English 308 || Spring 2020
Introduction to Radio Storytelling

| CONTACT |
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Class Location: Weiss 146
Time/Day: M 2:00-5:00
Office Location: 236 Herring

Office Hours: I’m always available. I live at Jones. Just email me to make an appointment.

| COURSE DESCRIPTION |
This project-based course will lead us through an introduction to the ever-expanding medium of podcasting, specifically radio storytelling. We will unpack and discuss the techniques of practiced radio producers and use those elements in our own attempts at radio reportage: arts & culture shorts, vox pops, sonic ID’s, and short and long-form interviews. We will become proficient in capturing sound, interviewing strangers, writing scripts, pitching ideas for stories, and using GarageBand software to edit and shape our content.

Participating students will be asked to venture out into the broader Houston community, compiling profiles, arts & culture pieces, and interviews. Your sojourns around town will generate the material for some of our most important work.

There is no prerequisite for this course, and no prior knowledge of recording, editing, or sound production is necessary. However, it is recommended that students possess the initiative and independence to pursue their own explorations throughout the city of Houston. A car is not required. A sense of adventure, and a nose for encountering new people and new situations, will be.

| REQUIRED TEXTS & TECHNOLOGY |
- Jessica Abel’s “Out On The Wire: The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio.” This is a fun, graphic ‘how-to’ book for best-practices in radio. You can buy it on Amazon in hardcopy for $15 or $10 for Kindle. If you buy it digitally, you’ll have to bring a device to class.

- A basic-decent pair of enclosed headphones (earbuds are not ideal for recording). We’ll check out recorders from the DMC. You can also check out enclosed headphones, but the quantities are limited.
• Convenient access to Mac's GarageBand software. Most Macs come with GarageBand installed, and you'll find that this is the case with most of the Mac desktops on campus and in your colleges.

• If you don't have easy access to a Mac and/or you'd like to use another kind of sound-editing software (i.e. Reaper, Audacity, Logic, ProTools), that's fine. Just know that, when it comes to things-technical, you will support yourself. It's totally doable.

LL LEARNING OUTCOMES

In this course you will...

- Develop close reading/listening, analytical reading/listening, and critical thinking skills.
- Develop genre-specific knowledge.
- Think, investigate, write creatively, and engage in the workshop and editing process.
- Gain a more nuanced understanding of podcasts and the craft of radio reportage.
- Be exposed to a breadth of radio producers, opinions on craft, and styles of storytelling.
- Explore the inner workings of radio stories and implement those techniques in your own work.
- Become a better communicator - a better medium between your listeners and the world.
- Become more attuned to your world, and the people and complexities in it.

COURSE OVERVIEW & Routines

A Typical Class: 3 hours. 10-minute break in the middle. Discussions of readings and podcasts we listened to for homework, in-class exercises, brainstorming sessions, Q&A's. We don't get out early. If you're the hangry type, please bring a snack.

Digital Media Commons: some of our classes will take place in the DMC. There we'll learn how to operate recording equipment and work with GarageBand. The DMC is located in the basement of Fondren.

Class Google Drive: our class drive will host all of the course's documents and assignments, as well as sound resources, and listening and reading links. You will also have a personal folder in the drive, shared only with you. This is where you can upload your homework. Google drive isn't fancy, but it's much more flexible than Canvas, and a better way to share audio. There is no Canvas page for the class.

Weekly Reading HW (1 hour): each week we’ll read a section from Jessica Abel's book, “Out On The Wire.” There will also be other supplementary articles assigned. Plan for about 1 hour of reading per week.

Weekly Listening HW (1-2 hours): each week, you’ll be asked to listen to some selected podcasts. These specific episodes will serve as the shared objects that we will unpack and examine as a class. You will be assigned about 1-2 hours of podcasts per week, sometimes more.

