

Feature Writing

JOUR 3130-M50

Spring 2018

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

CATALOG 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: JOUR 2121/JRSM 2121

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- There is no required text book. Required readings will be posted on eCourseware.
- Daily access to the World Wide Web. All course materials and instructions will be available at www.elearn.memphis.edu. As well as Web access, students will need Microsoft Word. All writing assignments shall be completed in Microsoft Word.
- Your online portfolio should be updated regularly during the semester, adding your best writing from this class. Your portfolio is graded and worth 5% of your grade.
- It is very important for your development as a feature writer to read and study well-written features. So you will need to:
 - Read the New York Times or an equivalent national newspaper every day.
 - Read your local daily newspaper every day.
 - Read, at your own discretion, from magazines and websites that do top-notch feature writing – such as “The New Yorker,” “Esquire,” “Vanity Fair,” “National Geographic,” “Rolling Stone,” “Sports Illustrated,” Salon.com, Slate.com, and so forth.

CLASSROOM FORMAT:

This is a writing intensive course delivered online in an asynchronous format. Students will write every week and receive regular feedback and coaching on their work.

Students must have Internet access and Microsoft Word or other word processing software that generates a “.doc” or “.docx” extension. All assignments MUST be filed in a “.doc” format; type must be double spaced with indented paragraphs.

ACCESSING THE COURSE WEBSITE:

1. Go to the University of Memphis home page: <http://www.memphis.edu>. **The course page will be available January 16 to May 7, 2018**
2. Click on the “MyMemphis” link at the bottom of the left column menu.
3. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
4. Click on the “eCampus Resources” tab.
5. In the center column of the page, click on the blue UofM eCourseware link
Down on that page, in the Spring 2018 course list available to you, click on the link for JOUR 3130 - M50 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

CLASSROOM FORMAT:

- Students will complete a writing assignment each week during the semester. If it is determined there is plagiarism or fabrication with an assignment, it will mean that assignment gets an automatic zero. **Your instructor does not accept late work.**
- All assignments must have a story slug, date and byline and be filed in a Word document that is double spaced with indented paragraphs. Do not put extra space between paragraphs. **If assignments do not follow this format, they will not be graded.** Feature writing requires knowledge of Associated Press style. Therefore, all writing assignments for JOUR 3130 will be written in correct AP style.
- You are required to post constructive feedback and comments about your classmates’ writing assignments on the Discussion Board. Each student is expected to offer a minimum of two comments (**minimum of 100 words**) each week. The comments are due at noon each Sunday. More details will be provided on commenting and requirements at the beginning of the semester.

GRADING:

Feature stories & assignments	60%
Discussion Board posts/comments	20%
Feature article analysis assignments	15%
Online portfolio	5%

GRADING SCALE:

- A: 90-100%
- B: 80-89%
- C: 70-79%
- D: 60-69%
- F: 0 to 59%

TENTATIVE TIMETABLE

Week 1: Jan. 22 – 28

Understanding the feature story

- What is a feature story?
- News reports vs. storytelling
- Building observational & listening skills: showing vs. telling

Week 2: Jan. 29 – Feb. 4

The story hunt begins:

- Finding a feature story
- Turning ideas into articles

Week 3: Feb. 5 – 11

Writing feature stories:

- Writing hourglass
- Anecdotes: leads & beyond
- Other leads

Week 4: Feb. 12 – 18

Formatting feature stories:

- Finding the theme (or nut graph)
- Focus on theme statements

Week 5: Feb. 19 – 25

Writing feature stories:

- Managing the middle: shaping the body
- Time for transitions
- Writing conclusions

Week 6: Feb. 26 – March 4

The roots of good writing: language & structure

Week 7: March 5 – 11

No new assignments – continue to read!

Week 8: March 12 – 18

Types of features:

- Profiles
- Round-ups, How-tos and Experiences
- Travel stories
- Seasonal stories
- Reviews

Week 9: March 19 – 25

Finding & using sources:

- Sources
- Attribution

Week 10: March 26 – April 1

Interviewing

Week 11: April 2 – 8

Finding stories off the news

Writing on a tight deadline

Week 12: April 9 – 15

Making ideas become \$\$

- Researching publications
- Framing queries
- Commissioning a feature

Week 13: April 16 – 22

Feature photos & Travel Writing

Week 14: April 23 – 29

Ethics & final thoughts

FIVE PILLARS OF JOUR3130

- *Professionalism*: Students learn the professional standards and practices of feature writing by discussing the composition and merits of award-winning features. Students learn to practice the highest standards of professionalism in research and writing of stories.
- *Writing*: Students are required to research topics and write and rewrite multiple short and long form articles and analyze their strengths and weaknesses.
- *Multimedia*: Students understand through lecture and demonstration how feature writing applies to print, electronic media and the web.
- *Critical Thinking*: Students must demonstrate an understanding of the audience for which their work is intended. As part of this process, students will be required to review such reference works as *Writers Market* prior to writing.
- *Media Literacy*: Students understand the increasingly changing media environment in terms of technological, economic, and societal trends.

ASSESSMENT

PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES FOR JOUR3130:

- 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 the diversity of people and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communication in a global society
- 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 grammatically correctness
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work, and to understand the digital world

HOW PROFESSIONAL VALUES AND COMPETENCIES WILL BE MET:

Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically):

- Acquire the technical knowledge necessary to write feature stories.
- Use 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 AP style and appropriate magazine styles.

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 use the AP 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:

Awareness:

- Aware of importance of diverse sources.

Understanding:

- Analyze targeted publication and write query letter, then produce multiple-sourced article appropriate to publication market.

Application:

- 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 five newspaper and/or magazine stories, including one article for specific publication.

DEPARTMENT POLICIES

PORTFOLIO REQUIREMENT:

All students in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of their work. Undergraduate students are to begin the portfolio in JRSM 3900 and contribute to it from every course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from his/her courses and/or professional experience and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in the capstone course for their majors.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. The department requires students to use WordPress to build their portfolio sites. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

Students should have a professional email address they plan to use throughout their professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail or Yahoo.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Social media links

Students might wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, SoundSlides presentations, design PDFs, audio files, and Storify pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career the student seeks after graduation. Thus, each student's portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

EMAIL:

You must have your UM email 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> website to implement forwarding of UM email. You are required to check your email daily. You are responsible for complying with any email sent to you by your professor or the University.

MOBILE PHONES AND LAPTOPS:

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Your instructor will set the policy for her/her specific class.

ATTENDANCE:

Class attendance is mandatory in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media. 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 because of 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 class. 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 and Strategic Media 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.

Further, as this is a journalism/mass communication class, students are expected to comply with copyright law, and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

“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 this course. Once your instructor has posted your grade, you can immediately see that grade, provided you completed a teacher evaluation for that class. 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.

DEADLINES:

Remember there’s a reason “DEAD” makes up half the word “deadline.” All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. If you get into trouble, talk to your instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

AP STYLE AND GRAMMAR:

All written work in this class should follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. If you don’t know the style for a particular phrase, look it up or ask your classmates or the instructor.

DISABILITY:

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

DIVERSITY:

Students are required to respect the differences of others and treat all persons with respect. Discriminatory, derogatory and threatening language or behavior will not be tolerated. Further, students are expected to consider their work through a diverse mind. Mass communications reach a mass audience, and students should be aware of how those messages are received by a diverse audience.

WEATHER POLICY:

Always check with local media and the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather. If the university is closed or classes are canceled, this course will not meet. However, students will still be responsible for that day's work.