1. **It’s just simple math.** When I work with balance sheets and financial statements in my classes, I only do addition, subtraction and percentages. Those are math equations that your students learned by the seventh grade.

2. **This is what they need to know in the real world,** whether they go into journalism, public relations, advertising or some other field. All of our students will be working for a company, so they need to know how the company operates and how it works.

3. **Gives them a leg up on other students.** Journalism and mass comm graduates who know something about business are more likely to be hired than those who don’t. More specifically, business journalists get paid more than journalists accepting a general assignment position.

4. **Everything is business.** The entire world revolves around money. Every beat in journalism has a money focus, whether it’s education, crime, courts, government, etc. This is what your students need to know to thrive.

5. **Make it fun.** Use real-world examples. When I teach inflation, I talk about the cost of beer and chicken wings. When the students write about unemployment, I make them go to the local unemployment office and interview people filling out forms.

6. **Business is about people.** Yes, the stories must include numbers, but business and economics is all about how they affect consumers and employees. Encourage your students to interview these people, not economists and CEOs. They are what make these stories work.

7. **Use the Internet.** There are tons of business-related databased online that can be used as scavenger hunts. For example, students can use OSHA.gov to find injured worker reports for your university, or SEC.gov to find out how much TheStreet.com pays Jim Cramer every year.

8. **Make them write about local businesses.** But don’t make it a feature. Have them dig into the company using the local courthouse, Secretary of State records, Uniform Commercial Code filings, etc. What is the news with this business.

9. **Use your university.** Universities are huge businesses, and there are dozens of stories, from faculty raises to the performance of the endowment to sponsorship contracts signed with the athletic department.

10. **Make them read the Wall Street Journal.** It is still the best business coverage in the country. Students can learn a lot just by reading it every day. Discuss the WSJ’s coverage at the beginning of class for about 10 minutes.

--Chris Roush is the senior associate dean for undergraduate studies and the Walter E. Hussman Sr. Distinguished Scholar for business journalism at UNC-Chapel Hill. In 2010, he was named Journalism Teacher of the Year by the Scripps Howard Foundation and the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. The judges noted that Roush "has become the expert in business journalism — not just at Chapel Hill, but throughout the country and even in other parts of the world." He has also been named the North Carolina Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Council for Advancement and Support of Education. He is the author of two books about business journalism — "Show Me the Money: Writing Business and Economics Stories for Mass Communication" (second edition, 2010) and "Profits and Losses: Business Journalism and its Role in Society" (second edition, 2011). He is the co-author of "The SABEW Stylebook: 2,000 Business Terms Defined and Rated" (2012).
Business-related websites for reporters


2. [www.hoovers.com](http://www.hoovers.com) Nice background information on all public and many private companies. Includes competitors.

3. [www.ipofinancial.com](http://www.ipofinancial.com) Good information about private companies wanting to convert to public status, including a calendar of when they plan to sell stock to the public.

4. [www.highbeam.com](http://www.highbeam.com) There you'll find Fair Disclosure Wire, a service that distributes conference call transcripts for most major corporations about two weeks after the call is held. In case your local library doesn't carry HighBeam/eLibrary, individual subscriptions are available for $19.95 a month or $99.95 a year. A seven-day free trial is available. Conference call transcripts can also be found at [http://seekingalpha.com/article/3683](http://seekingalpha.com/article/3683)

5. [http://biz.yahoo.com/i/](http://biz.yahoo.com/i/) Yahoo! company and fund index. Quick and easy reference tool that can take you to information about public companies.

6. [www.morningstar.com](http://www.morningstar.com) Information about mutual funds and what stocks they hold. Good way to find investors for companies you are writing on.

7. [www.nasdaq.com](http://www.nasdaq.com) Another good way to find investors of public companies you are writing about and to track their buying and selling of those stocks.

8. [www.switchboard.com](http://www.switchboard.com) Find home addresses and phone numbers for company executives and other sources. Also available at [www.whitepages.com](http://www.whitepages.com).

9. [www.profnet.com](http://www.profnet.com) Find an expert to talk to about thousands and thousands of subjects.

10. [www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov). Not just for the filings. The litigation and regulatory actions sections can also hold great information.

11. [www.guidestar.com](http://www.guidestar.com) Information about non-profit organizations.

12. [www.thomasregister.com](http://www.thomasregister.com) Easy to use searchable database of thousands of companies and the products they manufacture.


Basic sites:

1. [www.virtualgumshoe.com](http://www.virtualgumshoe.com)
2. [www.powerreporting.com](http://www.powerreporting.com)
3. [www.companyssleuth.com](http://www.companyssleuth.com)
4. [http://journalism.berkeley.edu/resources/car/](http://journalism.berkeley.edu/resources/car/)
5. [http://www.4ncrecords.com/](http://www.4ncrecords.com/)
Sample Syllabus

JOMC 452 - Business Reporting

Objectives: To teach students the basic methods and tactics of how business writers do their job.

