

Crippling the Deadline: Disrupting Academic Ableism and Industrial Time in Journalism Pedagogy

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Abstract

Journalism education is anchored to rigid deadlines that are routinely framed as neutral markers of professionalism, rigour, and readiness for industry practice. This article argues that such temporal norms function instead as ableist disciplinary technologies that privilege speed, endurance, and bodily consistency while excluding students whose bodyminds operate outside industrial time. Bringing journalism studies into conversation with critical disability studies (CDS) and crip theory, this article reframes the deadline as a pedagogical choice rather than an inevitable professional necessity. This paper does not argue for the abandonment of deadlines, but for a broader understanding of journalistic competence that values temporal coordination, collaborative newsroom labour, ethical reflection, and access. Drawing on concepts of crip time, fluidity, and interdependence, it critiques transaction-based accommodation models and offers a structural reimaging of newsroom pedagogy. Through concrete strategies, including rolling deadlines, slow journalism approaches, and tiered participation, the article operationalizes temporal justice within production-based courses. By dismantling the “lone wolf” reporter myth and centring care-based collective intelligence, the article proposes a framework for liberatory access that deepens ethical practice and redefines journalistic competence beyond the limits of endurance and immediacy.

Keywords: journalism pedagogy, academic ableism, crip theory, crip time, deadlines, newsroom simulations

Introduction: The Sacred Cow of the Deadline

In this newsroom, deadlines are not suggestions... If the story is late, it's dead. I don't care how good it is...news moves on, and so should you. This is how you learn discipline, professionalism, and respect for the reader.¹

¹ This quotation has been translated into English from a bilingual (Setswana and English) conversation with one of my first editors more than 20 years ago; the translation is my own.

I begin with this directive from my first newspaper editor because it encapsulates the temporal logic through which journalism is taught, learned, and normalized. Framed as professional common sense, the statement positions speed, endurance, and uninterrupted availability as moral virtues, rendering time not merely as a logistical constraint but a pedagogical instrument used to discipline aspiring reporters.

This “dead story” logic is not merely a memory; it is the foundational ethos of the industry. In entering this critique, I acknowledge that I am treading upon fiercely protected terrain. Within journalism education and praxis, the “hard deadline” is frequently guarded as a non-negotiable proxy for professional competence and ethical rigour. To question the deadline is often seen as a betrayal of the industry’s core mission. Yet it is precisely because this terrain is so heavily fortified that it must be critically interrogated. Importantly, this article does not reject deadlines as forms of professional coordination; rather, it questions when deadline culture becomes a mechanism for reproducing exclusion, exhaustion, and ableist assumptions about competence.

Journalism pedagogy, like that of other high-stakes professional disciplines, is historically tethered to industrial time, a regime characterized by rigid deadlines, high-stakes output, and the valorization of the “resilient” reporter who can withstand the pressures of breaking news (Steiner & Okrusch, 2006). However, this adherence to professional speed often functions as a mechanism of *academic ableism*, defined as the systemic exclusion of bodies and minds that do not conform to normative standards of productivity (Dolmage, 2017). By engaging with the framework of crip theory as articulated by Abrams et al. (2024), this commentary seeks to disrupt the accommodation model that currently dominates higher education. Rather than treating access as a post-hoc bureaucratic fix, I operationalize the tenets of crip time, fluidity, and interdependence to propose a radical reimagining of journalism instruction.

Drawing on Price’s (2011) critique of “kairotic spaces” (p. 21), those high-stakes, spontaneous arenas of peer adjudication that demand immediate, articulate presence, I argue that “cripistemological” approaches (Johnson & McRuer, 2014) offer a pathway toward what Mingus termed “access intimacy” (as cited by Abrams et al., 2024, p. 1). By centring the fluctuating capacities of learners, we can move journalism education from a gatekeeping function toward a collaborative, liberatory access model that prizes depth and interdependence over the ableist “lone wolf” reporting myth.

