

News Writing
MSTD 104

Speech assignments: Two stories and ideas for another.

1. Story 1. For the in-class (or by e-mail if you missed class) Thursday phase of this assignment, you will write a brief “coming event” or “advance story” about an upcoming speech. This story would appear in The Tartan a few days before the event. Do online background research to find out what makes the visiting speaker especially interesting. This research should contribute to the advance story and to ideas for an interview with him after his speech. (See item #3 on the last page.)

The advance should be 175-225 words -- no more than one double-spaced page, but it should let students know why they might want to hear this campus visitor. Use background information to supplement this information about his visit:

- a. When: 2 p.m. Tuesday
- b. Where: **Bondurant Auditorium in Preston Hall.**
- c. Who: Michael Gartner, editor, journalist (find more about him online).
- d. What: The invitation from Radford Student Media and the School of Communication asked Gartner to speak about “The Fun of Writing.”
- e. Gartner will be in Virginia visiting several universities’ communication and journalism programs as a trustee of the Newseum in Washington, D.C., and will meet with faculty to discuss how the Newseum can contribute to journalism education.
- f. Joe Staniunas, a Radford journalism instructor, tells you Gartner’s career is a good example for today’s students because it illustrates that “You shouldn’t expect to spend your entire career with one news organization, or even one news medium.”
- g. **Deadline: By end of class Thursday, or by e-mail, 3 p.m. Friday.**

2. Story 2. Weekend assignment: 525 to 650 words “after the speech.” Reporters sometimes “cover” speeches without actually being there in person. The more formal the address, the more likely it is to be distributed to reporters at or before the event, “embargoed” for publication after the speech is given.

Although this will be an educational event, not a political or policy speech, Mr. Gartner does speak from a prepared text, and you have an advance copy so that you can have a complete draft written before the speech. Do additional background research to clarify any references you need. (For example, he can be a name-dropper, and you may not know who those people are.)

How to proceed:

- Re-read the Chapter 6 “covering speeches” and “covering meetings” pages, pp 102-105, for help on how to focus a story.
- The speech itself starts on page 280 of your textbook. Enjoy it! It’s full of good advice about writing and reporting.
- Additional facts for the after-the-speech story:
- More than 100 Radford students and about a dozen faculty attended Gartner’s talk. He did stick to his prepared text, but you also have these facts in your notebook:
- About a dozen journalism students lingered afterward to ask him questions.
- You notice one student asking him to autograph her journalism textbook. “He was so full of good advice on writing,” she tells you. You ask her name; she says she is Jane Mangiapane, a junior media studies major with a journalism concentration.
- You overhear another student, a sophomore named Ed Rogers, telling Gartner he hopes to intern as a copy editor at the Wall Street Journal. Later, he tells you, “I liked the way he talked about the best advice he ever got when he was a young editor – and that it came from the editor of the Journal.”
- You catch Bob Stepno at the end of the talk, and he mentions that most of the students staying to ask questions are in his class. He says: “I’m glad I assigned them to cover the speech. It was as good as the best chapters in our textbooks. Even if today’s students will be writing for computer screens or iPhones, his career advice is as true today as it was when he started working for newspapers.”

Deadline: Tuesday at the start of class.

Writing tips:

A speech or meeting story should not look like chronological secretarial minutes of a meeting. DO NOT start with “First, he said...” and end with “to conclude, he said...” Instead, lead with an interesting summary or alternative lead; then pick parts of the speech that you think would be most interesting to **readers of The Tartan.**

- Suggestion: Take notes as if you were listening to the speech. What statements would make good full-sentence quotes? Even though he shared his ideas as a numbered list, you don’t have to go through them in order; you won’t have room to explain them all, but some need explaining if you are going to mention them. What parts could be grouped and paraphrased? What will you have to leave out?

The textbook also uses Gartner’s text for a “test yourself” exercise at the end of chapter 5, but with different made-up “facts” about the school and event. There is an “answer” in the back of the book – an acceptable version of a story about Gartner’s original speech. Don’t look at it until after you write your first draft. Think of the textbook’s version as a story by “your competition.” In your final draft, make sure your story doesn’t look too much like “the competition” in choice of quotes.

- 3. Story proposal and interview notes.** On a separate page, based on your background research and your knowledge of issues and events, prepare one or two story ideas and a list of questions you might ask Mr. Gartner if you had an opportunity to interview him after his speech.

Your interview topic(s) should not be exactly the same subject as his speech. You will be writing for The Tartan, so the questions should contribute to a story for its audience. **Deadline: Start of class Tuesday.**