

WRITING FOR MASS MEDIA

MCOM 2311

11 a.m. to 12:25 p.m. Monday, Wednesday CAS 106

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Best way to contact: Call/text

Office Hours: 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Monday and Wednesday and by appointment. (I welcome and encourage office visits.) I will meet with you any time I can.

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 teaches techniques used in gathering and writing (creating) information used in news, strategic communication, social media and broadcast. Students learn and apply interviewing techniques, observation, research, analysis, ethical considerations, grammar, AP style and storytelling. Emphasis is on writing cleanly, clearly and concisely and adapting messages to different platforms and audiences.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

a. Competency: Writing and Storytelling

- Write news and messages correctly, clearly and concisely appropriate for strategic communication and multimedia journalism.
- Produce accurate stories in an appropriate format when given a set of facts.
- Produce accurate stories in an appropriate format when having to use sources and conduct research.
- Demonstrate proficiency in writing, including use of Associated Press style.

b. Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry

- Gather and present information appropriate to strategic communication and multimedia journalism.
- Analyze information to determine whether it meets the criteria of news and professional standards of attribution and sourcing.
- Analyze information to determine the best techniques and formats to tell the story to reach a target audience.
- Analyze information to determine whether its primary purpose is to inform, persuade or sell.

c. Competency: Legal and Ethical Principles

- Demonstrate ability to apply legal principles pertaining to strategic communication and multimedia journalism.
- Recognize what constitutes libel, plagiarism, fabrication and other legal issues involving media.
- Demonstrate an understanding of ethical issues involved in journalism, strategic communication and social media.
- Apply ethical behavior to practices involved in gathering and writing information for mass media.

d. Competency: Mediated Presentation

- Apply theories in the presentation of messages and images and use of technologies appropriate for public relations/integrated communication or multimedia journalism.
- Write copy appropriate for news and strategic communication in appropriate formats -- including print, digital and broadcast - when given sets of facts.
- Write copy for news and strategic communication when having to originate ideas, do research and interview sources.
- Identify and distinguish different formats used in presenting information.

e. Competency: Critical Evaluation

- Use skills involving news value, fairness, clarity, sourcing, verification and attribution to better evaluate the accuracy of information presented as news
- Evaluate print, broadcast and public relations material for accuracy, transparency of sourcing, fairness and other professional standards.
- Evaluate news, broadcast and public relations material for inclusion of opinion and persuasion.
- Demonstrate the ability to evaluate impacts of media messages on individuals and society.

f. Competency: Media Literacy

- Demonstrate the ability to identify different platforms used in mass media.
- Demonstrate the ability to adapt messages to different platforms taking into account audience usage and preferences.
- Demonstrate the ability to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of different platforms.

g. Competency: Grammar, Spelling, Punctuation

- Demonstrate the ability to use words correctly.
- Demonstrate the ability to use proper grammar.
- Demonstrate the ability to construct sentences that are easily understood.
- Demonstrate the ability to edit and proofread messages for mass communication.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOK

- **Associated Press Stylebook.** New York: Associated Press. Also available online at apstylebook.org([Links to an external site.](#))[Links to an external site.](#) (No older than 2020 edition.)
- Readings and videos assigned in class and posted in Canvas. **Material posted in Canvas function as a textbook.**

RECOMMENDED 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. Examine press releases and advertising campaigns. Look at YouTube, Facebook and other social media in the context of this class.

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.

COURSE NOTES

Basic Requirements

The course requires that you have access to a reliable computer and internet connection. You may have to go off campus to gather information for some writing assignments. You will need the Associated Press Stylebook.

Communication

If you have a question, concern or just want to talk about something related to class, call or send me a text at **903-617-8196**. I will get back to you as soon as possible.

- You can also send me an email.
- Check the Announcements tab of Canvas.
- If there is any valid reason that you cannot turn in work on time, contact me.

Completing Work on Time

Assignments are posted in Canvas and each has a deadline. Missing a deadline results in a deduction. Those who miss an assignment without an excused absence may not get the opportunity to make up the assignment.

Academic Honesty

The University's academy honesty policies apply. You, and only you, must do the work that you submit. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, unattributed use of others' work (including test and paper "banks"), 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.)Links to an external site.

ASSIGNMENTS AND WEIGHTS/POINT VALUES

Each assignment has a posted value and information on the purpose of the assignment and how the grade is determined. If there is confusion on how to carry out the assignment, call or text me at **903-617-8196** BEFORE you do the assignment.

The assignments fall into five general categories:

- graded discussions
- skill-building assignments
- writing assignments
- attendance
- ethical guidance from the AP Stylebook

GRADING SCALE

Your final grade is determined by the points you have acquired as a percentage of the total points available.

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

Check Canvas frequently for the status of your grade. You will not be given an opportunity to do extra work to improve your grade.

LATE WORK AND MAKEUP EXAMS

There will be a deduction for work that it is turned in late -- typically 50%, but sometimes 100%. All assignments will have a posted due date. Work can be made up in cases of illness and emergencies. All I ask is that you be honest.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

You will receive a 5-pt. deduction for each time you miss class that is unexcused.

The University of Texas at Tyler recognizes many things that constitute an excused absence. For a complete list of these policies [click here](#). (Links to an external site.)Links to an external site.

