

## **MEDIA WRITING II**

JRSM 2121-002

SPRING 2026

CLASS MEETINGS: Tuesday and Thursday, 11:20 a.m. to 12:45 p.m.

ROOM: Meeman 212

Prof. Tonyaa Weathersbee

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

Email: [tjwthrsb@memphis.edu](mailto:tjwthrsb@memphis.edu)

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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, 2013) ISBN: 9780073526171
- Associated Press Stylebook, 2022-2024, 56th Ed. ISBN: 9781541601659 or online edition at [apstylebook.com](https://apstylebook.com)  
[Links to an external site.](#)

- The Commercial Appeal is available through the University of Memphis McWherter Library. [Access link hereLinks to an external site.](#) Here's the link for the [Daily HelmsmanLinks to an external site.](#) and the Institute for [Public Service ReportingLinks to an external site.](#)

### *Recommended*

- Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald, "When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style" 9th Ed. (Cengage Learning, 2016) 9781285052472

[Chalkbeat TennesseeLinks to an external site.](#)  
[MLK50Links to an external site.](#)

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 2121-002 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page.

## **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.

During the semester, you will complete two news stories. The first story will be a mock press conference that a newsmaker or other source will hold in class, and one that must be completed on deadline. The second story will be an enterprise story with the topic pre-approved by the instructor. It should include three

original interviews, a data source and/or research study. An excellent place to find the latter is The Journalist's Resource (<https://journalistsresource.org/Links to an external site.>)

An AP Style quiz or news quiz will be given at the beginning of class. Writing exercises will also be given during class. **Quizzes and in-class writing assignments cannot be completed remotely.** Anyone who attempts to do so will receive a zero.

Rewrites for stories may be required. However, rewrites must include the additional reporting discussed in story editing notes to receive additional credit. **Rewrites are required for the final enterprise story, and they must include the additional reporting and editing discussed in the story editing notes to receive a higher grade or to avoid having the initial grade lowered.** Students may also write outside stories for extra credit. Those stories must meet the journalistic standards taught in class.

Assignments must have a story slug, date and byline and be filed in a Word document that is double spaced with indented paragraphs in 11 pt. Verdana type. Do not put extra space between paragraphs. If assignments do not follow this format, they will not be graded. A story slug is a short (two or three-word) title, such as Speech Story.

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.

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.

Finally, students must stay informed about the news. They will, at a minimum, read The Commercial Appeal, the Daily Helmsman and the Institute for Public Service Reporting site to be prepared for class discussions and quizzes. Students may also be required to follow the recommended online news outlets during a particular week.

Students in all sections of 2121 complete the same midterm exam. The midterm covers such skills as leads, attribution, quotes, news fundamentals and AP Style, as well as short stories written from fact sheets.

## **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 two lowest in-class assignment grades will be dropped at the end of the semester.

**Attendance is mandatory for the mock press conference.** Anyone who misses it must have a documented emergency for doing so. They will also have to find another story – pre-approved by me – to make up for it.

**Students may not drop grades from the midterm, mock press conference or the final enterprise story.**

## **GRADING**

Written class assignments and quizzes: 30%

Mock press conference: 30%

Midterm exam: 10%

Final enterprise story: 30%

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**

Media writing is a practical, hands-on course that teaches you to think and write as professionals. Meeting deadlines is essential for media professionals. Late stories and assignments will receive a letter-grade drop, except for those 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.

Cheating, plagiarism and unethical behavior will not be tolerated. Evidence of such behavior may be grounds for an automatic "F."

## **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](http://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: Media Writing Basics**

Jan. 20: Review of syllabus. Lecture, class discussion. What is news? Accuracy, balance, news values and media lingo. Media use diary assignment.

Jan. 22: Lecture on the history of journalism and how newsrooms work. Exercise on finding stories. Read Chapter 2 plus pages 88-91 (Harrower) for Sept. 2.

### **Week 2: News values, news summary leads and the inverted pyramid.**

Jan. 27: News quiz. Review of media use diaries. Lecture on news values and current journalism issues. Read Chapters 3 and 4 (Harrower) for Jan. 29.

Jan. 29: Lecture on news summary leads, the inverted pyramid and the language of news. Exercise on newswriting style and news leads.

### **Week 3: More news summary leads and AP style.**

Feb. 3: Lecture on newswriting style, AP Style and basic leads. Lead writing exercise.

Feb. 5: AP style quiz. Review of basic lead writing assignments and lecture on alternative leads. Exercise on alternative leads.

### **Week 4: Quotes and attribution; writing complete stories**

Feb. 10: News quiz. Lecture and discussion of Chapter 3, pages 82-85. Exercise on writing complete stories.

Feb. 12: Lecture and discussion on the types of quotes and how to use them in stories. Exercise on writing complete stories.

### **Week 5: More on quotes, attribution and speech, advance and event stories**

Feb. 17: AP style quiz. Lecture and discussion of Chapter 5, covering the news and story types.

Feb. 19: Complete story writing assignment. Continuing lecture on covering the news and story types.

### **Week 6: Story structure and nut graphs**

Feb. 24: News quiz. Review complete stories. Lecture on story structure and exercise on news gathering.

Feb. 26: Complete story assignment. Discussion of final enterprise story ideas.

### **Week 7: Voice in writing. Ethics and distinguishing between fact and opinion**

March 3: AP style quiz. Lecture on distinguishing between fact and opinion.

March 5: Complete story writing assignment. Lecture on using voice and transitions in stories.

### **Week 8: SPRING BREAK**

### **Week 9: Midterm exam**

March 17: Complete story writing assignment. Midterm exam review.

March 19: Midterm exam. Announcement of mock press conference guest.

### **Week 10: Interviewing and sourcing**

March 24: AP Style quiz. Lecture on interviewing, gathering background information and sourcing. Read Chapter 4, pages 70 - 78.

March 26: Completing advance press conference story in class.



## **Week 11: Rewriting for accuracy, clarity, and conciseness**

**March 31: Mock press conference**

April 2: Review of mock press conference stories. Review of enterprise story ideas. Lecture on writing obituaries, shorts and different story forms.

## **Week 12: Enterprise stories**

April 7: In-class writing assignment on obituaries, features and shorts. Lecture, discussion on sourcing.

April 9: In-class writing assignment. Review of progress on enterprise stories.

## **Week 13: Enterprise stories, reporting on multiple platforms**

April 14: Lecture on reporting on multiple platforms and different story forms. Review of progress on enterprise stories.

**April 16: Enterprise story drafts due. Review of drafts**

## **Week 14: Enterprise reporting**

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

April 23: Review and update on enterprise stories.

## **Week 15 and 16: Final class/exam week**

**April 28: Final class. Enterprise stories due.**

**May 7: Final rewrites of enterprise stories due.**

## **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.

## **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.

## **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.