Incorporating English into the Journalism Classroom

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

James L. Streisel

Thesis Advisor

Mark A. Kornmann

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana
December 17, 1994

Graduation Date: May 1995
English in the Journalism Classroom

Abstract

This project discusses the plight of today's secondary school journalism teacher. With the approval of such programs as the Indiana Core 40, which requires that students receive so many credits from English or language arts, journalism classes are starting to become nothing more than extracurricular activities; however, journalism classes provide students with a viable alternative to "regular" English and language arts classes. This project shows the direct correlation of journalism curricular requirements to English and language arts requirements using both basic outlines and Indiana Department of Education curriculum guidelines for English and language arts. Finally, there is a practical discussion on hints and suggestions that journalism teachers can use to incorporate English class requirements into their own classrooms.
English in the Journalism Classroom
Part 1
Introduction

Many journalism programs are not viewed as a viable extension of the English curriculum. In reality, however, journalism programs are extremely important to students' academic growth and development. Journalism classes allow students to extend their English knowledge and apply it in many different ways. Journalism classes take the knowledge taught in English classes one step further by providing practical applications for students' creative endeavors. The basic elements are the same, but journalism shows new ways of approaching topics and retrieving and researching information. This information can then be used to further English skills or to create a new working knowledge of journalism which may lead to a future career; and students do make journalism career choices in high school, as a recent survey by Ohio State's Lee B. Becker and Eunkyung Park determined. The results showed that 46.8 percent of males and 50.7 percent of females enrolled in college journalism programs decided to study journalism in high school, perhaps as a direct result of their high school journalism experience (Death by Cheeseburger, 35).

Journalism classes, seemingly, are created only for the best and brightest students. A journalism curriculum is challenging and rigorous, and it may appear that only gifted students can adequately participate. On the contrary, journalism classes have a place for every student from the class valedictorian to the struggling student. Journalism is a team effort that gives students a sense of belonging and success. That team is comprised of individuals, and each individual must do his or her job to not only finish assignments, but also to help other teammates complete their assignments. In journalism classes, students
learn the importance of cooperation and organization in order to insure that the whole team is successful. Journalism also provides more variety and hands-on activities, which means that students, no matter what their academic level may be, have more opportunities to succeed.

This project will show how journalism and English teachers can blend their separate curricula together to create stronger writers, readers and journalists.

The new Indiana Core 40 requires that students, if they wish to go on to an institution of higher education, must have at least 8 credits in literature, composition and speech; journalism classes, in general, are not part of this 8 credit requirement. Instead, journalism classes rest in the "extracurricular" Core 40 requirements which state that students need 2 to 4 credits from any other courses offered at the high school that do not directly relate to the state-determined standards. This is, indeed, a detriment to journalism programs statewide. A 1989 Gallup Poll showed that only 10 percent of students were involved in the school newspaper, a number that was far behind the number of students involved in sports, band or orchestra, choir and the school play (Death by Cheeseburger, 7). This project, therefore, is an attempt to make journalism classes a viable, useful part of the English curriculum and an important option in the Indiana Core 40 requirements.

The two disciplines are actually much more similar than most educators would think. This project will show how closely related journalism and English classes are and will demonstrate how journalism and English curricula can work together to create stronger programs and to foster better professional relationships through cooperation and understanding. This project also includes several practical hints and suggestions on how to successfully incorporate English into the journalism curriculum and vice-versa.
Journalism and English teachers are indeed faced with a challenging situation. Blending two seemingly separate disciplines together can be quite difficult. However, in the case of journalism and English, the differences are not extremely great and the problems may be easier to solve than at first anticipated.
English in the Journalism Classroom

Part 2

Basic Similarities

Journalism and English classes are actually quite similar. The information presented in both classes can be outlined to show exactly how alike they are. English classes teach students how to read, write and research effectively. Likewise, journalism classes follow a similar format. The difference is that journalism classes build on students' previous English methods and employ different writing and researching techniques to convey messages. Also, journalism tends to put more of an emphasis on publication of students' works. The specific similarities as they relate to curriculum guidelines will be discussed in the next section. The following outline is, by no means, all-inclusive. However, this section will help to familiarize the reader with some of the basic similarities between journalism and English curricula.
English

I. Primary research sources
   A. Personal experience
   B. Library research—the emphasis of English research is based here
      1. Books
      2. Magazines
      3. Journals
      4. Reference materials (i.e. encyclopedias, atlases, dictionaries, etc.)
   C. Other media
      1. Videos
      2. Tapes/cassettes/recordings
      3. Films/filmstrips
   D. Interviews/primary sources

Research plays an important role in the writing process in English classes. A student’s information search tends to follow the above organizational flow. Many times, the student’s search stops after the first one or two methods.