Course requirements: Students are expected to attend class and actively participate in the discussions. Classes will include lectures on specific topics, as well as writing. In addition, students should be regularly reading The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times business section, The News & Observer business section, Fortune, Forbes and BusinessWeek.

Grading:

A= Story could be published in a major metropolitan newspaper's business section, or a business magazine.
B=Minor editing needed, but is publishable. Conclusions may be weak;
C=Needs extensive editing and rethinking. Structure or conclusions may be flawed. May contain spelling error;
D=Story needs to be rewritten and re-reported all the way through. May contain more than one spelling error;
F=Story has a fact error, or misstates facts from documents. Seriously flawed in writing and conclusions.

The final grade will be determined as follows:

50% = Writing assignments inside and outside of class.
15% = Midterm;
20% = Final project;
10% = Mock news conference;
5% = Book report.

The writing assignments will be strictly graded. Because business writing involves numbers and names of corporations and people, each fact error in a story will result in an automatic F, and each misspelled word will lower a grade by one letter. AP style errors will count a half-letter grade. There is a business news section in the AP stylebook. I would recommend that each of you review it carefully.

In addition, students will have the opportunity to earn points that can be added to the grades of their writing assignments through 10-point, unannounced quizzes that will be given on current business news topics.

Mock News Conference:

Students will also be required to participate in a mock news conference where the “Business Reporting” class will be the “business journalists” interviewing “Crisis Communication” students posing as “executives” of a major corporation in the midst of a crisis. We will discuss this assignment the closer we get to the date. Students in the class will split into groups and research a specific company in preparation for the mock news conferences. A group of professional business reporters and public relations professionals will then critique the performance.


For each of the readings listed below on the course calendar, make sure you have read these chapters by the time you come to class on that day.

Students in the class are also required to read Talking Biz News, a blog about business journalism, and post their opinions about items on the blog. The blog can be found at www.talkingbiznews.com. There will be unannounced quizzes about events in business journalism that will come from this blog.

Course calendar:

**Week 1:** Introduction to business reporting. Chapter 1 in Show me the Money.

**Week 2:** Public vs. private: How businesses operate and how they’re covered. Chapters 2 and 11 in Show me the Money.

**Week 3:** Different business beats and Internet sources for the business journalist. Chapters 4 and 15 in Show me the Money.

The SEC: Not a football conference. 10Qs and 10ks: Good business news is not hard to find. WRITING ASSIGNMENT. Read Taparia by this class. Yes, the entire book.

**Week 4:** 8ks and 13ds: The hidden SEC filings. Chapter 6 in Show me the Money. WRITING ASSIGNMENT.

IPOs: Going from private to public and what you can find in Form S-1 filings and their amendments. Chapter 8 in Show me the Money. WRITING ASSIGNMENT.

**Week 5:** The FCC, the FTC and state regulatory agencies of business. Chapter 14 in Show me the Money.

Writing the company strategy/profile story.

**Week 6:** The CEO and his role within a company. Interviewing the CEO. Chapter 10 in Show me the Money.

14As, or proxy reports. Chapter 10 in Show me the Money. WRITING ASSIGNMENT.

**Week 7:** Sapna Maheshwari, business reporter, BuzzFeed, and Stephanie Kane, public relations. Understanding the role between business journalist and PR spokesperson.

Mergers and acquisitions: Where there’s a will, there’s a deal. Chapter 7 in Show me the Money. WRITING ASSIGNMENT.
Week 8: Bonds. Not James. Munis, government, etc. Chapter 8 in Show me the Money.

Bankruptcy Court and how it’s covered. Let’s not forget about local courts for business coverage either. Chapters 13 in Show me the Money.

Week 9: Stock analysts: Good ones are a business reporter’s best friend and what to look for in their reports. Chapter 8 in Show me the Money.

Midterm Exam

Week 10: Emily Steel, business reporter, New York Times

The stock market: How it works. Chapter 8 in Show me the Money. WRITING ASSIGNMENT.

Week 11: Mutual funds/Hedge funds

Jonathan King, CEO, UNC Management Co. WRITING ASSIGNMENT.

Week 12: Insider Trading. Form 4, Schedule 13D and Schedule 13G.

Bret Ellis, Ply Gem Holdings Inc. WRITING ASSIGNMENT.

Week 13: Mock news conference competition.

The confrontational interview/story. WRITING ASSIGNMENT.

Week 14: The business of real estate. Chapter 14 in Show me the Money.

Reporting on the business crisis. BOOK REPORT DUE. A discussion of “24 Days.”

Week 15: Business journalism ethics: Stock ownership, gifts, etc. Chapter 2 in Show me the Money.

Wrap up and review of final project stories.

Final Project: An in-depth business story to be determined.

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies. This course covers the following values and competencies:

- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.