GRADED COURSE REQUIREMENTS INFORMATION

- **Writing assignments** require students to write news based on either information provided or obtained on their own.
- **Stylebook ethic guidance assignments** require students to use the Stylebook to master AP style and receive guidance on use of social media, working with sources, broadcast issues and ethical behavior.
- **Graded discussions** require students to share their thoughts on mass comm issues and comment on other posts.
- **Assignments** require students to demonstrate mastery of skills being presented in class and readings/viewings.

There is no midterm test or final. Students demonstrate knowledge by doing assignments, writing stories and discussing issues.

More detailed information on each assignment will be provided in class.

CALENDAR

Census Date: The census date for the semester is **January 29**. 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: There is no final exam given in this course.

Week by Week: Here is the week-by-week rundown of what will be covered. Sometimes circumstances require scheduling changes. Any changes will be posted in Canvas.

Each unit includes a PowerPoint presentation and supplemental readings/videos that are posted in Canvas. Due dates for all assignments are included as part of the assignment. Some assignments are done in class and others are homework.

UNIT I: IDENTIFYING NEWS

News Value - Jan. 17, 22, 24

Learning outcomes: a, b, c, e, f

- Is it Fake? - 30 pts.
- Distinguishing Facts from Opinion - 20 pts.
- Applying News Value - 30 pts.
- A Nose for News (discussion) - 25 pts.
- Critical Thinking - 30 pts.

"Sins" of Journalism - Jan. 29, 31

Learning Outcomes: b, c, e, f

- Recognizing Inappropriate Wording - 30 pts.
- What's the Problem - 50 pts.
- Media Bias (discussion) - 20 pts.
- Euphemisms, Slang, Idioms, Clichés - 30 pts.

Professional Standards -Feb. 5-7

Learning Outcomes: a, b, c, e, f

- Stay Out of Your Story - 20 pts.
- Analyzing a News Story - 20 pts.
- Proofreading - 40 pts.
- Write a Story (writing) - 150

UNIT II: DEVELOPING SKILLS

Being Clear - Feb. 12-24

Learning Outcomes: a, b, e, g

- Did You Misplace Your Modifier? - 20 pts.
- This is Clear as Mud – 25 pts.
- What is Missing? - 20 pts.
- Using the Right/Write Word - 30

Being Concise - Feb. 19-21

Learning Outcomes: a, b., e, g

- Active or Passive? - 20 pts.
- Recognizing Clutter - 40 pts.
- Getting Rid of Redundancy - 50 pts.
- Writing Cleanly, Clearly, Concisely (writing) 150 pts.

Associated Press Style - Feb. 26-28

Learning Outcomes: a, e, g

- Recognizing the AP Essentials - 40 pts.
- Mastering AP Style Essentials - 30 pts.
- Using the AP Stylebook - 50 pts.
- Stylebook Discoveries (graded discussion) - 15 pts.
- Putting AP Style to Use (writing) - 50 pts.

UNIT III: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

News and Feature Stories - March 4-6

Learning Outcomes: a, b, c, d, e, f, g

- Write a News Story from a Prompt (writing)- 150 pts.
- News or Features? - 30 pts.
- Terry Bradshaw at the Cowan Center - 180 pts.
- Getting the Opening Right - 45 pts.

Capstone Project - March 4-6

Learning Outcomes: a, b, c, d, e, f, g

- Your Story Proposal - 20 pts.
- Capstone Writing Project (writing) -250 pts.

Gathering Information - March 18-20

Learning Outcomes: a, b, c, d, e, f

- Asking Questions - 25 pts.
- Working With Sources - 30 pts.
- Learn from Expert Interviewer (discussion) - 25 pts.
- Rewriting a News Release (writing) - 70 pts.
- Writing from an Observation (writing) -100 pts.

Working With Quotes - March 25, 27

Learning Outcomes: a, b, c, d, e, f

- Stylebook Guidance on Quotes - 40 pts.
- Making Decisions About Quotes - 30 pts.
- What Would You Do? (discussion) - 15 pts.
- Writing from News Conference (writing) - 150 pts.

UNIT IV: ADAPTING TO PLATFORMS/AUDIENCES

The Digital World - April 1, 3

Learning Outcomes: a, b, d, e, f, g

- Reporting in the Digital Era - 30 pts.
- The Digital News Package - 15 pts.
- Writing Headlines - 20 pts.

Strategic Communication - April 8, 10

Learning Outcomes: a, b, c, d, e, f, g

- Components of a Strategic Plan - 35 pts.
- Event Planning - 20 pts.
- Managing a Crisis - 25 pts.
- Writing a News Release (writing) - 150 pts.

Social Media - April 15, 17

Learning Outcomes: a, b, c, d, e, f, g

- Social Media and the Press (Discussion) - 50 pts.
- Social Media Messaging – 40
- Social Media Video – 100
- Stylebook Guidance on Social Media - 150 pts.

Broadcasting - April 22, 24

Learning Outcomes: a, b, c, d, e, f, g

- Is it for Broadcast? - 30 pts.
- You're the News Producer - 20 pts.
- Stylebook Guidance on Broadcasting - 20 pts.
- Writing a Radio News Script (writing) - 150 pts.