Journalism

I. Primary research sources
   A. Interviews (relies heavily on this form of research)
   B. Library research
      1. books
      2. journals/magazines
      3. newspapers
   C. Other media
      1. radio
      2. television

Journalistic research re-prioritizes the hierarchy of information sources. Interviewing tends to be the dominant source of information. Because of this, journalism exposes students to research techniques they may have never tried before as well as strengthens their existing research techniques.
II. Writing types
A. Personal experience/narrative
B. Poetry
C. Analysis
D. Critique/review
E. Research paper

Writing in an English class tends to follow either a formal or informal approach. In English classes, students try writing messages to many different groups.

II. Writing
A. Types
   1. News stories
   2. Columns
   3. Captions/cutlines
   4. Features
   5. Briefs/short news stories
   6. Editorials

B. Styles
   1. objective (news stories, captions, headlines, etc.)
   2. subjective (columns, editorials)

Writing in journalism requires students to try new methods and techniques. Objective writing in particular presents a new and difficult challenge to many students. However, other journalistic techniques and styles also allow students to practice the more subjective techniques they have learned in their English classes.
III. Editing

A. General

1. Content
2. Organization
3. Grammar
4. Spelling
5. Punctuation

B. Citations/style

1. Modern Language Association (MLA)
2. American Psychological Association (APA)
3. Footnotes

Editing is extremely important in the English classroom. Whether done by teachers or peers, editing allows students to make their pieces of writing more clear, concise and in a common style that can be understood by all. The function of editing is to make a writer’s material more readable.

In the editing stage of journalistic writing, students learn not only different ways of correcting mistakes, but they also need to determine if the writing is appropriate for its intended audience (see next section). The editing techniques, however, are very similar to the techniques that English students follow when writing their material.
IV. Publication/presentation

A. Collection of works (certainly not practiced by all English classes, but an effective method to present students' work to an audience)
B. Portfolio (students can see their progress throughout the class)
C. Presentation for grade (perhaps the most common form)

Publication in secondary school English classes is not a focal point. Students in English classes write so they can practice their skills and expand their knowledge of the English language. Certainly, not every piece of written material in English classes is meant for all to see. However, publication of student work in journalism classes is given more priority.

IV. Presentation/publication

A. Design—determines how people will see a particular piece of information; just as important as writing and editing in that it "packages" the written word.
B. Publication for an audience
   1. Yearbook
   2. Newspaper
   3. Newsletter
   4. Public Relations release

The emphasis in a journalism class is on preparing information for an audience. Students learn to combine their efforts to produce something that their entire audience (students, parents, teachers, community people, etc.) will see. Students in a journalism class can learn first-hand how important accurate information and clear writing styles can be.
V. Journalism "extras"—non-traditional writing techniques

A. Photography/ photo essays
B. Graphics/ information graphics
C. Design
D. Marketing
E. Advertising

These "extras" show the versatility of the journalism program. Each of these methods can be used in one form or another to tell a story and convey a message. However, rather than using the written word, students learn to present information using pictures, illustrations, political cartoons and design elements like type and color. Students in journalism programs, therefore, expand their English knowledge to include other alternate forms of expression.
English in the Journalism Classroom

Part 3

Curriculum Guidelines for English and Language Arts

In the Indiana Department of Education’s curriculum guidelines, the requirements for English and language arts are clearly stated. But are journalism classes included in these guidelines? According to a survey by Jack Dvorak, the director of the Indiana University High School Journalism Institute, probably not. In his 1991 study of 786 journalism educators, the results showed that only 26 percent of journalism classes were given language arts credit and only 13 percent were given English credit (*Death by Cheeseburger*, 16). However, these Indiana state guidelines relate very closely, if not identically, to the requirements that journalism classes fulfill. In its statement of philosophy, the curriculum guideline’s English and language arts proficiency guide “is based on the belief that students should be surrounded by, immersed in, countless opportunities to learn language, learn about language, and learn through language.” Journalism classes also work directly to achieve this goal. This section will show, therefore, the specific Indiana English and language arts guidelines and how they relate directly to journalism requirements.

