

J650 Magazine Writing—Advanced Media Spring 2020

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Course goals

You will work for [Chalk](#), the University Daily Kansan's online magazine. *Chalk* was launched last spring. Last summer it won an honorable mention in the Association for Education on Journalism and Mass Communication Student Magazine Contest, so it's already on the map. A feature that appeared in *Chalk* in the spring, "[The Case for Sex Toys](#)," by Rebekah Swank, also won an honorable mention on the contest. This semester you will continue to pave the way for future semesters of our online magazine.

Chalk will offer you the opportunity to build a portfolio of departments and articles. You each will be assigned to a department and will write two department articles as well as shorts related to that department, and you will write one substantive magazine article and one first-person story. These will require initiative in generating ideas, and excellent reporting and writing.

The class operates as a staff. You will be assigned to write for one of the following three departments:

- Life: Stories about relationships, health, fitness, grooming and sex
- Culture: Stories about trends, entertainment (music, art, movies, but not reviews) and fashion
- Experience: Stories about what students can do to have fun

You will pitch department stories to the *Chalk* editors who will set deadlines for them. You will coordinate with your department group on story ideas, meeting outside of class if you need to.

The semester will not go entirely smoothly, I promise you. I have created a schedule that will change.

In the process of making *Chalk*, you will learn about how magazines and magazine writing differ from newspaper writing. You will learn how to write departments and articles, and how to work with an editor.

The classroom portion of this course has these purposes:

- To teach you about different kinds of magazine articles and how to write them.
- To develop your research and interviewing skills.
- To develop your ability to conceive different, and appropriate, ways of telling stories.
- To develop and strengthen your writing and editing skills.
- To learn to write for a diverse audience

Course requirements

	Point values
Writing assignments	
1. Departments (two longer plus at least four shorts)	300 points
2. Feature article (including pitch @25 points)	225
3. Essay	100
How It Feels article	50
Preparation and participation (Workshop critiques—four @10 points each)	40
Professionalism (Ability to meet deadlines and work with the <i>Chalk</i> editors)	50

Required texts

The Associated Press Stylebook

Grading

All of you come to this class with varying levels of knowledge and experience. Some of you already have worked for publications; others have just had the intermediate reporting class. You don't have to know how to do everything at the start of the semester, but you do have to show early and consistent progress. When you make mistakes, learn from them. When you get edited heavily, learn from that. **Consistent improvement over time is the key to a good grade.**

Departments

You will write two kinds of departments: longer ones (two) and shorts (*at least* four) related to your assigned departments. All shorts will fit sub-departments. For example, Health has the sub-department "You're Not Dying" (a short about things people freak out about but aren't anything to worry about). Your shorts will be around 300 words. They must have at least two sources. You're required to do four, but more is better.

Your longer departments will be about 600 to 800 words and must have at least three live sources, plus additional research such as studies.

You must write a headline (or title, as we call them in magazines) for every department.

Everyone is also required to eavesdrop on people for [Chalk Talk](#).

At midterm, you will turn in one longer department and at least two shorts. I will provide feedback on this work and tell you what grade your work would earn at this point. At the end of the semester, you will turn in a final portfolio that will include a list of every department you've written during the semester and your strongest two shorts and department. I will grade this work.

Essay

You will write an essay about a personal experience. You will have a one-on-one conference with me where we will go over your essay together, and then you will have a chance to revise it before turning it in for grading.

Feature

You will write a substantive feature of about 1,500 words. This feature will require deeper reporting (at least six live sources plus additional research) and storytelling. I will meet with each of you one-on-one to go over your feature. You will need to provide me with a **manuscript** (your original) of your feature a day before your conference. Plan on spending four weeks reporting and writing, and one week revising.

Readings summaries

When we talk about different types of magazine articles, I will give you articles to read and ask you to write one-page summaries to help prepare you for class discussion.

DEADLINES/PENALTIES

Attendance

You must attend class each week. You will be allowed one unexcused absence from class. More than one unexcused absence will lower your course grade. This is a professional environment; if you were to not show up for a job even once without notifying your boss, you might get fired.

Professionalism

All articles must be submitted on time, with all required components. If you get in trouble with a story (for example, a source backs out or you discover there is no story), talk to me as soon as possible.

Additional journalism school policies

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 the student's 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 aid. Students who receive any form of Financial Aid should learn all requirements including minimum hours and grades to qualify for and retain that aid.

Policy on Plagiarism and Fabrication/Falsification

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 questions about what constitutes plagiarism, fabrication or falsification, please consult the teacher 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.

Inclement weather and disabilities

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). The staff of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), 135 Strong, coordinates accommodations and services for KU courses. If you have a disability for

which you may request accommodations in KU classes and have not contacted SSD, please do so as soon as possible.

How Articles are Graded

Reporting:

Your departments and articles need to have multiple, sources, experts and participants. Because your audience is diverse, your sources also need to be diverse—in racial and ethnic background, age, gender, political and religious beliefs, majors, geography. You will need to consult many more sources than you actually will cite in your stories. *Kansan* policy is that you cannot use friends or relatives as sources.

You will have to interview live sources for your stories, preferably in person or over the phone. You should source Internet research/studies for use in your stories.

