

**Journalism 3004, Fall 2017**  
**Freedom of Information Assignment**  
**Worth 15 per cent**

**Initial request wording due at the start of class September 19**  
**File request once you have instructor approval**  
**Final memo due at the start of the last class (Nov. 28/17)**

For this assignment, you will file a FOI request, follow it through the term, then complete a written assignment for the start of the last class, handing in all associated materials.

**Part 1-The request**

You need to come up with your own request question, preferably a "surgical" request as discussed in *Digging Deeper*. You can file your request to a federal government department or agency, to a provincial department or agency, to Halifax Regional Municipality or another municipality, or to a university, such as King's or Dal. You will need to research online to find the appropriate address for mailing your request, if you plan to file it on paper.

The request should be filed on paper, or with the appropriate electronic filing portal, such as that provided by the federal government for many departments and agencies. The filing portals generally let you use a credit card or Visa Debit to pay the filing fee, if there is one. The fee at the federal level and in Nova Scotia is \$5.00.

You will hand in your proposed request at the start of class on September 19, including your letter/form and the address of the FOI office you plan to mail it to. If the request will be filed online, hand it in printed out, indicating the URL where you will file it.

I will check your request over, including the wording and the address/URL, and provide any necessary feedback. Once you have my go-ahead, you can file the request online, or file it by letter yourself, incorporating any suggested changes.

If you don't have a chequing account, bring the completed request to class on September 26, with everything complete including the letter/form and addressed, stamped envelope, along with cash to cover the request fee, if any. I will then attach a cheque and mail it for you.

**Part 2-Memo and materials**

In a minimum 1,000-word memo (more is better), outline the progress and outcome of your request, all of the interactions you had with the public body, your reflections on how easy or difficulty the process was, how you might use FOI for your own reporting in future, and consider critically the response of the public body within

the context of the role of FOI in a democracy. The memo should explain the progress of the request in the context of the applicable laws and regulations (e.g. what exemptions were applied, what fees were charged, or how long did the request take versus what is permitted?) and should show a firm grasp of the applicable provisions by referencing these in the memo text.

Consider chapter 10 of Digging Deeper, any additional readings you will be given during the term on FOI, as you write your memo. Back up your views with at least three examples drawn from your experience and five references to the readings, and consider how your own request might (or might not) support democracy. You are expected to demonstrate an understanding of the role of FOI in democracy and how that relates to your own request.

Write your memo even if you did not get any documents or if the request is not completed by the end of the term. Hand in copies of all correspondence (email and hard copy) and any documents or disks you received. I will return any originals to you.

You are free to pursue a story on your request if it is newsworthy.

Hand in everything in paper copy on the last day of classes.

### Marking rubric

(Note, that as with all assignments, misspelled names result in a mark of 0)

Element	Exceed standards (A- to A+ range)	Meets standards (good work) (B- to B+ range)	Minimally acceptable work (C- to C+ range)	Unacceptable (D and below)
Request wording (This is the initial request wording, as handed in on Sept. 19)  10 per cent of the grade	Request is clearly worded and succinct, demonstrates outstanding pre-request research.	Request is clearly worded and succinct, demonstrates sufficient pre-request research to make the intent of the request comprehensible to the public body.	Request wording may lack some clarity and succinctness, demonstrates minimal pre-request research.	Request wording unclear and/or verbose, demonstrates no pre-request research.

<p>Completeness of materials</p> <p>10 per cent of the grade</p>	<p>All materials required are handed in (letters, email correspondence, the response itself, if one has been received).</p>	<p>Materials required are handed in (letters, email correspondence, the response itself, if one has been received), but one document may be missing.</p>	<p>Some of the materials required are handed in.</p>	<p>None of the materials required are handed in.</p>
<p>Memo content</p> <p>40 per cent of the grade.</p>	<p>Memo shows a thorough understanding of the request process as demonstrated by references to the law and regulations, as well as of the association between FOI and democracy and how that applies with regard to the specific request. The memo outlines in detail the interactions between the requester and the public body. The memo examines critically the response of the public body within the context of the role of FOI in democracy. The memo uses at least three specific and appropriate</p>	<p>Memo shows a good understanding of the request process as demonstrated by references to the law and regulations, as well as of the association between FOI and democracy and how that applies with regard to the specific request. The memo outlines in some detail the interactions between the requester and the public body. The memo attempts to examine critically the response of the public body within the context of the role of FOI in democracy. The memo uses at least two specific and appropriate examples from the request experience, and at</p>	<p>Memo shows some understanding of the request process as demonstrated by references to the law and regulations, as well as of the association between FOI and democracy and how that applies with regard to the specific request. The memo provides minimal detail on the interactions between the requester and the public body. The memo makes little attempt to examine critically the response of the public body within the context of the role of FOI in democracy. The memo uses at least one specific and appropriate example from the request experience, and at least two references from the readings, and attempts to bring these to bear on the critical examination of the</p>	<p>Memo shows little to no understanding of the request process as demonstrated by references to the law and regulations, as well as of the association between FOI and democracy and how that applies with regard to the specific request. The memo provides no detail on the interactions between the requester and the public body. The memo makes no attempt to examine critically the response of the public body within the context of the role of FOI in democracy. The memo uses no specific and appropriate examples from</p>

	examples from the request experience, and at least five references from the readings, and brings these to bear on the critical examination of the request process and experience.	least three references from the readings, and brings these to bear on the critical examination of the request process and experience.	request process and experience.	the request experience, and and/or no references from the readings.
Memo writing  30 per cent of the grade	The writing is crisp, clear and economical, lacking unnecessary wordiness and padding. The memo is organized by theme. Ideas are clearly expressed and identified.	The writing is crisp, clear and economical, lacking unnecessary wordiness and padding, but with some flaws in the above. The memo is clearly organized by theme, with some flaws. Ideas are expressed and identified, but there is some lack of clarity.	The writing is wordy and or muddy, and seems padded. There is an attempt to organize the memo by theme, but there are many flaws. There is attempt to express and identify ideas, but there is less clarity in this regard than expected in top work.	The writing is difficult to penetrate and overly padded. There is no attempt to organize the memo by theme. There is no attempt to express and identify ideas.
Memo style, spelling, grammar  10 per cent of the grade	No errors in CP Style, grammar and usage.	Up to two errors in CP Style, grammar and usage.	Up to four errors in CP Style, grammar and usage.	More than four errors in CP Style, grammar and usage.