Following a similar organizational format as the Indiana English and language arts curriculum guideline, this section will be divided into the following sections:

Students will:

1) Exhibit a positive attitude toward language and learning through...
2) Select and apply effective strategies for reading, including...
3) Comprehend developmentally appropriate materials, including...
4) Select and use developmentally appropriate strategies for writing, including...

5) Write for different purposes and audiences producing a variety of forms, including...

6) Use prior knowledge of content area information to make critical judgments, including...

7) Communicate orally with people of all ages by...
1) Students will exhibit a positive attitude toward language and learning through...

- submitting works for publication
- entering literary, speech, and writing contests
- initiating and participating in conversations and discussions about reading, writing, and language
- writing for personal satisfaction and enjoyment
- choosing to read and write during leisure time
- playing language games

Certainly, most educators hope to foster an interest in writing and in language. Journalism classes are an invaluable way to give students many different methods of self-expression. Whether students are writing a column or an editorial to express opinions or are using a literary device (i.e. alliteration, play-on-words, etc.) to create a title for an article, they are employing various skills that demonstrate the above-listed guidelines.

Journalism is not so very different from English as many educators think. Journalists use the very same skills learned in English classes for their journalism projects. However, journalism may help to further a student's positive attitude toward language because the constant publication of that student's work may serve as a motivator. As for contests, there are several nationally-recognized contests to which students on a school newspaper or yearbook staff can apply.

Journalism classes can also expand the students' "community of writers" by becoming involved with exchange programs with other schools. Students
then have the opportunity to see what other students outside of their own school are writing, designing and publishing which may help the journalism programs by giving the students ideas on how to improve their own publications and writing styles.

2) Students will select and apply effective strategies for reading, including...

- reading from and understanding different points of view
- making connections to prior reading
- varying reading speed according to purpose for reading
- critically examining reading material
- establishing purposes for reading
- making comparisons and predictions
- drawing conclusions
- using headings, pictures, captions, and other textual clues
- using background knowledge to construct meaning
- monitoring understanding
- elaborating on meaning

Research is the connection between the above-listed guidelines and journalism classes. Journalists need to be able to find story information in a variety of sources. Before students go into interviews, it is important that they have "done their homework." This includes finding related information in the library (see "Journalism Research" section 2) to give the student the ability to ask pertinent, probing questions. This information will also help the student to write an informative, objective story clearly and concisely. Journalists must be able to "sift through" information to find the pertinent points that they can use.
They must also be able to clearly write that information in a language that their audience can understand.

As for using textual clues (or "points of entry"), journalists frequently and consistently use these methods to give their audience more information. In addition to using captions, pictures and headings (headlines and titles), journalism students learn how to create informational graphics, reference boxes, illustrations, etc. to provide readers with a multitude of ways to receive information—each of which present the information from different angles so that the reader has very little chance of getting confused.

3) Students will comprehend developmentally appropriate materials, including...

- magazines and newspapers
- electronic media, such as computer text, video disk, etc.
- student writing
- audio-visual media
- reference materials
- charts and graphs
- materials of personal choice

Student journalists do more than just comprehend these developmentally appropriate materials; they learn to use and even create these materials on a regular basis. Competent use of tools like the computer and the audio-visual media is almost a necessity in the journalism classroom. Journalism students learn to rely on these tools to write, edit and design; and they not only learn how to read items like charts and graphs, they also learn how to create their own to present to their audience.
As for comprehending student writing, students in journalism classes constantly read and critique one another's writing as a method for improvement, and they may also receive feedback from members of their audience (in the form of "letters to the editor," for example) that tell if a message was received correctly or incorrectly.

4) Students will select and use developmentally appropriate strategies for writing, including...

