Writing for the Media
Journalism 221
Summer 2013
Online

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"Nothing is easy."
-Y.A. Tittle.

Course Objectives

The purpose of this class is to make you a good writer and a better thinker. Good writing isn't an accident or a birthright. It's a skill like any other and as such, it needs to be practiced and developed. The same can be said for thinking. This is not going to be a class where you memorize names, dates, rules and mantras before spewing them back at me for a final that's worth 90 percent of your grade. You'll have to think. You'll have to justify. You'll have to improvise, adapt and overcome. This will not be natural to many of you and it won't come easy to most of you. Don't worry about it. If you stick with the class and work hard on what you've been assigned, you'll grow, develop and improve. That's the point of college, isn't it?

One of the things I'd like to stress is that this is likely a new experience for most of you; thus, we'll be working together to improve the course over the next four weeks. If something is working well, I need to know that. If something is failing horribly, I need to know that too. If you can't get something to work or you can't find something online or something is broken, I really need to know that. In order to make sure that you get the most out of this experience, you need to let me know what is going on with you. The quieter you are, the worse things are going to be.

Course Texts

News Writing and Reporting (10th Edition). The Missouri Group
The Associated Press Stylebook (2012). This will become your bible.
A good dictionary. If you don't have one, buy one. It's a decent investment.
In addition, you'll need access to the Internet on at least a weekly basis.

How this class will work:

The question of how best to run an online course is one that has been the topic of many discussions by academics. If you meter out the course too slowly, it's just as inconvenient as if you had to show up for a daily meeting. If you let it all out too quickly, some people will tear through the course and fail miserably while others will wait until the last minute and try to wedge it all in at the end.

To make this course something we can all learn from and to allow us to all work at a decent pace, the course will be released in four modules, one for each week. The module will consist of lectures, notes, examples, quizzes, assignments and tests for that week. The material will be available on the first day of that week (Monday, possibly Sunday if I'm ahead of the game). You are then expected to complete the tasks at hand no later than the end of that week (Friday at noon, so I can use Saturday to grade and get you some feedback). Then, on Sunday or Monday, the next chunk of material will be released to you and we start the process all over again. The only time this won't be the case is with the final project, which will be released to you earlier.

If things feel like they're running you over or if you feel that something isn't working right, make sure you get in touch with me right away and we'll see what we can do to fix that. The goal here is to get you a valuable experience and important information while still allowing you flexibility in how and when you learn. If that's not happening, I need to know.

Policy on Academic Misconduct

Cheating and plagiarism are prohibited. Whatever you do for this class must be done on your own, unless expressly noted during class. You'll note that journalistic credibility has taken a beating over the past few years and that trust isn't a boomerang: once you throw it away, it doesn't come back. The best place to start holding yourself to a decent ethical code is right here and right now. Academic dishonesty, including but not limited to plagiarizing and cheating, is a death knell for your program and your career as a journalist. The best way to make sure you aren't messing up is to ask me in advance of doing whatever it is you think might be problematic. If you don't and you get caught, the university will deal with you and that can range from probation to expulsion. The university website contains a list of procedures regarding dishonesty. I will follow those procedures.

Statement for Students With Special Needs

The university's policies regarding disability will be followed here. Contact the dean of students at 424-3100 or head to the web at: http://www.uwosh.edu/dean/disabilities.htm for information. The university and I will make every reasonable effort to accommodate students with disabilities.

Grading

The grades in this class aren't nearly as important as what you learn and how you progress as a writer and reporter. If you make this all about the grades, you will deprive yourself of a great opportunity to learn these skills and you will be kicking yourself later in life. As for getting out of here alive, the department and the university set the standards. **Students must earn at least a "C" to continue in the major or the minor.**

Don't panic about bombing out. I have found that students who operate that way often find themselves the victims of self-fulfilling prophecies.

100-91	Outstanding work. Work that is ready for publication
90-81	Above average. With minor revisions and editing, it could run.
80-70	Average. Work requires some editing/additional info/revision.
69-60	Below Average/Poor. Requires some major changes.
59-41	Failing. Paper has inherent problems in reporting/writing.
40-0	Beyond problematic. Work that is unacceptable because of factual, spelling or other major errors or reporter missed deadline.

Official course grades:

A	**100-91**	**C**	**78-71**
A-	**90-89**	**C-**	**70**
B+	**88**	**D+**	**69**
B	**87-81**	**D**	**68-61**
B-	**80**	**D-**	**60**
C+	**79**	**F**	**59-0**

Major ways you can cost yourself points:

In your major assignments, you will be graded in three areas: reporting, writing and style. Because this is a writing course, you will be graded most heavily on your writing. That said, each section accounts for a third of your grade. On more minor writing assignments, you'll get a single grade with notes as to specific deductions.

Factual errors (wrong information, misspelled proper nouns etc.) will cost you half of your reporting grade in assignments graded for reporting.

AP Style: You will lose 20 points per error in assignments with a graded style section. That means, if you write "July 4th" five times, you're already down to 0 points for your style grade.

In-Class Style: Several aspects of structure, grammar and spelling will be emphasized to improve your writing. For each violation of those rules (as they are introduced), you lose 10 points. That means, you write "said Smith" or keep slipping a "D" between "I" and the "G" of "religion," you'll be costing your 10 points a crack.

Other point deductions will be noted within the text of your story.

Course Assignments

Grades and assignments are not meant to be punitive. However, since the university does require the grades, here are the assignments for the class and what they' re worth:

Quizzes: 10 percent

You'll get about one quiz per week that hits on some of the basic elements of what we've discussed to that point. Each quiz will likely be 10 questions. If you check the course outline, the quizzes are located under the lecture you should have completed prior to taking the quiz. In other words, listen to the lectures and read the chapters listed to that point before taking the quiz.

