

## Understanding News

### 2024-2025, Semester A

**Time:** Sunday, 12:15-15:45

**Instructor:** Dr. Oren Livio

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**Office Hours:** By appointment, Rabin Building, Room 9319 or online via Zoom

**Course Type:** Elective

**Course Level:** BA

**Prerequisites:** None

### Course Overview

We live in an age in which more and more people avoid mainstream news. The rise of social media and alternative sources of information, increasing levels of distrust in the media, and the commonplace sentiment that the news we are exposed to is disproportionately shaped by financial and political interests – have all led to a decline in the status of news media. What was long considered a cornerstone of democracy, and a vital means of obtaining trustworthy information about the world, now faces an openly acknowledged existential crisis.

Precisely because of this crisis, being able to understand the ways in which news content is shaped, produced, and consumed has become more important than ever. In this class we will learn to critically examine the news we receive and to analyze the political, social, economic, and cultural processes through which news texts are manufactured. We will consider how the meanings of news items are construed through editorial, linguistic, and rhetorical choices, and examine the ideological worldviews reflected and constructed through these choices. We will address the characteristics of the language of news, of news organizations, and of the professional ethos of objectivity, and learn how to systematically take apart the elements of news texts to understand how they work. Through rigorous and extensive analyses of actual news stories, we will thus consider, on the one hand, the continued necessity of news journalism for citizens in democratic societies and its critical role in monitoring government; and, on the other hand, the importance of examining news media critically and recognizing their limitations with regard to neutrally observing and mediating the world.

## Course Topics

1. The significance of news
2. The contemporary news industry and the crisis of news journalism
3. The everyday practice of journalism
4. News values and their implications
5. The use of news sources
6. The layout of news and its meanings
7. The structure of news items
8. Verbal and grammatical choices in news stories
9. The use of visuals in news
10. The use of reported speech in news
11. Characteristics of digital journalism
12. Contemporary news consumption
13. The changing meanings of news

## Learning Outcomes

**At the end of the course, students will be able to:**

1. Understand the importance of news in democracy and its role in informing the public and monitoring government action.
2. Understand the economic, political, cultural, and organizational contexts in which news is produced, and identify the ways in which these contexts impact news content.
3. Understand how reporters and editors decide what is newsworthy and deserving of coverage, and how news items are composed and edited.
4. Critically analyze news texts using a variety of linguistic, visual, and multimodal tools, and consider the ideological implications of different semiotic choices in the construction of news.
5. Understand contemporary changes to the ways in which news is disseminated and consumed in the digital media environment, and consider the sociocultural consequences of these changes.

## Requirements

- Students will read all required readings for class and actively participate in class discussions. All readings are available through the course website on Moodle.
- Students are expected to monitor print, broadcast, and online news throughout the course and share relevant examples for analysis in class.
- Students will submit two short (up to two pages) written assignments during the course. Assignments will be completed in pairs and may be written in Hebrew or English. Due dates for assignments are listed in the syllabus (15.12.2024, 2.2.2025).
- Students will submit a final paper (6-8 pages) for this course. Final papers may be written in Hebrew or English and may be completed in pairs. Instructions for final papers will be handed out at the end of the semester. Papers are due by the start of the spring semester (17.3.2025). If you require an extension, please contact me in advance.
- This is a hybrid course and students are encouraged to attend class in person. Students attending via Zoom are expected to turn on their cameras when talking and during open discussions.

If you have a disability that may affect your studies and for which you may require accommodations, please contact the Accessibility and Learning Disabilities Department at the Dean of Students office.

E-mail: [LDA@univ.haifa.ac.il](mailto:LDA@univ.haifa.ac.il)

Phone number: 04-98249265

If you received an accommodation letter and need academic adjustments, please contact me as soon as possible so I can do my best to help.