- choosing methods of organization appropriate to audience and purpose
- revising for clarity, coherence, economy, and voice
- preparing final drafts that follow accepted language conventions
- using technology (e.g., word processing) to support the writing process
- rethinking and revising content as appropriate for audience and purpose
- improving writing based on peer and teacher response
- editing and proofreading for usage, mechanics, and spelling
- using dictionaries and handbooks for revising and editing
- using the writing process—prewriting, drafting, peer sharing, revising, and editing
- writing drafts with emphasis on content
- composing collaboratively

In no other section of the Indiana Department of Education English and language arts guidelines can one find the definition of journalism classes so clearly outlined as in section four. These guidelines epitomize what a journalism class strives to do.

Certainly, student journalists research, revise, edit and rewrite to produce writing that is appropriate for their purpose and for their audience. As
mentioned in the previous section, journalists use computer word processing in addition to graphics programs and photo programs to produce publications that are seen by a large number of students, faculty members and community members.

5) Students will write for different purposes and audiences, producing a variety of forms, including...
   - notes and messages
   - synthesis and analysis of information from a variety of sources
   - synthesis of information from at least one source
   - logs of ideas and information
   - lists and charts
   - stories

Written communication for the journalism student is a required skill. Student journalists communicate with all types of audiences including themselves, their fellow staff members and, ultimately, their audience. They organize information via lists, notes, memos and editing critiques to assimilate information for stories and to produce those stories on deadline.

6) Students will use prior knowledge of content area information to make critical judgments, including...
   - distinguishing between objective and subjective presentations of information and events
   - understanding how language is used to influence
   - identifying persuasion and its implications in mass media
   - distinguishing between fictional and nonfictional accounts
- distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant information
- choosing topics for writing
- telling why they like to read and listen to some things rather than others
- categorizing

Journalism students are constantly making judgments, whether they be on how to write a subjective opinion in a column or an editorial or on how to remain objective in a news story. The first step for journalists is to recognize objective and subjective viewpoints. Then the student journalists learn where objectivity and subjectivity are appropriate. Finally, student journalists learn how to use that knowledge to write their own objective and/or subjective articles.

Other judgments for the student journalist include the following: What stories should we print? What does the audience want to know? What does the audience need to know? What stories should go first, second, third, etc.? Is the coverage sufficient to cover all possible angles? All of these decisions are important and they all take place in the journalism classroom. Journalists have the added pressure of knowing that what they print, their audience will probably believe. Therefore, student journalists, in their classes, learn extremely well how to make good judgments not only for themselves, but also for their audience and for the good of the publication.

7) Students will communicate orally with people of all ages by...
   - explaining how history and culture are reflected in works of a given period
   - developing criteria for judging the quality of literary works
   - discussing relationships between form and content
identifying features of common literary genres

As with the other sections in the Indiana Department of Education's curriculum guidelines, this section also relates directly to the skills that student journalists learn. Journalism classes provide students with an understanding of journalism history (i.e. yellow journalism, the "great" reporters, etc.) to give them an understanding of both the "roots" of journalism as well as the importance of the roles of journalists through time. Further, students in a journalism class can see how prevalent journalism is in today's society via movies and plays like "Absence of Malice" and "All the President's Men." Finally, journalism students have the added privilege of being part of national journalism competitions like those sponsored by the National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA). The NSPA's competitions for yearbooks and newspapers judge student work from all over the country based on many of the same criteria discussed in this project, including a publication's communication effectiveness, quality, leadership and entertainment value.
In summary, this section has shown how closely journalism classes relate to the Indiana Department of Education's curriculum guidelines for English and language arts. With the classes so similar, one wonders why many secondary school journalism programs are not given English or language arts credit. Journalism is indeed a viable alternative for students who wish to gain English or language arts credit from a class other than an "approved" English or language arts class.

The next section will provide more specific information on how journalism can be incorporated in the English classroom. It will show how journalism teachers and English teachers can work together to create stronger programs in both areas.
English in the Journalism Classroom

Part 4

Practical Applications

In the previous three sections, this report has stressed the similarities between journalism and English classrooms through basic course outlines and Indiana Department of Education English and language arts curriculum guidelines. This section will further aid English and journalism teachers by presenting practical solutions of how to incorporate English into the journalism classroom. By using sample course requirements, this section will provide not only specific lesson suggestions, but also, inherent in the project, hints and suggestions that can relate universally to most English class requirements.