Weekly Recording HW (2-4 hours): early in the course, you will be responsible for producing small, weekly recording projects. These small assignments will take the final form of anywhere
from 1-2-4 minutes of edited sound. Though small in scope, these pieces will sometimes take more time than you expect – especially if you attempt a really unique or difficult approach to them. They will require you to speak to strangers and to venture off campus to get tape. Those trips will take time. It will also take time for you to edit that tape in GarageBand. Sometimes we will take actual class time to do these edits. Other times, especially later in the course, we will not have that luxury. In general, these weekly recording projects will take anywhere from 2-4 hours to complete. Towards the middle and end of the course, we’ll be embarking on our longer-form project. There you’ll have 4-6 weeks to gather, edit, and refine your tape.

**Reading/Listening Quizzes:** the questions on these quizzes are very basic and will cover the reading and listening homework that was assigned for that particular class. Make sure you’re on the same sonic “page.”

**Workshop:** we will occasionally meet in the workshop setting to listen to and talk about our ongoing work. This is not a forum where we’ll critique one another’s work so much as a space to share tips and tricks, and where we can help each other brainstorm potential futures and possibilities for our projects.

**Feedback:** In general, feedback on your work will come in the group setting; we will listen to your ideas for a project, or listen to the sound you’ve created, and offer our constructive opinions on it. I will not be “grading” your projects in the way one might grade a test or a paper. Instead, I’ll be grading you based on your effort and on completion: are you doing the weekly work, are you satisfying the basic requirements of each project, and are you working up to your own level? You should know that feedback/comments/grades rarely make us better as creators. “Creating” - physically doing and practicing the thing over and over and over - makes us better. Improvement in this course will come about through trying new things and keeping an eye out for our old mistakes. We’ll be impressed when you take creative, technical, and/or artistic risks - even if you fail.

### EXPECTATIONS

**Talking:** So important. Please do. Our class will only be as strong as the voices in it. It's your space. Step into it. We need to hear from you at least once a class.

**Attendance:** You are allowed one (1) class absence for all emergencies. 2 absences and the best you can get is a B+ for the course. 3 = C+. 4 = D+. 5 = F. If you miss a class, please contact me to find out what you missed. Don’t rely on the syllabus. It can change.

**Keeping in Touch:** when you miss a class, I’ll be waiting to hear from you via email. If you come to the following class without having done the assignments your peers have done, that work will be counted as late (barring emergencies, of course). Remember, the 21st century is amazing! You can always get in touch. You should get in touch. It’s kind of your job as a professional student, and you don’t want to get behind.

**Email:** you can email me at either ianschimmel@rice.edu or ianschimmel@gmail.com. The assumption is that you check your own email at least every 24-36 hours or so. Please do. Things come up. Assignments change. Mistakes are made. Hurricanes descend. Life happens.
Late Work: weekly homework assignments will be reduced by one letter grade for every class they are late. If you are absent, homework assignments are due within a timeline that is commensurate with the deadline of the original assignment. The final project will be reduced by one letter-grade for every day that it is late.

Plagiarism: The work you turn in to this course must be original AND it must be work that is particular to this semester (that is, you created the piece during our class). It is a form of self-plagiarism to submit work that you have created for other courses or mediums. This can be a common but serious offense, so please be in touch with questions. Please consult Rice’s student handbook and our honor code for more information. And if you ever have any doubts or uncertainties about what constitutes plagiarism, please contact me personally. I’m here to help.

Professionalism: Our class will reproduce in many ways a “real-world” work environment, and you will be expected to participate professionally—be on time, meet deadlines, collaborate, and pull your load. Professionalism includes all of these as well as regular attendance, willing participation in all facets of classroom life. In some cases, professionalism could mean the difference between one grade and the next—or, in borderline cases, between passing and failing.

Technology Restrictions: Cell phones should be turned off and stowed. Texting is not only distracting, but rude to your peers and their work. Unless we’re physically working with them, laptops should also be tucked away, as this is a largely discussion and paper-based course. We like to see your face. If you need the accommodation of a laptop for notes or other in-class work, please let me know.

Hate Speech: While this class will focus on challenging one another’s views, hate speech of any kind, directly or indirectly stated, will not be tolerated and can result in permanent dismissal from the class. Be a respectful, constructive, and decent human being. You know. If you think something you’re writing might walk a fine line in this regard, reach out to me. It's always good to talk these things out first.

