

## **Feature Writing**

JOUR 3130-002

Spring 2013

11:20 a.m. - 12:45, Tuesday & Thursday, Meeman Journalism Building, Room 212

Instructor: Darrin M. Devault, M.A.

Office: Meeman Journalism Building, Room 332

Office hours: Tuesday & Thursday, 2-4 p.m.

Office Phone: (901) 678-2405; Cell Phone: (901) 569-6353

E-mail: [darrin.devault@memphis.edu](mailto:darrin.devault@memphis.edu)

Twitter: @DarrinDevault

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

### **CATALOGUE/COURSE DESCRIPTION:**

Advanced practice in writing, publishing feature stories for magazines and newspapers and the Web; finding and developing publishable ideas; freelance techniques; advanced reporting skills; writing techniques with emphasis on leads, endings, description, effective use of anecdotes and quotations; critiques of student work.

### **PREREQUISITE:**

Media Writing (JOUR 2121)

### **REQUIRED MATERIALS:**

*Writing for Magazines* by Wray, C.S., 2nd edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005). ISBN 978-0-07-286491-5

In addition to the textbook, you are expected to regularly read *The Commercial Appeal*, *USA Today* and *The New York Times*. These newspapers are available free at various locations around campus, including Jones Hall (Tiger Den) near the Meeman Journalism Building. You also must read at least one different magazine each week.

### **CLASSROOM FORMAT:**

Lecture, lab assignments and outside writing assignments.

### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

- Assignments will be completed both in and outside the classroom, so attendance and participation are vital. Additionally, class time is valuable for discussion about news features and upcoming assignments. Please arrive to class on time.
- **An important note about attendance:** Your instructor keeps attendance records. You will get three free passes (no questions asked) during the semester. After you use these passes, each additional missed class will result in a half-letter deduction from your semester grade.
- All assignments must be filed to the eCourseware dropbox by midnight on the day they are due. **Late assignments will not be accepted.** It is extremely important that you recognize the importance of deadlines and file assignments on time.

- All assignments must be written in third person in a structure that conforms to standard media writing guidelines. Assignments also will be graded on content, grammar, punctuation and Associated Press style.
- Additionally, all assignments must conform to these specifications: All features must be double-spaced with indented paragraphs and filed in a Microsoft Word document that is identified with a date and byline. If assignments don't meet these specifications, they will be returned to you ungraded.

## **GRADING:**

### **Grading Procedure:**

Feature writing assignments will count for 85 percent of your final grade. Keeping a weekly journal and writing a query letter will count for the remaining 15 percent.

Your major writing assignments will include four newspaper features and one multiple-source feature for a consumer magazine. Feature stories that are rewritten will be graded in this way: 75 percent of the grade will come from the first draft you submit; the remaining 25 percent will come from your rewrite. All feature stories must be submitted for publication. You won't be penalized if your stories are not published, but you must actively try to get them published. Published work is important in obtaining internships and getting jobs after college. Any published story will receive extra credit, which will vary based on the prestige of the publication.

You also will be required to keep a one-page weekly journal. Be prepared to discuss your journal entries in class. Your journal entry will name a magazine and describe your favorite article in that issue. In the same report, you will describe the feature story in one of the newspapers (see above section on Textbooks) you enjoyed most that week. Include what you thought was the best piece of description among the publications you read that week.

*Sources:* News releases are not acceptable sources, except as a starting point. Nothing, especially direct quotes, should be taken directly from a news release or from published works. Websites should rarely be quoted and when they are, the story should reflect that. Do not use a website as a source without first checking with the instructor.

