:50 p.m.

Instructor: Lori Shontz

Email: lshontz@uoregon.edu

Student drop-in and appointment hours, virtual and in-person:

- **In-person drop-in hours, no appointment necessary, Allen 328:**
 - Mondays: 3 to 5 p.m.
 - Wednesdays: 1 to 3 p.m.
- **Phone or Zoom appointments:**
 - Schedule at this link: <https://calendly.com/lorimshontz>
 - Availability varies
- **What are these for?** They're for you. Getting to know your instructors matters—research shows that students who connect with faculty have more success in college. These hours matter to me, too: I'm better able to make recommendations for internships and jobs, and I'm able to give better advice for scheduling, etc. Plus, it's fun to get to know everyone.
 - **You don't need a specific question or problem** to come to drop-in hours or make an appointment. We can just chat. **Come tell me about a story that you love!**

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

I once attended a conference on the art of journalistic storytelling, and one of the presenters grabbed everyone's attention by announcing that storytelling is a "basic human need." He showed a diagram of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, a pyramid that includes what humans need to thrive, including a base of water, food and sleep.

Then he proceeded to discuss why "story" belongs on that pyramid.

Would humans die without story the way we would without water or food? That seemed like a stretch, even for a conference of storytellers.

But the presenter made a strong case, discussing the human need for information and, vitally, the need to make sense of that information. That's where storytelling comes in. Storytelling helps us make sense of the world around us. And making sense of the world helps us live.

It's, also, of course, the reason the SOJC exists. Our majors show the diversity of the kinds of storytelling we do here: journalism, public relations, advertising, media studies. That's a wide variety of stories, and of course each genre is different from the others.

But they also have important similarities. That's why we built this class.

This class will ground you in the basics of story: the components, the structure, the conceptual framework. It will help you harness your creativity. And it will prepare you for whichever SOJC major you choose.

Specifically, this is what you'll do in this class:

- Read, watch and listen to stories as creators rather than solely as consumers.
- Explain and analyze the process of crafting a story, with a focus on the choices storytellers make.
- Explain how stories serve as a tool for shaping values and influencing culture.
- Identify kinds of story structures and in what situations storytellers use them.
- Compare and contrast the characteristics of stories in journalism, advertising, public relations and scholarly research.
- Describe who the audience is for a story is while considering issues of diversity and equity.

WHAT YOU'LL READ AND WHAT YOU'LL NEED

You need to buy one book: How Stories Work by Lani Diane Rich. It's available in paperback (\$14.99) or as an eBook (\$9.99) at Amazon: <https://www.amazon.com/How-Story-Works-elegant-storytelling/dp/B09NRBTH7Z>

I'll post other readings, listenings and viewings on Canvas.

You also need a nice notebook: You'll be keeping what I'm calling a Storyteller's Notebook throughout the term and turning it in three times. You'll need space to doodle, to draw, to make lists and just to write. Get something that feels special; the basement at the Duck Store has great options. (You might want to treat yourself to some nice pens or pencils, too – perhaps even in color.)

Your notebook will be useful to you even -- maybe especially – after you finish this class.

The Technology:

- **Canvas:** Everything you need for this class is at canvas.uoregon.edu; log in with your DuckID.
- **Zoom:** I will create a Zoom link just in case circumstances dictate that we need to learn remotely at some point during this term. You can access this video conferencing system through the Canvas page. I've set up one recurring meeting for the entire term. The Zoom password: StoriesRock! You'll need that password, which is also in the Zoom invite, and you'll be placed in a waiting room until I let you in.
- **Technical support:** If you have questions about accessing and using Canvas, visit the [Canvas support page](#). Canvas and Technology Support also is available by phone or live chat: [541-346-4357](tel:541-346-4357) | livehelp.uoregon.edu.

COMMUNICATING WITH ME

My favorite part of teaching is talking with students—getting to know you, coaching you, connecting you with former students I think you should know. So please don't hesitate to contact me with questions, suggestions ... even complaints. I mean it.

This is how you can reach me—and how I'll reach you. Communication is a two-way street, and I'll do my best to hold up my end.

