

# Media Writing Journalism 304/5 Spring 2016

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TR 9:30-10:45 (#62517 & 62524) Stauffer-Flint 105  
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MW 9:30 to 11:00  
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and by appointment

## The course

Media Writing could be called Informative Writing.

Good writing is at the heart of all professional journalism: strategic planning, news, advertising, public relations, you name it. Journalists write to inform and persuade. Clear, informative writing is the foundation of it all.

***Media Writing seeks to improve your ability to get to the point, and to get the point across clearly.***

You will sharpen your ability to write clear, factual copy.

To make a good point, you have to know what it is. This course will develop and strengthen your ability to find things out and write clearly about them.

This class is a writing-intensive. It requires much time and effort outside of class. To succeed in JOUR 304, you must devote this time, along with critical thought and creative energy.

You must keep up with the assignments in this course. Deadlines are crucial. I reserve the right not to accept work after the assigned deadline.

## Goals

You will learn to:

- get straight to the point.
- write clearly and concisely to engage and inform readers.
- use correct grammar and essential journalistic style.
- write in broadcast style.
- gather information through searches and interviewing.
- synthesize information from multiple sources.
- write factually and attribute opinion properly.
- handle quotes, attribution and sources properly.

## Assgt objectives

The assignments in this course will teach you to:

- get right to the central point of reports.
- put together clear, concise and informative reports.
- report a speech or meeting in an informative and timely way.
- ask the kinds of questions professional communicators need to ask.
- research and write a profile story about an interesting and newsworthy person.
- research a product sector, company and brand; write a clear and informative strategic message planner.
- conduct enterprise and background reporting to “advance” a story with new information.
- use social media effectively to promote your writing.

## Be a pro

You are a **journalism professional now**.

**Pros come prepared.** Do the preparation assignments and be ready to put that preparation to work when you walk in the classroom. Then we'll start discussion and projects.

**Pros don't miss class or show up late.** You get two free absences. After that, your participation grade will drop; it could cost as much as a full letter grade for the course. Missed classes do not excuse deadlines.

**Pros meet deadlines.** Unless you have a documented emergency or get an extension in advance of the deadline, the assignment will get a serious grade penalty, if it is accepted at all. If you're absent, you're **still responsible for any deadlines** unless you make arrangements with the instructor.

**Pros don't “multitask” in class.** (The scare quotes are intentional. “Multitask” is a dirty word.) If you're messing around on your phone or laptop, you could be counted absent for the day.

## Materials and resources

### Required

Access to course materials on Blackboard and the Internet

**No required textbook**

### Recommended

Kessler and McDonald, “When Words Collide” (any edition)

Zinsser, “On Writing Well” (2001 or later)

“The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law” (latest ed.)

USB 2.0 thumb drive or other way of saving in-class writing assignments

### Media labs and orientations

You will learn how to post online using WordPress.

## Graded assgts

This course has two types of projects. *Exercises* are short-turnaround projects assigned in class. Exercise and quizzes come to 75 points, or about one-tenth of the final grade.

*Assignments* are more substantial projects with deadlines posted in the Syllabus folder on Blackboard.

Assignments:	Points possible
News release	50
Speech or panel story (70) and pitch (10)	80
Profile story (90) and fact sheet (10)	100
SMP	75
TV scripts	75
Final project story (150), pitch (10) and social media (15)	175
Exercises, summaries & quizzes	75
Participation and professionalism, including attendance	70
	<hr/> 700

***The assignments and their grade weights are subject to revision.***

## Grading standards

**Your grade is in your hands.**

You must pass this course with a “C” (not C-minus) or better to take JOUR 415, JOUR 419 or JOUR 560.

### Final grade scale

A	647 (92.4%) and above	C+	546 – 559 (78.0% – 79.9%)
A-	630 – 646 (90.0% – 92.3%)	C	511 – 545 (73.0% – 77.9%)
B+	616 – 645 (88.0% – 89.9%)	C-	490 – 510 (70.0% – 72.9%)
B	581 – 615 (83.0 – 87.9)	D	420 – 489 (60.0% – 69.9%)
B-	560 – 580 (80.0% – 82.9%)	F	419 (59.9%) and below

### 92.4 to 100 percent - EXCELLENT (A)

An excellent story accomplishes ALL of the following:

- Provides readers with accurate and timely information they need to function in a free society
- Has a clear summary focus statement positioned either in a summary lead (or lead-in for broadcast writing) or in a nut graf high in the story or press release
- Presents a compelling lead that establishes the theme of the story and features new information or an intriguing anecdote or scene
- Develops the story's theme through exhaustive reporting, research, persuasive examples and compelling quotes from key sources
- Attributes all information that requires attribution
- Sustains focus through logical organization and compelling transitions
- Expresses ideas fluently and precisely, using effective vocabulary and sentence variety
- Demonstrates facility with the conventions (i.e., grammar, usage, and mechanics, and AP style) of journalistic writing, usually manifested in flawless use of the language

### 88 to 92.3 percent- GOOD (B+ to A-)

A good story accomplishes MOST of the following:

- Provides readers with accurate and timely information they need to function in a free society
- Has a clear summary focus statement positioned either in a summary lead (or lead-in for broadcast writing) or in a nut graf high in the story or press release
- Presents a compelling lead that establishes the theme of the story and features new information or an intriguing anecdote or scene
- Develops the story's theme through exhaustive reporting, research, persuasive examples and compelling quotes from key sources

- Attributes all information that requires attribution
- Sustains focus through logical organization and compelling transitions
- Expresses ideas fluently and precisely, using effective vocabulary and sentence variety

### **78 to 87.9 points or percent - AVERAGE (C+ to B)**

An average story accomplishes MOST of the following:

- Provides readers with accurate information they need to function in a free society
- Has a summary focus statement positioned either in a summary lead or in a nut graf
- Presents a lead that establishes the theme of the story and focuses on new information
- Develops the story's theme through reporting, research, persuasive examples and quotes from key sources
- Attributes all information that requires attribution
- Sustains adequate focus through elementary organizational and transitional devices
- Expresses ideas using adequate vocabulary and sentence variety
- Demonstrates knowledge of the conventions of journalistic writing, though errors occur

### **70 to 76 percent - LIMITED (C- to C)**

A limited story exhibits ONE of the following:

- Provides readers with accurate information that may not be timely
- Has an unclear summary focus statement positioned either in a summary lead or in a nut graf high in the story
- Presents a lead that does not establish the theme of the story
- Contains inadequate reporting and research, but can be salvaged with more effort
- Leaves unattributed a single piece of information that needs attribution
- Appears to have a vague organizational philosophy
- Has problems in language and sentence structure that result in a lack of clarity
- Contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, mechanics, AP style and/or journalistic writing style

### **60 to 69.9 points or percent -WEAK (D)**

A weak story exhibits MORE THAN ONE of the following:

- Provides readers with accurate information that may not be timely
- Has an unclear summary focus statement positioned either in a summary lead or in a nut graf high in the story
- Presents a lead that does not establish the theme of the story
- Contains inadequate reporting and research, but can be salvaged with more effort
- Leaves unattributed information that needs attribution
- Appears to have a vague organizational philosophy
- Has problems in language and sentence structure that result in a lack of clarity
- Contains occasional major errors or frequent minor errors in grammar, usage, mechanics, AP style and/or journalistic writing style

### **1 to 59 percent - FAILING (F)**

A failing story exhibits MORE THAN TWO of the following characteristics:

- Provides readers with inaccurate information
- Appears to contain little "news"
- Appears to have no focus statement or summary lead

## Academic honesty

- Provides inadequate evidence of what sources were used to gather information
- Exhibits a serious lack of organization
- Exhibits problems in sentence structure that persistently interfere with meaning
- Contains pervasive errors in grammar, usage, mechanics, journalistic writing style and/or AP style

### Plagiarism and fabrication/falsification

**Do not make \$#!+ up or take others' work without due credit** – simple as that. If you do, it will not end well. If you don't understand the following, or you get into a situation where you're not sure, **ask the instructor**.

### J-School policy adopted May 7, 2004

The William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications does not tolerate plagiarism, fabrication of evidence and falsification of evidence.

Penalties for plagiarism, fabrication or falsification can include a failing grade for this course and expulsion from the School of Journalism and Mass Communications.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, please consult the professor(s) of this course.

*The following definitions are from Article II, Section 6, of the University Senate Rules and Regulations, revised FY98.*

#### Plagiarism

Knowingly presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgement of the source). The sole exception to the requirement of acknowledging sources is when the information or ideas are common knowledge.

#### Fabrication and Falsification

Unauthorized alteration or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise.

