

## **FEATURE WRITING**

### **MCOM 3301.001, Fall 2024**

Class Meets: 11:15 a.m. to 12:10 p.m. MWF, CAS 106

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Office Hours: **9 a.m. to 11 a.m. Monday and Friday or by appointment.** I welcome and encourage office visits.

## **DEPARTMENT SYLLABI**

Use this link to access the syllabi for all Department of Communication courses

[https://www.uttyler.edu/communication/syllabi/Links to an external site.](https://www.uttyler.edu/communication/syllabi/Links%20to%20an%20external%20site.)

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is a study of the purposes, characteristics, story forms and subject matter of feature stories -- most notably creative nonfiction narrative writing. Emphasis is placed on writing and analyzing the feature story in its many forms including alternative storytelling forms. Students learn feature writing techniques; how to find story ideas, plan, write and revise features; and how to market writing.

Prerequisite: MCOM 2311

## **STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Students will be able to identify literary devices, story structures and techniques of compelling storytelling; write nonfiction narrative targeting specific audiences; explain the role of storytelling as part of a media strategy to entertain and inform; and use a multimedia approach to storytelling that incorporates photography, graphics and videography.

## **COMMUNICATIONS COMPETENCY**

Students will gain knowledge and skills mastery in the following areas.

### **a. Media Literacy**

- The ability to identify different types of media and the messages.
- The ability to analyze, evaluate and create media products in different forms.
- The ability to gauge the impact of media messages.

### **b. Legal and Ethical Principles**

- The ability to apply the First Amendment and other legal principles involving strategic communication and multimedia journalism.

- The ability to identify legal and ethical issues involving multimedia journalism and strategic communication.
- The ability to act ethically when gathering, writing and selling information.

#### c. Writing/Storytelling

- The ability to apply correct grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- The ability to apply literary techniques more commonly used in fiction to create compelling true stories.
- The ability to use interviewing skills, research and observation to gather information for true stories.
- The ability to use timelines, outlines and subheads to organize the writing process.
- The ability to adapt writing to the needs of different markets and audiences.

#### d. Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry

- The ability to conduct research and evaluate information using methods appropriate to multimedia journalism and strategic communication.
- The ability to explain differences in writing styles, goals and outcomes of feature writing versus news writing.
- The ability to determine whether nonfiction narrative is the proper format for delivering the message.
- The ability to understand how narratives shape culture and viewpoints.

#### e. Competency: Grammar Proficiency

- The ability to use words properly in a sentence.
- The ability to spell words correctly
- The ability to punctuate sentences properly in English grammar.
- The ability to write clearly by avoiding ambiguity and not leaving out essential information.

#### e. Media Ecology

- The ability to adjust the presentation of the story based on the platform it appears in.
- The ability to adjust the story based on the likely setting it will be received.
- The ability to adjust the story based on how the story will be used.
- The ability to consider the influences of print, video and presentation as part of how the story will be perceived.

#### REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

- Associated Press Stylebook. New York: Associated Press. Also available online at [www.apstylebook.org](http://www.apstylebook.org) (Links to an external site.). No older than 2022 edition. You will be required to write following AP Stylebook guidelines.

#### ADDITIONAL LEARNING GUIDES

Select readings and videos are posted in Canvas.

#### MEDIA CONSUMPTION

Immerse yourself in mass media to get the most out of this class. Read newspapers and magazines in print and online. Watch news programs and listen to NPR. Look at YouTube, Facebook and other social media sites in the context of this class. Good sources for captivating narratives include Texas Monthly and Vanity Fair

Other recommendations:

- Clark, Roy Peter. (2006) Writing Tools, 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer.
- Strunk Jr., W., & White, E.B. The Elements of Style (4th Ed.), New York: Longman.

#### SPECIAL COURSE NOTES

##### **Basic Requirements**

This course requires that you have access to a computer and a reliable internet connection. You will be required to go off campus to collect information for some stories. You will need an account to Canva or another online design product. There are additional expenses, such as an admission to Caldwell Zoo, required for this class.

##### **Communication**

If you have a question, concern or want to talk about something, call or send me a text at 903-617-8196. Tell me your name, what class you are in and why you are reaching out to me. I will get back to you as soon as possible.

- You also can send me an email at [jmogle@uttyler.edu](mailto:jmogle@uttyler.edu).
- Check the Announcements tab of Canvas regularly.
- If there is a valid reason that you cannot turn in work on time (such as becoming sick), contact me.

##### **Completing Work on Time**

Each assignment is in Canvas and has a deadline. You must meet the deadline to receive full credit. Every assign lists the last day it will be accepted. Late work will only be accepted under extraordinary circumstances.

##### **Academic Honesty**

The University's academy honesty policies apply. You, and only you, must do the work that you submit. However, you can receive help in organizing your stories and proofreading.

Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, unattributed use of others' work, disruption of class, and discourtesy to, or harassment of, other students or your instructor. Anyone caught cheating will earn a "0" for that assignment and will be subject to academic and disciplinary action.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism includes but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another's work and the submission of it as one's own academic work offered for credit. Students caught plagiarizing will fail the assignment, may fail this class and will be subject to academic and disciplinary action. Go here for more:

<http://www.uttyler.edu/judicialaffairs/scholasticdishonesty.php> (Links to an external site.)

AI in the form of ChatGPT or Copilot -- much like search engines -- can be used to identify sources. If you use AI to generate writing, then it is not your work. This is a form of plagiarism. If it is deemed that an assignment has a large portion of AI generated content, then you could face disciplinary action.

### **ASSIGNMENT WEIGHTS/POINTS VALUE**

Each assignment has an assigned value, instructions and information on how the grade is determined.