The Big Two: 30 percent

Obviously, writing is a big part of this course, so you will be asked to write two major stories. You will be provided a speech of some kind along with two press releases reacting to that speech. You will then be expected to write a two-to-three-page story based on the material you have available to you. You will be graded on three areas: Reporting, Writing and Style. Each will count for one-third of your grade. The reporting area will involve how well you understood the material, incorporated key aspects of the pieces you have received and if you are factually accurate in your work. The writing area will involve things such as how well you wrote your lead, if you used proper paraphrase-quote structure, if you ordered the elements in descending order of importance and if it read well overall. The style area will consist of AP style and any spelling/in-class style issues we talk about.

If you finish these early and want me to give them a quick read, I'd be happy to do so. However "early" doesn't mean three hours before they are due. I'll need at least a day before the deadline, so plan accordingly if you want some help.

Minor Assignments: 20 percent

You will be required to do some minor writing and minor style assignments throughout the course. These pieces should help strengthen your understanding of what we've covered in the lectures.

Exams: 30 percent
You will take three exams. They will not be cumulative (not even the final). They are open-book, open-notes exams, as I couldn't stop you from looking at this stuff if I wanted to. The tests are two-part set ups. The first part will be a D2L quiz-style exam while the second part will involve some short writing or essay work. The D2L portion will have a two-hour limit, so reviewing your notes will be a good idea before you get started. These tests should be taken after you complete the lectures, assignments and other

Professionalism/Participation: 10 percent
In order to keep you attuned to the issues that your colleagues might be having with the course or with the material, we will host a discussion board via D2L. Each week, you will be expected to make one post of your own and respond to one other person's post. I'll get things started with a prompt or a question for the week, but you should feel free to post if you'd like on any topic related to the course. The completion of this task with a post and response of some quality (as in not just saying, "Yeah, I agree with this post.") will help all of us feel connected to the course and each other. It's also a slam-dunk way to get 10 percent of an "A" in the class, so don't blow it.

A Few Final Reminders

1. Late assignments will not be tolerated. Sorry, but if you miss a deadline at a paper, firm or station, you can embarrass yourself and your editor. You can cost the place thousands of dollars each minute you are late. You are given ample time to finish the task set in front of you. Make the time for this or you will hate yourself.

2. Learning is the most important part of this class. Yes, grades matter, but the skills you acquire here are the most important thing to take away from here. I know people who were "C" students in this type of class who have landed jobs in major markets. The reason why? They took what they were told and incorporated it into their approach to journalism. If you approach this class as something you have to "get through" you will have deprived yourself of a great opportunity to learn.

3. This class is a time suck. It will take more than putting aside and hour or two the day before something is due. If it is near deadline time, most of the procrastinators will be freaking out and get that wonderful feeling of brain lock we call writer' s block. Don't assume you can get everything done in the 11th hour.

4. Have fun. You become involved in a lot of different areas, work with a lot of different people and get a rare perspective into the human condition. Some days it's a drudge, but over all, it is one of the few jobs where the bad days are far outnumbered by the good days.

Schedule:

Here is a breakdown of what you'll be getting each week so that you can better prepare. Some of these sections will account for more than one lecture.

REMEMBER: DEADLINES FOR YOUR HOMEWORK, QUIZZES AND TESTS ARE SET FOR NOON ON FRIDAY OF EACH WEEK.

Week 1

Introduction: Welcome to the course
Lecture: Intro
BY THE END OF WEEK 1, YOU MUST HAVE READ THE AP STYLE GUIDE FROM A TO Z

The elements of news value
Readings: NONE
Lecture: Elements of news value

Grammar and more
Readings: Chapter 1
Lecture: Grammar 1 and Grammar 2
ASSIGNMENT: AP Style

Lead Writing
Readings: Chapter 9
Lecture: Leads 1 and Leads 2
Quiz: Week 1 Basics
ASSIGNMENT: Lead Rewrite
TEST: Test 1 (parts 1 and 2)

Week 2

Basic research: Foundation of journalism
Readings: Chapter 5
Lecture: How to research

Inverted Pyramid
Readings: Chapter 10
Lecture: The Inverted Pyramid
ASSIGNMENT: 4-paragraph brief

Quotes: The spice of every story
Lecture: Quotes 1 and 2
READINGS: Chapter 4

Interviewing basics
READINGS: Chapter 6
Lecture: Interviewing
Quiz: Interviewing and Writing Basics
ASSIGNMENT: Interview Assignment

Putting it all together: Story Structure
Lecture: Story structure
TEST: Test 2 (parts 1 and 2)

Week 3
Meetings, speeches and news conferences
READING: Chapter 13
Lecture: Meetings
ASSIGNMENT: Big Story 1

Broadcast writing
Lecture: Broadcast
READING: Chapter 15

Writing for public relations and advertising
Lecture: PR; Advertising
READING: Chapters 20

Writing for the web
Lecture: Web writing
READING: NONE
QUIZ: Week 3 basics

TEST: NONE

Week 4
Art and craft of good writing
Lecture: Secrets to writing
READINGS: Chapter 11
ASSIGNMENT: Big Story 2

Law
Lecture: Law 1 and 2
READINGS: Chapter 21

Ethics
Lecture: Ethics
READINGS: Chapter 22
QUIZ: Law and Ethics

Social Media
Lecture: Social Media
READINGS: None

You Pick Day
Lecture: ?
TEST: Final Exam