

Media Writing

JRSM 2121-003

Spring 2020

Class meeting: Tuesday/Thursday, 1-3:15 p.m., MJ208

Prof. Pamela Denney

Office: 330 Meeman Journalism Building

Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday, 3:30-5:30 p.m. or by appointment

Email: padenney@memphis.edu

Twitter & Instagram: @memphis_stew

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

Basic instruction in journalistic forms and AP style; information gathering and composition of news stories; media literacy. One lecture hour, four laboratory hours per week.

Prerequisites

JRSM 1750

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Required

Tim Harrower, "Inside Reporting" 3rd ed. (McGraw Hill, 2010) ISBN 978-0-07- 337891-6

"The Associated Press Stylebook 2018" ISBN 978-0-917360-67-1

The Commercial Appeal is available through the University of Memphis McWherter Library. [Access link here.](#)

Recommended

Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald, "When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style" (Thomson and Wadsworth, 2004) ISBN 0-534-56206X

Classroom format

Media writing is a reporting and writing course. Consequently, students write every week and receive regular feedback and coaching on their work. The class consists of both lecture and laboratory time to be determined by instructors.

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 JRSM 2121-003 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page.

Course Requirements

During the semester, each student completes three writing assignments written outside of class: an advance story with at least two interviews; (2) an event on or off-campus with at least three interviews; and (3) a second event on or off campus with at least three interviews and a data source. Students also rewrite all outside stories. **Rewrites must include the additional reporting discussed in story editing notes. If students do not complete additional reporting, they will receive lower grades than the original stories.**

Here's how attendance works: I'm not interested in hearing excuses. You get **three free passes** during the semester. After you cash in the passes, missed classes are reflected in your final grade. **For example, if you miss one additional class, your final grade drops a letter grade. If you miss two more classes, your grade drops again. So, if you miss six classes, your final grade drops two letters.**

Assignments must have a story slug, date and byline and be filed in a word document that is double spaced with indented paragraphs in 11 pt. Verdana type. Do not put extra space between paragraphs. **If assignments do not follow this format, they will not be graded.**

Additionally, professors grade story assignments in track changes — the editing component of Word — to encourage effective feedback and learning. All students are responsible for learning how to use track changes, as well as how to navigate course materials on eCourseware. You can find tutorials on eCourseware in the “Getting Started” link for this class.

Media writing requires knowledge of Associated Press style. Therefore, students write all assignments for 2121 in correct AP style and complete quizzes on basic AP style during the semester. Individual professors determine quiz schedules.

Instructors may assign an AP Stylebook presentation during the semester.

Students must stay informed about the news. They will, at a minimum, read The Commercial Appeal and the Daily Helmsman every day in order to be prepared for class discussions and quizzes. Students also may be required to follow other news outlets online.

Students in all sections of 2121 complete the same mid-term and final exams. The mid-term covers such skills as leads, attribution and quotes. The final exam includes short stories written from interviews and fact sheets, along with short answers on news fundamentals and AP style.

A story component of the final exam may be evaluated by outside experts as part of a department assessment of student achievement. This assessment will not impact final course grades.

Grading

Written lab assignments: 30 percent

Homework, news quizzes and AP style quizzes: 15 percent

Three outside story assignments: 30 percent

Three outside story rewrites: 10 percent

Mid-term exam: 5 percent

Final exam: 10 percent

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%

Other issues

Media writing is a practical, hands-on course that teaches you to think and write as professionals. Meeting deadlines is essential for media professionals, so story deadlines are firm. **Late stories and assignments will not be accepted, except for medical emergencies with verification.** Preparing for class is equally important. This means keeping up with reading and assignments and staying informed about current events. JOUR 2121 is the linchpin for a professional program in journalism, so act accordingly.

COURSE SCHEDULE

This is a basic schedule for topics and major assignments over the course of the semester. Although every effort will be made to stick with this schedule, please understand that some material may require more or less discussion and class time. Thus, changes to the schedule may occur. All changes will be announced in class.

Week 1, Jan. 21, 23: Course Introduction

Media Writing Basics: What is news? Accuracy, balance, news values and media lingo.
Read chapter 2 plus pages 88-91 (Harrower).

Week 2, Jan. 28, 30: Media Writing Basics: News summary leads and the inverted pyramid.

Read chapters 3 and 4. (Harrower) Specific pages to re-read are noted below.

Extra credit: "Updates from German Public Broadcast," 5:30-7:30 p.m. (MJ room 100)

Feb. 1: JRSM scholarship deadline. [See scholarship manager here.](#)

Week 3, Date: Feb. 4, 6: Media Writing Basics: More news summary leads, mini stories and AP style.