The graded work falls into five categories:

- **Capstone project -- 600 pts., 22% of grade.** Your capstone project demonstrates extraordinary effort combining writing, photography, video and magazine design. The project will be explained the first day of class. It comes in four parts: 1) the story pitch (25 pts); update (20 pts.); draft version (200 pts); class presentation (75 pts.); final version (300 pts.). Competencies: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry, Media Literacy, Legal and Ethical Principles, Grammar Proficiency, Media Ecology
- **Jobs -- 1,450 pts., 53%.** Jobs are assignments in which students write nonfiction narratives or use alternative storytelling forms. These assignments are structured as assignments from an actual employer with considerations of length, style, content and target audience. Competencies: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry, Media Literacy, Legal and Ethical Principles, Grammar Proficiency, Media Ecology
- **Graded Discussions/In-Class Presentations -- 230 pts., 8%.** In online discussions, students answer questions and comment on other posts to learn from one other and see things from different perspectives. During in-class presentations, students share discoveries and seek input from classmates. Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry
- **Assignments -- 260 points; 9.5%.** Assignments are designed to help students master skills, analyze work of others and reinforce lessons presented in class. Competencies: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry, Media Literacy, Legal and Ethical Principles, Grammar Proficiency

- **Blogs -- 200 points; 7.3%.** Students write a blog for four weeks. Each is worth 50 points. The grading is based on grammatical accuracy and quality of writing. Competencies: Media Literacy, Writing and Storytelling, Analysis and Systematic Inquiry, Grammar Proficiency

No assignment is weighted more heavily than any other. Some have higher point values than others.

#### GRADING SCALE

The final grade represents the number of points earned as a percentage to the total points available.

- A: 90-100%;
- B: 80-89%
- C: 70-79%
- D: 60-69%
- F: 59% and below

Check Canvas frequently to learn the status of your grade.

#### LATE WORK AND MAKEUP EXAMS

All assignments have a deadline. Late assignments will receive a deduction. Most assignments will not be accepted if they are turned in more than 48 hours after they are due. Work can be made up for illnesses, family emergencies or an excused absence recognized by the University.

#### CALENDAR

Census Date: The census date for the Fall 2024 semester is Sept. 9. This is the final date for many enrollment-related actions, including adding new courses, changing sections, or dropping courses without incurring grades of “W” or “Q”. Census is also the second drop for non-payment date each academic session. See the Office of the Registrar website for additional details.

Final exam: No final exam is given for this course.

#### WEEK BY WEEK AND GRADED COURSE WORK

Here is the week-by-week schedule. Sometimes circumstances require changes in planned coursework. Any changes will be announced in class and on Canvas. All deadlines and point values are posted in Canvas.

WEEK I (Aug. 26, 28, 30) The World of Narratives

- Introduction to the course, capstone project.
- Blog 1
- Discussion Board: Story Ideas
- Presentation: Here's a narrative feature I love

WEEK II (Sept. 4, 6) Narrative Writers Toolbox

- Blog 2
- Assignment: Putting Writing Tools to Use
- Discussion Board: Narrative Writing Tips.

WEEK III (Sept. 9, 11, 13) Power of Observation

- Blog 3
- Job (descriptive essay): Harvey Lake
- Assignment: Writing Descriptively
- Capstone pitches

WEEK IV (Sept. 16, 18, 20 Prepare, Write, Revise

- Blog 4
- Job: Caldwell Zoo
- Assignment: Study "Tigers in East Texas"
- Assignment: Zoo Story Self Evaluation
- Presentation: Capstone Pitch
- Due Date: Harvey Lake. Sept. 21

WEEK V (Sept. 23, 25, 27) Visual Storytelling

- Job: The Photo Essay
- Presentation: Good Photos

WEEK VI (Sept. 30, Oct. 2, 4) Opening, Nut Graph, Ending

- Assignment: Good Narrative Openings
- Discussion Board: Rate These Openings
- Assignment: Headlines and Subheads
- Due Date: Zoo Story, Sept. 29
- Presentation: Zoo Story

WEEK VII (Oct. 7, 9, 11) Human Interest Story

- Job: The Human-Interest Story
- Assignment: Study "She Can Do It"
- Assignment: Study "My Baby Saved My Life."

WEEK VIII (Oct. 14, 16, 18) Alternative Storytelling

- Job: The Alternative Story (Graphics, Illustrations)

WEEK IX (Oct. 21, 23, 25) Special Interest Story

- Job: Special Interest Story
- Assignment: Quick Fixes to Writing
- Discussion Board: Your Favorite Writing Tips
- Due Date: Human Interest Story: Oct. 20.

WEEK X: (Oct. 28, 30, Nov. 1) Photo Essay Presentations, Capstone Work Days

- Due Date: Photo Essay, Oct. 27
- Presentation: Photo Essay

WEEK XI: (Nov. 4, 6, 8) The First Person Story

- Job: Including Yourself in the Story
- Assignment: Study "Haunted Jefferson"
- Story Due: Special Interest Nov. 3

WEEK XII: (Nov. 11, 13, 15) Capstone Update, Work Days

- Presentation: Capstone Update

WEEK XIII (Nov. 18, 20, 22) Live Performance Review

- Attend Performance of "Holidaze" on Nov. 19
- Assignment: Study "Holidaze" Review
- Due Date: First Person Story, Nov. 17.
- Discussion Board: Being a Critic

WEEK XIV (Nov. 25, 27, 29) Thanksgiving Holidays

- Due Date: Capstone Draft, Nov. 24.

WEEK XV (Dec. 2, 4, 6) Capstone Presentations

- In-Class Capstone Presentations
- Final Version of Capstone Due