



University of Vermont
Center for Community News

Assignment Template: Covering redrawn districts

The Center for Community News' mission is to grow and support partnerships between college reporting programs and local news outlets. CCN has created a series of sample templates for faculty to give to students to contribute local news to their community. Faculty are welcome to use any and all of these and amend them as they see fit for their classes. For questions about this template, contact CCN Program Coordinator Sarah Gamard at sarah.gamard@uvm.edu.

Notes for Faculty

WHAT: Due to new laws and litigation, 10 states — Alabama, California, Florida, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas and Utah — have new congressional map between the 2024 and 2026 elections. Redistricting happens every 10 years, but before 2025, [only two states](#) had conducted voluntary mid-decade redistricting since 1970. The new maps will help determine the outcomes of elections within those states. We have enough journalists examining how redistricting could affect the makeup of Congress and power in D.C. But how could it affect the communities located within the new maps, and how do those voters feel about their new representation?

WHY: This assignment is great for students to tackle an intimidating, complicated topic in a simple but still interesting way. The point of the assignment is not to analyze or predict the implications of redistricting on the election, but instead whether the residents within the new maps feel the newly drawn district is an accurate representation of their community. For example, is the community politically mixed, but separated by a strange barrier due to this redistricting? Where does the line stop and end, and what is the neighborhood like where this barrier runs through? Most importantly, this assignment teaches students to look for the human element behind major political decisions — when reporting on government, that is always where the best stories are.

HOW TO USE THIS TEMPLATE: This assignment is best for programs that are located in or near redrawn districts. It can be used either as a beginner man-on-the-street group assignment, where students simply get one photo and a quote per interviewee to compile into a greater photo essay, or as a more intermediate assignment that incorporates analysis of the implications that redistricting could have on the local politics. Either way, the story should focus

on the people who live within the district and how the new maps affect or don't affect their lives and/or their perception of democracy and the political process.

About CCN

The [Center for Community News](#) at UVM is a nonpartisan organization that is working to grow and strengthen university-led reporting programs around the country, to create a more sustainable future for local news outlets and the communities they serve.

Assignment: Covering redrawn districts

Due to new laws and recent Supreme Court decisions, 10 states — Alabama, California, Florida, Louisiana, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas and Utah — have a new congressional map between the 2024 and 2026 elections. Redistricting happens every 10 years, but before 2025, [only two states](#) had conducted voluntary mid-decade redistricting since 1970. The new maps will help determine the outcomes of elections within these states. How does it also affect the community?

Instructions

Step 1: Research how congressional districts changed in our state. Read up on news articles and reputable sources that already exist on the topic *before* doing your reporting. Study up on the reasoning as to why recent laws or Supreme Court decisions led to these changes (they are different depending on the state). Understand not only what has happened, but *why* it happened. Be able to write down a summary of these findings in a few sentences; you'll need them later when you interview people.

Step 2: Interview three people within the redrawn district. With their permission, take their photo and do a recorded interview. You can ask the questions outlined below. Identify yourself as a reporter and be transparent about where the resulting story could be published.

Step 3: Select the most suitable quote. Often during an interview, you will get too many quotes to fully use. In that case, pick the best one or two. If there are parts where they stutter or say filler words such as “um” or “like,” you can omit them from the quote. You can also separate two sentences with “...” if they are at different parts of the interview, as long as the two sentences are still in chronological order. Ensure the quote accurately represents what was said and meant during the interview in response to your questions.

Step 4: Submit the photo and quote to your professor. When in doubt, ask them what they think based on the interview.

