

FALL 2020 JOURNALISM POLICIES

We face a semester with unusual challenges: Our students must be safe as they gather information, conduct interviews and shoot photographs and video for stories. At the same time, they must learn and practice time-tested skills and ethical values to prepare them for success in journalism.

These policies are written with an acknowledgement that a spike in COVID-19 cases could change state restrictions, Penn State policies and the modes with which we deliver our classes. If that were to happen, our students, as always, must follow the most current laws, restrictions, policies and, of course, common sense.

1. Because of health/safety reasons, students may decline to do assignments that involve going out in public or having direct, face-to-face contact with sources. Students must notify their instructors at the beginning of the semester or prior to the start of the assignment for the exemptions. In those situations, instructors will provide alternative assignments that provide similar learning objectives as the originals. Instructors will also have discretion during an assignment to make changes to account for health/safety conditions in general or to accommodate student health situations.
2. Students must wear masks and adhere to social distancing guidelines of 6 feet or more when doing face-to-face interviews or taking still photographs or videos. We encourage students to do live interviews and cover events in person, but we understand that telephone or Zoom interviews or covering and writing about events remotely may be necessary in some situations.
3. We strongly encourage students to conduct interviews and shoots photos and video outdoors, whenever practical. Whether outside or inside, students should maintain 6-foot social distancing from sources.
4. Students should avoid crowded areas when doing their stories.
5. As a best practice, we strongly discourage email/text interviews. They can only be done with the permission of instructors.
6. In news stories, students should not interview relatives or friends because of the ethical problems doing so presents. In special circumstances, particularly features or first-person accounts, if students get approval in advance, instructors may make exceptions, especially in documenting COVID-19-related stories.
7. Students using equipment – cameras, microphones, etc. – will follow rules established by their instructors about the use and cleaning of that equipment.
8. Instructors will make assignments and grade them by keeping in mind that student safety is our primary concern.
9. As much as possible, instructors should spell out in writing on their syllabi what the course requirements will be as they relate to COVID-19 and health/safety issues.
10. Instructors will update their classes and journalism assignments in the event state restrictions, Penn State policies or class-delivery modes are changed.