

Newspaper Syllabus

1. **Course Overview:**

Newspaper is an elective course that involves the student production of four quarterly newspaper editions of ***Panther Prints***, as well as periodic contributions to our online publication, <https://www.peshprints.com>. The course is student-driven and requires responsibility and active participation in order to meet printer deadlines. This course is designed for students who already have a background in journalism, or understand the basics. Quick review of the following will be covered at the beginning of the year:

1. Purposes of Journalism
 - a. To inform the masses
 - b. To keep the government transparent
2. How to Write like a Journalist
 - a. Succinct, Just the Facts, the 5 W's and H, and the Inverted Pyramid
 - b. Plagiarism, Libel, and Slander – the Law
 - c. Active vs. Passive Voice
 - d. The Copyeditor's RED INK
3. Types of Newspaper Articles
 - a. News, Features, Editorials, Sports, Columns, and MORE
4. Photos & Captions
 - a. How to take excellent photos
 - b. How to write proper captions
5. Appropriate Content
 - a. Eager journalists
 - b. School publication
 - c. Will this story offend administrators, parents, and/or peers?
 - d. Is there a way to make it more balanced? Less offensive? Or should it be scrapped?

2. **Publication Policies:**

Content:

By virtue of the fact that the newspaper is student conceived, planned and produced, as well as a product of an academic program, there are certain guidelines that must be put into practice ethically and legally.

Journalistic in nature, the newspaper attempts to inform and entertain its audience in a broad, fair and accurate manner on all subjects that affect readers in the areas of lifestyles, academics, clubs and sports. The entire student body constitutes the target audience for the newspaper with secondary audiences

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Mr. Birnbaum
Plano East Senior High School – Room B4-201
mike.birnbaum@pisd.edu

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including parents, school personnel, community members and other scholastic journalism groups. Content focuses on coverage that will meet the wants and needs of the majority of these students.

While the staff not only allows, but also encourages, constructive criticism of any part of the publication editions, before or after distribution, final authority for the content rests solely in the hands of student journalists and their adviser. Administrators rely on the advisor and staff to make **appropriate content** decisions.

Controversial news topics may occasionally be covered. Topics, such as politics, particularly at the national level, are inescapable in today's environment. When it comes to writing editorials, for example, your opinion as the journalist is required. Such opinions on topics can often cause tempers to flare.

Maturity AND respect for your classmates will be **REQUIRED** at all times. Anyone who disrespects a classmate by making verbal attacks will be reprimanded, including the possibility of permanent removal from the class. However, as alluded to earlier, all content must be approved by the advisor and staff prior to going to press.

No material, opinionated or otherwise, will be printed which is libelous, irresponsible, advocates an illegal activity or which the editorial board and/or adviser deem in poor taste.

Attribution Policy:

Should any photograph or article be provided from an outside source, attribution will be given in accordance with the style agreed upon by the newspaper staff.

Ethics and Plagiarism:

It goes without saying that journalists are expected to follow an ethical creed when covering the news. Not only are journalists expected to be honest, but their reporting should be accurate, in good taste, and in their own words. If caught plagiarizing **ANY WORK**, you will receive a **"0"** for that assignment, your parents/guardians will be notified, and you may be removed from the class.

Advertising Policy:

All advertising accepted by the staff must meet the same guidelines as the content and portrait policies. Acceptance of advertising does not constitute an endorsement by the school, the staff as a whole or its individual members.

3. Staff Policies:

Attendance & Commitment:

This newspaper class is a business and, as in industry, time is money. Staff members must pay attention to their attendance and be committed to creating an exceptional product for their clients. As such, it is each

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staff member's responsibility to ensure that their work is completed **on time** and that any pre-planned absences have been made known to the editor as well as the adviser (Mr. Birnbaum).

You will be tasked with covering numerous school-related and local community events and producing written articles as well as excellent accompanying photographs and captions. This can't be stated enough – this class requires a lot of time **outside of school hours**. If you know that you are NOT someone who can commit to a lot of assignments outside of school hours, **please seriously reconsider your choice to be enrolled in this class**.