## Grading:

Written assignment #1 – 20%

Written assignment #2 – 20%

Final paper – 60%

## Course Structure and Reading List

### Class 1 – 3.11.2024

#### **Introduction: What Makes News Important?**

##### **Watch before class:**

*The Newsroom*, Season 1, Episode 1 (United States, 2010; Director: Greg Mottola). The episode is available on the course website.

### Class 2 – 10.11.2024

#### **The News Industry and the Crisis of Journalism: Economics, Trust, and Professionalization**

Schudson, M. (2016). The crisis in news: Can you whistle a happy tune? In J. C. Alexander, E. Butler Breese & M. Luengo (Eds.), *The crisis of journalism reconsidered: Democratic culture, professional codes, digital future* (pp. 98-116). Cambridge University Press.

### Class 3 – 17.11.2024

#### **Making News: The Everyday Practice of Journalism**

Cotter, C. (2010). The ways reporters learn to report and editors learn to edit. In *News talk: Investigating the language of journalism* (pp. 49-64). Cambridge University Press.

### Class 4 – 24.11.2024

#### **What is Newsworthy? News Values and Their Implementation**

Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2017). What is news? News values revisited (again). *Journalism Studies*, 18(12), 1470-1488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193>

### Class 5 – 1.12.2024

Assignment #1 handed out. Assignment due 15.12.2024

#### **The Construction of News: How Are Source Materials Transformed?**

Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K., & Baden, C. (2018). Journalistic transformation: How source texts are turned into news stories. *Journalism*, 19(4), 481-499.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884916667873>

### Class 6 – 8.12.2024

#### **The Design of News: Form, Layout, and Multimodality**

Machin, D., & Niblock, S. (2008). Branding newspapers: Visual texts as social practice.

*Journalism Studies*, 9(2), 244-259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700701848287>

### Class 7 – 15.12.2024

Assignment #1 due. Please turn in by midnight on course website.

#### **The Hierarchization of News: Headlines, Leads, and Pyramids**

Dor, D. (2003). On newspaper headlines as relevance optimizers. *Journal of Pragmatics*,

35(5), 695-721. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166\(02\)00134-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0378-2166(02)00134-0)

### Class 8 – 22.12.2024

#### **Choices and Ideology: Words, Verbs, and Grammar**

Grazia Busà, M. (2014). The power of words. In *Introducing the language of the news: A student's guide* (pp. 129-152). Routledge.

No Class on 29.12.2024 – Hanukkah Break

### Class 9 – 5.1.2025

#### **How Much Is a Picture Worth? Exploring the Meaning of Visuals**

Caple, H. (2013). The multiple functionality of news images. In *Photojournalism: A social semiotic approach* (pp. 55-90). Palgrave Macmillan.

### **Class 10 – 12.1.2025**

#### **People Talking: Representing Reported Speech**

Obiedat, N. (2006). The pragma-ideological implications of using reported speech: The case of reporting on the Al-Aqsa Intifada. *Pragmatics*, 16(2-3), 275+304.

<https://doi.org/10.1075/prag.16.2-3.03obi>

### **Class 11 – 19.1.2025**

**Assignment #2 handed out. Assignment due 2.2.2025**

#### **New media, New News? Characteristics of Digital Journalism**

Scott, K. (2023). “Deceptive” clickbait headlines: Relevance, intentions, and lies. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 218, 71-82. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2023.10.004>

### **Class 12 – 26.1.2025**

#### **Contemporary News Consumption and the Platformization of News**

Mitchelstein, E., Boczkowski, P. J., Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K., Hayashi, K., Villi, M., & Kligler-Vilenchik, N. (2020). Incidentalness on a continuum: A comparative conceptualization of incidental news consumption. *Journalism*, 21(8), 1136-1153.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884920915355>

### **Class 13 – 2.2.2025**

**Assignment #2 due. Please turn in by midnight on course website.**

#### **Conclusion: Rethinking, Understanding, and Misunderstanding News**

Bengtsson, S., & Johansson, S. (2021). A phenomenology of news: Understanding news in digital culture. *Journalism*, 22(11), 2873-2889.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884919901194>