

MEDIA WRITING I

JRSM 1750-002

SPRING 2026

CLASS MEETINGS: Tuesday and Thursday, 9:40 to 11:05 a.m.

ROOM: Meeman 206

Prof. Tonyaa Weathersbee

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

Email: tjwthrsb@memphis.edu

Office Phone: 901-678-3484

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

Required

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>

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page:
<http://memphis.instructure.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 1750-002 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page.

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 or writing exercises will coincide with each chapter. At the end of the semester, students will complete a final news story.

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.

All assignments must be uploaded to Canvas. Students are responsible for navigating course materials on Canvas. You can find tutorials in the “Getting Started” link for this class.

ATTENDANCE AND TARDINESS

Attendance is mandatory. You are allowed to miss four classes without penalty, but any absences beyond that will result in a zero for each missed class. This rule also applies to leaving class early; after four times it will result in a zero. You are also encouraged to arrive to class on time, as no makeups will be given for those who arrive after the quiz or assignment time is up. The three lowest in-

class assignment grades will be dropped at the end of the semester. **Students may not drop the final story grade.**

GRADING

Written class assignments and quizzes: 50 %

Final news story: 50 %

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%

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 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: Deadlines for this course are firm and will be posted in announcements. 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. **In-class quizzes or assignments completed remotely will not be accepted.**

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

This is a basic schedule for topics and assignments over the course of the semester. Other assignments are explained on Canvas. Although every effort will be made to stick with this schedule, changes to the schedule may occur. All changes will be announced in class or Canvas updates.

Week 1: Course introduction: Writing with Accuracy and Precision

Jan. 20: Review of syllabus. Welcome and introductions. Lecture on why grammar matters. Kessler, Ch 1-2.

Jan. 22: Lecture on 8 parts of speech, 10 secrets to writing well. Lecture on essential reading for writing well.

Week 2: Seeking clarity

Jan. 27: Quiz on Kessler, Ch. 1-2. Lecture on sentence structure. Kessler, Ch. 3-4

Jan. 29: Lecture on clarity and composition and verbs and how to use them.

Week 3: Maximum verbiage.

Feb. 3: Quiz on Kessler, Ch. 3-4. Continuing lecture on the power of verbs.

Feb. 5: Exercise on the power of verbs. Lecture on nouns and pronouns.

Week 4: Sentence Building Blocks I

Feb. 10: Continuing lecture on nouns, pronouns and the supporting cast for sentences. Kessler, Ch. 5-6.

Feb. 12: Quiz on Kessler, Ch. 5-6 Complete sentence exercise. Lecture on subject-verb agreement.

Week 5: Sentence Building Blocks II

Feb. 17: Lecture on case and sentence logic. Kessler, Ch. 7

Feb. 19: Quiz on Kessler, Ch. 7. Complete sentence exercise. Continuing lecture on subject-verb agreement, case and sentence logic.

Week 6: Sentence Building Blocks Part III

Feb. 24: Lecture on prepositions, conjunctions, interjections, and passive voice. Kessler, Ch. 8.

Feb. 26: Quiz on Kessler, Ch. 8. Lecture and exercise on passive voice and word choice.

Week 7: Powering your words.

March 3: Lecture on the power of punctuation. Kessler, Ch. 9-10

March 5: Quiz on Kessler, Ch. 9. Writing exercise. Lecture on avoiding common grammar pitfalls and spelling errors -and powering your words.

Week 8: SPRING BREAK

Week 9: Preparing for Media Writing

March 17: Lecture on news values and where news comes from.

March 19: Anatomy of a news article and news judgement.

Week 10: The role of the news lead

March 24: Lecture on summary news leads.

March 26: Writing summary news leads in class.

Week 11: What's good information?

March 31: Lecture on media literacy.

April 2: Quiz on media literacy. Lecture on reliable versus unreliable news sources.

Week 12: Sourcing, direct quotes and writing complete stories

April 7: Lecture on quoting direct sources and inverted pyramid style in newswriting.

April 9: Writing complete story. Discussion of final writing assignment.

Week 13: News story

April 14: Discussion and evaluation of story pitches.

April 16: Drafts of story pitches due.

Week 14: News story, continued

April 21: Optional class day. Students will use the time to work on their stories. Instructor will be present to provide additional guidance.

April 23: Stories due. In-class editing and rewriting.

Week 15 and 16: Final class/exam week

April 28: Final class. News stories due.

May 7: Final rewrites of news stories due.

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in 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).

- 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)

- Report and write 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.
- Apply basic news writing story structure to all assignments.
- Demonstrate an ability to write on deadline.
- Use the AP Stylebook in applying basic news writing style rules to lab and outside assignments.

- Take AP style quizzes.

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Learn how journalism works in today's media environment.
- Identify the difference between legitimate and fake news.
- Appreciate the value of original journalism, of intellectual integrity.
- Recognize the role of the press in a democracy.

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 JRS 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 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 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 accommodation.

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 always remain respectful and professional.

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>
Links to an external site. 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.

