

Science Journalism (HPSC0122) Course Syllabus

2023-24 session | Scott Keir | scott.keir.18@ucl.ac.uk

A practical course in communicating science considering various genres of output for different audiences and on different platforms. Students learn how to write short news stories, profiles, and reportages for broadsheet newspapers and popular science magazines, targeting a range of audiences from educated adults to school children with an interest in science. They write different formats and produce other kind of contents for social media such as podcasts. They interview scientists on their work and present their interviews in writing as well as through podcasting. Issues in the public understanding of science are discussed from this practical standpoint of communication.

This module is time intensive and requires substantial group work. It rests on the idea that the only way to learn how to write is to write as much as possible. The assessment for the module is a mix of formative and summative assessment and assignments.

Course Information

Basic course information

Course website:	See Moodle
Moodle Web site:	Search "HPSC0122"
Assessment:	Coursework
Timetable:	See Portico
Prerequisites:	None
Required texts:	See reading list on Moodle
Course tutor:	Scott Keir, Cecilie Hilmer
Contact:	Scott Keir scott.keir.18@ucl.ac.uk Cecilie Hilmer cecilie.hilmer.20@ucl.ac.uk
Web:	
Office location:	See office hours
Office hours:	Scott Keir: Email for an appointment Cecilie Hilmer: Thursdays 12-1pm (22 Gordon Square, Room B14); or online, or by appointment (email)

Teaching for this course takes the form of two-hour weekly seminars with a lecture in the first part followed by practical activities in the second. The synoptic schedule (table below) provides you with an *indicative* list of the weekly themes for the lecture material and for the practical activities. We will suggest specific items from the reading list each week on Moodle. These are indicative, for those willing to go deeper into the subject.

Note: The themes and order might be changed at short notice if deemed necessary by tutors. You will be notified via Moodle if this is the case.

Aims & objectives

Aims

The aim of the module is to introduce students to the basics of science journalism. The module will equip student with foundational skills to use different media and format to effectively communicate scientific ideas. Through this practical approach, students will be invited to reflect on what is science communication, why it is done, what are the social and political roles of science communication.

Objectives

By the end of the module, students should:

- know how to structure a piece of communication to achieve their aims;
- be able to write short informative texts, for blogs or more traditional news outlets;
- have a sense of what it takes to find good science news story;
- be aware of different ways of communicating scientific idea;
- be able to communicate scientific ideas through different media, using sound, image, or objects, as well as the written word;
- be familiar with the basic principles of interviewing;
- have planned and conducted a reportage;
- be able to coordinate different sources to write a feature piece;
- be aware of sociological issues pertaining to the communication of scientific knowledge.

Teaching team

Module Tutors	Scott Keir and Cecilie Hilmer
Graduate Teaching Assistant	Davy Tennison

Synoptic Schedule

Week (UCL week)	Date	Lectures	Tutorials
1 (20)	11/01/2024	Introducing science journalism. What is good writing? Essential techniques.	Getting started writing - short format practice
2 (21)	18/01/2024	The media relationship with science – history of science journalism, a story of mutual dependence.	Writing a news piece. Critical engagement with press releases.
3 (22)	25/01/2024	Preparing and conducting an Interview: the how and why of interviewing – situated knowledges	Preparing and asking questions.
4 (23)	01/02/2024	Planning and constructing a radio show. The value of multiplying entry points in a story.	Podcasting.
5 (24)	08/02/2024	Storytelling and researching stories. Legal and ethical considerations	How to construct a magazine.
6 (25)	15/02/2024	Reading week	
7 (26)	22/02/2024	Communicating scientific ideas visually.	Scripting and storyboarding.
8 (27)	29/02/2024	Objectivity – balance – subjectivity – Objectivity as intersubjectivity.	Long form writing.
9 (28)	07/03/2024	Reporting with numbers, statistics, and data	
10 (29)	14/03/2024	Innovation and innovative science journalism	
11 (30)	21/03/2024	Future of journalism - careers, entrepreneurship	

Assessments

Summary

Assessment for this module is meant to enable you to produce two items for your portfolio, to demonstrate your journalistic abilities, with these three deadlines:

	Description	Deadline	Word limit	Weight
CW	Mini-Magazine – project description	26 January 2024, 5.00pm	See below	0
CW	3' Newscast	28 February 2024, 5:00pm	N/A	40.0
CW	Mini-Magazine	27 March 2024, 5:00pm	2,500	60.0

Please note:

- All deadlines for submission are at 5:00pm UK local time
- The two pieces of coursework will constitute your 3,000-word portfolio.
- You are advised to **start working early** on the mini-magazine as it will take time. Your research work for the mini-magazine should feed naturally into the production of the podcast. See guidance below.