This section provides ideas that are interchangeable; the specific examples are used merely for illustration of lessons that journalism teachers could try with any literary work or English requirement, depending on the school's curriculum.
Section 1: Journalism suggestions based on English reading requirements

English reading requirement:
Lord of the Flies

Incorporation into the journalism classroom:
Mock Newspaper
1) Break the class up into two groups; each group represents one of the two factions represented in Lord of the Flies. These groups will become "newspaper staffs" and will report on the events in the story from their groups' point of view. Neither side will discuss articles or other information with the other side.
2) The groups will elect editors, chief reporters, etc. Each student is responsible for writing at least two stories.

Possible story types (and related class instruction):
   a) news stories (inverted pyramid)
   b) columns
   c) editorials
   d) political cartoons
   e) features
3) Students will publish their "newspapers" and compare and contrast the results with the other team's product.

Journalism themes to discuss:
   a) objectivity vs. subjectivity
   b) What are the differences/similarities between the two publications?
   c) How can newspapers/media sway opinions?
d) How do personal opinions work their way into media?

Other benefits:

a) students learning to work together on a "staff"
b) working with design
c) hierarchy of stories
d) importance of editing

Other writing assignments

1) Write a news story relating the events of Lord of the Flies (i.e. What would the newspapers in England say about the missing children?).

2) Write a news story (or feature) on what happened to the children after they returned from the island. Did they assimilate back into the culture? Did they learn anything? Are they still friends? Include quotes.

**********

English reading requirement:

"Hamlet"

Incorporation into the journalism classroom:

1) Write a news story about the events in "Hamlet" (i.e. murder, revenge, etc.).

2) Write a feature profile, using appropriate journalistic style, on one of the characters in "Hamlet."

3) Students pair off. One student is a citizen of King Claudius’ kingdom. The other student will interview this student about his or her knowledge of the events in "Hamlet." Write a news story using this information.
Journalism themes:

a) interviewing
b) research
c) inverted pyramid
d) editing

**********

English reading requirement:

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Incorporation into the journalism classroom:

1) "Interview" Huckleberry Finn. Write a feature about his life.
2) Study newspapers from the time period of Huckleberry Finn. How do they differ from the newspapers of today. Discuss writing techniques, style, design, etc.
3) Study the Mississippi River. What news stories could come from events taking place on the Mississippi River? (i.e. flooding, transportation, importation and exportation, low-income families, life in the south, etc.) Students will select a topic that interests them from this study, research information and write a news story, feature or column using the results from their research (use quotes where possible).

Journalism themes:

a) news story
b) feature
c) research
d) interviewing skills
e) journalism history
Section 2: Journalism suggestions based on English writing requirements

English requirement:
Personal experience/personal narrative

Incorporation into the journalism classroom:
1) Column writing
2) Editorial
3) Features
   a) personal experience
   b) humor

English requirement:
Grammar

Incorporation into the journalism classroom:
1) AP style
   Discuss differences and similarities between AP style and English style. Why do journalists use different styles? Discuss local style. Why have local style in addition to AP style?
2) Importance of good grammar
   Why is it important for a publication to be accurate with grammar (i.e. spelling, punctuation, etc.)? Discuss clarity, accuracy, etc.
3) Self-editing exercises, peer-editing, teacher-editing
   Use student work as examples for use in editing exercises. Use AP style.

**********
English requirement:
Alternative writing structures
   a) poetry
   b) songs

Incorporation into the journalism classroom:
1) Alternative story structures
   a) informational graphics
   b) photography
   c) illustrations
   d) design—how to present information graphically/packages
2) Points of entry
   a) captions/cutlines
   b) headlines/titles
   c) subheads
   d) refer boxes
Section 3: Assessment

For assessment purposes, journalism teachers can use a variety of methods.