It is within this broader intervention that the present article positions itself as a conceptual and critical scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) inquiry grounded in critical disability studies (CDS), crip theory, and reflective pedagogical practice. Rather than presenting empirical findings in a conventional sense, the article draws on theoretical synthesis, critical reflection, and journalism pedagogy to interrogate how deadlines operate as disciplinary technologies within production-based education. In doing so, the article positions journalism classrooms as sites where temporal norms are not merely instructional tools but ethical and political choices that shape who can participate, succeed, and be recognized as professionally

competent. By bringing CDS into conversation with journalism pedagogy, this conceptual inquiry contributes to broader SoTL discussions concerning access, assessment, professional formation, and justice-oriented teaching practices within high-pressure learning environments.

Guided by CDS and crip theory, this article examines how temporal norms operate within journalism education and how they might be reimaged through justice-oriented pedagogical frameworks. In particular, it asks three interrelated questions:

1. How do rigid deadline structures function as mechanisms of academic ableism within journalism pedagogy?
2. How might concepts such as crip time, fluidity, and interdependence reshape dominant understandings of professionalism, access, and rigour in newsroom-oriented education?
3. What might a crip-informed model of journalism pedagogy look like in practice within production-based courses?

The sections that follow develop these questions by first examining journalism's attachment to industrial time before proposing crip-informed pedagogical alternatives grounded in temporal justice, relational access, and interdependence.

The Conflict of Industrial Time: Journalism's Ableist Foundations

Journalism pedagogy and indeed practice are historically tethered to a professional imaginary that prizes the body's endurance as much as the mind's acuity. To understand the friction between current instructional practices and CDS, one must first interrogate the archetype of the "ideal" or "model" journalist. As Usher (2014) noted in their ethnography of *The New York Times*, the modern newsroom is governed by industrial time, a temporal regime where the value of information is inextricably linked to the speed of its delivery. Usher described a culture of "constant intensity," where the 24/7 digital cycle creates a "hamster wheel" effect, compelling journalists to prioritize immediacy over almost all other professional values (p. 13). In this environment, the ideal journalist is framed as a resilient, always-available subject, capable of navigating breaking situations with cognitive and physical immediacy (Steiner & Okrusch, 2006).

Another critical dimension of this archetype is the heroic narrative that anchors journalistic identity. Eldridge (2017) argued that practitioners often construct their professional selves through stories of personal grit where success is measured by the ability to persevere through the chaos of complex news events. This romanticized heroic standard is not just a professional ethos; it is an ableist benchmark that assumes a bodymind capable of what Stupart (2021) described as the "exhausted" and "emotionally evacuated" labour required to stay on deadline regardless of physical or psychological cost (p. 1575).

This industrial archetype is mirrored in the classroom where the ideal student is constructed through the lens of academic ableism. Dolmage (2017) argued that higher education is structured through the logic of "steep steps" where institutional norms of pace,

endurance, and productivity function to filter out those who cannot conform to dominant expectations of ability. In journalism education, this filtering is often disguised as professionalism. Instructors of journalism production courses, myself included, frequently justify rigid, high-stakes deadlines and intense newsroom simulations as necessary preparations for the “real world.” This conflates rigour with speed, creating a pedagogical environment that views the student’s ability to work under pressure as the primary indicator of their potential and intelligence (Abrams et al., 2024). Consequently, the ideal student is one who possesses the normative capacity to process information, conduct interviews, and file copy within a linear, unforgiving timeline.

However, CDS offers a scathing critique of these foundational assumptions by distinguishing between the medical model, which locates the “problem” within the student’s impairment, and the social/political model, which understands disability as emerging from the interaction between individuals and the social, institutional, and environmental barriers that restrict participation (Oliver, 1996; Kafer, 2013; Goodley, 2014). From a CDS perspective, the disability in journalism education is not the student’s attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism, anxiety, or mobility restriction; rather, it is the environment’s refusal to accommodate any rhythm of work that falls outside of industrial time. Hosking’s (2008) social construct tenet highlighted that the journalism newsroom is a human-created structure that could, in theory—and perhaps even in practice—be designed differently. By insisting on a singular, fast way of knowing, we effectively pathologize students whose bodies and minds move differently, labelling their need for time as a “deficit” rather than as diverse epistemology approaches, which recognize disabled ways of knowing, sensing, navigating, and moving through the world as legitimate forms of knowledge rather than deficits (Johnson & McRuer, 2014).

