

Journalism 304—Spring 2016 Syllabus

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Office Hours: 10 – 11:30 a.m., T/Th
Also available by appointment

Media Writing

This course is designed as a J-School entry-level writing course. You will write (and re-write) material for print news, broadcast news, public relations, advertising – and online content in all areas. Good writing is good writing regardless of discipline. Everything in J304 is designed to help you become an effective communicator and a discriminating media consumer, particularly in a rapidly evolving media landscape. Regardless of your chosen area of emphasis, you will all need the skills that come with writing and research.

This is a writing-intensive class. You may expect time-consuming writing assignments that require hours and effort beyond the in-class time required for this course. To succeed in J304, you must devote time, critical thought and energy. **You must earn a C in this course to move on in the journalism school. And by C, I mean C, not a C-.**

Our class will use KU's online Blackboard system. I will post additions to the lectures, including writing tips and format suggestions, to Blackboard as needed. I will also post your assignment grades to Blackboard.

You will learn to:

- Write clear and accurate stories using correct grammar, punctuation and syntax.
- Develop storytelling skills for mass media and strategic communication.
- Develop news judgment and prepare messages targeted for appropriate audiences.
- Observe, interview, gather research and understand how to verify information.
- Write effective, concise leads and logically organized news and feature stories.
- Know when information must be attributed to a source to avoid editorializing.
- Use basic Associated Press style in print stories and PR documents.
- Think critically and independently, keeping objectivity in mind.
- Make pictures and words work together to tell a story.
- Understand the concepts supporting strategic communication messages.

Course Materials

“The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law”
“When Words Collide” Kessler and McDonald (Optional)
USB storage drive

What you'll need to do to succeed

- **Show up.**

To avoid the nonsense often associated with “excused” and “unexcused” absences, know that you have two free absences. Use your freebies for sleeping, court dates, funerals or whatever. I don't have to know why you aren't in class. After you've used your freebies, your course grade may drop a full letter for the third absence – and a letter for every third absence following. Tardies count, too. Three late arrivals equal one absence. If you have some sort of catastrophic event that alters the course of your life, I will work with you to figure out how best to deal with this class.

- **Pay attention to the policies.**

Deadlines are, well, deadlines. I don't accept late assignments. Catastrophic events are the exception, but less than a catastrophe will earn you a zero. Even one zero could seriously affect your grade. You will be expected to begin work on assignments soon enough to contact all necessary sources or to prepare a back-up story. Check with me if you have difficulty with sources.

Type and double-space all your assignments, unless told otherwise by me. This means no handwritten corrections on assignments prepared outside of lab.

Turn off your phone when you come to class. No scrolling Pinterest, Instagram or ESPN on your phone in lab. If you're texting, you'd better be sending a message asking your roommate to bring me coffee!

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 specified level of attendance, without the student's consent.

The last day to drop a course is April 20 (Monday): The transcript will show a “W.” After that, you will get a grade in the course.

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

In the event of inclement weather, KU officials make the decision to cancel classes. Call (785) 864-SNOW (7669) to find out if classes have been canceled.

- **Don't cheat. Really.**

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

Plagiarism is stealing. You take someone else's ideas, thoughts, or words, and you present them as your own original work. This includes taking ideas from written sources, such as books, as well as materials on the Internet. Cutting and pasting materials from the Internet and presenting that work as if it was your own is plagiarism. There may be times when you want to incorporate another person's ideas, opinions, and words into the papers you write, to make a point or to provide background. If you do, it is essential that you attribute that information—that you explain where the information came from and give credit where credit is due. "Recycling" past assignments from other students and presenting them as your own falls into the category of plagiarism.

Fabrication and falsification mean that you made it up. This can include making up an entire story/source or embellishing a fact, quote, or statistic to make it sound better. Don't do it.

In this course, the penalty for plagiarism, fabrication or falsification is a failing grade for the semester. Additional penalties can include expulsion from the School of Journalism. If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, please contact me.

You signed a contract of understanding during the j-school orientation that says you know what plagiarism is and its consequences in this school. Don't be the student who has to call home and tell your parents you've been expelled.

Understand the grades you earn.

94 to 100 percent — EXCELLENT (A)

An excellent story accomplishes **ALL** of the following:

- Provides readers with accurate and timely information.
- Has a clear summary focus statement positioned either in a summary lead or in a nut graf high in the story or news 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

87 to 93 percent— GOOD (B+ to A-)

A good story accomplishes **MOST** of the following:

- Provides readers with accurate and timely information.
- 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 news 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.

77 to 86 percent — AVERAGE (C+ to B)

An average story accomplishes **MOST** of the following:

- Provides readers with accurate information.
- 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.

67 to 76 percent — LIMITED (D+ 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 66 percent —WEAK (D- to 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 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.

1 to 59 percent — FAILING (F)

A failing story exhibits **ONE OR MORE** of the following characteristics:

- Provides readers with inaccurate information.
- Appears to contain little “news.”
- Appears to have no focus statement or summary lead.
- Provides little or no evidence what sources were used to gather information.
- Exhibits a serious lack of organization.
- Exhibits severe problems in sentence structure that persistently interfere with meaning.
- Contains pervasive errors in grammar, usage, mechanics, journalistic writing style and/or AP style.

