

# Feature Writing

JOUR 3130-001

Spring 2020

Class Meeting: TR 4:10-5:25 p.m., MJ 212

## Prof. David Waters

**Office:** 316 Meeman Journalism Building

**Office Hours:** By appointment

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog description

Advanced practice in reporting, writing and editing feature stories for magazines, newspapers and the Web; finding and developing publishable ideas; freelance techniques; advanced reporting skills; writing techniques with emphasis on clarity, focus, structure, word choice, narrative and explanatory approaches; critiques of student work, editing and revision.

### Prerequisites

JRSM 2121

JRSM 3526 or PBRL 3421

### Course requirements

- There is no required textbook. 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](http://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, the Wall Street Journal, or an equivalent national newspaper every day.
  - Read your local daily newspaper(s) 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.

### Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis eLearn home page: <http://elearn.memphis.edu>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.

3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for JOUR 3130-001 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

### Class format

This class will focus on developing students' reporting and writing skills. The classroom will be run like a newsroom with the instructor acting as editor and the students as reporters. Professional reporting and writing standards and deadlines will be set and must be met.

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.

- The classroom will be run like a newsroom. We will spend most of our time discussing, evaluating and making decisions about story assignments and stories – stories written by others and by members of the class.
- Students will complete a number of writing assignments 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 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 comments about your writing assignments and readings on the Discussion Board. Each student is expected to offer a minimum of one comment (**minimum of 50 words**) each week. The comments are due at noon each Sunday. More details will be provided at the beginning of the semester.
- **All** class writing assignments must be accompanied by an assigned multimedia component – an infographic, photograph, photo slideshow, video, audio or podcast.

### Grading

Assignment categories and points or percentage weights.

A: 90-100% (final drafts publishable in a reputable newspaper or magazine)

B: 80-89% (final drafts publishable with minor editing)

C: 70-79% (final drafts publishable with editing/revision)

D: 60-69% (final drafts not publishable)

F: 0 to 59% (failure to complete assignments, meet deadlines)

#### *Grade Distribution:*

Assignment	Percentage
Feature stories & assignments	80%
Classroom/Discussion Board participation	15%
Online portfolio	5%

### COURSE SCHEDULE

*Week 1, Jan 21-23: Understanding the feature story.*

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

*Week 2, Jan. 28-30: Finding/reporting feature stories:*

- Story ideas and choices that are relevant, useful, informative, interesting
- Reporting choices and techniques
- Discussion/Approval of ideas for first feature story

*Week 3, Feb. 4-6: Writing feature stories:*

- Story structures
- Leads/anecdotes/quotes
- Sources and attribution

*Week 4, Feb. 11-13: Types of feature stories:*

- Personality Profiles
- Explanatory features
- Narrative features
- News/Issues features
- Place/Time features

*DUE: First feature due 6 p.m. Feb. 13.*

*Week 5, Feb. 18-20:*

- Discussion/Approval of ideas for second feature story
- Critique of first features

*Week 6, Feb. 25-27:*

- Interview techniques

*DUE: Second feature due 6 p.m. Feb. 27.*

*Week 7, March 3-5:*

- Critique of second features
- Discussion/Approval of ideas for third feature story

*Week 8, March 10-12: Spring Break*

*Week 9, March 17-19:*

- Print, digital and multimedia opportunities and challenges

*DUE: Third feature due 6 p.m. March 19*

*Week 10, March 24-26*

- Critique of third feature story
- Discussion/Approval of ideas for fourth feature story

### Week 11, March 31-April 2

- Magazine, newspaper and online features

DUE: Fourth feature due 6 p.m. April 2.

### Week 12, April 7-9

- Critique of fourth feature story
- Discussion/Approval of ideas for final feature idea

### Week 13, April 14-16

- Freelance methods — selling your stories

### Week 14, April 21-23

- The ethics, efficacy and responsibility of the journalist

DUE: Final feature due 6 p.m. April 24.

## ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

### Five Pillars in JOUR 3130

- *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.
- *Multimedia*: Students understand through lecture and demonstration how feature writing applies to print, electronic media and the web.
- *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.

### Professional Values and Competencies in 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 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 a specific publication.

## JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA 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 graduate students are to begin in JRSM 7002. Students are to contribute to it in every skills course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from courses and/or professional experiences and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in their capstone courses.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. Students may use any content management system, but students are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix or SquareSpace. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but they 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 lives, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

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 writing 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**

Students must have their UofM email accounts activated. Students using another provider, such as Google, are required to have all UofM email forwarded to that account. Students should go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UofM email. Students are required to check their email daily. They are responsible for complying with any email sent to by professors or others in the University.

## **Electronic devices**

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

## **Attendance**

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism and Strategic Media. Students may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements with the class 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). Journalism and Strategic Media is a professional program, and students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students who have some problem making it to class on time should make arrangements to correct the problem or consider taking another class. Students should consider this class as a "job" in the educational process and be on time just as they would elsewhere.

## **Course repetition**

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade ("C-") in a class required by their program of study in Journalism and Strategic Media more than three times will be dropped from the program.

Students may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. If students wish to substantially rework the original submission, or to work with the same general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from the professor of the current course. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence by the professor, and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is the student's online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo).

### **Academic integrity**

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 students receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on their own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, as this is a journalism and strategic media 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 rating originality of your ideas. Also to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. As part of this process, you may require to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your work. Other instructions to follow may also be given. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all. (*Office of Legal Counsel, October 11, 2018*)

### **Online SETEs**

Students are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once the instructor has posted grades, student can immediately see that grade, provided they have completed a the SETE for that class. To access evaluation forms, students should log in to MyMemphis using their UUIDs and email passwords; click on the gray "Student" tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Student feedback is essential and is appreciated.

### **Deadlines**

All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the 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 must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. Students are responsible for learning these rules and checking their work for errors.

### **Disability and accommodations**

Students who need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office for Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

### **Diversity and inclusivity**

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. Media 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.

### **Student support**

Student who are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, should visit the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/saos/sos/crisis-resources.php>. Any student who faces personal challenges including, but not limited to securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support (901-678-2187) located in the University Center, Suite 359 for assistance. Students may also talk with course instructors about the challenges they are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting with campus or community support.