This ableist construction reaches its zenith in what Margaret Price (2011) termed “kairotic spaces,” those spontaneous, high-pressure arenas where intelligence and professionalism are judged through real-time performance. In the journalism classroom or simulated newsroom, these spaces manifest as live-reporting assignments, scrum interview simulations, the rapid-fire Q&A of a press conference, or even strictly timed story submissions. To be clear, the intervention I propose is not an argument against the existence of deadlines; I recognize that temporal boundaries are the skeleton of journalistic practice. Rather, I am against the use of the deadline as a weapon of exclusion.

However, while critics argue that the 6 p.m. broadcast and the 2 p.m. online update cannot wait, a crip intervention asks: At what cost does it arrive? When immediacy is weaponized as the sole proxy for professionalism, we trade accuracy for speed and sustainability for “grit.” By operationalizing fluidity and interdependence, we ensure the deadline is met not through the exhaustion of the individual student journalist but through the collective intelligence of the newsroom.

While my introduction identified the deadline as a “sacred cow” of the industry, the concept of the kairotic space reveals how that cow is guarded through the demand for an

immediate, articulate presence. As Price (2011) argued, the requirement for quickness is never a neutral professional standard; it is a rhetorical gatekeeping mechanism that excludes students whose cognitive processing, speech patterns, or mobility require a different temporal orientation. I want to argue that, when we prioritize these kairotic moments as the ultimate litmus test for journalistic potential, we do not merely simulate the real world: we actively reinforce a “tyranny of the clock”² that suggests a story filed in two hours possesses more inherent rigour than one produced through deep, slow reflection (Woodcock, 1944). By deconstructing these spaces, we can see that journalism’s deadline culture is not an immutable objective reality but an ableist choice that dictates who is (and who is not) granted the authority to tell the world’s stories.

At the same time, acknowledging the ableist dimensions of industrial time does not require denying that journalism frequently operates within genuine temporal constraints. Breaking news, emergency communication, election coverage, and live broadcasting often demand rapid coordination and timely dissemination (Usher, 2014; Harro-Loit & Josephi, 2020). However, recognizing the necessity of temporal coordination is different from accepting exhaustion, speed, and uninterrupted productivity as the primary measures of journalistic competence. A crip-informed journalism pedagogy does not reject accountability or responsiveness; rather, it questions whether professional legitimacy should be tied so closely to bodily endurance and temporal conformity (Dolmage, 2017; Kafer, 2013). The challenge, therefore, is not whether journalism education should prepare students for the realities of the profession but whether it can do so without reproducing the exclusionary conditions that have long shaped newsroom culture.

Operationalizing Crip Time: From “Extra Time” to Temporal Justice

I vividly remember the “news panic” of my own reporting days, the feeling of being, as Stupart (2021) described, “tired, hungry, and on deadline” (p. 1574). I used to wear that exhaustion as a badge of professional honour and, yes, I received credit and awards for it.³ But as an educator, I must ask: Why are we training students to survive a “hamster wheel” (Usher, 2014, p. 12) that we know is unsustainable, especially for those whose bodies and minds require a different pace and rhythm of learning? Indeed, I must also ask: What kinds of journalists are we implicitly valuing when speed, endurance, and sacrifice are treated as professional virtues rather than structural demands worthy of critique?

To disrupt this cycle, journalism pedagogy must operationalize crip time. As Kafer (2013) and Samuels (2017) argued, crip time is not merely a request for a deadline extension, a post-hoc fix that leaves the normative structure intact. Instead, it is a “reorientation to time” that

² The phrase “the tyranny of the clock” is borrowed from writer George Woodcock, who coined and popularized it in his influential 1944 essay titled “The Tyranny of the Clock” to critique how clock-regulated time disciplines human life, subordinates autonomy to productivity, and transforms time into an instrument of social control rather than lived experience.

³ Over the past two decades of working as a journalist in Botswana, and briefly in South Africa, I have received several professional awards, including participation in the team that won the 2017 *Pulitzer Prize for Explanatory Journalism* for its work on the *Panama Papers* project.

acknowledges the non-linear, unpredictable realities of disabled lives (Kafer, 2013, p. 26). In the journalism classroom, this approach requires a shift from quantitative time (how many minutes a student has) to qualitative time (the autonomy a student has over their labour). In other words, as Jones et al. (2021) suggested, we must move away from an equal distribution of minutes and hours toward a collective strategy that “bends the clock,”⁴ allowing students to express themselves through various modes and at speeds that respect their individual mental and physical requirements.