People you can interview:

- Strangers who live within the redrawn district

People you *can't* interview:

- Fellow students
- Family members
- Friends or acquaintances

Questions you can ask:

- *Do you know about the new congressional maps that were enacted this election cycle? [If they don't know about them, tell them, and explain the reasoning succinctly based on Step 1.]*
- *How do you feel about the change?*
- *Do you agree with the change? Why or why not?*
- *Do you think the new maps are a more or less accurate representation of the population? Why?*

Definitions:

- A **congressional district** is a specific geographic area within a U.S. state that elects one member to the U.S. House of Representatives. The U.S. has 435 total districts, and each one represents roughly the same number of people.
- **Redistricting** is the process of redrawing the boundaries of voting districts, such as for the U.S. House of Representatives, state legislatures or local governments. It is meant to ensure equal population representation. It typically follows the national census every 10 years, and affects political power.
- **Gerrymandering** is the practice of drawing voting district boundaries to give one political party or group an unfair advantage. The term involves key strategies like packing voters into a single district or cracking them across multiple areas.
- **The Voting Rights Act of 1965** [aimed](#) to “overcome legal barriers at the state and local levels that prevented African Americans from exercising their right to vote as guaranteed under the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The Voting Rights Act was considered one of the most impactful pieces of civil rights legislation in U.S. history.”
- ***Louisiana v. Callais*** was a 2026 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that struck down Louisiana’s congressional map as an unconstitutional racial gerrymander. The 6–3 decision held that Section 2 of the Voting Rights Act did not require the state to create a second majority-Black district.

Word Count:

Deadline:

Assignment: Changes to voting laws (intermediate version)

Step 1: Study up on the changes to voting laws. See what coverage has already been done. Consider the effects of redistricting. Who will be hurt or helped by them? **Note to faculty:** You can include links to the ballot measure language or existing news coverage.

Step 2: Divvy up reporting tasks. Each reporter needs to do their own slice of reporting to make this story whole. This story will need someone to interview regular voters, someone else to interview advocates for or against the redistricting, someone else to interview a local official on the ballot within the new district, someone to research the changes to the maps, and someone else to research what led to this change and how it could affect local politics (for the latter two items, it helps to interview a local expert, such as a nonpartisan political professor, since the topic is complex and they can talk through it). Decide who will do what before proceeding to Step 3.

Step 3: Interview your assigned people. Ask them the questions below, making sure you identify yourself properly. Make sure they know they are on the record and where the story could be published. Get their names, residence, age and occupation.

Step 4: Condense the interviews and add them to a collaborative document to share with your fellow reporters. Take the key points they said and summarize them into a section of the greater story.

People you can interview:

- Strangers in public spaces
- Advocates for the redistricting
- Advocates against the redistricting
- A local official within the redistricted area
- A local, nonpartisan political analyst
- One or two people are directly affected by redistricting (these are the most important people you can interview for the story)

Note to faculty: If students are new, explain that their First Amendment rights allow them to document or interview people in public spaces, such as on the street, but if they try to approach and interview strangers in a private establishment, such as a restaurant or grocery store, they could be kicked out.

People you *can't* interview:

- Fellow students
- Family members
- Friends or acquaintances

Questions you can ask voters or people affected:

- *Do you know about the new congressional maps that were enacted this election cycle? [If they don't know about them, tell them, and explain the reasoning succinctly based on Step 1.]*
- *How do you feel about the change?*
- *Do you agree with the change? Why or why not?*
- *Do you think the new maps are a more or less accurate representation of the population? Why?*

Questions you can ask advocates for or against redistricting:

- *We spoke with X voters about this new district map, including X people who were directly affected because X. They said XXX. What is your response?*

Questions you can ask the political analyst:

- *How will redistricting impact the community and the state this election? What should people know?*
- *What other communities do you know of that are doing something similar, and what has been the reaction?*

Note: For whoever takes this assignment, it's best to get information first on what regular voters think, as well as what the nonpartisan political analyst says, and then bring those quotes to an elected official and the advocates to see how they respond to voters' reaction to the law.

Note: Do not use these interviews as a way to debate with the interviewees on their views; a journalist's job is to report what they see and hear, no matter if they agree with it or not. Be kind and listen!

Word Count / Video Length:

Deadline: