

## COMS 460 Journalist in Popular Culture Final Take-Home Exam/Paper

- Proposal & preliminary bibliography before Thanksgiving break -- 25%
  - For Plan A, the proposal should say what your main research question is and what films, novels and radio shows you plan to use to address it, as well as what other sources you are likely to consult: A half-dozen books and articles about the works or the issues the works raise. (Sample question: “Were TV news women in the ‘80s treated more harshly by Hollywood than newspaper ‘sob sisters’ of the 1940s? Why?”) For Plan B, which *gives* you the research question, explain why you have chosen particular works and what other sources you will consult.
- The final paper itself, due on “final exam” day, Dec. 12 -- 75%
  - 8-12 pages including a two or three page annotated bibliography of at least six sources, three or more of them from academic journals or books.
  - For Plan A, your research should narrow your preliminary research question to something more focused – and you should have at least a tentative answer by the end. In our example, instead of suggesting you were covering *all* films of each decade, the final paper might focus on two or three that you could study in depth and draw conclusions about. For Plan B, your research might inspire you to switch to a different film or other work.
  - An “annotated” bibliography not only lists author-title-publisher-date, but also includes a summary saying what the book, article or other work was about and how it relates to your project. Two or three sentences of “annotation” should be enough for this project. (Elsewhere, scholarly annotated bibliographies are often much longer, and can be research projects in themselves.) See these references for the basic style:
    - <http://writingcenter.unc.edu/handouts/annotated-bibliographies/>
    - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/614/01/>
  - The bibliography should include **academic sources** (books and articles from film journals, history journals, media studies journals, etc.) as well as **popular sources** (newspaper or magazine movie reviews, interviews, websites, mass-market books, etc.) and **primary sources** (films, scripts, novels the films were based on, autobiographical writings by the authors or film-makers).
  - Your paper may use MLA or APA style (footnotes, endnotes or in-line citation); just be thorough and consistent. See library guides.
  - If there are no strictly academic journal articles about the films or novels you are writing about, seek academic articles about one or more *issues* the works bring up – journalism ethics, history, politics, media criticism, portrayal of gender issues, etc. If you were writing about the ethics of a fictional sportswriter or combat reporter, you could find discussions of real-life sportswriters or foreign correspondents in books by media scholars or in journals like “Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly.”

Those general descriptions apply to both “Plan A” and “Plan B” versions of the final project described below. The first allows you more freedom to plan and organize your own project, especially if you are used to writing critical/analytical research papers; the second offers more structure in a ready-to-go research question.

In both cases, grades will be based on the quality of your research and its support for your arguments. Writing should be accurate, clear and careful.

**Plan “A”: Final essay approach:** An 8-12 page final historical or critical essay tracing an issue or theme of your choice over time and/or across media, showing evidence of close reading, extensive background research and critical analysis. It must have a fresh research question and annotated bibliography, and demonstrate thoughtful analysis. It can be an original investigation of works that follow a similar theme (detective reporters, women reporters) or works that present contrasting themes or approaches (newspaper idealism vs. television cynicism; government officials in journalism films of the 1940s, ‘50s and today).

**Plan “B”: Hybrid approach:** Same length and deadlines, but a cross between a take-home exam and a research paper. Choose any *three* films, books or radio series to compare to the behavior of journalists suggested in four main topics of the *Society of Professional Journalists Code of Ethics* (<http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>):

- Seek truth and report it
- Minimize harm
- Act independently
- Be accountable

**Rough sample outline:**

1. Summarize your conclusions at the opening of the paper. (1 page)
2. Write a short evaluation of each work. (2 pages each x 3= 6 pages)
3. Then give the details of your conclusion. (2 pages)
4. Include your annotated bibliography. (2 pages)

**The catch:** Since you are only using three “works,” **do not use more than one shown in class.** Two should be films you watched, read or listened to on your own. Transcribe dialogue, quote texts, or use scene descriptions to support your points in case the reader hasn’t seen the film or read the book you’re reporting on. State clearly what you have watched, listened to, or read. Cite specific page numbers for all printed sources and include a briefly annotated bibliography of works cited and additional works consulted.

In your introduction point out your reason for choosing those three works. Did they have things in common, or things you wanted to contrast? (Behavior of editors versus reporters, differences across time, three different films with the same actor, etc.) In your conclusions, compare what you found in the three separate works.

Probable bibliography: Ehrlich’s *Journalism in the Movies*, at least two additional sources that have analyzed or reviewed the work, and three sources that discussed similar ethical situations in real-life or in other fiction.

## Recommended research resources

Matthew Ehrlich's *Journalism in the Movies*, especially chapters 5 through 8 & notes.

Papers at the Image of the Journalist in Popular Culture website ([ijpc.org](http://ijpc.org))

Blog entries and pages at Newspaper Heroes on the Air ([jheroes.com](http://jheroes.com))

Online sources and sources at RU library (some are on reserve; some are available for regular borrowing)

- Front page girls: Women journalists in American culture and fiction, 1880-1930; Lutes, Jean Marie, 1967 -- PN4888.W66 L88 2006
- News for all: America's coming-of-age with the press; Leonard, Thomas C., 1944 -- PN4855 .L46 1995
- The newspaper in the American novel, 1900-1969; Berry, Thomas Elliott -- PS374.N45 B4
- Stop the presses! : The newspaperman in American films; Barris, Alex -- PN1995.9.J6 B3 1976
- Several of the radio series CDs at the library came with small folders of notes about the series, including Frontier Gentleman, The Green Hornet and Night Beat. The notes discuss the individual program contents, which should help you choose which episodes to listen to.
- *Proquest Historical Newspapers* database (for contemporary reviews of films and books in The New York Times, Washington Post and Wall Street Journal)
- *Communication and Mass Media Complete* database (for academic research in journalism and media history journals)
- The library also has numerous journalism textbooks, media ethics books, and reporting guides, which may be good sources in your reporting-technique and reporting-ethics evaluations.