Below are three proposed strategies to operationalize crip time in journalism education and across practical and production-based curricula: 1) De-stigmatizing the timeline, 2) Toward a “slow journalism” pedagogy, and 3) Flexible synchronicity and varied models of expression.

De-Stigmatizing the Timeline: Rolling Windows and Grace Periods

The first step in this operationalization is what Abrams et al. (2024) called “de-stigmatizing non-normative academic timelines.” If we accept the CDS tenet that capacity is fluid rather than fixed (Hosking, 2008), then the weaponized deadline must be replaced with a supportive temporal skeleton. In practice, this means moving away from single-point cutoffs toward structures such as *rolling deadlines* or *grace windows*. By rolling deadlines, I mean submission structures that allow students to file work within a defined period rather than at one fixed moment. A grace window refers to a shorter built-in period after a deadline during which work may still be submitted without penalty or forced disclosure.

For instance, rather than a hard 6 p.m. cutoff for a feature story, a 48-hour or a week submission window allows students to navigate flare-ups of chronic illness or neurodivergent burnout without the traumatic burden of self-disclosure or the bureaucratic hurdle of securing medical documentation. This approach does not eliminate the professional necessity of deadlines; rather, it responds to the realities of temporal acceleration in journalism (Harro-Loit & Josephi, 2020) by introducing a safety valve, one that ensures access is embedded in the design of the course rather than appended later as an individual accommodation (Abrams et al., 2024).

Toward a “Slow Journalism” Pedagogy

Operationalizing crip time also invites a “pedagogy of slowness” (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Supple & Cronin, 2023). This approach disrupts the ableist assumption that fast reporting is inherently better reporting. Indeed, when we force students into the “kairotic space” (Price, 2011, p. 75) of breaking news, we often prioritize superficiality over depth. As Waters et al. (2011) have shown, intense time pressure often leads practitioners to drop the ball on complex inquiries.

⁴ This phrasing is drawn directly from Alison Kafer’s formulation of *crip time*: “Rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds” (Kafer, 2013, p. 27).

In a high-output course, slowness can be implemented by moving away from the “factory-like reliance” on individual speed and instead adopting a “collective ethos” (Jones et al., 2021, p. 327). This strategy might involve increasing course contact hours, shifting from a three-hour weekly block to a six- or nine-hour “newsroom-intensive” model, to provide the “temporal variations” needed for deep reporting without the “news panic” of external hours (Jones et al., 2021, p. 313). By expanding the physical time available for the lab/newsroom, we reduce the kairotic moments that marginalize neurodivergent learners who require more processing space.

Furthermore, slowness in a high-volume course can be operationalized through thematic banking. Rather than 10 disparate stories, students might produce 10 installments of a single, deeply reported community project. This type of work allows for a process that is, as Jones et al. (2021) suggested, “collaborative, consensual, slow, [and] nuanced” (p. 327). A student who requires more time to process an interview may catch nuances or ethical complexities that a fast reporter might overlook.

In one advanced reporting course I taught, a student who struggled with the speed and sensory intensity of traditional newsroom exercises initially appeared disengaged within fast-paced reporting environments. However, when given additional time to revisit interview recordings and work through a staged revision process, the student ultimately produced one of the most ethically nuanced and deeply sourced feature stories in the course. The extended reporting timeline created space for follow-up interviews, more careful source verification, and a richer understanding of the community being covered. What initially appeared, within an industrial-time framework, as slowness became a strength of the journalistic process itself.

In this model, crip time is not a deficit to be accommodated; it is a professional methodology that can enhance the accuracy, depth, and rigour of the journalistic product.