### **Grading Scale:**

Four Feature Newspaper Stories — 600 points

One Feature Magazine Story — 150 points

In-Class Lab Assignments— 100 points

Weekly Journals/Writing a Query Letter — 150 points

**TOTAL: 1,000 points**

**A** = 900-1,000 points

**B** = 800-899 points

**C** = 700-799 points

**D** = 600-699 points

**F** = 599 and fewer points

## WEEKLY JOURNALS

**Journal #1 (10 points):** due January 27  
**Journal #2 (10 points):** due February 3  
**Journal #3 (10 points):** due February 10  
**Journal #4 (10 points):** due February 17  
**Journal #5 (10 points):** due February 24  
**Journal #6 (10 points):** due March 3  
**Journal #7 (10 points):** due March 19  
**Journal #8 (10 points):** due March 24  
**Journal #9 (10 points):** due March 31  
**Journal #10 (10 points):** due April 7  
**Journal #11 (10 points):** due April 14  
**Journal #12 (10 points):** due April 21  
**Query Letter (30 points):** TBA  
**JOURNAL TOTAL: 150 points**

**IN-CLASS LAB ASSIGNMENTS: 100 points**

## NEWSPAPER/MAGAZINE FEATURES

**Newspaper Feature #1 (150 points):** due February 7  
**Newspaper Feature #2 (150 points):** due February 28  
**Newspaper Feature #3 (150 points):** due March 21  
**Newspaper Feature #4 (150 points):** due April 11  
**Magazine Feature (150 points):** due April 30  
**FEATURES TOTAL: 750 points**

**TOTAL POSSIBLE SEMESTER POINTS: 1,000 points**

## TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE:

**Week #1 (January 17):** Course Introduction/What Is a News Feature?  
**Week #2 (January 22 & 24):** Developing Story Ideas/Leads and Story Organization  
**Week #3 (January 29 & 31):** Descriptive Writing  
**Week #4 (February 5 & 7):** How to Make a Pitch/*First Feature Due on Feb. 7*  
**Week #5 (February 12 & 14):** Editing and Rewrites  
**Week #6 (February 19 & 21):** Personality Profiles  
**Week #7 (February 26 & 28):** Group or Organization Features & Hobby Features/*Second Feature Due on Feb. 28*  
**Week #8 (March 5 & 7):** Historical Features/Science, Research and Health Features  
**Week #9 (March 12 & 14):** Spring Break – No class  
**Week #10 (March 19 & 21):** Critical Writing (film, book, concert, food reviews)/*Third Feature Due on March 21*  
**Week #11 (March 26 & 28):** Seasonal Features  
**Week #12 (April 2 & 4):** Travel Writing/Personal Experience  
**Week #13 (April 9 & 11):** The Differences Between Magazine and Newspaper Features/*Fourth Feature Due on April 11*  
**Week #14 (April 16 & 18):** Development of Final Features  
**Week #15 (April 23 & 25):** So You Want to Be a Freelancer/Discussion of Final Features  
**Week #16 (April 30):** Presentation of Magazine Features/*Magazine Feature Due*

## **ASSIGNED TEXTBOOK READINGS**

*Here are the assigned readings from your textbook:*

- Chapter 1:** “So You Want to Be a Magazine Writer,” January 22
- Chapter 2:** “The Wonderful World of Magazines,” January 22
- Chapter 3:** “What’s the Big Idea?” January 24
- Chapter 4:** “What Do I Do with This Article,” January 24
- Chapter 5:** “You Can’t Hit Anything If You Don’t Aim at It,” January 29
- Chapter 6:** “So Much to Write, So Little Time,” January 29
- Chapter 7:** “A Writer’s Tools,” January 31
- Chapter 8:** “Getting Started,” January 31
- Chapter 9:** “Writing the Article,” February 5
- Chapter 10:** “The Mechanics of Writing,” February 5
- Chapter 11:** “Writing That Shines,” February 7
- Chapter 12:** “Writer’s Block,” February 12
- Chapter 13:** “The Business and Legal Side of Writing,” February 19
- Chapter 14:** “A Potpourri of New Writer Concerns,” February 26
- Chapter 15:** “Twenty Ways to *Not* Get Published,” February 26

## **ASSESSMENT**

### **PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES FOR FEATURE WRITING (JOUR 3130):**

- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

### **HOW PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES WILL BE MET FOR FEATURE WRITING (JOUR 3130):**

#### **Cognitive Objectives To Be Mastered (Ability to Explain, Analyze, Understand, Think Critically):**

- Acquire the technical knowledge necessary to write news feature stories.
- Utilize interviewing skills to develop information needed to write feature stories.
- Practice higher order critical thinking skills by analyzing feature stories for style, structure and focus.
- Enhance retention and transfer of information from class discussions to the real world by researching and writing feature stories.
- Be familiar with Associated Press style and appropriate magazine styles.
- Students can write a query letter and submit to a publication.
- Students knows how to find appropriate publication market for an article idea.

