

Writing for the Media

Fall 2007 / 61-221-A09C

Mondays / Wednesdays 8:10-10:10 a.m.
Clow 150

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OFFICE HOURS: 10:20 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Mondays
9:30-10 a.m., and 12:40-1:40 p.m. Tuesdays
8:15-10:10 a.m. Thursdays
By appointment

REQUIRED TEXTS

The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual

Fred Fedler, John Bender, Lucinda Davenport and Michael Drager, *Reporting for the Print Media*, Eighth Edition

The Elements of Style, available free online at <http://www.bartleby.com/141>

THE ROLE OF JOURNALISM IN A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

Writing for the Media is offered through the UW Oshkosh College of Letters and Sciences, the liberal arts college of our campus. A liberal arts education transcends preparation for specific careers, providing general knowledge and allowing students to develop intellectual capacities and make sound news judgment when editing copy, laying out pages, and deciding on appropriate artwork. Specifically, a liberal arts education:

- Prepares students to be responsible citizens who understand and contribute to the changing world in which they live.
- Exposes students to a broad spectrum of knowledge about the human experience and the natural world, from contemporary science to literature, music and art.
- Enhances the skills of communication and critical thinking.
- Challenges students to appreciate their cultural heritage, to be sensitive to diverse traditions and opinions and to value truth.
- Encourages students to develop a lifelong commitment to inquiry.

In short, 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 OBJECTIVE

This introductory class will teach the writing of effectively organized media stories. It will emphasize the clean, direct, well-organized style of writing that communications majors in all sequences need to master. Most facts will be provided to enable the student to concentrate on mastering a good writing style. Approximately half of the class time will be devoted to a laboratory where the student will work on developing writing skills.

Students will learn:

- To create stories directly on a computer
- To work efficiently under deadline pressures
- To organize information in ways that communicate clearly and effectively.
- To ensure that work is accurate.
- To eliminate mechanical problems from their writing.
- To adjust their writing style to the purpose their work is intended to serve.
- To make solid news judgments.
- To better understand as a consumer the role the news media play.

Because this is a prerequisite course for further journalism study, you must earn at least a C grade to continue in the major or minor.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Each class will be split between lecture/discussion and lab work. You should expect to work on a writing assignment in nearly every class, most of which will receive a letter grade. Because a large portion of your grade will depend on work that you produce during a class, you should make every effort to attend every session.

ATTENDANCE

As noted above, attendance is critical since a significant portion of your grade will come from lab assignments. If you must miss a class for a serious illness or personal emergency, it is your responsibility to email me or call me BEFORE class. Only then will you be allowed to make up the assignment.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Students are permitted to talk with each other on all writing exercises except tests and quizzes. University guidelines regarding academic dishonesty, including policies for punishment, are strictly adhered to in journalism classes. Acts of academic dishonesty will be adjudicated and appropriate action taken consistent with UWS 14.03, Wis. Adm. Code. You are expected to do your own work, and any form of plagiarism will not be tolerated.

GRADING

Half of your grade will be based on writing done during the laboratory sessions, as well as pop quizzes. In addition, each student will be required to make a presentation on the AP Stylebook. That presentation/paper will account for two times a regular lab assignment.

The midterm and final exams will each account for 20 percent of your grade, while the remaining 10 percent will be for a news analysis project.

Because precise writing is critical in the journalism profession, grades on writing assignments will be lowered for technical problems, including spelling, grammar and AP Style errors. Inaccurate information will also have *a significant adverse affect* on the grade. A misspelled proper name of any kind — first name, last name, country name, company name, city name or any other proper name — will result in an automatic F on your assignment, no matter if the rest of your story is perfect.

You are also expected to contribute to class discussions.

Final letter grades will be based on the following scale:

A	93 to 100	C	70-75.9
AB	89 to 92.9	CD	65-69.9
B	83-88.9	D	60-64.9
BC	76-82.9	F	Below 59.9

The cutoff points for grades are not negotiable. In other words, an 88.9 will translate into a B and will not be rounded up to an AB.

There is a certain amount of subjectivity involved in grading written work. The following guidelines will give you some indication of what is expected of you.

A —Your writing is marked by insight and originality. It adequately covers all elements of the story and highlights key points in a manner appropriate to the subject. Assignment is written in proper English with no factual errors, no or few AP Style errors, and no or few grammatical errors.

B — Your writing is complete and clear. Major points are addressed. Assignment is written in proper English with no factual errors, no more than minor AP Style errors and no more than minor grammatical errors.

C — Your writing has no factual errors, but is wrought with problems such as unclear focus or inappropriate word choice, choppy phrasing, multiple AP Style errors or significant grammatical errors. Key facts are left out, and unfair or libelous connotations are suggested.

D — Your writing does not meet the minimum standards for the course for one or more of the following reasons: major or multiple factual errors, significant mistakes in AP Style or grammar or misleading implications.

F —Your writing is of extremely poor quality with problems such as misspelled words, repeated grammatical mistakes, extensive factual errors and misspelled proper names.

ONGOING READING / BEAT COVERAGE

How do you become a better writer? By reading people who write!

Over the course of the semester, you will be required to track the developments of a single news topic, which will be of your choosing, by reading articles that appear in current publications. These stories will come from a variety of sources, including the Fox Valley, Wisconsin, national and international press. Students can also read news magazines — Newsweek, Time, U.S. News and World Report — or national newspapers like the *Wall Street Journal*, the *New York Times*, or the *Chicago Tribune*.

