

# Precision Language

JRSM 1750-M50, M30

Spring 2020

## Prof. Dana Albright, M.A.

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog description

Introduction to grammar and writing style for use in journalism and mass communication; foundations of research and information gathering, media literacy, and plagiarism.

### Prerequisites

None

### Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

**Required:** Arnold, G.T. (2013). *Media Writer's Handbook 6th ed.* New York: McGraw Hill.

ISBN: 978-0-07-351200-6

**Very strongly recommended:** *Associated Press Stylebook*. 2019 Edition.

Note: The latest electronic version of the AP Stylebook is available for a yearly subscription fee, and it comes with your purchase of the print version from the Associated Press store. The iPhone/Android app will serve you well.

### Classroom format

This course teaches the basic skills of writing and grammar. Sometimes, this will be a review for you. Other times, this will address new material.

The course is delivered **online** in an **asynchronous** format. Lectures for each unit will be presented in an audio format with accompanying PowerPoint presentations or videos (transcripts will be provided).

**Assignment instructions and all deadlines are posted on eCourseware at the beginning of the semester.** There are no surprises. Students are expected to follow instructions and submit work on time.

### 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 Spring 2020 course list, click on the link for JRSM 1750 to enter the course and read the instructions on the welcome page.

## Course Requirements

- Weekly exercises to be completed via eCourseware
- Writing assignments
- Three exams
- Final exam: **A score of less than 70 on the final exam will result in failure of the course regardless of overall course grade**

## Grading

A+ = 96.5-100%; A = 92.5-96.4%; A- = 89.5-92.4%

B+ = 86.5-89.4%; B = 82.5-86.4%; B- = 79.5-82.4%

C+ = 76.5-79.4%; C = 72.5-76.4%; C- = 69.5-72.4%

D+ = 66.5-69.4%; D = 59.5-66.4%

F 0-59.4%

## Grade Breakdown

Weekly quizzes: 15%

Writing assignments: 30%

Case study paper: 10%

Exams: 30%

Must-Pass Final Exam: 15%

## Other issues

This course is essential to your success in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media. It builds the grammatical skills necessary for clear and effective writing. Although some of these concepts might seem elementary to a university student, a perfected sense of grammar is essential in our profession.

Lectures for each week coincide with the assigned textbook chapters. You must take the time to read the book and be prepared to study the online content. These assignments, along with instructions and examples of how to successfully complete them, are available in eCourseware on the first day of class.

None of the assignments should be particularly difficult, but waiting until the last minute to attempt them is not advised.

**DEADLINES:** Deadlines for this course are firm. Late work will not be accepted outside of reasonable circumstances, *if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date*. Notifying the instructor that work will be late after the deadline has already passed or is imminent is unacceptable. All work must be turned in via eCourseware.

**TECHNICAL SUPPORT:** Computers and network access can be finicky. Unfortunately, providing tech support is beyond my capabilities. As a University of Memphis student, you are entitled to ask for help from the IT helpdesk. It is in your best interests to call as soon as you are aware of the problem, and to not wait until the last minute to begin your work. There are two ways to access the University of Memphis IT helpdesk: call 901-678-8888, or log in to the website ([umhelpdesk.memphis.edu](http://umhelpdesk.memphis.edu)) to open a ticket.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### *Week 1, Jan. 21-24: Nuts and Bolts*

Course Intro; Avoiding Plagiarism; 25 Ways to Improve Writing Immediately

Readings: Arnold, Ch. 1

Assignments: Diagnostic quiz, Quiz 1

### *Week 2, Jan. 27-31: Crushing It in JRSM (and life!)*

Are These Distinctions Worth Making? News judgement. Elements of Newsworthiness.

