

Media Writing II

JRSM 2121-001

Spring 2026

Monday/Wednesday, 9:10 - 10:35 a.m.

Meeman Journalism Building 212

Prof. Casey Hilder

Office: 326 Meeman Journalism Building

Office Hours: Monday/Wednesday, 10:30 a.m., 12:30 p.m. or by appointment

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

Basic instruction in journalistic forms and AP style; information gathering and composition of news stories; media literacy.

Prerequisites

JRSM 1750

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Required

Tim Harrower, "Inside Reporting" 3rd ed. (McGraw Hill, 2010) ISBN 978-0-07-337891-6
(You may purchase this book, but the required chapters will be posted in Canvas.)

"The Associated Press Stylebook 2020" ISBN 154-164-7572 (or 2022-2024 edition).

The Commercial Appeal is available through the University of Memphis McWherter Library.

[Access link here.](#)

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.

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 term year course list available to you, click on the link for JRSM 2121-001 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 ckhilder@memphis.edu.

Course Requirements

During the semester, each student completes three writing assignments outside of class: (1) a story on a recent meeting or speech; (2) a profile of a person or organization; and (3) an issue-related story. All should be based on three original interviews. The third 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/>.)

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.

Additionally, professors 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.

Media writing also requires knowledge of Associated Press style. Therefore, students write all assignments for 2121 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, the Daily Memphis and the DH in order to be prepared for class discussions and quizzes. Students also may be required to follow other news outlets online.

Students in all sections of 2121 complete the same mid-term and final exams. The mid-term covers such skills as leads, attribution and quotes. The final exam includes short stories written from interviews and fact sheets, along with short answers on news fundamentals and AP style.

Grading

Written lab assignments: 20 percent

Homework, news quizzes and AP style quizzes: 15 percent

Attendance: 15 percent

Three outside story assignments: 30 percent

Mid-term exam: 10 percent

Final exam: 10 percent

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

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

Media writing is a practical, hands-on course that teaches you to think and write as professionals. Meeting deadlines is essential for media professionals, so story deadlines are firm. Late stories and assignments will not be accepted, 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 2121 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 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 service ticket.

COURSE SCHEDULE

This is a basic schedule for topics and major 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: What is News?

Media Writing Basics: What is news? Accuracy, balance, news values and media lingo.

Class 1 – Welcome to 2121

Class 2 – Identifying News Elements

Week 2: News summary leads and the inverted pyramid

Class 3 – Key J2121 Terms

Class 4 – Accuracy, Five W's (and One H) and Introduction to Leads

Week 3: Quotes and attribution

Class 5 – Attribution Lecture, Quote Exercise

Class 6 – Voice in Writing

Week 4: Intro to AP Style

Class 7 – Key J2121 Terms, Part 2

Class 8 – Intro to AP, Lead Writing Review

Week 5: Sourcing and advance news stories

Class 9 – The Basics of Interviewing

Class 10 – Anatomy of the Advance story

Week 6: Story structure and the Art of Editing

Class 11 – Simple News Story Edits & Rewrites

Class 12 – Advance Story Writing Tips

Week 7: Midterm exam

Class 13 – Midterm Study Guide, Progress Check, Review Roundup

Class 14 – Your Midterm Exam

Week 8: Break/Catch-up Week

Week 9: Where News Comes From

Class 16 - Covering Press Conferences and Lectures

Class 17 - How Journalists Use Press Releases

Week 10: Interviewing

Class 18 - Event Story Introduction

Class 19 - Covering and Sourcing Live Events

Week 11: Rewriting for accuracy, clarity, and conciseness

Class 20 – News in Memphis

Class 21 – Event Story Class discussion

Week 12: Media Law and Ethics Primer

Class 22 – Truth in Reporting

Class 23 - Truth in Reporting/FOIA

Week 13: Catch-up week

Class 24 – In-class Extra Credit

Class 25 – No class / Thanksgiving

Week 14: Final exam review

Class 26 – TBA

Class 27 – Final Exam Review

Week 15: Final exam

Class 28 - In-Class Final Exam

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in JRSM 2121

- 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.

Understanding

- Understand the difference between fact and opinion.
- Recognize the qualities of newsworthiness.
- Learn the basics of news gathering.
- Study the principles of effective story telling.

Application

- Read and analyze news stories in order to learn what constitutes news.

- Keep abreast of local, national, and international.
- Practice correct grammar, punctuation and word usage.
- Learn AP news writing style.
- Write leads, nut graphs, and indirect and direct quotes.
- Develop information-gathering skills and apply them to assignments.
- Compile and organize information into a multi-source news story.

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.

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. Here's how attendance works: 15% of your overall grade is tied to attendance. You get three free passes throughout the course of the semester, but after that your absence is reflected in your overall grade.

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 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 you with campus or community support.