Read chapter 3, pages 56-63 (Harrower)

Week 4, Feb. 11, 13: Media Writing Basics: Quotes and attribution

Readings: Read chapter 4, pages 82-85 (Harrower)

Assignments: **Single source story due.**

Week 5, Feb. 18, 20: More quotes, attribution and advance stories.

Assignments: Advance story practice due. Take AP Quiz No. 1 (addresses). **Single source story rewrite due.**

Week 6, Feb. 25, 27: Story structure and nut graphs

Readings: Read chapter 3, pages 48-51 (Harrower)

Assignments: **Advance story due.**

Week 7, March 3, 5: Midterm exam and covering events

Assignments: **Midterm exam due.** Take AP Quiz No. 2 (numbers).

Assignments: **Advance story rewrite due**

Week 8, March 10, 12: Spring Break (March 7 - 15)

Week 9, March 17, 19: Sources (expert and data) and story ideas

Readings: Read chapter 4, pages 70-81 (Harrower)

Assignments: **Event story due.**

Mandatory Attendance: Norm Brewer lecture with New York Times columnist Frank Bruni: March 19 at UC ballroom. Class cancelled March 19.

Week 10, March 24, 26: Interviewing

Assignments: Take AP Quiz No. 3 (Money, time and dates). **Humans of Memphis due.**

Week 11, March 31, April 2: Rewriting for accuracy, clarity, and conciseness.

Read chapter 3, pages 52-63 (Harrower).

Assignments: **Event story rewrite due.**

Week 12, April 7, 9: Catch up week

Assignments: Take AP Quiz No. 4 (Titles and capitalization). **Second event story due.**

Week 13, April 14, 16: Media Law and Ethics

Read Chapter 7, pages 140-156.

Assignments: **Second event story rewrite due.**

Week 14, April 21, 26: Final Exam

Assignments: Final exam and AP Quiz No. 5 (Mixed AP Style).

Week 15, April 28: Last day of class

Study Day: April 30

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Five Pillars in JRSM 2121

- *Critical Thinking:* Students integrate the skills necessary to meet deadlines and to write accurate and professional news stories. Along with grammar and writing techniques, students learn to work independently, to develop story ideas, to interview sources, to organize information from multiple sources.
- *Media Literacy:* Students stay informed about news, newsmakers, and the business of media companies through classroom discussions, assignments, and weekly current events quizzes. Students also learn the basics of how news is written, packaged, and produced.
- *Multimedia:* Students learn how to use and distinguish social media as a professional tool with in-class assignments and a class Facebook page. Additionally, students build an online portfolio to showcase their professional skills, work experience, and writing samples.
- *Professionalism:* Students learn the professional skills and expectations of today's media environment by focusing on the basics: ethics, interviewing sources, writing news stories, and

editing stories for accuracy and fairness. Students also have opportunities to publish stories in the campus newspaper.

- *Writing:* Students learn basic newswriting techniques. Coursework emphasizes grammar, sentence structure, AP style, leads, story organization, quotes, and attribution. Along with classroom and homework assignments, students write three outside stories: an advance story, an event or lecture story, and a news feature.

Professional values and competencies for JRSM 2121

- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications
- 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 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)

- Recognize the characteristics of news and newsworthiness, demonstrated through current events quizzes, lecture, and workbook exercises.
- Acquire basic information-gathering techniques, including interviewing and research, through classroom exercises and story assignments.
- Be familiar with libel and journalism ethics through classroom discussion and assignments.
- Understand the difference between fact and opinion.
- Learn ramifications of news practices.
- Be knowledgeable about developments in the media industry.

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

- Write an entry-level news stories with multiple sources, including relevant data.
- Attribute sources correctly for both direct and indirect quotes.
- Write effective news summary leads and nut graphs.
- Demonstrate an ability to write on deadline.
- Practice basic five-shot sequence for photo packages.
- Write informative captions in two-sentence news format.
- Use social media for communicating and reporting.
- Use the AP Stylebook in applying basic news writing style rules to lab and outside assignments.
- Take AP style quizzes.

- Take weekly current events quizzes.

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Learn how journalism works in today's media environment
- Discuss the difference between legitimate and fake news
- Recognize the role of the press in a democracy

Understanding

- Understand the difference between fact and opinion
- Appreciate the value of original journalism, of intellectual integrity
- Recognize the qualities of newsworthiness
- Learn the basics of news gathering
- Study the principles of effective story telling

Application

- Read and analyze news stories in order to learn what constitutes news
- Practice correct grammar, punctuation and word usage
- Learn AP news writing style
- Practice writing leads, nut graphs, and indirect and direct quotes
- Develop information-gathering skills and apply them to assignments
- Organize information into a news story
- Keep abreast of local, national, and international news

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

Students 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.