Learning Accommodations: Students who have, or think they may have, a learning disability are encouraged to seek more information through Rice University’s Disability Support Services. If you have a learning disability, or require any special accommodations, please find some comfortable means to inform me so that I can make arrangements as soon as possible. I want to help you in any way I can.

GRADING, FINAL PRODUCTS, & PUBLIC WORK

Final Project: The final product for this course will be a longer-form piece of radio reportage (7-12 minutes in length). This project can take a variety of forms that we’ll talk about in much greater detail later in the semester.

Publicizing/Displaying Work: This course will require that you share and even “display” your radio stories. Specifically, all stories will be hosted on our class website, whatdidyoueatforbreakfast.com. Of course, exceptions to this can and should be made in
certain, personal circumstances. But be aware that the things you’re producing in this class are intended for a larger audience.

Final Grade Distribution:

10% = Professionalism: effort, attendance, overall quality of your work and presence
10% = Participation: effort, speaking in class, reading quizzes, group participation
10% = Small Audio Projects: “Not So Great Interview” and “Man on the Street”
15% = Live-Read Components: pitch, proposal, interview(s), and your “live-read”
20% = Zombie Drafts: on-time, emerging quality of story
10% = First Final Draft: on-time, production quality of voice, music & story
25% = The Final Edit: on-time, final production quality of voice, music, sound, & story

A Note on Grading Methodology: It’s difficult to imagine any suitable metric for grading creative work – and our radio stories will be very much that. Some of art’s power is subjective and dependent upon a listener and shared taste. Therefore, this course places an emphasis on your consistent, thoughtful effort – in person and on tape. Much of what you are graded on in this course is effort and professional participation: did you do your reading, listening, and recording homework each week, and did you do it thoughtfully and submit it on time? Are you coming to class, prepared and on time? Are you scoring well on reading quizzes? Are you trying to implement the ideas and techniques that we’re discussing in your own work? Are you a vocal member of the class and are you honestly attempting to challenge yourself with the material and assignments? It doesn’t matter if you’re falling down a lot; are you trying new things? Are you pursuing untold stories and coming up with new ideas?

THE DISCLAIMER

The syllabus that follows is an approximation. Don’t follow it blindly. It probably will change in best interests of the class. If you miss a class, please contact me to find out what you missed.
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PART 1 || BASICS OF RECORDING & GARAGEBAND

1.13 | Introduction & Recording Basics
Welcome & Course Overview
Recording Basics & Sound Scavenger Hunt @ DMC

WEEK 1 HOMEWORK //

Read: 1-43 from “Out on the Wire” (in class drive as a PDF). Buy the book for next week.
Listen: This American Life’s “20 Acts In 60 Minutes,” Transom’s “3 Student Stories.”
Record: “The Not So Great Interview” project. Upload your interview to your personalized
drive folder before the start of our next class.
Write: Tell me about a few (2-3) potential story ideas. Upload your ideas to your drive folder.

1.20 | MLK DAY: NO CLASS

1.27 | Man on the Street (meet @ Weiss)
Interviews Review
Discussion of Transom Example Stories
Man on the Street examples, tips & tricks
MOTS question workshop

WEEK 2 HOMEWORK //

Read/Listen: listen to the MOTS examples and Robert Smith’s interview. Listen to the 5
student example stories from our class website.
Write: Come up with two (2) more story ideas and upload them to the drive.
Record: do your MOTS project and upload that tape to your drive by next class.

2.3 | GarageBand & Voiceover Tutorial w/MOTS (meet @ DMC)
Recording studio-quality voiceover
Arranging & editing w/ GarageBand, Adding Music

WEEK 3 HOMEWORK //

Read: 79-106 on “Character” from Out on the Wire
Listen: Character-Driven stories
Record: finalize and upload your MOTS by next Wednesday at 11:59pm.
PART 2 || FINDING & IMAGINING YOUR STORY

2.10 | Character-Driven Stories & “The Pitch”
Listen to and comment on MOTS
What are character-driven stories? What makes a story worth telling?
Preparing for your pitch meeting

WEEK 4 HOMEWORK //

Listen: Mystery, Inquiry, & Quest Stories
Read: 47-76 on “Ideas” from Out on the Wire, and Blumberg’s “Manifesto Part 1”
Write: Prepare your two (2) viable story pitches and email them to me at least 24-hours before you pitch meeting. Be ready to present and discuss your ideas at next week’s pitch meeting.

