

Syllabus
MCOM 3303 Section 001
Spring 2024

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(The best way to contact me is by email.)
Office Hours: M 10-noon, Th 2-3 p.m., and by appointment

Note: Syllabus is subject to change. Any changes will be posted under “Announcements” on the class Canvas site, by email through Canvas, and verbally announced in the next class meeting.

Course Description: Instruction and development of journalistic writing skills for the print, digital and broadcast media, with an emphasis on interviewing, source development and research.

Prerequisites: MCOM 2307 and MCOM 2311.

I. Student Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

A. Competency: Writing and Storytelling

1. Write correctly and clearly using the formats and compelling storytelling styles appropriate for the audiences and purposes for print/digital news and multimedia journalism.
2. Produce accurate news stories in the appropriate format when given sets of facts.
3. Demonstrate proficiency in writing including basic grammar and style and the use of the Associated Press.

B. Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry

1. Research and Evaluation

- a. Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to print/digital or multimedia journalism professions.
- b. Evaluate newsworthiness of events, issues, and people, and develop reporting angles appropriate to the story.
- c. Develop peer review skills in evaluating stories for content, organization, mechanics, and Associated Press style.

2. Legal and Ethical Principles

- a. Demonstrate an understanding of and be able to apply the First Amendment and other legal principles for public relations/integrated communication and/or multimedia journalism a. Recognize what constitutes libel, appropriation, intrusion, false light, and publicity about private facts.

b. Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and issues for public relations/integrated communication and/or multimedia journalism. a. Demonstrate an understanding of ethical behavior in mass media industries.

C: Competency: Mediated Presentation

1. Apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information using tools and technologies appropriate for print/digital or multimedia journalism.
2. Produce engaging, informative, and accurate news stories and print/digital media story packages in appropriate format when given sets of facts.

II. Required Reading:

1. The Missouri Group. News Reporting and Writing, 13th edition. Bedford/St. Martin's.
2. Associated Press Stylebook. New York: Associated Press. Also available online at www.apstylebook.com.
3. