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## Writing for the Media

Journalism 221, Section AO9C, Clow 150

Monday and Wednesday, 8 a.m. to 10:10 a.m.

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**Office Hours:** Monday and Wednesday 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

### 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*, 4<sup>th</sup> 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.

In this class, we will stress the development of a clear and effective writing style. In order to do that, we will discuss, analyze and critique the work of established writers as well as our peers.

Our emphasis will be on writing. For much of our purposes, the basic information for a writing assignment will be provided so that you can concentrate on developing the appropriate writing style. However, there will be assignments that require some outside work.

Additionally, we will work to understand and apply the rules of the Associated Press Stylebook. AP style is the industry standard, and you must know when and how to use it. We will conduct regular style reviews and quizzes to test your knowledge. Additionally, all assignments must conform to AP 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 quality media writing you will learn, but these are the core skills we will concentrate on during 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.

Included in this time will be peer reviews of work we have done in class and peer led reviews of the Associated Press Stylebook. You are expected to take part in these group discussions and projects and your level of participation will directly affect your final grade.

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. 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 conduct this class in a manner consistent with many of the professional writing venues where you may eventually work. The standards of discipline, quality and work ethic will be similar.

### **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 250 points

Style quizzes: up to 150 points (These will be unannounced)

In-class reviews and critiques: up to 150 points

Final exam: up to 100 points

An "A" grade is given to any story judged publishable. For a quiz or critique, it is the equivalent of earning 93 percent or higher of the maximum score. 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

**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

<b>Date</b>	<b>Lecture/Exercise</b>	<b>Assignment</b>
Feb. 4	Course Introduction	
Feb. 6	Grammar, Spelling and the Language of News	Chapter 2&4 in Fedler. A in Stylebook.
Feb. 11	What is News? Grammar and Punctuation Exercise	Chapter 1&5. B in Stylebook.
Feb. 13	News Writing Style. Style Review. A profile for fun	Chapter 3. C in Stylebook.
Feb. 18	News Leads: your chance to hook the reader. Peer Review	Chapter 6. D in Stylebook.
Feb. 20	Alternate Leads: There is more than one-way to hook them. Style Review	Chapter 7. E in Stylebook.
Feb. 25	And now, for the rest of the story. Body of a news story. Peer Review	Chapter 8. Critique #1 due. F & G in Stylebook.
Feb. 27	Quotations and Attribution. Style Review.	Chapter 9. Critique #1 due. H & I in Stylebook.
March 3	Moving beyond basic news. Peer Review.	Chapter 13. J & K in Stylebook.
March 5	Obituaries. Style Review.	Chapter 11. L & M in Stylebook.
March 10	Speeches and Meetings. How to make people interested. Peer Review.	Chapter 12. N & O Stylebook. Critique #2 Due
March 12	Style Review	P, Q & R in Stylebook.
March 17	Feature Story. Peer Review.	Chapter 14. S,T,U in Stylebook.
March 19	More fun with features. Style Review.	V,W,X,Y,Z in Stylebook.
March 23-30	Spring Break.	HAVE FUN!
March 31	Interviews. We add Reporting to the mix. Peer Review.	Chapter 10. Critique #3.
April 2	Public Affairs. Style Review.	Chapter 15.
April 7	Public Affairs. Peer Review.	Chapter 15.
April 9	Numbers Crunch - how to use numbers in your writing. Style Review.	Chapter 17.
April 14	Going Online - Writing for the Next Generation. Peer Review.	Critique #4 Due.
April 16	Going Online - Writing for the Next Generation. Style Review.	
April 21	Ethics and legal issues facing the media. Peer Review	
April 23	Career in Media. Style Review	
April 28	Writing for Public Relations. Peer Review	Chapter 19. Critique #5 Due.
April 30	Writing for Public Relations. Style Review.	Chapter 19.

May 5	Peer Review	
May 7	Style Final	
May 12	Final Prep. Peer Review.	Final Critique Due.
May 14	Final Exam	

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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. 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:

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.