Coursework 1: 3' Newscast

Submission date: 28 February 2024, 5:00pm

For this assignment, working on your own, you will produce a 3 (three)-minute radio news segment about a recent piece of research conducted at UCL. To produce this newscast, you will need to identify a recent press release from the UCL press office and work from there. Your newscast must feature a short interview segment with a scientist.

Please note:

Together with the podcast (a sound file) you are required to upload a short note (pdf, Word document) on Moodle, containing:

1. the topic of the podcast and a brief summary (80 words) of the content;
2. the name of the UCL researcher interviewed for the podcast as well as their lab, and/or department;
3. the credits for the podcast, including any sound (sound effect, background music...) used.
4. If and how AI technologies were used (see below for more detail)

Assessment Criteria for the Newscast:

Your work will be assessed against the following criteria:

1. Science communication value:
Is the podcast dealing with a science communication topic, i.e. is it an assignment relevant to a science communication course? (E.g.: Is it about research, or scientific practice, or the impact of science on citizens and society, or about a science education project....)
2. Effective use of the medium (Sound):
Is the medium used effectively, e.g. to create a sense of place, to elicit images in listeners' mind, to create an atmosphere. Is the sound quality consistently good throughout? Is editing clean (e.g. no blanks, no word cut short, etc.)
3. Structure:
Is there an introduction, clearly identified segments and a conclusion. Is the essential message coming through clearly at the beginning? Is it clear what the newscast is about?
4. News Value:
Is there news value in this newscast? Is it topical? Will people want to know more about what the newscast is about? How relatable is it? Etc.
5. Information value:
Are scientific ideas presented in a creative, yet clear and accessible way? Do we learn something new listening to the newscast?
6. Listening value:
Is the segment pleasant to listen to, surprising, thought provoking, intriguing?
7. Length:
Is the Newscast three minutes (180 seconds) long?
8. Intellectual property:
Have issues of copyright been properly considered and all the sounds appropriately credited? (Do not omit any credits – e.g. for public domain sounds, do state that these are public domain).

Coursework 2: Mini-Magazine

Submission date for mini-magazine project description (formative): 26 January 2024, 5.00pm

Submission date for final product (summative): 27 March 2024, 5:00pm

For this assignment you will work in a group. Together, you will produce a mini-magazine. Your mini-magazine should contain different types of contents, briefs, long reads, profiles, medium format, photo-reportage, even games if you want to. Each group member will be expected to produce different pieces of writing for the magazine, and to sign them.

This varied content should enable you to cover a topic, related to research conducted at UCL. Don't forget that it all needs to be newsworthy, topical, and attractive.

The word limit for your mini-magazine will be determined by the number of people in the group. As a guide, each member will have to contribute up to **2,500 words worth of material and a specific set of formats**:

- **2 pieces @ 50 words**
- **4 pieces @ 100 words**
- **2 pieces @ 500 words (one of which interview-based)**
- **1 feature @1,000 words**

The word count for each piece includes headlines and captions. Some in the group will do copy-editing for the others, which can be traded for less words to produce towards the magazine.

Please note: Together with the mini-magazine you are required to upload a document on Moodle, in which each member of the group answers following questions (200 words per group member):

1. What was your contribution towards the group's Mini-Magazine?
2. What did you learn in the process of the group work (about yourself)?
3. Did you use tools driven by artificial intelligence (such as LLMs), and if yes where and how did you use them?

Working in a group

Groups will be decided by course tutors randomly but including criteria that results in an evenly distributed mix of diverse experience and background, to ensure the best learning outcome.

Within your group you will need to attribute roles. As a minimum, you will need

- an editor, who will be in charge of coordinating the project;
- and a graphic designer to lead on the visual aspect of the project.
- copy editor, who checks all the texts for typos, spelling, grammar;

All these roles can be assumed collectively but it helps to have one person in charge of each. This does not mean that they must take all the decisions and do all the work on their own, they rather keep track of the process, and make sure the necessary work gets done (e.g. it will be helpful for you to share the task of copy editing as much as possible so you can all experience its importance).

Note that misalignments and misunderstandings can and do happen in group-work, that is totally normal. Your experiences from this group work will allow you to respond in a better and more productive way when doing this work professionally in the future. The course tutors will do their best to support your learning. If for some reason, a student finds themselves unable to work with a group to produce a magazine, they shall consult the course tutors. If no solution can be found the tutors can exceptionally assign an alternative assessment with the same deadline.

First Step: Producing a project description

Your first task as a group will be to create a **project description for your mini-magazine**. You will need to come up with a concept, a topic, a list of rubrics (or at least a sense of the architecture of the magazine, how will you present the content, which formats will you use, etc.), and a tentative table of content.