- **Canvas announcements:** This is the easiest way to reach the entire class, so I'll primarily post updates and changes this way. You should receive announcements in your inbox. If you don't, let me know.
- **Email:** I am reachable via email, lshontz@uoregon.edu, and I'll almost always get back to you within 24 hours (exceptions below).
 - I do not answer emails on Sundays or after 7 p.m. weekdays.
 - I also don't answer emails first thing in the morning—that's my thinking/reading time. I'll get back to my inbox late morning.

Important: If something's not working for you, let me know as soon as you can.

BASIC NEEDS

If you have challenges outside the classroom that are making it harder for you to learn, there is help for you. If you're comfortable telling me about any such challenge you are facing, please do so. If there is anything I can do to help, I will.

You can also get information and help at these links:

- **Mental health:** The UO's [Counseling Center](#) is open; see the link for information about in-person appointments and remote options. Note that there is a [Let's Talk service](#), which enables you to talk to a human being without making an appointment; you Zoom in for designated drop-in hours each day.
- **Food and other basic needs:** If you are having trouble affording food, please [visit this webpage](#), where the UO has a list of resources and programs with free food and other life necessities.
- **Accessible Education Center:** I know that some of you may have disabilities or other health conditions that present challenges in the classroom. And as always, the University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. I encourage you to contact the [Accessible Education Center](#) in 164 Oregon Hall at 541-346-1155 or uoacc@uoregon.edu.
- **In general:** If you are having trouble connecting with the university in any way, email uoadvising@uoregon.edu.

WHAT I EXPECT FROM YOU

Come to class – when you are healthy.

- **Attendance policy:** This is a face-to-face class, and you need to be here and interact with the rest of the class to succeed. A successful class, like a successful piece of storytelling, requires a diversity of perspectives, which means your attendance matters. ***Excessive absences make it difficult to succeed in this class, which is designed to give you a strong foundation for the rest of your time in the SOJC.***
- **That said, if you are sick, do not come to class.** COVID-19, the flu and RSV, to name a few, can be serious illnesses. I'll help you to catch up, and we'll have some shared notes documents, as well, that will help.
- **Accommodation for religious observances:** The UO respects the right of all students to observe their religious holidays and will make reasonable accommodations upon request. If you need to be absent from a class because of a religious observation or observance, please complete [the Student Religious Accommodation Request form](#) and email it to me by the end of Week One so we can make arrangements in advance.
- ***While there is no automatic grade deduction for missing class, if you miss more than four classes this term, you are unlikely to pass.*** The activities we do during class time are directly connected to your assignments, so missing class means that you won't do as well.

Participate, and be respectful: There are lots of ways to participate, well beyond just raising your hand to talk in front of the entire group. You can engage in our in your small group in-class activities. Visit my drop-in hours. Send me interesting links. We will learn together—and I include myself in that “we.” All communications fields are in disruption, so we're all learning all the time.

Make deadline: You've got only six major assignments in this class; each one is due at **8 p.m. Monday**. The assignment deadlines are spaced so I have time to give each of you actionable feedback on your work – and to give you time to use that feedback on the next assignment.

- **Late Assignment policy:** Life happens, in j-school, in newsrooms, in industry. When you're covering breaking news, deadlines are not negotiable, but in other circumstances they can be. In recognition of this, ***I allow two late assignments with no penalty. You can use a 24-hour grace period two times, not including the final story pitches.*** You don't have to email me; just turn it in when you are finished.
- If you need more than 24 extra hours or find yourself needing more than two automatic extensions, then email me, and we'll talk about solutions.

Be accurate: Credibility is everything in journalism and communications. This is an introductory class, so you'll have some time to get the hang of it. ***Starting in Week Six, an assignment will receive a C-minus at best if it has a major fact error such as the misspelling of the subject's name, the incorrect outcome of an event or a misidentification of a major figure.*** Minor factual errors and earlier major errors will be penalized less harshly.

Have fun! There is joy in the craft of storytelling -- and in the hard thinking that prepares you to do the craft. I want our How Stories Work community to be an engaging place for you to belong to.

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM ME

Prompt feedback and return of assignments: I will return your assignments—with feedback and, if applicable, a grade—before the next assignment is due. Usually, that will be within seven to 10 days of turning in an assignment. If something prevents me from meeting my goal, I will let you know in advance.