2.17 | Story as Inquiry, Mystery, or Quest
X + Y and it’s interesting because...
Mysteries, Inquiries, & Quests
Reminder: your pitch meeting is this week!

WEEK 5 HOMEWORK //

Listen: Place-Based & Event-Based stories
Read: Two short articles on “Interviewing”
Write: Submit your 2 pitches and come to your pitch meeting this week.
Record: Set up a primary interview for either this coming week or next.

2.24 | Place/Event-Based Stories & “The Interview”
Interview Preparation
Interview strategies: creating visuals, follow-ups, anecdotes and “universals”

WEEK 6 HOMEWORK //

Write: your 35 to 50-question interview and upload it to your drive.
Read: 109-143 “Story Structure” from Out on the Wire
Listen: History & Explainer Stories
Record: record your primary interview ASAP. There are 4 weeks until your Live Read.

PART 3 || SHAPING YOUR STORY
3.2 | History/Explainer Stories & “Story Structure”
   Narrative arcs, e-shaped & circular stories, act-structure

WEEK 7 HOMEWORK //

Listen: two example live-reads, S-Town, Chasing After Antelope, and other stories TBD.
Record: record your primary interview. There are less than 3 weeks until your live read and you will need at least a week to prep for the Live Read itself. You should also be making firm plans to collect secondary tape, visuals, and interviews.

3.9 | Writing for Radio & “Live Read” Prep
   Writing for Radio: signposting, visuals, & beginnings
   Live Read Prep

WEEK 8 HOMEWORK //

Record: Continue to collect your final pieces of tape & final interviews.
Write: Properly format your live read script and finalize and prepare for your live read.

3.16 | SPRING BREAK: NO CLASS

3.23 | Live Read Part 1
   We’ll be splitting into smaller workshop groups to make these more manageable

WEEK 9 HOMEWORK //

Record: Continue to collect your final pieces of tape & final interviews.
Look Ahead: Review the “Zombie Draft” assignment in next week’s HW folder and start working. It takes time. Regardless of when you presented your Live Read, your first 5 “zombie” minutes are due in 2 weeks.

3.30 | Live Read Part 2

WEEK 10 HOMEWORK //

Record: arrange the first 5 minutes of your “Zombie Draft.” Your first 5 “zombie” minutes are due by the start of our next class on 4/6.
Write: Make sure that you are properly formatting and updating your script as your Zombie Draft takes shape.
Read/Listen: 3 Transom articles on Voicing & Script Writing
PART 4 || DRAMATIZING & EDITING YOUR STORY

4.6 | Voicing Basics & Script Writing (@ DMC)

WEEK 11 HOMEWORK //

Record: arrange minutes 6-12 of your “Zombie Draft.” These minutes are due by the start of our next class on 4/13.
Write: Make sure that you are properly formatting and updating your script as your Zombie Draft takes shape.
Listen: Assigned stories on Music & Sound.
Read: 147-165 on “Sound” from Out on the Wire.

4.13 | “Pro Tips” Music & Sound Design Session (@ DMC)
     w/ Visiting Producer Davis Land from KHOU 88.7

WEEK 12 HOMEWORK //

Read: 169-201 “Your Baby’s Ugly” from Out on the Wire.
Record: start work on your “First-Final Draft” that is due on 4/28 at 11:59pm.

4.20 | “Pro Tips” Voicing & Editing Session (@ DMC)
     w/ Visiting Producer Davis Land from KHOU 88.7

WEEK 13 HOMEWORK //

Record: complete and upload your “First Final Draft” by 4/28 at 11:59pm.

4.28-5.1 | Graduating Students - 1:1 Conferences on Final Edits

5.2-5.10 | Non-Graduating Students - 1:1 Conferences on Final Edits

5.7 | DEGREE CANDIDATES: FINAL RADIO STORIES & ALL FINAL WORK DUE BY 5PM

5.19 | EVERYONE ELSE: FINAL RADIO STORIES & ALL FINAL WORK DUE BY 5PM