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Writing for the Media

Journalism 221, Section C01, Clow 150

Monday and Wednesday, 12:40 p.m. to 2:50 p.m.

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Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday before class and by appointment.

Textbooks

1. Reporting for the Print Media, Eighth Edition, Fedler, et al.
2. Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law. You must bring this book to each class session.
3. William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, *Elements of Style*, 4th Edition. Available for free at: <http://www.bartelby.com/141/>. Of particular note: *Chapter V, An Approach to Style*.
4. A good dictionary. If you don't own one, purchase one.

Course Objective

The purpose of this class is quite simple - to make you a better writer, regardless of which field of media you ultimately pursue. To achieve that goal, we will emphasize a clear and direct writing style that communication majors in all sequences must master.

Our emphasis will be on writing. While this class will not have the outside class information gathering requirements of its successor class News Reporting, there will be assignments that require outside work. Good reporting and good writing go hand-in-hand, and you cannot exercise either one independently of the other. For much of our purposes, the basic facts of a story will be provided so that you can concentrate on developing the appropriate writing style.

At least half of each class will be used as a writing lab, where you will learn:

- To organize, write and edit directly on a computer.
- To work efficiently under deadline pressure.
- To organize information in a clear prose that quickly and effectively communicates the news.
- To be accurate.
- To make good news judgments.
- To use AP style.
- To develop a unique voice and sense of style.

There are other elements of good news writing that you will learn, but these are the core skills we will concentrate our time on in this class.

Class Format

We meet twice a week.

For outside work, you will be responsible for assigned readings and writing assignments. I will reserve part of each session for lecture, discussion, questions and guest speakers. On most days, we will also have in-class assignments to develop, refine and test your writing skills.

This class meets for more than two hours. Except during tests and quizzes, if you need to leave the room during class time you are free to do so.

Attendance

Attendance is crucial.

Since it is likely that there will be a writing assignment during each class, you are choosing to lower your grade significantly if you are absent.

There is no makeup for a missed in-class writing assignment.

If you are absent more than three times, I suggest you withdraw from this class. We will have guest speakers throughout the semester. We will do a writing assignment based on these speakers. Do not miss these sessions.

If you must miss a class for a serious illness or personal emergency, it is your responsibility to let me know what is happening. Send E-mail. I check my e-mail many times throughout the day. You can also leave a message for me with the department secretary or put a note in my mailbox.

I run this class in the manner similar to the metropolitan dailies where I have worked. It is similar to other professional writing venues. The same standards of discipline, quality and work ethic exist. I expect that you will adhere to those same standards.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty is a very serious matter. 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.

Any form of plagiarism will not be tolerated. This is a serious break of trust and journalistic ethics.

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Grading

Final grades will be based on a 1,000-point scale, with points being earned in the following manner:

In-class writing assignments: up to 350 points

Outside-class writing assignments: up to 200 points

Style quizzes: up to 100 points (These will be unannounced)

Outside reading and critiques: up to 150 points

Mid term exam: up to 100 points

Final exam: up to 100 points

An "A" grade is given to any story judged publishable. Anything less reflects the degree to which your story is approaching publishable quality. Grade distribution will be as follows:

A	930 - 1000	C	710 - 779
AB	890 - 929	CD	660 - 709
B	810 - 889	D	610 - 659
BC	760 - 809	F	0 - 609

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 889 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.

Because of the importance of careful writing, grades will be reduced for any and all manner of errors, including spelling, grammar, style and factual inaccuracy. Missed deadlines will also lead to reduced scores.

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Lecture/Exercise Schedule

Date	Lecture/Exercise	Assignment
Sept. 5	Course introduction.	
Sept. 10	What is News?	Chapters 1 & 5 in Fedler
Sept. 12	Grammar and Spelling, Language of News	A in Stylebook Chapter 2 & 4 B in Stylebook
Sept. 17	News Writing Style A profile for Fun	Chapter 3 C in Stylebook
Sept. 19	News Leads: your chance to hook the reader.	Chapter 6 D in Stylebook
Sept. 24	Alternate Leads: There is more than one-way to hook them.	Chapter 7 E in Stylebook
Sept. 26	And now, for the rest of the story. Body of a news story	Chapter 8 Beat Report #1 due F & G in Stylebook
Oct. 1	Quotations and Attribution.	Chapter 9 Critique #1 due H & I in Stylebook
Oct. 3	Interviews. We add reporting to the mix.	Chapter 10 J & K in Stylebook
Oct. 8	Obituaries.	Chapter 11 L & M in Stylebook
Oct. 10	Speeches and Meetings. How to make people interested.	Chapter 12 N & O Stylebook
Oct. 15	Moving beyond basic news	Chapter 13

		Obituaries Due P, Q & R in Stylebook Chapter 14 S,T & U in Stylebook
Oct. 17	Feature Stories	
Oct. 22	More fun with features	V, W, X, Y & Z
Oct. 24	Public Affairs and Elections	Chapter 15 Critique #2 due
Oct. 31	Public affairs - Police and Courts	Chapter 16
Nov. 5	Public Affairs - Police and Courts	Feature Story Due
Nov. 7	The Internet as a tool for writing	Chapter 16 Critique #3 due
Nov. 12	The Internet as medium	
Nov. 14	Advanced Reporting	Chapter 17
Nov. 19	Lies, more lies and stats - The power and pitfalls of precision reporting and writing	Event Story
Nov. 21	No Class - Thanksgiving Break	
Nov. 26	News Media and Public Relations	Chapter 19 Critique #4 due
Nov. 28	Ethics and Legal issues facing the media.	Chapter 18, 20,21
Dec. 3	Careers in Media	Critique #5 due
Dec. 5		Press Release due
Dec. 10	Prep for the Final	
Dec. 12	Final Exam	

NOTE: We will try to stick with this schedule as much as possible. However, it is not rigid in that it will limit what we can do or the order in which we study the material.

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Outside Reading and Critiques

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 read

newsmagazines - 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 four, you will need to provide a summary of the articles you have read. 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:

1. 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 & The 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 |

Writing Critique

During the semester, each of you will be required to provide a detailed critique of one of the articles you have read. In this critique, you will discuss the style and methods used by the writer, and whether they are appropriate and effective for the story content. Information you will discuss includes: lead style, voice, body style and story type. Your critique is not limited to these criteria, but must include it. Critiques will be one page, in paragraph form.