**Performance Standards To Be Met (Demonstrable Skills, Abilities, Techniques, Applied Competencies):**

- Students will write at least four newspaper features and one magazine feature. Story length will vary based on the assignment.
- Students are responsible for developing the story idea and researching and writing the story within the stated deadline.
- Students will analyze award-winning features for class discussion.
- Students will utilize the *Associated Press Stylebook* in writing newspaper features.
- Magazine articles will be extensively researched with multiple and multi-cultural sources.

**HOW ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING WILL BE MET FOR FEATURE WRITING (JOUR 3130):**

- Require multi-cultural sources.
- Require a list of sources with contact information so professor can do spot-checks for accuracy.
- Required to gather and analyze secondary data.
- Required to write at least newspaper and/or magazine stories, including one article for specific publication.
- Analyze targeted publication and write query letter, then produce multiple-sourced article appropriate to publication market.

**PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES FOR JOURNALISM PROGRAM:**

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies and be to

- understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.
- understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- think critically, creatively and independently;
- conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

**ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT LEARNING FOR JOURNALISM PROGRAM:**

The Council seeks to promote student learning and encourages experimentation and innovation. Assessment is a system of evaluation of student learning at the course or unit level (as opposed to grading at the individual level). Three criteria should guide assessment of student learning:

- Awareness: familiarity with specific information, including facts, concepts, theories, laws and regulations, processes and effects.
- Understanding: assimilation and comprehension of information, concepts, theories and ideas.
- Application: competence in relating and applying skills, information, concepts, theories and ideas to the accomplishment of tasks.

**DEPARTMENT POLICIES****E-MAIL:**

You must have your UM e-mail account activated. If you are using another provider such as Google, you are required to have your UM email forwarded to that account. Go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> Web site to implement forwarding of UM e-mail. You are required to check your email daily. You are responsible for complying with any e-mail sent to you by your professor or the University.

**CELL PHONES:**

You must turn them off during class.

**ATTENDANCE:**

Class attendance is mandatory in the Department of Journalism. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance, or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements, which are acceptable to your professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence due to illness or other catastrophic emergency such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g., with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary). This is a professional program for journalists who are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. If you have some problem making it to class on time make arrangements to fix the problem or consider taking another course. You should consider this class your "job" in the educational process and be on time just as you would elsewhere.

**CHEATING:**

In addition to university-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Department of Journalism considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses, or a student receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on his/her own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. That may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the university.

“Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for an evaluation of the originality of your ideas and proper use and attribution of sources. As part of this process, you may be required to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your written work, or be given other instructions to follow. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process and that the assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com’s restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Any assignment not submitted according to the procedures given by the instructor may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.” (Office of Legal Counsel, October 17, 2005)

**ONLINE SETEs:**

You are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of the course. Once your instructor has posted your grade, you can immediately see that grade, provided you completed a teacher evaluation for that course. How to access your evaluation forms: Log in using your UUID and email password; click on the gray “Student” tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the “Submit” button at the bottom of the form. It will only take a few minutes of your time. We take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and will be appreciated.

**DISABILITY:**

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at (901) 678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

**EXIT EXAM FOR ALL JOURNALISM MAJORS:**

All Journalism majors are required to take the Journalism Exit Exam their last semester before graduation. Please contact the Journalism office staff anytime during the semester to sign up. You may take the test anytime there are open lab hours during the semester. You will not be certified to graduate until you have completed the test.