Unlike other classes, if you miss an assignment or deadline, the consequence does NOT solely fall on you (failing grade), but rather the entire staff. You will be letting your entire staff down and possibly resulting in a degraded final product (in this case, a well produced newspaper edition). If you know you are going to be absent, it is vital that you let your other staff members know. They will have to pick up some slack while you're gone. Obviously, it goes without saying that if they do this, you owe them one down the road. If this becomes a recurring incident, you will likely earn a failing grade for the grading period and possibly be removed from the class.

Assignments/Coverage of Stories:

All assignments will be posted regularly in the appropriate document and folder in the Newspaper 2024 GOOGLE DRIVE. Please get in the habit of checking Google Drive on a regular basis, especially if you miss a day. Occasional announcements are also made in Google Classroom.

Periodically your adviser (Mr. Birnbaum) will be doing assessments to see what is being covered and who is covering it. If your name is never mentioned or seen on the list, that **will not bode well** for you in terms of grades, positions for next year, and your ability to remain in the class. You are all at an age where **you must be a responsible individual**. For a newspaper to be successful, the staff must operate as a well-oiled machine, a team of superstars... and, a team is only successful when it is the sum of outstanding individuals, working cohesively together. Your adviser will NOT hold your hand and always tell you what needs to be done next. **You must take the initiative**.

Multimedia Policy:

Staff members are expected to follow school Internet policies in the publications classroom. Computers are for publications use only and not for other non-publication related business. Any misuse of computer equipment will result in an automatic exclusion from computer privileges in the classroom for the remainder of the current deadline cycle. Students' grades will reflect any work that is not submitted.

Using multimedia for digital communication (i.e., text messaging, social networking, etc.) or gaming of any kind is prohibited from the publications room unless directed otherwise by the adviser.

Staff members will have access to digital cameras throughout the creation of the publication. Because the equipment is fragile and extremely expensive (**often thousands of dollars**), staff members take responsibility to make sure that it is used properly and returned undamaged. Digital cameras left unattended or lost may result in the loss of privileges for that staff member. At any time throughout the

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year, staff members are welcome to use their own digital cameras rather than borrowing school equipment.

If a school-owned camera is damaged or lost while in the staff members' possession, that student will be responsible for the partial or full cost of replacing the equipment (based on an appropriate retail value). When a student has the camera signed out, only that student should be using the camera and only pictures appropriate for the publication should be taken.

Email and Texting Etiquette:

When communicating with teachers and/or other adults via email or texting, you are to use professional etiquette at **ALL TIMES**.

Proper email and texting etiquette is how we maintain a respectful, appropriate and professional tone. When communicating with adults, you as the student, are **NOT** communicating with your best buds or boyfriend/girlfriend. Your messages should be constructed accordingly.

This means the following:

1. Use correct grammar
2. Use correct spelling
3. Proofread BEFORE sending
4. Address the reader with correct titles (Mr, Mrs, Dr.)
5. Use a proper salutation (Dear, Good Afternoon, Hello, Good Evening)
6. Correctly spell the reader's name (if you don't know it, look it up!)
7. Identify oneself within the first line or two
8. Be clear about your needs or requests
9. For email, ALWAYS write a subject line
10. For email, double-check any attachments
11. For email, NEVER "Reply All," unless it is something the entire group needs to know
12. For email, always reply within 24 hours
13. For texting, always try to respond ASAP (at least within 2 hours)
14. For texting, respect sleep hours (don't send text messages at 10:30 pm or 4:30 am), unless it's an emergency
15. Don't use all capital letters (no need to SHOUT)
16. Avoid using exclamation marks... unless it's an actual emergency
17. Avoid negativity; if you have a complaint, express it in a constructive and professional manner
18. For email, don't forget a proper closing (Sincerely, Best Regards, Thank You)
19. Never Ever make any obscene or vulgar remarks
20. Never use any profanity

The Key thing to remember is this—**always be professional AND appropriate**. Ask yourself if this text or email can be considered offensive or inappropriate in any way whatsoever BEFORE SENDING.