Readings: Arnold, Ch. 2

Assignments: Quiz 2, WA 1

### *Week 3, Feb. 3-7: Seeking Clarity*

Precision (in) Language; Message Analysis; Ways of Knowing

Readings: Arnold, Ch. 3

Assignments: Quiz 3, WA2

### *Week 4, Feb. 10-14: It's Better to Know*

It's Nobody's Guess; The Trouble with "Only;" One Potato Two Potatoes; Library Research Skills

Readings: Arnold, Ch. 4-6

Assignments: Quiz 4, WA 3

### *Week 5, Feb. 17-21: Less Is More*

Excising the Excessive; "I Don't Sound Like A Vice President;" Internet Research Skills

Readings: Arnold, Ch. 7-8

Assignments: Quiz 5, WA 4

### *Week 6, Feb. 24-28: Review and Exam*

Review for Exam 1

Readings: None

Assignments: Exam 1

### *Week 7, Mar. 2-6: Sentence Building Blocks, Part I*

Nouns, Pronouns and Agreement

Readings: Arnold, Ch. 9-11

Assignments: Quiz 6

### *Week 8, Mar. 9-13: SPRING BREAK*

No reading or assignments due this week.

### *Week 9, Mar. 16-20: Sentence Building Blocks, Part II*

Verbs and Verbals. Adjectives and Adverbs.

Readings: Arnold, Ch. 12-16

Assignments: Quizzes 7-8

*Week 10, Mar. 23-27: Sentence Building Blocks, Part III*

Prepositions. Conjunctions. Interjections. Sentences and Syntax.

Readings: Arnold, Ch. 17-20

Assignments: Quiz 9, WA5

*Week 11, Mar. 30 – Apr. 3: Review and Exam*

Review for Exam 2

Reading: None

Assignments: Exam 2

*Week 12, Apr. 6-10: Punctuation and More*

Punctuation. Interviewing. Story writing.

Readings: Arnold, Ch. 21-24

Assignments: Quiz 10. WA 6

*Week 13, Apr. 13-17: Wrapping It Up*

More Punctuation. Media Literacy. Sensitivity in writing.

Readings: Arnold, Ch. 25-31

Assignments: Quiz 11. WA 7. *Begin research for Case Study.*

*Week 14, Apr. 20-24: Review and Exam*

Review for Exam 3.

Readings: None

Assignments: Exam 3

*Week 15, Apr. 27-29: The Final Countdown*

Final Exam Review. Finish Case Study.

Readings: None

Assignments: Case Study (Due Friday, May 1)

*FINALS WEEK: May 1-7*

Final Exam opens at 8 a.m. on Friday, May 1 and closes at 11:59 p.m. on Thursday, May 7.

## **ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES**

### **Five Pillars in JRSM 1750**

- *Critical Thinking:* Students explore options for creating and sourcing media content, addressing diverse publics, and managing audiences.
- *Media Literacy:* Students are exposed to the vocabulary and grammar of media production. Students learn how media is researched, sourced, and prepared through multiple assignments.
- *Multimedia:* Students explore the use of grammar for multimedia application.
- *Professionalism:* Students learn the implications of accuracy in language. They explore styles and grammar used in professional media applications.
- *Writing:* Students develop grammar and writing skills through discussion and exploration of grammar specific to journalism and mass communications.

## Professional values and competencies for JRSM 1750

- 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 peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications 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 grammatical correctness.

## How professional values and competencies will be met

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

- Develop advanced understanding of grammar as used in mass communication.
- Establish a working knowledge of Associated Press style.
- Understand media language respectful of a diverse audience.
- Critically examine the language used in media as persuasive and communicative.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion.
- Expand knowledge of the resources available for communications professionals.

### *Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)*

- Examination of grammar skills specific to journalism and mass communication
- Examination of Associated Press writing style
- Examination of understanding of current events
- Examination of research techniques and available resources.

## How assessment of student learning will be met

### *Awareness*

- Becoming aware of specific language for journalism and mass communication.

### *Understanding*

- Use of grammar and style to communicate clearly, precisely and succinctly.

### *Application*

- Passage of examinations concerning grammar, style, AP preferences, and basic information-gathering skills.

## 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 JRSJ 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.