High standards: I'm not going to penalize you for circumstances that are beyond your control. That said, I would be doing you—and the communities who rely on accurate and excellent storytelling—a disservice if I didn't hold you to a high standard on your assignments. *To get an A or a B, expect to spend at least four hours a week outside of class reading, writing/creating, and reflecting.*

Help: If you're struggling, let me know. *If my comments on your work are unhelpful or if you don't understand them, email me and let me know.* Communication requires at least two people; I will work to hold up my end of the conversation.

GRADING

Peer-reviewed scholarly research (that's the highest standard) shows that grades prevent students from absorbing and using feedback. *And the feedback is the point; that's how you learn.* The most important part of this class is building a foundation for your upcoming communications work, in the SOJC and beyond.

I have built a grading scale that reflects this knowledge, and your final project, which is the biggest part of your grade, will have plenty of pieces that lead up to it. You'll get feedback as well as grades.

Here's how it breaks down:

Baseline assignments: These two assignments form the base from which you'll do the big-picture assignments:

- **Storyteller's Notebook: 20%.** You'll work on this weekly, and you'll turn it in three times. The grade is complete/incomplete. You need to meet the standards for a complete assignment; we'll discuss what this looks like in class.
- **Midterm: 15%.** You'll take an in-class Canvas survey/quiz to make sure you're clear on the key vocabulary and concepts in storytelling. You can use your Storyteller's Notebook while you are taking the midterm.

Big-picture assignments: Each assignment here feeds into the next one. We're slowing down a process you'll use all the time. As you gain experience in the SOJC, you'll speed up.

- **Story ideas: 10%.** This is the first part of the idea process. You need a lot of them. You'll turn in 10 of them, with some detail on each, and you'll get feedback from me on how to sharpen some of them.
- **Story proposals: 20%.** This is the second part of the idea process. With help from me, you'll choose three of your strongest ideas, and you'll develop them further.

- **Story pitch: 35%** This is the culmination of the process. With help from me, you'll take your strongest proposal and turn it into a full-fledged story pitch, which you could send to an editor, boss, creative director, academic journal, whoever, whatever.

Grading scale:

- A: 90% and above
- B: 80 to 89%
- C: 70 to 79%
- D: 60 to 69%
- F: 59% and below

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

The University Student Conduct Code (conduct.uoregon.edu) defines academic misconduct. Students are prohibited from committing or attempting to commit any act that constitutes academic misconduct.

You will be able to use your notes and any other resources you need for all assignments in this class—which is exactly how it works in a newsroom.

In JCOM 202—and in any journalism or communications class or environment, in person or remote—academic integrity means the following:

- **Do not plagiarize:** Do not copy someone else's work and pass it off as your own. That includes the work of professional reporters and communicators as well as the work of your classmates, friends, family, fraternity brothers, sorority sisters, teammates, roommates, fellow club officers, etc. You get the picture.
- **Attribute your work properly:** Use first and last names for everyone you quote or paraphrase in every story and assignment. Quotations are direct quotes—don't tweak what someone said to make the sentence sound better. When you use information from a news or other source, attribute it to that source.
- **Don't copy directly from websites or other background sources:** This is plagiarism, too. Don't think you can fool me—or your readers—by changing a word or two around. That doesn't fly. Again: Attribute your work properly. ***Be especially careful if you are cutting and pasting information from the internet.*** In fact, don't do it.
- **Do not make things up:** Don't invent sources, facts, people, scenarios, scores, quotes, etc. I truly hope this is self-evident.
- **IF YOU AREN'T SURE, ASK:** You're still beginning communicators. If you are unsure about whether you're skirting too close to the line, ask me.

If you plagiarize or otherwise violate these principles of academic integrity, you will flunk this class. Period.

GENERATIVE AI

You can use AI in this class only under specific conditions, which I've explained below.

According to UO policy, if you use AI in other circumstances, I may submit a report of suspected academic misconduct to the Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards for that office to determine responsibility and, if warranted, assess a grade penalty.

