

## **GRADUATE MEDIA WRITING**

JRSM 7000-001

FALL 2025

CLASS MEETINGS: Monday 5:30-8:30 p.m.

ROOM: Meeman 106

Prof. Tonyaa Weathersbee

Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00 to 4:00 PM or by appointment.

Email: [tjwthrsb@memphis.edu](mailto:tjwthrsb@memphis.edu)

Office Phone: 901-678-3484

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

Catalog description: Basic instruction in journalistic forms and AP Style; information gathering and composition of news stories; media literacy

Prerequisites

None

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

### *Required*

- Tim Harrower, "Inside Reporting," 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. (McGraw-Hill, 2013) ISBN: 9780073526171
- Associated Press Stylebook, 2022-2024, 56<sup>th</sup> Ed. ISBN: 9781541601659 or online edition at [apstylebook.com](http://apstylebook.com)
- The Commercial Appeal is available through the University of Memphis McWherter Library. [Access link here](#) Here's the link for the [Daily Helmsman](#) and the Institute for [Public Service Reporting](#).

### *Recommended*

- Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald, "When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style" 9<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Cengage Learning, 2016)

9781285052472

[Chalkbeat Tennessee](#)

[MLK50](#)

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page:

<http://memphis.infrastructure.com>

2. Login using your University of Memphis username and password.

3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for JRSM 2121-002 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page.

4. Please do not use the internal Canvas email system on the course web page. Use your regular University of Memphis email to correspond with me at

[tjwthrsb@memphis.edu](mailto:tjwthrsb@memphis.edu)

## **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.

## **COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

During the semester, each student will write two stories outside of class and one on deadline during class. The first assignment will be 1) a story on a recent meeting, speech or event; 2) a profile of a person or organization; 3) an issue-related story. All should be based on three original interviews. The issue-related article should also include a data source and/or research study. An excellent place to find the latter is The Journalist's Resource (<https://journalistsresource.org/>)

The second story assignment will be a mock press conference in which a newsmaker or other source comes to class and holds a press conference. Students will be required to complete that story on deadline. The third story will be an enterprise piece that students develop from an original idea. It must include at least three sources, data and photos. The instructor must also pre-approve the idea.

Students will also be required to complete in-class quizzes and laboratory assignments, as well as a midterm exam.

**Attendance and tardiness:**

Students are strongly encouraged to attend class regularly. This class meets once a week, so missing one class is the equivalent of missing a week of classes. No makeup opportunities will be given for those who arrive after the quiz or assignment time is up. The three lowest in-class grades will be dropped at the end of the semester, but chronic absences and tardiness will also be factored into the final grade.

**Assignments:** All assignments must have a story slug (a two- or three-word title), date and byline and be filed in a Word document that is double-spaced with indented paragraphs in 11 pt. type and in a professional font (Verdana, Arial, Times New Roman, etc.). Do not put extra space between paragraphs. If assignments do not follow this format, they will not be graded.

Students are responsible for learning how to use Word, as well as how to navigate course materials and how to upload their assignments to Canvas. You can find tutorials in the “Getting Started” link for this class.

Media writing also requires knowledge of Associated Press style. Therefore, students must write all assignments for 7000 in correct AP style and complete quizzes on basic AP style during the semester.

Instructors may assign an AP Stylebook presentation during the semester.

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

The midterm will cover skills such as leads, attribution, AP Style, quotes and writing complete stories. There will be no final exam; the final enterprise story will serve that purpose.

**GRADING**

Written lab assignments and quizzes: 30%

Midterm exam: 10%

First outside story: 20%

Mock press conference: 20%

Final enterprise story: 20%

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%

AI-assisted writing and ChatGPT use and similar AI tools, though useful in many contexts, are inappropriate for use in this course. An important outcome of this course is to strengthen your own abilities as a thinker and writer. That is only possible when you do your own work. You may not submit work that is written wholly or partially by an AI tool.

Assignment submissions may be run through AI detection software. If your submission appears to have been written using AI, you may either receive a failing grade or be asked to resubmit the assignment.

## **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. Late stories and assignments will result in one or more letter-grade drops, except with prior approval from instructors BEFORE posted deadlines.

Preparing for class is equally important. This means keeping up with reading and assignments and staying informed about current events. JRSM 7000 is the linchpin for a professional program in journalism, so act accordingly.

## **TECHNICAL SUPPORT**

Computers and network access can be finicky. However, tech problems are not an acceptable reason for missing deadlines. As a University of Memphis student, you are entitled to help from the IT helpdesk. It is in your best interest to call as soon as you are aware of the problem. 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 service ticket.

## **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, changes may occur.

**Aug. 25:** Course Introduction: Media Writing Basics: What is news? Accuracy, balance, news values and media lingo. Welcome to 7000, Identifying News Elements. Media use diary assignment.

**Sept. 1:** LABOR DAY

**Sept. 8:** Discussion of media use diaries. News summary leads and the inverted pyramid. Review accuracy, five W's (and One H) and introduction to leads.

**Sept. 15:** Quotes, attribution and voice in writing lecture. Exercise on quotes, voice in writing.

**Sept. 22:** Introduction to AP Style and lecture. Lead writing review.

**Sept. 29:** Lecture on sourcing and advance news stories. Introduction to the basics of interviewing.

**Oct. 6:** Advance news story exercise. Simple news story edits and rewrites. Midterm review.

**Oct. 13:** FALL BREAK

**Oct. 20:** Midterm exam. Lecture on story structure.

**Oct. 27:** First outside story due. Lecture on covering press conferences and lectures.

**Nov. 3:** Review of first outside story. Writing advance story on mock press conference.

**Nov. 10:** Mock press conference. Lecture on rewriting for accuracy, clarity and conciseness.

**Nov. 17:** Review mock press conference stories. Meet as a newsroom to review and share input on final enterprise stories.

**Nov. 24:** Drafts of final enterprise stories due. Review in class. Lecture on media law and ethics.

**Dec. 1.** Last day of class. Work on final enterprise stories.

**Dec. 8:** Final enterprise stories due.

## **JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES**

### **Portfolio requirement**

As a student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work.

Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or SquareSpace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, 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
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn) You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work.

The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

Email: You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account.

Go to the account management website for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

## **Electronic devices**

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

## **AI/Chat GPT**

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

### **Attendance**

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media.

You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

### **Course repetition**

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You 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. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

### **Academic integrity**

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the Office of Student Accountability's website.

In addition to university-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and 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, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws 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 and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources.

All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). 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.

### **Online SETEs**

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; 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 seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

### **Deadlines**

Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. 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.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

### **Disability and accommodations**

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### **Diversity and Inclusivity**

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences.

As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others. Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.



The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

### **Weather policy**

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website and the LiveSafe App regarding inclement weather.

### **Student support**

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance.

You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting yo