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Group Texts with Other Students (excluding the teacher):

Same Rules apply here.

You have a little more freedom to express yourself here. You may not have to use proper grammar or spelling or salutations, BUT... Please, still keep it appropriate. I will be relying on editors to inform me of any uncomfortable or inappropriate messages within the group chat. Reprimands may be enforced for those who violate this policy, including the possibility of expulsion from the program.

Staff Selection & Dismissal Policy:

A high standard of professionalism and maturity is expected from students in the newspaper classroom. Staff will be selected after completing an application, a formal interview and obtaining teacher recommendations. Applicants must be receiving at least a 'B' in all core classes in order to be eligible as a staff member. Students not fulfilling their duties as members of the team will be subject to undergoing the discipline referral system (see below).

Conduct Policy:

It is expected that when staff members are conducting newspaper business they act professionally and courteously. To create and maintain consistency in the organization and morale of the staff, commitment and responsibility play as much of a role in the success of the team as does the mastery of skills. Therefore, each staff member must establish self-discipline in meeting staff expectations.

If expectations are not met, staff leadership will contact the staff member to establish a management plan. A tri-level management plan will be initiated and followed.

· **Step 1 – Staff member/editor/adviser conference:** The staff member will meet with those directly involved and affected by the action(s). A plan of action will be detailed and agreed upon by all concerned parties.

· **Step 2 – Staff member/legal guardian(s)/adviser conference:** Upon a second inability to meet expectations, the staff member will meet with his/her legal guardian(s) and the adviser to identify the problem and develop a workable solution. This plan of action will be detailed and agreed upon by all concerned parties.

· **Step 3 – Staff member/legal guardian(s)/adviser/administrator conference:** A discipline referral to the administrator will be completed and the staff member will be directed to the appropriate school authority. Only as a last resort will the student be removed from the staff. If a student reaches this step, they may or may not be removed from class (at the discretion of the adviser and administrator). If the individual remains in the class, but is removed from the newspaper staff, they will be given an entire slate of alternative written assignments to finish out the grading period or semester.

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Basic Classroom Rules:

Read your Student Handbook. All Plano East Senior High School rules MUST be followed.

- Be in your seat and working on the Bell Ringer **before** the tardy bell rings.
 - Sit up in class. Be attentive.
 - No sleeping. Those who violate this rule are subject to possible humiliation—you've been warned (insert evil laugh here). 😊
 - No food or drink in class, except water... unless given approval by your teacher.
 - All cell phones and/or electronic devices should be silent **and** put away unless recording an interview
 - You may use the hanging pockets for your device, especially if you cannot trust yourself
 - Having a cell phone is a privilege. If students abuse this privilege, than stringent rules will be applied and enforced, including the possible confiscation of said devices
 - **YOU** must take responsibility for your decisions, actions, and future.
 - If you need tutoring/assistance, I am here every day (except FRIDAYS) after school until at least 4:45 (often later).
 - I can also come in early before school if you arrange it with me ahead of time.
 - Please **DO NOT** assume you can stay in the classroom during lunch time. You must obtain permission for each occasion.
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4. Grading:

Basic Principles of Grading:

Many classes that can be taken have deadlines, but the instructor can often extend these easily. The newspaper, however, operates like a business and has deadlines that are controlled from an outside source. The website is more self-monitored of course, but for both media outlets, we strive for excellence. Many of our articles will be submitted to various journalism competitions throughout the school year. In order to earn these esteemed awards, you must produce Grade A quality content.

With this in mind, it is important to understand that time management and quality production both play crucial roles for grading for this class.

It's really quite simple... you produce quality content for the website and the quarterly newspaper, and you meet your deadlines... then you get an A. You fail to achieve these goals, and your grade begins to fall.

