

Interpretive & Persuasive Writing—Spring 2009
Journalism 61-441, Clow 150
Tuesdays & Thursdays 10:20 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

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Required Texts

- Associated Press 2008 Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law (or other recent edition).
- “Journalism: The Democratic Craft,” Adam & Clark.

Course Content

This is a writing-intensive course that focuses on advanced forms of journalism, specifically those that go beyond a basic recitation of facts and attempt to achieve a given purpose. In this case the goals are either to persuade the reader of the rightness of a particular opinion or to explain the background and significance of an event. While these purposes are not the same, they share certain characteristics, including the burden they place on writers to master their subject matter and to make conscious choices about how to present information to elicit particular responses from an audience.

Like basic news stories, successful interpretive or persuasive writing is highly dependent on the quality and quantity of the information included, and so this course will also cover the techniques of fact gathering. To make our arguments this semester, we will draw heavily on the principles of rhetoric articulated by the Greek philosopher Aristotle nearly 2,500 years ago.

We will focus our efforts in three areas. First we will be reading and discussing selected essays on the craft of journalism and the role of journalism in a democratic society. Some of these discussions will be in class and some online. Second we will work collaboratively to create a class wiki on a particular reporting topic (I have one in mind already, but we will talk about this before coming to a final decision). The wiki will provide the raw materials for the most significant of your writing assignments. The third area of activity will be a series of persuasive and interpretive writing projects. One of these writing projects will involve the creation of a resume and a cover letter and will require you to participate in the department's mock interviews, which will be held on Thursday, April 2, from 2 to 5 p.m. Please save this date on your calendar, and let your instructor know right away if you have some irresolvable schedule conflict.

Course Objectives

1. To acquaint you with some key texts dealing with the philosophy and practice of

journalism in a democratic society.

2. To teach you how to use a “Web 2.0” tool, a wiki, to develop and share in depth knowledge.

3. To increase your skill in writing for interpretive or persuasive purposes.

Class Expectations

Class time will be devoted to a mixture of lecture, discussion and lab work, and your presence in class is extremely important, both for the sake of your own grade and for what you can contribute to others.

If you are absent for any reason, it is your responsibility to find out what you missed in class by contacting other students. If you cannot make it to class, do not expect your instructor to accommodate your situation by providing individualized instruction.

On some occasions we will not meet in the classroom but will instead conduct conversations online. You are expected to participate in back-and-forth discussions, and not just post a statement to beat the deadline. The online discussions will not be considered formal writing, and so you will be graded mostly on content (quality and quantity).

Grades

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

- Up to 100 points for participation, especially in online discussions.
- Up to 200 points for your contributions to the wiki.
- Up to 700 points for writing assignments.

You must complete all of the writing assignments. 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.

Articles will be graded according to the following guidelines (which use the term “story” even though some of your assignments will not be news stories):

A = The story is thoroughly reported and well written. It is ready for publication with no changes. (100 percent)

AB = The story is pretty good. It requires one or two minor edits, to clarify facts or improve writing, before publication. (90 percent)

B = The story is OK, but the reporter must do some additional work. A story that gets a B might have such flaws as some small amounts of missing information, structural problems, and a few grammar, punctuation or AP errors. (80 percent)

BC = The story is not ready for publication without major fixes. It may be missing critical information. Also, the story may have structural flaws and multiple

writing problems, such as word choice, grammar, punctuation or AP errors. (70 percent)

C = The student must rework the story completely. The reporting is insufficient, and the writing is weak. (60 percent)

CD = The student needs to start the assignment over and rethink what the story is. (50 percent)

D = The student has not produced a story that can be edited into usable form. Far too little reporting has been done. (40 percent)

F = The story would prove a liability to the reporter or publisher. These stories often contain factual errors, such as the misspelling of a proper name. (zero percent)

You will get an F for any story in which you misspell the name of a source or include a factual error.

Final letter grades will be based on the following scale:

A	930 to 1,000	C	700 to 759
AB	890 to 929	CD	650 to 699
B	810 to 889	D	600 to 649
BC	760 to 809	F	000 to 599

Writing Assignments & Objectives

Here are your writing assignments, along with the associated learning objectives and maximum point awards. Refer to the course schedule for due dates.

1. News Comment, 50 points. Given a news article on a topic that interests you and about which you are reasonably knowledgeable, you will apply the three Aristotelian tactics for making an argument in a short commentary that is published online.

2. Review, 50 points. Given some cultural event or artifact, you will apply the three Aristotelian tactics for making an argument in a 750-1,000 word review of that event or artifact to convey your opinion in a persuasive way.

3. Personal Column, 75 points. Reflecting on some recent incident or sequence of experiences in your life, you will apply the three Aristotelian tactics for making an argument while telling a story that uses observational detail to illuminate some interesting or revealing point about life in the 21st Century.

4. Political Endorsement, 75 points. You will write a 500-word endorsement of a candidate for an open seat in local government (and seek to get a shorter version published).

5. Cover Letter/Resume, 100 points. Given a potential job opening, you will construct a resume that highlights your relevant credentials and a cover letter that applies the Aristotelian techniques to convince the prospective employer to want to hire you.

6. Extended Interpretive Essay, 300 points. Given the information that has been gathered through the group reporting project and on your own, you will write an extended essay, roughly 3,000 words or 12-15 pages, explaining the problem and suggesting a solution.

7. Pitch Letter, 50 points. Given a topic that interests you and about which you are reasonably knowledgeable, you will develop a story idea and write a pitch letter to an appropriate publication.

NOTE: These are not the kinds of assignments that can be completed (successfully) at the last minute. You will need to think ahead and work ahead.

Course Policies

To the extent possible, class sessions will be conducted in a manner simulating the style and atmosphere of a working newsroom. Among other things, this means:

- You should get in the habit of addressing your instructor by his first name.
- You don't necessarily have to show up for class on time but should expect to be severely penalized (as much as 100 percent) for any assignments on which you fail to meet deadline. At a minimum late assignments will be penalized at the rate of 10 percent of the total points available per day.
- Unless you have a worksheet or specific instructions that call for you to write in your answers by hand, all assignments for this class must be typed. You should expect to lose points for material that is written by hand or not in complete sentences.

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>.

The following schedule is intended as a guide and may be subject to change.

Course Calendar

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS	DUE
2/3	Aristotle's Rhetoric		
2/5	Wikis	Ways, p. 98	
2/10	News 2.0	Sontag, p. 208	
2/12	Reviewing	Angelou, p. 23	News Comment
2/17	↓	Wolfe, p. 271	
2/19	↓	Stone, p. 34	Review
2/24	Personal writing	Orwell, p.4	
2/26	↓	Didion, p. 12	
3/3	↓	Lippmann, p. 48	
3/5	↓	Boorstin, p. 80	Personal Column
3/10	Politics	Orwell, p. 242	
3/12	↓	Kenner, p. 251	
3/17	↓	Park, p. 225	
3/19	↓		Endorsement
3/24	SPRING BREAK		
3/26	SPRING BREAK		
3/31	Practical writing	Lippmann, p. 116	
4/2	↓		Resume/Cover
4/7	Long form	Carey, p. 305	
4/9	journalism	Starobin/Verley, p. 332	
4/14	↓	Hayakawa, p. 256	
4/16	↓	Kovach/Rosenstiel, p. 170	
4/21	↓	Cohn, p. 193	
4/23	↓	Ettema/Glasser, p. 126	
4/28	↓	Hersh, p. 163	
4/30	↓		Extended Essay
5/5	Making the pitch	Adam, p. 344	
5/7	↓		
5/12	↓		
5/14	↓		Pitch Letter