Flexible Synchronicity and Varied Models of Expression

Finally, crip time requires us to rethink the “presence” required in simulated newsrooms and labs. The demand for physical or synchronous presence at a specific hour is a cornerstone of academic ableism (Dolmage, 2017). Operationalizing crip time means providing asynchronous alternatives for newsroom labs. Providing pathways for students to contribute via recorded briefings or collaborative digital documents ensures that their expertise remains central to the newsroom even during periods of low physical capacity. By embedding crip time into the syllabus, we move beyond a model of inclusion, where students are merely allowed to enter existing structures, toward a framework that reimagines the very tempo of journalistic success.

Drawing from my own experience teaching production-based journalism courses, and consistent with scholarship on slow pedagogy and crip-informed educational practice (Abrams et al., 2024; Berg & Seeber, 2016; Jones et al., 2021; Supple & Cronin, 2023), the pedagogical value of crip time becomes visible not through the absence of deadlines but through changes in the quality of student engagement, revision, and reporting practice. When students are given structured grace windows, staged deadlines, or rolling submission periods, the observable outcome is often not diminished rigour but improved process: students ask for feedback earlier,

revise more substantially, conduct follow-up interviews, and produce stories with stronger sourcing and clearer ethical judgment. In this sense, temporal flexibility becomes a condition for better journalism rather than a retreat from professional standards. What becomes visible is a shift from panic-driven compliance to reflective production, where students learn that accountability includes planning, communication, revision, and care for the communities they report on.

The pedagogical implications of crip-informed journalism instruction become more visible when translated into specific newsroom practices and observable learning outcomes. Table 1 summarizes several practical ways in which crip-informed pedagogy can reshape assessment, participation, and reporting practices within journalism education.

Table 1. Observable pedagogical outcomes in crip-informed journalism education

Crip-informed pedagogical practice	Observable learning outcome
Rolling deadlines or grace windows	Increased revision, reduced panic-driven submissions, improved assignment completion
Staged reporting assignments	Stronger sourcing, earlier feedback engagement, improved story development
Thematic or longform reporting projects	Greater depth, ethical nuance, and sustained community engagement
Asynchronous newsroom participation	Broader participation from students with fluctuating capacity
Collaborative newsroom roles	Recognition of editing, verification, and research as valuable journalistic labour
Reflective editorial memos and revision logs	Increased metacognition, ethical reasoning, and accountability

To transition from industrial time toward temporal justice, journalism pedagogy must ultimately reorient how time, access, participation, and journalistic competence are understood within production-based learning environments. Table 2 provides a broader comparative framework illustrating how crip-informed pedagogy replaces ableist disciplinary technologies with relational and interdependent practices.

Table 2. From industrial time to crip-informed journalism pedagogy⁵

Pedagogical dimension	Industrial time model	Crip-informed pedagogical reframing
Conception of time	Linear, fixed, deadline-driven	Non-linear, flexible, responsive to fluctuating capacity
Purpose of deadlines	Enforcement of discipline and professionalism	Structural coordination with built-in temporal justice
Model of access	Individual accommodation, post-hoc and bureaucratic	Embedded, relational, and anticipatory
Treatment of capacity	Assumed stable and uniform	Recognized as fluid, episodic, and relational
Ideal student/journalist	Autonomous, fast, resilient lone wolf	Interdependent, collaborative, ethically responsive
Mode of participation	Synchronous, presence-based, time-bound	Multiple modes (asynchronous, distributed, collaborative)
Evaluation of rigour	Speed, endurance, uninterrupted productivity	Depth, accuracy, care, and collective intelligence
Pedagogical outcome	Filtering and exclusion	Expanded participation and epistemic plurality

Fluidity: Resisting the Bureaucracy of Disclosure

The pedagogical relationship between a student and an instructor often begins with a standardized, automated email:

Dear Instructor, please be advised that [Student Name] is registered with the Access and Disability Office. Based on a review of their documentation, the following are the

⁵This table synthesizes the shift from industrial time to a crip-informed pedagogical framework, illustrating how time, access, and journalistic competence are reconfigured across production-based journalism courses.

student's approved accommodations: 1.5 × time on all exams, flexible deadlines, and occasional absences...⁶

This message, seemingly neutral and administrative, signals how disability is institutionally rendered legible in higher education: as a fixed condition, verified through documentation, translated into a static list of accommodations, and communicated to instructors as a closed transaction. If *crip time* addresses the tyranny of the clock, the concept of fluidity addresses the “tyranny of the label”⁷ (Sagarin, 1977). In production-heavy disciplines like journalism, access is often imagined as something that can be settled once and for all at the start of the semester. A student discloses, the institution adjudicates or judges, and the instructor complies. Yet this model rests on the flawed assumption that disability is stable, predictable, and consistently experienced across time.