What you cannot do:

- **Quote people from stories you find online**
- **Lift sources from their websites or use quotes from them without attributing their information to their websites. This misleads readers into thinking you actually interviewed them yourself.**
- **Make up sources or quotes. If you do this, you will fail the class and be banned from working for the *Kansan*.**

Writing:

In magazine writing, you want to tell stories, not push information. Don't just string together quotes from various sources. There has to be both logic and grace to the organization; as a rule, it is a good idea to place similar information together. Your leads need to compel your reader. There should be a sense of character, complication and resolution (an effective ending). Also, there should be good transitions throughout. I appreciate interesting and original style, but never at the expense of clarity. Good writing makes efficient use of words. Use every word that is needed, not one more. Good grammar is essential.

Editing:

Magazines hire editors as well as writers. The quality of your copyediting will affect your grade. All articles must follow AP and *Kansan* Style. Every story you write must include a headline.

Grading criteria:

90 to 100%

Outstanding. This grade is for work of clearly professional caliber. The focus is clear and relatable to *Chalk* readers. The reporting is complete (at least five cited live sources for your major article; three cited live sources for longer departments, two for shorts) and leaves no significant questions unanswered. It shows depth of understanding of the topic and a grasp of storytelling. The writing is clear and well organized and follows proper grammar and style. It requires only minor editing.

80% to 89%

Good. This grade is for work that could be raised to professional standards without radical 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. Work needs minor revisions such 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 or subject, a more artistic presentation, better information, or improved writing.

70% to 79%

Adequate. Work needs significant revision in at least one major area. Does not measure up to professional quality but could be salvaged with considerable rewriting. Writing has rough spots, and grammar and style errors are

present in significant numbers. Reporting may be incomplete, or timid, or factually flawed. These papers and presentations have weak ideas, concepts or presentation problems. They draw attention because they don't do the job.

69% and below

Unacceptable performance. The writing is confused and ungrammatical. The reporting is flawed and may contain major factual errors and/or omissions or may show poor judgment about what's appropriate for a magazine

Workshops

This class follows a workshop format, one that demands as much class participation from you as it does from me. It's vital that at this stage of your college career, on the verge of becoming professional writers and editors, that you learn how to talk about your work and the work of others openly. So we will talk in this class to help you develop skills in analytical thinking and discussion.

In this class, critical discussion falls into two categories: discussing published magazine articles, which I will provide you, and discussing the articles written by your classmates. Next to the practice of writing itself, reading articles is the best way to learn to become a magazine writer.

Read each article at least twice. The first time, treat it uncritically; read it as you would for information or entertainment, and respond to it the same way, from the gut. How did the article make you feel? Did you like the article, hate it, feel ambivalent about it? Were you left with the strange sense that something's missing, or that you don't know exactly what the article's about? Then read the article again, this time critically. Imagine that you have to teach yourself to write for magazines only by reading magazine articles. What would you want to explore? Consider the following questions:

1. What is the article about? What point is it trying to make? Is there a nut graph or topic statement? If not, is it clearly implied early in the article?
2. Does the article flow smoothly from point to point? Are there problems with organization? A good organizational test is to see if you can map out the article in outline format.
3. Does the lead get your attention? Does it fit the story? What kind of lead does the story use?
4. Does the article end satisfactorily or does it just come to a dead stop?
5. Are there adequate examples, anecdotes and description to make the story interesting?
6. Are the quotes clever, authoritative? How many quotes does the story have?
7. Are there enough apparent sources in the article to give it credibility? Who are the sources? Why did the writer choose them?

As you read through articles critically, make notes on them to highlight specific trouble spots. Also—and this is equally important—make notes about what you like: effective turns of phrase, for example, or good imagery.

For each set of published articles assigned for discussion, you will turn in a one-page summary of your observations at the end of the workshop class. These summaries will be recorded as part of the preparation and participation part of your grade.

J650 Magazine Writing–Capstone
Tentative course schedule | Spring 2020

Week 1 | Jan. 22
Intro to Chalk
Bring a print magazine to class
For next class: READ How It Feels articles

Week 2 | Jan. 27
Discussion: How It Feels articles
For next class: READ department articles

| Jan. 29
Discussion: Department articles

Week 3 | Feb. 3
Discussion: Department articles

| Feb. 5
Department groups meet
How It Feels articles DUE
For next class: READ Essays

Week 4 | Feb. 10
Discussion: Essays
Brainstorm essay ideas
Schedule Essay conferences
For next class: READ features

| Feb. 12
Discussion: Features

Week 5 | Feb. 17
Pitch features

| Feb. 19
Essay conferences #1

Week 6 | Feb. 24
Essay conferences #2

| Feb. 26
Essay conferences #3

Week 7 | March 2
In-class workshop: Departments
Essays DUE

| March 4
In-class workshop: Departments

Week 8 | March 9 – 13
Spring Break

Week 9 | March 16
Feature progress / questions
Midterm portfolio DUE: Must include one
department and 2 shorts

| March 18
Revision: The soul of good writing

Week 10 | March 23 – 26
Feature conferences

Week 11 | March 30 – April 1
Feature conferences

Week 12 | April 6 – 8
Feature conferences

Week 14 | April 20
TBD

| April 22
TBD

Week 14 | April 20
Guest speaker

| April 22

Week 15 | April 27
How to Get a Job: Resumes / cover letters
Features DUE

| April 29
How to Get a Job: interviewing

Week 16 | May 4
Portfolio DUE

| May 6
Course wrap-up and evaluations

