

Feature Writing
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh
Fall 2006

Course: Journalism 61-413-A01
Class hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3 to 5:10 p.m.
Room: Clow 148
Instructor: Grace Lim
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Office: Clow 126B

Office hours: MW, 8:30 to 10 a.m.; TTh, 8:30 to 9:15 a.m. and by appointment.

Reading Material:

- Copied material. I will hand this out as needed.
- Articles from online news publications and other online sources.
- Readings from the Margaret Davidson's "A Guide for Newspaper Stringers," which will be loaned to students.
- Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual (2004 or later).

Ongoing Readings:

- ***The New York Times* (daily)** You can get the main stories for free online at www.nytimes.com. You'll need to sign up. Copies of *The New York Times* can be found in the Journalism Department's reading room and in Polk Library.
- *Advance-Titan*

Other Required Materials:

- A flash drive.

The role of journalism/editing in Liberal Arts education

Journalists are the eyes, ears, voice and heart of society. Journalists question status quo; they fight for the proverbial "truth, justice and the American way." The skills students learn are not exclusively tailored to those who will become editors or journalists. These skills will enable the students to value accuracy and fairness. They will not be afraid to ask questions. They will not be afraid to prompt change.

Course Content

Do not be misled by the "soft news" label that features stories bear; there is nothing light or soft about effective feature writing.

Feature stories go beyond the requisite "who," "what," "when" and "where" of news stories; they delve into the "why" and "how" and "why should we care." Quality feature stories give background and context to news stories that often sacrifice substance and style for speed.

This class emphasizes **producing and submitting articles for publication** in newspapers, regional and national consumer magazines, and online publications. Students will analyze the concept, writing techniques and structure of quality features in newspapers and magazines. Students will develop ideas, target stories for specific audiences, research, report and write different types of features.

Heed these words from Bruce Garrison, author of “Professional Feature Writing”:
“If you want to be a successful professional feature writer, then you have to be willing to sweat. You have to like people and be willing to spend time with them, too. You have to be willing to live with frustration. You have to make personal sacrifices... You have to be willing to work long hours. You have to have a strong desire to publish your writing.”

By the end of this course, you will have been given the chance to learn to do the following:

- Build on basic writing skills to write compelling features -- from brights to in-depth magazine pieces.
- Generate story ideas and develop them into feature stories
- Outline and structure longer pieces
- Turn breaking news stories in features
- Tackle stories that fall outside one’s comfort zone
- Research effectively (online and off-line)
- Prepare for interviews
- Find quality and diverse sources
- Conduct in-depth interviews
- Write queries
- Market (pitch) stories to editors
- Understand the legal and ethical issues involved in free-lancing

Classroom Conduct

- Computer monitors must be turned off during class lectures. Students may not use the computers during lectures.
- Students may not work on homework for this class or other classes during class lectures.
- All work must be original. Students copying another person’s assignment will receive a zero for that assignment. Two students turning in identical homework will each receive a zero for that assignment.
- Students caught cheating on quizzes will receive a zero for that quiz.
- Cell phones must be turned off or set to vibrate so they won’t disturb other students.
- Private conversations must take place outside the classroom.

Class time will be devoted to a mixture of lecture, discussion and lab work. Each day’s reading assignment must be done before you come to class.

Attendance

While you won't be graded on attendance, you will be graded on class participation (5 percent of the semester's grade). If you do miss class, you are still responsible for that day's material. You'll need to rely on a classmate for class notes. In general, however, you will **not** be able to make up missed quizzes, exams or other assignments unless you **notify the instructor before class meets** and provide an acceptable excuse, such as illness, religious observance or participation in university activities at the request of university officials.

Late papers: In the "real" world, a missed deadline means a gaping hole in the newspaper or magazine. Meet the deadlines or suffer dire consequences. (Your grade will be lowered one-half letter grade for each day your paper is late.) Plan your stories in advance. Missing sources is no excuse. Always have backup sources ready.

Grades

Written assignments will receive letter grades. In computing the average grade, the instructor will use the following corresponding numbers.

A	95	C	75
A-	91	C-	71
B+	88	D+	68
B	85	D	65
B-	81	D-	61
C+	78	F	55 (if assignment completed)

Your final grade will be based on a 1,000 point scale. You can earn points as follows:

- Up to 500 points for writing assignments
- Up to 200 points for quizzes (current events, AP, geography, lectures, readings, homework, etc.)
- Up to 200 points for the final magazine article
- Up to 50 points on analysis of national magazine or Pulitzer-Prize winning article
- Up to 50 points for class participation

Final letters grades will be based on the following scale:

A	900 to 1,000	C	730 to 779
AB	870 to 899	CD	680 to 629
B	830 to 869	D	600 to 679
BC	780 to 829	F	000 to 599

You must complete the assignments in each area. Even if you have enough points to receive a passing grade for the course without turning in a particular assignment, you must still do that assignment. Otherwise you will get an incomplete for the course.

The cutoff points for grades are not negotiable. In other words, an 869 will translate into a B and will not be rounded up to an AB. It is possible that you will come within

a handful of points for a higher grade, but if you wish to receive that higher grade, you must earn it, which you can do by putting maximum effort into each assignment.

Note: An “A” grade is given to any story deemed publishable. Keep this in mind. Writing well takes time, effort and care.

ACCURACY COUNTS: A misspelled proper name of any kind – first name, last name, company name, country name, city name or any other proper name – will result in an automatic zero on your story. Proof your paper before turning it in.

Stories and all other assignments will be due at the beginning of class unless otherwise noted.

Bonus

A bonus will be given for a successful query that generates a magazine assignment. The target publication must meet the instructor’s standards. (No blogs, friends’ Web sites, etc.) The bonus will be an “A” in place of the student’s lowest grade on an article assignment, which could be up to 10 percent of the final grade.

Academic Integrity

Don’t cheat. The university has rules and procedures that could lead to severe disciplinary action, including expulsion, for academic misconduct.

The university’s student code of discipline states that “examples of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to: cheating on an examination; collaborating with others in work to be presented, contrary to the stated rules of the course; submitting a paper or assignment as one’s own work when a part or all of the paper or assignment is the work of another; submitting a paper or assignment that contains ideas or research of others without appropriately identifying the sources of those ideas; stealing examinations or course materials; submitting, if contrary to the rules of a course, work previously presented in another course; tampering with the laboratory experiment or computer program of another student; knowingly and intentionally assisting another student in any of the above, including assistance in an arrangement whereby any work, classroom performance, examination or other activity is submitted or performed by a person other than the student under whose name the work is submitted or performed.”

Special University Services

The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is committed to providing reasonable accommodation to students with special needs. Contact the Dean of Students at 424-3100 (voice) or 424-1319 (TTY). The Web site is <http://www.uwosh.edu/dean/disabilities.htm>.

Note: Course schedule may change depending on the pace of the class, the pace of the instructor, guest speakers or forces beyond human control.

Assignment Schedule

Sept. 12 Ideas
Sept. 28 Story 1
Oct. 5 Story 2
Oct. 12 Story 3
Oct. 19 Quiz
Oct. 26 Story 4
Nov. 2 Queries due
Nov. 9 Report on final magazine article
Nov. 16 Analysis of magazine or assigned article
Nov. 21 Magazine article, first draft
Dec. 7 Quiz
Dec. 14 Magazine article, final draft