CDS challenges this assumption by insisting that disability is not a permanent or uniform state but a relational and fluctuating experience shaped by bodies, environments, and institutional demands (Kafer, 2013; Siebers, 2008). Capacity is not constant. Energy, focus, pain, sensory tolerance, and cognitive load can vary dramatically not only across weeks but across days or even hours (Wendell, 2001). A pedagogy grounded in fluidity therefore resists the idea that access can be reduced to a checklist tied to a biomedical label (Dolmage, 2017). Instead, it recognizes disability as something that emerges unevenly in relation to deadlines, newsroom pressures, group dynamics, and the affective demands of journalistic work.

Beyond the “Static” Student

As Abrams et al. (2024) argued, higher education's reliance on the medical model demands a fixed and medicalized understanding of disability that often ignores the fluid nature of students' lived realities. This framework struggles to account for the realities of students whose capacity fluctuates due to chronic illness, mental health conditions, neurodivergence, or episodic impairments. In a newsroom lab, or any other lab, for example, a student may be highly productive and fully engaged on Monday, only to be functionally disabled by a flare-up of chronic pain, migraines, or neurodivergent burnout by Wednesday. The problem is not the student's inconsistency but an institutional imagination that equates professionalism with bodily reliability.

A pedagogy that operationalizes fluidity moves away from what I will describe as a “diagnoses-dropping culture,” in which the disclosure of a biomedical label becomes the primary currency for legitimacy. Sadly, within this culture, students learn, often implicitly, that flexibility must be earned through disclosure, and that silence is safer than being marked as difficult,

⁶ This is an anonymized and representative version of accommodation letters I routinely receive at the beginning of academic terms. While the wording varies across institutions, most university disability, accessibility, or inclusion offices use similar forms of communication to notify instructors of approved accommodations and support measures.

⁷ The phrase “the tyranny of the label” is borrowed from Edward Sagarin (1977), who used it to critique how labels convert actions into identities, producing fixed and restrictive understandings of the self.

unreliable, unprofessional, or even suspicious. Fluid pedagogy rejects this logic by recentring the student-journalist and their work, rather than their diagnosis. In other words, it asks not “What is wrong with you?” but “What is possible for you right now, and how can the newsroom respond?”

Resisting the Bureaucracy of Access

Institutional access regimes often require students to repeatedly verify their disability through documentation, doctor’s notes, or formal reapproval of accommodations. Karpicz et al. (2025) described this process as the *bureaucracy of access*, a system that produces exhaustion rather than equity by demanding ongoing administrative labour from disabled students. These practices implicitly position students as suspect, framing flexibility as something that must be policed to prevent abuse rather than as a necessary condition for participation.

Fluid pedagogy resists this surveillance logic. Rather than requiring medical proof for every missed deadline or altered form of participation, instructors can design low-energy pathways for engagement that anticipate fluctuation as a normal part of student life. In a journalism course, such options might include tiered modes of participation: analyzing interview transcripts instead of conducting live reporting, contributing background research rather than attending an event, engaging in remote copy-editing, or collaborating asynchronously through shared digital documents. These alternatives are not lesser forms of participation; they are different journalistic labours that sustain the collective work of the newsroom.

Disclosure as Dialogue, Not Confession

Operationalizing fluidity transforms disclosure from a bureaucratic requirement into an ongoing, collaborative dialogue. Rather than positioning disclosure as a singular moment of confession, often mediated through institutional email, fluid pedagogy treats access as something that must be continually negotiated. Following Jones et al. (2021), this approach emphasizes “reciprocal communication” in which students signal their current capacity through informal check-ins rather than formal medical evidence (p. 328). Such practices recognize that expertise about one’s own body and mind constitutes a valid form of knowledge.