J304 Schedule Spring 2016
Holstead

WEEK 1

Tuesday, Jan. 19

Course introduction

Writing basics: Grammar, usage and AP style. Why good writing is important no matter your profession.

Thursday, Jan. 21

Purpose/Audience/Medium

Students interview a classmate for a written profile

Assignment Due Jan. 27: Write a brief profile of the student you interviewed. 25 pts

WEEK 2

Tuesday, Jan. 26

What is news? Where do we find news ideas? TIPCUP. Evaluate a news story for TIPCUP elements. Can news values be found in social media? Following a beat.

Thursday, Jan. 28

Elements of news/message construction: Word choice, conciseness, Five Ws, Similarities in writing for news and strat comm. Examine examples of news and strat comm writing. Practice highlighting the news.

Assignment Due Feb. 3. Three story ideas based on news. 15 pts.

WEEK 3

Tuesday, Feb. 2

Leads: Discuss direct and indirect leads. In-class lead writing practice.

Assignment Due Feb. 5: Leads exercise. 15 pts.

Thursday, Feb. 4

Lead, bridge, quote format; inverted pyramid; nut graphs

Advancing the story: Using inverted pyramid format to write and advance a story.

Assignment Due Feb. 9: Write an inverted pyramid news story from a fact sheet. 50 pts.

WEEK 4

Tuesday, Feb. 9

Review leads and inverted pyramid. Discuss use of primary and secondary research and the credibility of sources of information.

Thursday, Feb. 11

Interviewing and pre-reporting: the importance of good interviews and getting quotes right.

Assignment Due Feb. 16: Students interview 5 diverse sources about a timely issue. **50 pts.**

WEEK 5

Tuesday, Feb. 16

Review: developing leads, quotes and attribution, inverted pyramid

Thursday, Feb. 18

Covering speeches and events, newsworthiness in events and presentations, story plans, quotes and attribution; in-class preliminary research on speakers and topics.

Assignment Due Feb. 23: Choose a newsworthy event between now and March 13 and complete a story plan for review in class. **25 pts.**

Assignment Due by March 11: Cover your approved speech/presentation/event and write an inverted-pyramid story summarizing both the speaker's main point and audience reaction. Due via email within 24 hours of event. **100 pts.**

WEEK 6

Tuesday, Feb. 23

Broadcast media: Broadcast style, listening audiences, visual newsworthiness, visual storytelling methods, VO writing

Thursday, Feb. 25

In-class broadcast style quiz

VO writing practice in lab

Assignment Due March 1: Students convert one print story to a broadcast script **50 pts.**

WEEK 7

Tuesday, March 1

Shooting video. Elements of a video story. Video editing

Thursday, March 3

Shooting video

Assignment Due March 22: Shoot a 1-minute video of an event. **IDEA DUE TOMORROW. 50 pts.**

WEEK 8

Tuesday, March 8

Feature Writing: Discuss the differences between straight news and feature writing. In-class feature story analysis.

Assignment Due March 25: Write a short feature about a timely subject **100 pts.**

Thursday, March 10

Feature Writing. Discuss features

WEEK 9—Spring Break

WEEK 10

Tuesday, March 22

Discuss feature pitches

Thursday, March 24

Using graphics to tell a story.

Assignment Due March 31: Students develop an infographic to accompany their feature story
50 pts.

WEEK 11

Tuesday, March 29

Persuasive writing: Discuss difference between news and persuasive writing. Introduce news releases. Students practice writing a news release from a fact sheet.

Thursday, March 31

Guest speaker discusses a specific event students will promote through a news release

Assignment Due April 5: Write a news release promoting event. **100 pts.**

WEEK 12

Tuesday, April 5

Social media: Students explore how Facebook, Twitter and other social media are used to transmit persuasive messages.

Assignment Due in class: Students write a FB post and tweet about the event they promoted in their news release. **25 pts.**

Thursday, April 7

Advertising: Business research

Students complete an in-class business research exercise.

WEEK 13

Tuesday, April 12

Strategic Message Planners: Discuss importance of understanding product and audience. Students select a product to research and promote to a specific target audience.

Thursday, April 14

Discuss results of research and look at demographics and psychographics

Assignment Due April 26: Develop and present an SMP for selected product 100 pts.

WEEK 14

Tuesday, April 19

Introduce final project: Feature of 700 words with three live sources + infographic + photo

Assignment Due April 26: Story budget for final project 25 pts.

Thursday, April 21

WEEK 15

Tuesday, April 26

Discuss story budgets for final projects

Thursday, April 28

SMP presentations

WEEK 16

Tuesday, May 3

Individual conferences to discuss final projects

Thursday, May 5

Course evaluations

Work on final projects

WEEK 17

Tuesday, May 10

FINAL PROJECTS DUE 150 pts.