## Policies

### Disabilities

The University of Kansas is committed to helping all students learn. If you have a special need that may affect your learning, please contact the instructor as soon as possible. Please be aware that the KU Office of Disability Resources coordinates accommodations and services for all students who are eligible. If you have a disability for which you wish to request accommodations and have not contacted this office, please do so as soon as possible. Information about services can be found at <http://www.disability.ku.edu/~disability/>. Or you can visit the office on the first floor of Strong Hall. The phone numbers are: 785-864-2620. Please contact me privately regarding your needs in this course.

### Journalism School policy on classroom attendance

"No student may add a journalism class after the 20th day of a semester.

"Students must attend their classes and laboratory periods. Instructors may take attendance into account in assessing a student's performance and may require a certain level of attendance for passing a course. Instructors may choose to drop students from a course, based on attendance, without consent.

"The School of Journalism reserves the right to cancel the enrollment of students who fail to attend the first class or laboratory meeting."

"The KU Office of Student Financial Aid is required by federal law to determine whether students who receive aid are attending each class in which they are enrolled. Instructors are required to report to that office absences of students who have stopped attending and names of those who have enrolled but never have attended. Students who do not attend classes may be required to repay federal and/or state financial aid.

"Students who receive any form of financial aid should learn all requirements including minimum hours of enrollment and grades to qualify for and retain that aid."

### Inclement weather

In the event of inclement weather, the decision to cancel classes is made by KU officials – **not by the instructor**. To determine whether snow or icy conditions have canceled classes, call 864-7669 (864-SNOW).

### Copying or recording lectures

Course materials and lectures are property of the instructor or School of Journalism. You must obtain permission to record lectures electronically or use course materials outside this course.

## Assignments and exercises

**Changes on the fly during the semester are not only possible, they're almost inevitable.**

1/19

Getting to the point

1/21

**Due: Short profile exc; Comfort level exc; key documents. We'll begin Public Occurrences.**

In-class: short profile leads exc

1/26

Due: Grammar definitions, Law & Order, and Paraphrasing

In-class: grammar diagnostics exc

1/28

**Due: Paraphrasing exc; Essential Writing sections**

In-class: NYT hire summary exc

2/2

**Due: Summaries #1; Essential Writing sections**

2/4

**Due: TIPCUP review and exc; Honing Your Information Judgment**

2/9

**Due: Essential Writing sections; Quotations exc; TIPCUP/LBQ exc**

2/11

**Due: "News releases" readings (be sure to look at Mindie Paget's work)**

In-class: news release exc

2/16

**Due: News release assgt**

In-class: covering speeches and writing stories

2/18

**Due: Speech or panel pitch/BG; Speech tips; Speech story examples**

In-class: go over speech pitches

2/23

In-class: Obama speech exc

2/25

**Due: Creeds for leads**

In-class: lead writing

3/1

**Due: Lead writing exc**

In-class: Heather Lawrenz orientation on WordPress

3/3

**Due: Summaries #2 exc**

In-class: researching a publicly traded business

3/8

**Due: Business research exc**

**Due: look at examples in the SMP assignment; read Psychographics links**

In-class: prepping an SMP

3/10

**Due: Personality profile readings**

In-class: prepping a profile fact sheet

**Fri 3/12**

**Due: Speech or panel assgt (last possible deadline)**

3/15

Spring Break

3/17

Spring Break

3/22

**Due: Profile fact sheet**

**Due: Gay Talese; Three more profiles; Reveal character traits**

In-class: go over fact sheets & discuss reading

3/24

**Due: SMP assgt**

In-class: profiles, cont.

3/29

**Due: Final projects xamps and reading**

In class: backgrounding a final project story

3/31

In-class: Developing a final project

4/5

In-class: earmarks of a good final project

4/7

**Due: Personality profile assgt**

4/12

**Due: Final project pitch/BG**

In-class: go over pitches

4/14

**Due: broadcast writing module**

In-class: broadcast writing

4/19

**Due: VO New contract**

In-class: go over scripts, broadcast style

4/21

**Due: TV Scripts**

In-class: go over TV scripts

4/26

**Due: WSJ-style story readings; social media readings; embedded links reading; plagiarism outline**

4/28

**Due: Summaries #3**

In-class: progress check on Final Project



5/3

Individual appointments/consulting for Final Project

5/5

Individual appointments/consulting for Final Project

**Fri 5/6 11:59 p.m.**

**Due: Final project to Blackboard and WordPress**

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