

Media Writing I

JRSM 1750-001

Spring 2026

Mon/Wed, 9:10 - 10:35 a.m.

206 Meeman Journalism Building

Prof. Joe Hayden

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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*. (ISBN: 053456206X)

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

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. 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 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 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 ckhilder@memphis.edu.

Course Requirements

- Exercises and writing assignments to be completed via Canvas.
- Weekly Quizzes
- Final news story

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%

AI-assisted writing and ChatGPT use

This course employs a **zero-tolerance** policy toward ChatGPT and similar AI tools. 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. So 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.

Attendance

You're in a professional program. Please act accordingly. That starts with showing up, on time, every time. You may miss two class sessions for any reason. After that, though, two points will be deducted from your course grade for each additional absence. (*In other words, if you miss, say, seven classes, that will mean the drop of ten points—a whole letter grade.*)

Other issues

This course is essential to your success in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media. It builds the grammatical and style 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.

Audio and video lectures 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 Canvas on the first day of class.

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

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: 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: Seeking Clarity

Sentence Structure & You

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 3-4

2.1: Clarity & Composition

2.2: Verbs and how to Use them

Week 3: Maximum Verbiage

Nouns & Pronouns

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 5

3.1: Expanding your Repertoire

Week 4: 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: 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: 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: 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: Spring Break

Week 9: 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: News Summary Leads

News summary leads.

10.1: Writing News Summary Leads

10.2: Even More News Summary Leads

Week 11: What's Good Information?

Source Types. Information Gathering. Media Literacy.

11.1: Sourcing & You

11.2: Your Media Diet

Week 12: 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: News story

Making Your Story Happen

13.1: Class devoted to "The Pitch"

13.2: Sources Follow-up

Week 14: Editing

Editing and rewriting news stories. Rewrite assigned. In-class editing workshops.

14.1: Editing and Rewriting

14.2: Story Return Discussion

Week 15: Story rewrites due.

15.1 : Final Review

15.2 : Story Deadline

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional values and competencies for JRSM 1750

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, both in a global context and in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media

contexts.

- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- 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

As an undergraduate 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.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. Up to 15% of your overall grade in this class will be determined by attendance. 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

All deadlines are firm. 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 catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

AP Style and grammar

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

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 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 you with campus or community support.