In practice, such a dialogue might involve brief, private capacity check-ins embedded within newsroom routines, reflective memos accompanying assignments, or flexible planning conversations that allow students to anticipate periods of reduced capacity without disclosing diagnoses. These practices redistribute epistemic authority by trusting students as credible narrators of their own experience. Importantly, they also shift responsibility away from individual students and toward pedagogical design, acknowledging that access is not something students should have to constantly justify in order to receive.

Fluidity as Ethical Pedagogy

Ultimately, fluidity challenges the assumption that disability must be fixed, named, and documented in order to be pedagogically legible. By resisting the bureaucracy of disclosure,

instructors can create journalism classrooms that respond to bodies as they are—variable, contingent, and relational—rather than as institutions wish them to be—stable, predictable, and continuously productive. In doing so, fluid pedagogy does not simply accommodate disability; it exposes how professional norms, temporal regimes, and access systems actively produce disability.

Interdependence: Dismantling the “Lone Wolf” Reporter Myth

Across my journalism and news production courses, a consistent pedagogical pattern has emerged: students are asked to demonstrate individual competence through a series of solo assignments before being permitted to collaborate at the end of the term. This structure mirrors an industry logic in which reporters must first prove autonomy before earning the right to work collectively. From a CDS perspective, however, this sequence privileges an idealized lone wolf journalist, one assumed to manage deadlines, interviews, and cognitive load independently. Such a model reflects neoliberal and ableist logics that equate competence with self-sufficiency and cast dependence as deficiency.

Within this framework, students who require collaboration, flexibility, or shared labour earlier in the learning process are rendered marginal, not because they lack journalistic aptitude but because course design presumes a narrow range of bodily and cognitive capacities. By centring individual output, journalism pedagogy reinforces what Jones et al. (2021, p. 328) described as the “mechanical monolith” of traditional journalistic practice, upholding a regime of objectivity that imagines the reporter as a detached, self-contained unit rather than as a person embedded within social and professional relations (Hackett & Zhao, 1998). When collaboration is deferred or treated as a supplementary soft skill, interdependence is framed as optional rather than as a necessary condition of journalistic survival and knowledge production.

Access as a Co-Constitutive Process

Within CDS, access is increasingly theorized not as an individualized accommodation but as a co-constitutive process, one that emerges through relationships, environments, and shared practices rather than being delivered to a single body (Jones et al., 2021). This understanding resonates with Mian Mingus’s (2011) foundational concept of “access intimacy,” which described forms of access built through trust, responsiveness, and mutual recognition rather than bureaucratic procedures alone. This framing challenges the assumption that independence is the default condition of participation and instead foregrounds interdependence as the ordinary state of social life.

Applied to journalism education, this insight exposes the limits of an access model that treats accommodation as a private exchange between a student and an institution. When access is framed as individual and transactional, responsibility is displaced onto the disabled student to disclose, request, and justify their needs. An interdependent pedagogy, by contrast, understands access as something that is continuously produced through newsroom practices themselves—through how roles are assigned, how deadlines are negotiated, how labour is distributed, and how contribution is recognized. In this model, access is not an exception to the

workflow; it is embedded within it and reflected in pedagogical arrangements that value multiple modes of participation and expression.

This approach aligns with Garland-Thomson's (2011, 2024) articulation of *misfitting* in that disability emerges not from bodies alone but from their friction with social arrangements. Journalism classrooms structured around individual endurance and uninterrupted productivity actively produce misfitting by design. Interdependence intervenes by redesigning the environment rather than attempting to fix the student, redistributing capacity across the collective rather than isolating it within individuals.

Importantly, understanding access as co-constitutive also disrupts the professional mythology that journalists must operate autonomously to maintain credibility. As Alison Kafer (2013) reminded us, the cultural obsession with independence is not a neutral value but a political ideal rooted in a "curative imaginary" that assumes intervention is the only path to a viable future (p. 27). Normative life schedules presume a linear development from "dependent childhood" to an "independent adulthood," effectively casting those who require assistance as "out of time" or "burdensome" (Kafer, 2013, p. 34). Reframing access as relational allows journalism education to resist these ableist futures and instead cultivate professional identities grounded in collaboration, reciprocity, and ethical dependence. By rejecting the lone wolf narrative, we move toward a crip futurity that recognizes collaboration as a necessary condition of life.