Here's what you should be aware of as you decide whether you want to use Generative AI:

- **You need to double or even triple check everything.** No GenAI tool differentiates among verified information, honest mistakes, misinformation, disinformation, sarcasm or satire. In short: GenAI is often wrong. Trust nothing. Verify.
- **A response to a GenAI prompt is based not on quality, but on the quantity of the material that has been used to train the tool.** A lot of published journalism, for instance, is not the kind of journalism we teach at the SOJC. Some of it is boring. Some of it upholds problematic power dynamics, including white supremacy. That's not the kind of work I want you to do – or the kind of communication communities and democracy need.
- **You must explain to your readers, viewers and listeners how you used Gen AI in your work.** GenAI is a source, and it needs to be treated as such.

Here's how you **CAN** use Gen AI:

- Transcribing interviews. Many communicators use Otter.ai.
- Searching for expert sources or a summary of basic facts to help get yourself familiar with a new topic you're reporting on. The host of the Newsroom Robots podcasts recommends Perplexity.ai, which pulls from peer-reviewed journals (the highest research standard).
- Copy editing and proofreading, including checking for correct grammar and AP style. Grammarly can be helpful.

Here's how you **CANNOT** use Gen AI:

- Inputting your notes and asking it to use those notes to write your assignment.
- Inputting my assignment directions and asking it to produce a response.

In all other cases: ASK ME:

- If you find yourself wanting to use AI in another way in this class, send me an email with the details first: what you want to use, why you want to use it, how you will use it.
- You must have my explicit permission before you proceed. You'll get that only in writing, not in a discussion with me.

One last, important, personal note:

One of the most important things I do as a teacher is give you feedback. Obviously, that's because it sharpens your craft. That matters.

But it's also because giving feedback helps me to build a relationship with each one of you. Learning is social. We all learned that during the pivot to remote at the beginning of the pandemic, right? It was hard to learn alone.

You'll get better feedback when the original work comes from you, personally, rather than being filtered through GenAI. **Your original work and the struggle to produce it are vital to helping us build strong relationships, which are at the heart of both quality communication and meaningful learning.**

TITLE IX

If you are experiencing sex- or gender-based discrimination, harassment or violence, you should call the 24-7 hotline 541-346-SAFE (7224) or visit safe.uoregon.edu for help. If you are experiencing any kind of discrimination or harassment, contact the Dean of Students Office at 541-346-3216 or the non-confidential Title IX Coordinator/OICRC at 541-346-3123 to request information and resources.

You are not required to participate in an investigation to receive support, including requesting academic supportive measures. Additional resources are available [at this link](#).

As a UO faculty member, I am a designated reporter. This means if you tell me about sex discrimination, harassment or retaliation, I am required to report this to the Title IX coordinator. (More information is [here](#).) There are confidential employees at the UO, including advocates in the [Care and Advocacy Program](#) in the Office of the Dean of Students.

Pregnancy modifications: Pregnant and parenting students are eligible for academic and work modifications related to pregnancy, childbirth, loss of pregnancy, termination of pregnancy, lactation and related medical conditions. To request pregnancy-related modifications, complete this [Request for Pregnancy Modifications form](#) on the OICRC website.

WEATHER AND CAMPUS EMERGENCIES

If there is an emergency that disrupts academic activities, that means that course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages could change. I'll communicate information about changes as soon as possible through Canvas announcements (or email if Canvas is not working).

Unless the UO is officially closed for inclement weather, our class will meet in person. If I need to cancel class while the university is open, I'll announce via Canvas.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS

The best journalism and communications work reflects the community it covers. That's why I am passionate about increasing and maintaining diversity in the classroom and in workspaces. If everyone is the same gender, race, ethnic group, sexual identity, religion, etc., you're going to produce homogenous work that is at best boring, at worst riddled with errors of fact and/or omission.

In this class, I will encourage open inquiry, freedom of expression and respect for difference. I expect you to respect the differences among you and your classmates and between the class and me. I will respect yours. We can certainly disagree—in fact, I expect that we will at times. But we can all respect each other, and we can all learn from each other.

If anything in this class makes you uncomfortable, let me know ASAP. Let's talk about it.

SCHEDULE

Deadline note: All of your assignments will be due at 8 p.m. Mondays.

They will reflect the work you have done over the previous week.

I hope that simplifies your life a bit.

