

Jour 3004, Advanced Reporting 1
First News Reporting Assignment
Due in hard copy, at the start of class, Sept. 26

Keeping public figures and others accountable is one of the most important jobs of journalists in a democratic society, and in our Sept. 19 class we explored some public records used to do that.

Your assignment now is to write an accountability news story. You have two options.

- 1) Using the public sector salary disclosure information for universities and NSCC for 2016, the data we worked with in class, write a 750-word news story about higher-education salaries in Nova Scotia. Themes you could look at:
 - a) Who has the highest salaries, what kinds of positions do they occupy, and why are they at that level? How do they compare with salaries in other provinces (Ontario has similar disclosure to Nova Scotia's. What can you find for post-secondary institutions in other provinces?)
 - b) How do Nova Scotia's universities, and NSCC, compare to one another in terms of compensation greater than \$100,000?
 - c) How are the salaries justified in light of tuition fees students have to pay and (in some cases, e.g. Acadia) struggling university finances?

- 2) Using one of the other records we looked at in class (lobbyist registry, N.S. MLA expenses, expenses of senators, federal proactive disclosure of travel and hospitality expenses, or political donations), develop your own 750-word accountability story. This option is for the confident and adventurous.

For either option, do at least two interviews. This requirement will increase with subsequent assignments; this one will get your feet wet. You may need more than two interviews to ensure you have interviewed all appropriate sources. Remember, no interviews with students or family members are allowed, per the syllabus.

This story should, at the very least, include an interview with the accountable person and/or organization and someone commenting from the outside (e.g. Taxpayer's Federation).

Of course, doing an accountability records story doesn't mean that you are going to advance an opinion; it's not up to you to decide whether the accountable person is right or wrong. Instead you will write a straight news story, setting out the facts, while including the opinions and observations of others, so that the reader/audience will understand the extent and implications of the facts you have set out.

Go for a hard-news lead for this story. Here's an example (don't use this one, not just because it's not very sparkling):

Dalhousie University President Richard Florizone was by far the highest paid university employee in Nova Scotia in 2016, according to salary information required to be disclosed online. Etc...

At the end of your story, please provide a brief citation (description and URL for online research source; description, location and title for offline material) for each research source, along with the names and phone numbers of all human sources used (whether quoted or not).

Marking rubric. Forty-five per cent of the mark for this assignment is based on your research, 45 per cent on writing, grammar, etc and 10 per cent on my professional judgment of the quality of your story.

	Exceeds standards (A- to A+ range)	Meets standards (good work, B- to B+ range)	Minimally acceptable work (C- to C+ range)	Unacceptable (D and below)
Writing, grammar, etc. 45 per cent				
Effective and appropriate lede paragraph	Lead is crisp and clear, takes the reader into the story, is economical with words and precisely states the core point of the story. Goes beyond standards by demonstrating exceptional creativity and craft.	Lead is crisp and clear, takes the reader into the story, is economical with words and precisely states the core point of the story.	Lead may be somewhat wordy and imprecise, may not take the reader into the story causing him or her to abandon the story. The lead may be unclear.	Lead may wordy and imprecise, would not take the reader into the story, causing him or her to abandon the story. The lead is unclear.
Facts backing up	The lede is backed up with appropriate research-driven facts.	The lede is backed up with appropriate research-driven	The lede may not be backed up with appropriate	The lead is not backed up with appropriate

the lede.	The story answers all of the questions raised by the lede.	facts. The story answers most of the questions raised by the lede.	research-driven facts. The story answers some of the questions raised by the lede, but may have noticeable holes.	research-driven facts. The story fails to answer the questions raised by the lede.
Logical structure, organization and flow, progressing from the lead to the end.	The story is optimally organized, such that the reader is taken from beginning to end smoothly and without hesitation. It is clear that the writer put superior thought and planning into the organization of the story.	The story is well organized, such that the reader is taken from beginning to end relatively smoothly, though there may be minimal flaws in the flow. Thought and organization is apparent.	The story has organizational flaws, such that the reader may hesitate to continue or have difficulty following the logic of the story. There has been some attempt at thought and organization of the material.	The story is nearly impossible to follow and haphazard, and an average reader would be unlikely to follow it through to the end. The story flow is illogical and there it is not apparent that any thought or organization went into the material.
Use of quotations to back up factual information and to punctuate the story.	Quotations are crisp and lively, punctuate the copy, and deliver an emotional punch. They are not used to convey information, but emotion, opinion and colour.	Quotations are lively but may be a little wordy. They punctuate the copy, and deliver some emotional punch. A minority may be used to convey information.	Quotations are flabby and may feel to have been dropped into the copy haphazardly. Many are used to deliver information.	Quotations are flabby, dull and not tied to the logic and flow of the story. They are used to deliver information, and subtract from rather than add to the effect of the story.

Story focus.	The story is focused on one main idea.	The story is focused, but may wander off the main idea.	The story is poorly focused, and wanders from idea to idea.	The story is an unfocused mess.
CP Style, spelling, grammar and usage.	All CP Style, spelling, grammar and usage is correct.	No more than two errors in CP Style, spelling, grammar and usage.	Two to five errors in CP Style, spelling, grammar and usage.	More than five errors in CP Style, spelling, grammar and usage.
Research 45 per cent				
Appropriate facts and statistics selected from the research to drive the narrative.	The selection of research and statistics used in the story is laser focused on the main premise of the story, and leaves no questions unanswered. Research comes from the sources discussed for the story, as well as other appropriate sources.	The selection of research and statistics used in the story is largely focused on the main premise of the story, and leaves few questions unanswered. Research comes mostly from the sources discussed for the story, as well as other appropriate sources.	The selection of research and statistics used in the story is partially focused on the main premise of the story, and leaves many questions unanswered. Research often from sources not discussed for the story, or from other, inappropriately chosen sources.	The quotes reflect a careless and/or haphazard selection of human sources.
Economy of use of factual information and statistics (i.e. not a “data dump.”)	Information selected is necessary to the telling of the story.	Most of the information selected is necessary to the telling of the story.	Some of the information selected is necessary to the telling of the story.	None of the information selected is necessary to the telling of the story.

Accuracy of factual and statistical information derived from research.	All factual information and statistics are accurate and properly-cited.	There may be minor inaccuracy in statistics and factual information, and/or gaps in citations.	Significant inaccuracy in statistics and factual information, and/or gaps in citations.	Information and statistics used are inaccurate and not cited as to source.
Selection of human sources	The quotes reflect a careful selection of human sources with necessary involvement or expertise in the story. All appropriate and/or necessary sources present.	The quotes largely reflect a careful selection of human sources with necessary involvement or expertise in the story. Most appropriate and/or necessary sources present.	The quotes sometimes reflect a careful selection of human sources with necessary involvement or expertise in the story. Some of the appropriate and/or necessary sources present.	The quotes fail to reflect a careful selection of human sources with necessary involvement or expertise in the story. None of the appropriate and/or necessary sources present.
Professional judgment. 10 per cent.	The story is outstanding and publishable, in the professional judgment of your instructor.	The story meets classroom standards at this level of study, in the professional judgment of your instructor.	The story falls short of classroom standards at this level of study, in the professional judgment of your instructor.	The story is far below classroom standards at this level of study, in the professional judgment of your instructor.