From Individual Output to Care Webs

Crip and disability justice scholars have long emphasized that survival, let alone excellence, is made possible through care webs rather than individual resilience. Piepzna-Samarasinha (2018) conceptualized care webs as informal, adaptive networks through which disabled people share labour, knowledge, and energy in ways that institutions routinely fail to provide. These webs are not signs of weakness or inefficiency; they are sophisticated systems of collective intelligence developed in response to exclusion.

When journalism education prioritizes individual output above all else, it forecloses the possibility of such care webs forming within the classroom. Students are assessed on what they can independently produce, often under compressed timelines and high cognitive load, leaving little room for shared problem-solving or collective sense-making. This model rewards those who most closely approximate the able-bodied, neurotypical ideal while rendering invisible the forms of journalistic labour (editing, emotional processing, contextual research, peer support) that sustain news production but rarely receive formal recognition.

Reorienting pedagogy toward interdependence allows these care practices to become visible and valued. Group reporting teams, rotating newsroom roles, shared research repositories, and collaborative writing environments transform the classroom into what Clare (2017) described as a space where vulnerability and capacity coexist, rather than compete. In such spaces, contribution is not measured by speed or volume alone but by how effectively students support the collective production of knowledge.

This shift is not merely pedagogical; it is epistemic. As Price (2011) demonstrated, academic and professional norms systematically devalue ways of knowing that emerge through collaboration, affect, and non-linear cognition. Interdependence directly challenges this devaluation by legitimizing multiple forms of journalistic intelligence and redistributing authority away from the figure of the solitary reporter.

By dismantling the lone wolf reporter myth, interdependent pedagogy does more than increase access for disabled students. It exposes the myth itself as an ableist fiction—one that obscures how journalism has *a/ways* relied on networks of care, cooperation, and shared labour. In doing so, it opens space for a journalism education that is not only more inclusive but more honest about how news is actually made.

Conclusion: Reimagining the Deadline as Pedagogy

I want to close where this argument ultimately lives: the classroom. In the classroom, journalism's temporal norms are not abstract ideals but everyday pedagogical decisions. In one of my past reporting courses, a student missed a major deadline by a week. There was no accommodation letter, no formal disclosure, and no appeal to institutional authority. The explanation was brief: their capacity had collapsed, and the deadline had become impossible to meet. What unsettled me was not the lateness itself but the absence of a pedagogical script beyond enforcement. In that moment, I was forced to ask whether I was teaching journalism or reproducing industrial time.

That encounter clarified what this article has sought to demonstrate: the deadline, long treated as a neutral marker of professionalism, operates as a “disciplinary technology” (Foucault, 1977, p. 227)⁸ that privileges speed, endurance, and bodily consistency while filtering out students whose bodyminds move differently. When journalism education treats the ability to withstand exhaustion, acceleration, and uninterrupted productivity as evidence of competence, it does not simply prepare students for industry conditions; it also reproduces academic ableism by privileging particular bodies, temporalities, and ways of knowing while marginalizing others.

Crippling the deadline does not require abandoning standards or dissolving professional expectations. Rather, it demands the structural reorientation of time, labour, and contribution summarized in Table 1. Operationalizing crip time shifts pedagogy from deficit-based extensions toward temporal justice. Attending to fluidity resists access regimes that demand constant disclosure and proof. Centring interdependence dismantles the lone wolf reporter myth and replaces it with pedagogies grounded in collaboration, care, and shared capacity—conditions under which journalism has always, in practice, been produced.

⁸ In Foucauldian scholarship, disciplinary technologies refer to the routine institutional practices through which power shapes conduct and produces particular kinds of subjects. The deadline is understood here as one such technology, regulating students through temporal expectations rather than explicit coercion.

For journalism education, the implications are pedagogical—for journalism as a field, they are ethical. As long as deadlines function as gatekeeping devices that privilege certain bodies and rhythms over others, the profession will remain narrower, less reflective, and less honest about how news is actually made. Crippling the deadline is therefore not an accommodation strategy or a pedagogical indulgence; it is an ethical refusal to let industrial time determine who is permitted to learn journalism and, ultimately, whose stories are allowed to shape the public record.

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