1) Portfolio assessment

At the end of the year or semester, students could submit a portfolio to the teacher. In this portfolio (for a basic journalism class) would be a student's best examples of articles that he or she has written during the class. Requirements could say that each student must submit one sports story, one news story, one column, etc.; or they could require that students merely produce their nine or ten best pieces of writing from that semester. Also included in the portfolio would be the students' analyses of the processes involved in completing the stories in the portfolio including the students' awareness of the different modes of writing for each purpose and their opinions on how well they succeeded.

An end-of-the-term portfolio successfully accomplishes two things. First, it allows a student to put his or her best foot forward. If the student has written something during the class that he or she was not overly fond of, that student does not have to submit it in his or her portfolio. The portfolio allows students to take pride in their work. Second, a portfolio, if done correctly, can also be an excellent teaching tool in itself. When assembling their portfolios, students can use their new knowledge of design and placement as well as their editing skills when revising and finally selecting the stories they will use. In publications classes (i.e. yearbook and newspaper), the students can still create portfolios; but instead of works produced in class, the students can use published articles that they have written or designed while working for that publication.
In any case, the portfolio is something that students can take away from a journalism class with pride. Certainly, a well-organized collection of student works is a potentially useful momento that will last for many years.

2) Self-evaluation

Students in journalism classes should be given an opportunity to evaluate themselves. A journalism teacher, no matter how good he or she is, cannot possibly keep track of all of his or her students. Many students help other students with their journalism work without the teacher's knowledge. Basically, a student self-evaluation allows each student to explain what he or she has done over the grading period and gives the students a chance to give themselves a grade for their performance.

Obviously, this evaluation should be in conjunction with the teacher's evaluation. If there is a major discrepancy between the two grades, then the teacher should hold a private conference with the student to discuss the student's performance.

3) Objective methods

The above-listed methods are much more subjective grading methods than many students may be used to; and consequently, they should not be used by themselves. Any good journalism teacher will combine objective and subjective methods to grade students. The following is a list of some possible objective methods:

a) Attendance
b) Meeting deadlines
c) Current events news quizzes
d) Periodic grammar and spelling quizzes
English in the Journalism Classroom

Part 5

Conclusion

School administrators and teachers around the United States are being forced to deal with many curriculum changes, and journalism teachers are no exception. With new programs like the Indiana Core 40 requirements, journalism teachers are now facing the reality that their courses are slowly being transformed into nothing more than extracurricular activities. However, journalism classes are extremely important for students. The classes provide an alternative to "regular" English and language arts classes while at the same time teaching the same skills that are required in those classes. This project shows not only how closely English and journalism classes can be, but it also provides some insight on how to help journalism and English teachers work together to accomplish their goals.

Section one provided a brief overview of the bleak situation that today's journalism teachers face. Research shows that journalism classes seem to be overlooked by administrators as viable extensions of English and language arts curricula. However, it also shows that many students enrolled in college journalism programs decided to become journalists from their high school journalism experiences. This presents a dilemma that needs to be addressed. Section two provided an outline of the similarities between journalism and English classes. Both classes teach students the same methods from research to writing to editing to publication. The relationship of the Indiana Department of Education's curriculum guidelines for English and language arts to journalism classes was outlined in section three. Each was broken down into specific requirements to show how similar the
requirements in a journalism class are to those in English and language arts class. Finally, section four provided several hints and suggestions that journalism teachers could use to incorporate English into the journalism classroom. The list of suggestions can be used by journalism teachers who may be struggling to achieve English or language arts credit for their classes. The suggestions can also make journalism teachers' classes more closely related to the English or language arts curriculum while at the same time fostering a sense of community between journalism teachers and English teachers.

In conclusion, this project shows that English and journalism classes are not as different as many might think. A journalism program can be an important asset to any English or language arts curriculum. The differences are easy to overcome and they must be overcome if journalism classes are to survive in today's changing secondary school environment.
English in the Journalism Classroom

Bibliography


Acknowledgments

Thanks to all the secondary school teachers who provided valuable research information for this project, including: Pam Popovich and Dr. Richard Hays (Muncie Burris Laboratory School); Denise Newton (Griffith High School); Tony Willis (Carmel High School); and anyone else who I might have accidentally overlooked.

Special thanks to my adviser, Mark Kornmann, who provided much of his time and energy to help me complete this project. Your assistance has been invaluable.