

Journalism 304 — Spring 2017 Syllabus

Jon Niccum, Instructor
jniccum@ku.edu
(785) 840-4421
Office: 312 Stauffer-Flint
Office hours by appointment

Tuesday & Thursday 11 a.m.– 12:15
p.m. (#61351)
107 Stauffer-Flint

Media Writing

This course emphasizes journalistic writing and the critical thinking that goes with it.

Regardless of whether students are in the news and information or strategic communication tracks, it all comes down to coherent and engaging storytelling. That, in turn, is based on an understanding of how the purpose of the communication, the audience it targets and the medium used in conveying it dictate the form each message takes. Good writers need to use effective sentence construction, and clear and concise wording to get their points across.

This class builds on JOUR 300 and JOUR 302, helping students enhance their writing and interviewing skills for the web, for print and for broadcast; sharpen their judgment in choosing and attributing information, sources and story forms; and appropriately targeting the audience and message for persuasive purposes.

Students will also learn Associated Press style, considered the standard in the news and strategic communication industries, as well as communicating with multicultural and diverse audiences.

Students will learn to ...

- Write clear and accurate stories.
- Develop news judgment.
- Observe, interview, gather research and verify information.
- Develop storytelling skills for mass media and strategic communication.
- Write effective leads and logically organized stories.
- Synthesize information from multiple sources.
- Know when information must be attributed to a source to avoid editorializing.
- Make pictures and words work together to tell a story.
- Write in basic Associated Press style.
- Use correct grammar, punctuation and syntax.

Course materials and Sources

- **The Associated Press Stylebook** – latest or recent edition.

- **Assigned readings and materials on Blackboard** (<http://courseware.ku.edu>). This course is to a considerable degree a “flipped” or hybrid course. Students will pull up modules online to prepare for class. Those modules will include readings, video presentations, exercises and other materials. In class, students may be quizzed and will be expected to use what is learned from the module to get right to work.
- **Email:** The instructor will communicate by messages to the student’s KU-registered address. It’s the student’s responsibility to keep track of them.
- **Laptops:** Bring a laptop or tablet to class for exercises and assignments. Students can also use the classroom’s desktop computers.

What is needed to do to succeed

- ***Show up***

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 lab 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.

- ***Pay attention to the policies***

Deadlines are, well, deadlines. Late assignments are not accepted. Catastrophic events are the exception, but less than a catastrophe will earn students a zero. Even one zero could seriously affect a grade. Students will be expected to begin work on assignments soon enough to contact all necessary sources or to prepare a backup story. Students should check with the instructor if there are difficulty with sources.

Type all assignments, unless told otherwise by the instructor. This means no handwritten corrections on assignments prepared outside of lab.

Turn off the phone when in class. No scrolling Instagram or playing Fruit Ninja in lab.

Disabilities: The Office of Student Access Services, 22 Strong Hall, 785-864-2620 (v/tty), coordinates accommodations and services for KU students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that requires accommodation in KU classes and have not contacted Student Access Services, please do so as soon as possible. Please also contact the instructor privately in regard to this course.

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.

Course materials prepared by the instructor, as well as content of all lectures presented by the instructor, are the instructor's property. Video and audio recording of lectures without instructor consent is prohibited. On request, the instructor usually will permit students to record lectures, on the condition that these recordings are only used as a study aid by the individual making the recording. Unless the instructor gives explicit permission, recordings of lectures may not be modified and must not be transferred or transmitted to any other person, whether or not that individual is enrolled in the course.

The School provides computer and broadcast laboratories for student use. Adequate laboratory resources are available for students who complete their assignments in a timely manner. The hours for the computer lab in 105 Stauffer-Flint are posted outside the lab. Computers are available on a first-come, first-served basis. Hours for the Weir Production Laboratory are posted in the Dole Center. Students may sign up for editing time and equipment on a first-come, first-served basis on the online reservation system at <http://journalism.ku.edu/dole-center>. Sign-up instructions are on the website. Remember, all posted lab times are subject to change. Plan to work Monday through Friday.

In the event of inclement weather, the decision to cancel classes is made by KU officials. To determine whether snow or icy conditions have canceled classes, call 864-7669 (864-SNOW).

- **Don't cheat**

The William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communication 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

students have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, please consult the instructor 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.

Grading

This course has two types of assignments. “Exercises” are short-turnaround assignments given in class. Exercises come to 20 percent of the final grade. “Projects” are more substantial assignments with deadlines published in the Syllabus folder on Blackboard.

Exercises and Projects:

- Leads Exercise - 20
- Social Media Exercise - 20
- Press Release Exercise - 20
- Grammar and Copyediting Exercise - 20
- Critical Writing Exercise - 20
- Lead and Nut Graf Project - 50
- Press Conference Project - 50
- Profile Feature Project - 50
- Listicle Project - 50
- Portfolio Project – 50
- Final Pitch and Final Project - 100
- Attendance and Participation - 50
- TOTAL: 500

The assignments and their grade weights are subject to revision as the course goes along.

Understand the grades that are earned

Each assignment will be graded on its content, organization, grammar and format. Each assignment also includes a professional component. A student’s failure to behave professionally in the completion of an assignment can result in the reduction of the

assignment's grade. Grades will be assigned on the basis of what is known as the **publishability standard**:

A - Outstanding. This grade is for work of clearly professional caliber (publishable or broadcast ready). The writing is clear and well organized; it requires virtually no editing. The reporting is complete and leaves no significant questions unanswered. The work is turned in by or before deadline, needing no changes before submission to clients or editors. These strategic messages get results, win awards and, when appropriate, feature creative concepts; they are executed with comprehensive research, interesting presentation and nearly flawless writing.

B - Good. This grade is for work that could be raised to professional standards without extensive editing. Writing is grammatically correct but may lack the sparkle and fine organization of "A" work. The reporting answers the main questions but may miss the proper emphasis or the best sources. The work is turned in by deadline with little or no prompting and needs minor revisions in such areas as reorganizing, rewriting, reformatting or providing more or better sources. "B" work doesn't necessarily have anything wrong, but it could be better, often with a stronger topic, a more artistic presentation, better information or improved writing. "B" work demonstrates basic broadcast or print style.

C - Adequate. This grade is for work that indicates a problem in at least one area, such as grammar, diplomacy or strategy. It does not measure up to professional quality but could be saved by revision. Work is incomplete by deadline and/or needs more than minor revision before submission to a client or supervisor. These messages have weak ideas, concepts or presentation. They draw attention because they don't quite do the job. In summary, the work is an adequate first draft but isn't yet ready to show a client or supervisor.

D - Unacceptable performance. This grade is for work that is clearly unacceptable even in a classroom setting. The writing is confused and/or ungrammatical. The reporting is flawed and may contain major factual errors and/or omissions or may show little concept of basic strategic judgment. Work may miss the deadline.

F - Failing. This grade is for work that is not completed in a professional, timely way. For whatever reason, it has the appearance that the student did not take the assignment seriously. Such performance is often the result of personal or time-management problems that extend beyond a lack of skills or understanding of the research, writing or production processes.

A = 92.4% and above
 A- = 90-92.3%
 B+ = 88-89.9%

B = 83-87.9%
B- = 80-82.9%
C+ = 78-79.9%
C = 73-77.9%
C- = 70-72.9%
D = 60-69.9%