Schedule note: This class is based in part on what is happening in the news and culture. If I need to change the schedule to accommodate this, I'll send updates via Canvas.

WEEK ONE: Sept. 30 to Oct. 6 **What is story? Why does it matter?**

We'll watch, listen to and read examples of some of my favorite stories and begin working together to develop language for the characteristics for stories. Importantly, we'll begin to discuss how non-fiction storytelling distinguishes itself from fiction.

- **Reading for Thursday's class:** Rich, Chapter One: On Story (pp. 1-23) and Chapter Two: Craft and Magic (pp. 24-28)

WEEK TWO: Oct. 7 to Oct. 13 **Curiosity as an ethical imperative**

We'll discuss the connection between curiosity and creativity – plus ways to nurture and harness curiosity. We'll also analyze why a curious mindset – about your own experience and about experiences beyond your own – is a core ethical value for any storyteller in any field.

- **Reading for Thursday's class:** Rich, Chapter 3, Narrative Principles (pp. 29-37)
- **Due 8 p.m. Monday, Oct. 14:** Storyteller's Notebook No. 1 (this reflects readings for Weeks One and Two, class discussions and your own experiences and thinking)

WEEK THREE: Oct. 14 to Oct. 20 **Elements of story and narrative fundamentals**

Having a formula doesn't get in the way of your creativity. It enhances it. We'll review the traditional, time-tested ways stories are organized, and we'll also look at how storytellers have tweaked those structures.

- **Reading for Thursday's class:** Rich, Chapter 4, Conflict (pp. 38-64)
- **Due 8 p.m. Monday, Oct. 21:** Story ideas

WEEK FOUR: Oct. 21 to 27
The ethics of story

Stories are powerful. How you wield that power matters. We'll deconstruct stories that made a difference.

- **IMPORTANT NOTE:** Not all storytellers use their power for good, and we will spend some class time discussing the power of destructive narratives, specifically some racist and xenophobic tropes from the presidential campaign. This won't be easy, but it's necessary. I'm including this information here – and will have more details closer to the date – so that you can prepare yourself.
- **Reading for Thursday's class:** Rich, Chapter 5, Structure in Theory (pp. 65-92, but note that much of this is a screenplay, so the reading isn't as long as it appears)

WEEK FIVE: Oct. 28 to Nov. 3
Storytelling within the SOJC

All four majors in this school – journalism, public relations, advertising and media studies -- work with story. We'll compare and contrast what storytelling looks like in each field.

- **Thursday's class:** Midterm exam (open Storyteller's Notebook)

WEEK SIX, Nov. 4 to Nov. 10
Audience, with a focus on diversity and inclusion. Part One.

Storytelling isn't solely about the storyteller. All stories need an audience, and in the SOJC, that's primarily "the public" or "the client." Or both. We do outward-facing work, and we'll dig into both who that work is for and who has been traditionally excluded.

- **Due 8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 11:** Storyteller's Notebook No. 2 (reflects readings and class discussions for Weeks Three, Four and Five, plus your experiences and thinking)

WEEK SEVEN: Nov. 11 to Nov. 17
Audience, with a focus on diversity and inclusion. Part Two.

This is so important that we're spending two weeks on it.

- **Reading/viewing for Tuesday's class:** Selection of Colin Kaepernick stories on Canvas
- **Due 8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 18:** Story proposals

WEEK EIGHT: Nov. 18 to Nov. 24
Pitching stories. Part One.

Now we'll get practical. How do you pitch to a client, an editor, a boss? What are the elements of a good pitch? How do you get beyond topic to story? How do you explain what you want to deliver, and how can you address the needs of your client/editor/boss?

WEEK NINE: Nov. 25 to Dec. 1
Pitching stories. Part Two.

Again, this is so important that we're spending two weeks on it.

- **Thursday:** No class, Thanksgiving
- **Due 8 p.m. Monday, Dec. 2:** Storyteller's Notebook No. 3 (this reflects class activities and discussions for Weeks Six, Seven and Eight, plus your experience and thinking)

WEEK 10: Dec. 2 to Dec. 8
The joy of storytelling

We'll wrap up the class with an eye toward setting you up for your eventual major.

- **Due 8 p.m. Monday, Dec. 9:** Final story pitch