

Feature Writing

JOUR 4165-M50

Spring 2025

Online/Canvas (Asynchronous)

Prof. Dana Albright

Office Hours: Virtual, 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; editing and revision.

Prerequisites

JRSM 2121

JRSM 3526 or PBRL 3421

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

- There is no required textbook. Required readings will be posted on Instructure.
- Daily access to the World Wide Web. All course materials and instructions will be available at memphis.instructure.com. As well as Web access, students will need Microsoft Word. All writing assignments must 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 important for your development as a feature writer to read and study well-written features. Class discussions will include:
 - Read a feature story in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, or an equivalent national newspaper at least once a week.
 - Read your local daily newspaper(s) every day.
 - Read, at your own discretion, from magazines and websites that publish top-notch feature writing such as "The New Yorker," "Esquire," "Vanity Fair," "National Geographic," "Rolling Stone," "Sports Illustrated," and "Memphis" magazine.

CLASSROOM FORMAT

This is an asynchronous online course, which means that we will not be meeting virtually or otherwise at any point this semester (except when requested by the student on an individual basis). You will be expected to log in to Canvas throughout the week to participate in discussion and critique. Staying apprised of deadlines in this course requires self-discipline and the time management skills expected of advanced undergraduate or graduate students in an academic setting.

Reading

Reading selections will be posted from the textbook that has been assigned for this class. These selections will give students an opportunity to see the principles of good feature writing at work. In addition, you should already be reading news from reputable outlets each day. You will be asked to submit and provide critique of examples you have found in the publication(s) of your choice.

Discussion

To aid in the development of ideas and engagement with the material and your classmates, students will be expected to participate in discussion. Each week, I will post a guiding question for you to consider and respond to. Each student will be expected to post a substantive original response to the question, as well as *at least* one substantive reply to another student's post by the weekly deadline of Sunday at 11:59 p.m. Examples of what constitutes a "substantive" entry will be provided at the start of the semester. In general, however, merely agreeing or disagreeing with another student's post without qualification or explanation will not meet this requirement.

Writing Assignments

Students will complete a total of five writing assignments this semester. Plagiarized or fabricated work will receive a grade of zero, with no opportunity for a rewrite. Subsequent instances of plagiarism or fabrication will be reported to the department chair for further disciplinary action.

This course presumes knowledge of Associated Press style. Therefore, all writing assignments for JOUR 4165 will be written in correct AP style. In addition, your work must be submitted in Microsoft Word format (.doc/.docx). No other file format will be accepted.

Writing assignments must be accompanied by at least one multimedia component. More information will be provided as the semester progresses.

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 2025 course list, click on the link for JOUR 4165 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 dpaisley@memphis.edu. I may not see these emails, as they do not alert me in a manner that allows me to see your message as it comes through.

Grading Scale

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%

Grading system:

A: Final drafts publishable in a reputable newspaper or magazine

B: Final drafts publishable with minor editing

C: Final drafts publishable with editing/revision

D: Final drafts not publishable

F: Failure to complete assignments, meet deadlines

Additionally, instructors 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 this software, as well as how to navigate course materials on Canvas. You can find tutorials in the “Getting Started” link for this class

Grade Distribution:

Feature stories & assignments: 80%

Classroom discussion/participation: 15%

Online portfolio: 5%

AI/ChatGPT

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.

OTHER ISSUES

DEADLINES: Unless otherwise specified, all assignment deadlines are Sunday at 11:59 p.m.

Deadlines for this course are firm and posted at least two weeks in advance. All work must be turned in via Canvas. Emailed assignments will not be accepted for any reason, nor will corrupted files. Check your work after it is uploaded to make sure the file works. The time to let me know you are having issues with Canvas is before the work is due.

PORTFOLIO: Your student portfolio must be updated with at least one example of work from this class. You will be expected to email me a link to your portfolio within one week of the first day of the semester’s start. This will be checked at the end of the semester and composes 5% of your final grade.

LATE WORK: I will not consider any requests for deadline extensions received less than 48 hours before the assignment deadline, and requests will only be approved in extenuating circumstances. Your first approved extension will be granted with no penalty as long as your work is received within three days of the published deadline. Subsequent late assignments will be penalized 10 points per calendar day, up to four days. After the fourth day, I will not accept your work.

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 interests 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) to open a ticket.

COURSE SCHEDULE*

**All dates are subject to change. Any changes will benefit the student.*

Week One, Jan. 21: Introduction to the Course

- Get to know the course, the instructor and your classmates
- Syllabus overview

Assignments: Discussion post 1; submit portfolio link

Week Two, Jan. 27: Types of Feature Writing

- Overview of feature writing types (with examples)
- News vs. features
- Coming up with good ideas

Assignments: Posted readings/lectures; discussion post 2

Week Three, February 3: Ethics and Issues

- Plagiarism and fabrication
- Case studies
- Writing assignments discussed in detail

Assignments: Posted readings/videos/lectures; discussion post 3

GRADUATE STUDENTS: Begin thinking of topic for research paper. You may need to contact me via email, text, or schedule a Zoom meeting with me for this.

Week Four, Feb. 10: Writing Profiles

- What makes a good profile?
- Examples of profile features

Assignments: Posted readings/lectures; discussion post 4; pitch and begin writing WA1

Week Five, Feb. 17: Like News, But Longer

- Coming up with good ideas
- Interview techniques

Assignments: Posted readings/lectures; discussion post 5; WA1 due.

GRADUATE STUDENTS: Research topic due. Upon approval, you will have the remainder of the semester to write this paper. DUE: April 29.

Week Six, Feb. 24: Tackling the Issues

- Bringing awareness to the masses
- Case studies; examples; critique

Assignments: Posted readings/lectures; discussion post 6; pitch and begin writing WA2

Week Seven, March 3: Once Upon a Time

- The elements of time and place in non-fiction storytelling
- Assignments: Posted readings/lectures; discussion post 7; WA2 due*

Week Eight, March 10: Spring Break

Spring Break. Relax. Regroup. Recharge.

Week Nine, Mar. 17: Shaping the Narrative

- One story, three parts
 - Good narrative leads
- Assignments: Discussion post 8; pitch and begin work on WA3*

Week Ten, Mar. 24: Striking Out on Your Own

- Freelance strategies
 - What's best for your story?
 - Putting yourself out there
- Assignments: Discussion post 9; WA3 due*

Week Eleven, Mar. 31: Multimedia Elements

- The role of multimedia in features
 - Print vs. digital
 - Case studies; critique
- Assignments: Discussion post 10; pitch and begin work on WA4*

Week Twelve, April 7: The Major Feature

- WA4 due
 - Assign WA5
- Assignments: Pitch and begin work on WA5 (major)*

Week Thirteen, Apr. 14: Major Feature (continued)

WA5—first draft due

Week Fourteen, Apr. 21: Revision Round

- Begin WA5 revisions

Week Fifteen, Apr. 28: Final Story Due

- WA5 due Monday, May 5

Note: The semester ends Wednesday, April 30; however, I am giving students until Monday, May 5 to complete the final assignment. Late work will not be accepted. I must have adequate time to read and grade your work before grades are due.