Beginning in Week 4, you will need to provide a summary of the articles you have read. The summary is due at the beginning of class on Mondays. You need to read a minimum of seven articles each week. The format is as follows:

GOP Senators Push to Overhaul Energy Policy
Chicago Tribune
Lizette Alvarez
Feb. 27, 2001
A three-sentence summary of the story

Each student will have a different beat. You may select from the following list, or propose another topic with the instructor's approval.

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| 1. Federal Government | 8. Business & Economy | 15. Crime |
| 2. Internet/News Media | 9. Politics | 16. Education |
| 3. TV & Movies | 10. Legal System | 17. Environment |
| 4. Music | 11. Europe | 18. Health |
| 5. Technology | 12. Middle East/Africa | 19. Energy |
| 6. Professional Sports | 13. Asia | 20. Defense |
| 7. Collegiate Sports | 14. Latin America | 21. Arts & Culture |

During the semester, you must provide a detailed critique of one of the articles you have read. In this critique you should discuss the style and methods used by the writer, and whether they are appropriate and effective for the story content. Information to be covered includes the lead style, voice, body style, story type. Your critique is not limited to these criteria, but must include it. The critique should be 3-4 pages long, double-spaced in paragraph form. It is due Dec. 3.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Sept. 5	Introduction Lab: Interview a classmate	
Sept. 10	The Basics, Selecting News, Careers Lab: A review Ex. 3, 4 & 5, pg. 19-25	Ch. 1, 5 & 22 in Fedler A in Stylebook

	Ex. 1, pages 143-145	
Sept. 12	Diversity Lab: Finding diverse sources, B-E review	B-E in Stylebook
Sept. 17	Grammar & Spelling Lab: F & G review Ex. 2, pg. 52-54	Ch.2 in Fedler F&G in Stylebook
Sept. 19	Writing Style Lab: H & I review Ex. 2 & 3, pg. 77-82	Ch. 3 in Fedler H & I in Stylebook
Sept. 24	Language of News Lab: J & K review Ex. 2 & 3, pg. 107-111 Hand in: Beat coverage summary	Ch. 4 in Fedler J & K in Stylebook
Sept. 26	Basic News Leads Lab: L & M review Ex. 3, pg. 167-70	Ch. 6 in Fedler L & M in Stylebook
Oct. 1	Basic News Leads II Lab: N & O review Ex. 4, pg. 171-173 Hand in: Beat coverage summary	N & O in Stylebook
Oct. 3	Alternative Leads Lab: P & Q review Ex. 2, pgs. 194-196	Ch. 7 in Fedler P & Q in Stylebook
Oct. 8	Alternative Leads II Lab: R & S review Ex. 3, pg. 197-199 Hand in: Beat coverage summary	R & S in Stylebook
Oct. 10	The body of a news story Lab: T & U review Ex. 2, # 1, 2 & 4, pgs. 226-228	Ch. 8 in Fedler T & U in Stylebook
Oct. 15	Quotations & Attributions Lab: V & W review Ex. 2 & 3, pgs. 263-266 Hand in: Beat coverage summary	Ch. 9 in Fedler V & W in Stylebook
Oct. 17	Finish AP Style, Midterm review	X, Y, Z & punctuation
Oct. 22	MIDTERM	
Oct. 24	Interviews Lab: Review midterm, speaker	Ch. 10 in Fedler
Oct. 29	Writing obituaries Lab: Write obit for celebrity Hand in: Beat coverage summary	Ch. 11 in Fedler
Oct. 31	Covering meetings Lab: Covering a common council meeting.	Ch. 12 in Fedler
Nov. 5	Covering speeches and panel discussions Lab: Ex. 6, pg. 337 Homework: Mercury 13 panel discussion.	

	Hand in: Beat coverage summary	
Nov. 7	Specialized types of stories Lab: Ex. 1, Squirrels, Love & Underage Drive Ex. 2, pg. 355-356 Ex. 5, ph. 361-362 Due: Mercury 13 story	Ch. 13 in Fedler
Nov. 12	Feature stories Lab: Classmate profile Hand in: Beat coverage summary	Ch. 14 in Fedler
Nov. 14	Crime and accidents Lab: Ex. 5, pg. 429 Homework: Airplane crash	Ch. 15 in Fedler
Nov. 19	Covering the courts Lab: Criminal complaint Hand in: Beat coverage summary Homework: Paulus complaint	
Nov. 21	THANKSGIVING BREAK	
Nov. 26	Use of the Internet / Writing for the 'Net Lab: Flash Exercises Homework: Writing story for Young Eagles Due: Paulus complaint, beat coverage summary	Ch. 16 in Fedler
Nov. 28	Advanced Reporting Lab: Ex. 3, pg. 481-482 Due: Young Eagles story	Ch. 17 in Fedler
Dec. 3	News Media & PR Practitioners Speaker: Steve Wuerger, Affinity Health Lab: News conference Hand in: Final critique of news article	Ch. 19 in Fedler
Dec. 5	Communications law, ethics Lab: What would you do?	Ch. 20 & 21 in Fedler
Dec. 10	Review for exam	
Dec. 12	FINAL EXAM	