The project description will contain a brief (200-300 words) description of the overarching topic, its relevance and timeliness. You will need to emphasise its newsworthiness, what makes it worth writing about it now? You will need to indicate what is your target readership (e.g. children, teenagers, young adults, affluent middle class educated, or excluded groups, elderly people, pet lovers, vegans, LGBTQI+...).

You will then need to sketch out your approach to the topic: What kind of contents will you produce? Consider that some contents are only justified by their news value (briefs), but others' purpose is to provide context and background information, or broaden the perspective (longer formats, features).

You will then provide an outline of the structure of your magazine, with planned rubrics and key pieces. Ideally each rubric should vary in the type of content and provide a specific entry point in the magazine.

Overall, this project description should fit on 2 A4 pages, 3 at most.

It will not be graded, but you will receive formative feedback on it, and you as a group will be invited to come and discuss it with a member of the teaching team.

*Submit for formative feedback by **26 January 2024***

Second Step: Producing the magazine.

Once you are set on your project, you will need to actually produce the magazine.

You will need to agree on deadlines and set up a timeline within the group (when texts are to be delivered in order to allow for copy-editing and adjustments, for a first draft of the complete magazine to be assembled, etc.). Regular editorial meetings (once a week is a good regularity) will be necessary for you to keep track of how everyone is progressing and decide on the different practical aspects of the production.

*Submission date for this assignment is **27 March 2024***

Assessment Criteria for the mini-magazine

Your mini-magazine will be assessed against the following criteria:

1. Structure:
Does the magazine provide a clear structure/architecture that guides the reader through its content in a comprehensive and inviting manner? Do the different parts interact well (e.g. does the cover-page give an inviting sneak peak of the content, does the table of content offer a good overview of the rubrics/topics)? Do the article titles fit with the overarching theme and style of the magazine?
2. News value:
Does the content of the magazine contain newsworthy contributions? For example: Does it affect people's lives (impact and meaningfulness), is the insight or information

novel (timeliness), is it about someone important or a prominent actor, is it unexpected, reporting on a conflict, or bring in a new and/or interesting take/perspective?

3. Information value:

Is the information gathered from trustworthy sources and verified? Does the reporting show a healthy scepticism towards information used to back up the claims made? Have power and purpose of the sources consulted, and possible inherent bias of the information been considered (e.g. conflicts of interest)? Are relevant sources cited/mentioned transparently and adequately?

4. Journalistic content:

Are the stories well-written? Does the content provide evidence of legwork? Does the work show an awareness of rights and responsibilities concerning the value of information (incl. copyright and fair use)? Is the reporting accurate and fair in conveying a diversity of perspectives to their audiences (e.g. a variety of voices in the pieces to cover the different sides of a story)?

5. Variety of sources:

Is the information used to make arguments from a variety of sources and in a variety of forms?

6. Effective use of source material:

Is the source material presented and used to make claims in a clear and engaging manner?

7. Copy editing:

Have the texts been checked to ensure no language or typing errors remain, and layout and typographical standards are met? (e.g. facts, dates, and name checking; grammar, spelling and punctuation are correct; titles and subtitles, captions correct and aligned with overarching style).

8. Something extra

Something that lifts it up beyond the everyday (for example, good use of images, gripping stories, etc.)

Use of AI in your assessments

In this assessment we are interested in original journalistic contribution and training the necessary skills for this. Any use of AI tools that generate or manipulate text – whether ChatGPT, Bing, Copilot, Google Bard, Grammarly or any other brand – is entirely optional but discouraged. As STS scholars we critically reflect on these technologies as we do with any other. If you choose to use any AI technologies in class or in your assessments, particularly generative AI tools, we require that these be used thoughtfully, ethically, and transparently.

Students are permitted to use AI tools for:

- Drafting ideas and planning or structuring written materials
- Reviewing and critically analysing written materials to assess their validity
- Helping to improve your grammar and writing structure – especially helpful if English is a second language
- Experimenting with different writing styles

- Getting explanations

Students are not permitted to use AI tools for:

- Writing parts of the submission (e.g., more than a few sentences).

Any use of AI must be made transparent (see additional notes to be handed in with the coursework). Students must correctly document any use of AI tools so that it can be appropriately acknowledged. Please be aware that you are responsible for ensuring that the assessment that you submit correctly references the use of other people's ideas and work. For further information on using AI in your assessments, please visit UCL guides for assessment success: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/exams-and-assessments/assessment-success-guide/engaging-ai-your-education-and-assessment>.

If you submit AI-generated text that has used the work of human authors and it is not appropriately referenced, this may count as academic misconduct. Please see the library's guidance, here: <https://library-guides.ucl.ac.uk/referencing-plagiarism/acknowledging-AI>

Reading list

Students are encouraged to consume and critically reflect on contemporary science journalism throughout the course, and to keep up-to-date with current discussions on science journalism. In addition, we will suggest specific items from the reading list available on Moodle.