

Media Writing I

JRSM 1750-M90
Spring 2025
Virtual/Asynchronous
Prof. Tori Cliff

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

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

Prerequisites

None

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Miller, T. I., & Kessler, L. (2016). *When words collide: A Media Writer's Guide to grammar and style*. Cengage Learning.

Associated Press Stylebook, 56th edition or online access at <https://www.apstylebook.com>

Classroom format

This is an online course. Deadline will fall on Sundays NLT (no later than) 11:59 p.m. when listed. 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. Weekly quizzes will coincide with each chapter. Students may take quizzes twice. The highest score will be recorded.

Assignment instructions and all deadlines are posted on Canvas. Students are expected to follow instructions and submit work on time. If there is confusion, please ask for clarification early so you have ample time to complete the assignment, understand the topic, etc.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page: <http://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the published course list, click on the link for JRSM 1750 to enter the course and read the instructions on the welcome 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 tmcliff@memphis.edu. A link to UM Mail can be found on the homepage, www.memphis.edu. For security purposes, please only email me from your official UM email account.

Requirements

- Exercises and writing assignments to be completed via Canvas
- Weekly Quizzes

- Final news story

Grading

A= 100-90

B= 89-80

C=79-70

D=69-60

F=59-0

AI-assisted writing and ChatGPT use

ChatGPT 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.

TIP: There is a plagiarism checker in Turnitin, which is available in Canvas when you submit assignments. It also scans for AI. Look at it if you are unsure if you have cited things correctly, or visit the library (online or in-person) for a wealth of knowledge on attribution.

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.

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 Canvas.

None of the assignments should be particularly difficult, but waiting until the last minute to get started on them is not advised. Also, AP style takes time to use and to get used to. Give yourself the time you need to succeed. With AP style, when in doubt, look it up.

DEADLINES: Unless otherwise specified, all assignment deadlines are Sunday at 11:59 p.m. Deadlines for this course are firm and posted from the first day of the semester. All work must be turned in via Canvas.

LATE WORK: I will not accept late work, except for extenuating circumstances. Any revised deadline must be approved by me prior to posted deadlines.

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 the helpdesk 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) to open a service ticket.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Unit One: Writing with Accuracy and Precision

Week 1, Jan. 21-26: Course Introduction

Course Intro, Best Practices and Writing Tips

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 1-2

1.1: Welcome and Introductions, Why Grammar Matters

1.2: 8 Parts of Speech, 10 Secrets to Writing Well

Week 2, Jan. 27-Feb. 2: Seeking Clarity

Sentence Structure & You

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 3-4

2.1: Clarity & Composition

2.2: Verbs and how to Use them

Week 3, Feb. 3-9: Maximum Verbiage

Nouns & Pronouns

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 5

3.1: Expanding your Repertoire

Week 4, Feb. 10-16: Sentence Building Blocks, Part I

Verbs, Adjectives and Adverbs

Reading Kessler, Ch. 6

4.1: Sentence Building Blocks, Part 1

4.2: Coming to a Subject-Verb Agreement

Week 5, Feb. 17-23: Sentence Building Blocks, Part II

Punctuation & Powering Your Sentences

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 7

5.1: Sentence Building Blocks, Part 2

5.2: Punctuation and Powering Your Sentences

Week 6, Feb. 24-March 2: Sentence Building Blocks, Part III

Putting It All Together: Prepositions. Conjunctions. Interjections. Sentences and Syntax.

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 8

6.1: Sentence Building Blocks, Part 3

6.2: Word Choice

Week 7, March 3-9: Breathing Life into Your Words

Style, Substance & Appealing to the Senses in Writing.

Readings: Kessler, Ch. 9

7.1: Common Grammar Pitfalls

7.2: Giving Power to your Words

Unit Two: Preparing for Media Writing

Week 8, March 10-16. SPRING BREAK

Enjoy yourself.

Week 9, March 17-23: Making the News

News Judgment & The Elements of Newsworthiness.

9.1: The Elements of Newsworthiness & Where News Comes From

9.2: Anatomy of a News Article & News Judgment

Week 10, March 24-30: News Summary Leads

News summary leads.

10.1: Writing News Summary Leads

10.2: Even More News Summary Leads

Week 11, March 31-April 6: What's Good Information?

Source Types. Information Gathering. Media Literacy.

11.1: Sourcing & You

11.2: Your Media Diet

Week 12, April 7-13: Direct quotes

Interviewing. Introduction to quoting expert sources. News story assigned.

12.1: Introduction to Quoting Expert Sources

12.2: Final Writing Assignment Discussion

Unit Three: Practice

Week 13, April 14-20: News story

Making Your Story Happen

13.1: The Pitch

13.2: Sources Follow-up

Week 14, April 21-27: News story, continued

Interviewing and Writing

14.1: Monitoring progress

Week 15, April 28-30 (Wednesday. April 30 is last day of classes): Editing

Editing and rewriting news stories. Rewrite assigned.

15.1: Editing and Rewriting

15.2: Story Return Discussion

Week 16, Finals Begin, All work due NLT 11:59 p.m., Sunday, May 4: Editing, continued

16.1: Final Review

16.2: Story Deadline

News Story Due

Deadline: 11:59 p.m. Sunday, May 4

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