Should you fail to meet these goals on a regular basis, discussions will be held to have you removed from the course. This class is all about producing quality content, not the grades. Everyone needs to do their part.

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5. **Contests:**

Newspaper Competitions:

Students enrolled in this class should expect to compete in various academic journalism (including UIL), newspaper, and photography competitions.

6. **Quill & Scroll:**

All Newspaper staff members are encouraged to join Quill & Scroll Honor Society. This is an exclusive organization where you must have a consistent A/B grade average in all of your classes, have completed some superior work in some phase of journalism (newspaper or yearbook), be recommended by your adviser, and be voted upon by current members to join.

Quill & Scroll is a service organization that will require you to actively participate in local community service events on occasion.

Members of Quill & Scroll have access to a national network of like-minded individuals who share a passion for journalism, have the opportunity to earn exclusive scholarships for college, get the well-deserved distinction with a special cord for graduation, and can add their membership to their college applications, which is like having a golden ticket.

7. **Adviser's Role:**

Direct Roles:

As your adviser, I will continuously track the progress of editors and staff members to ensure that deadlines are met with accuracy. I will establish a fair system of evaluating all editors and staff members on daily contributions and final assignments.

I will oversee both the journalistic and business sides of the newspaper endeavor. I will periodically provide staff with new resources for learning journalism trends, writing, photography, design, project management and leadership.

I will give the staff opportunities to learn more about journalism by informing and/or taking them to workshops, speakers and/or conventions.

I serve as the liaison between administration, printer and staff.

I will make every effort possible to keep in contact with parents/guardians, especially if I have specific concerns about student progress. If at any time there are questions or concerns, please email me. My email address is mike.birnbaum@pisd.edu

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Mr. Birnbaum's Background:

As your instructor, I look forward to sharing my wealth of knowledge and skill set with you, no matter what your initial abilities may be. I have spent 12 years teaching various aspects of journalism, photojournalism, yearbook, English and Social Studies. Prior to my time as an educator, I spent five years as a publicist, and seven years working as a news writer for CNN in Atlanta.

8. Course Objectives:

Upon the successful completion of this course, students should:

- a. Develop personal strength in communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking.
 - b. Have used their journalistic writing skills and photography skills to produce a student-driven quarterly newspaper and news website
 - c. Make use of an organizational system to meet deadlines
 - d. Contributed to a professional quality newspaper that can later be used for college applications
 - e. Possess a vastly **improved writing skill set** that is transferable to all disciplines
 - f. Be able to **cover any newsworthy topic** in a **succinct, well-written** manner, that **captures the reader's attention**
 - g. Exhibit a **logical arrangement of ideas** in writing
 - h. Acquire an **increased knowledge of current events**
 - i. Take great photos using the rule of thirds, line, contrast, and composition
 - j. Become proficient in **research techniques**, including internet research and primary research (interviews)
 - k. **Differentiate between fact, opinion**, and fact-driven opinion
 - l. Develop the crucial ability to look at **both sides of an issue**
 - m. Understand and employ the ethical decisions inherent in producing a newspaper
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9. Materials:

****ALL SUPPLIES NEEDED BY MONDAY, AUGUST 19th****
(See me *after class* if this is an issue)

You must be prepared for class and have the following with you on a DAILY basis:

- A College-ruled, spiral (**NOT shorter composition book**)
 - Your Chromebook or MacBook (**fully charged**)
 - A pen or pencil
 - SD Card (**at least two**)
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- The following are **recommended, but NOT** required:
 - A 3-ring binder
 - A 3-ring pencil pouch (to store your pencils and pens—what a concept!)

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10. Contract:

In order to be a staff member of the publication for the 2024-2025 school year, students must complete the contract in the Google Form (see link below) with their legal guardian(s) and submit it to the adviser.

<https://forms.gle/gahpQA7WibXHYJV78>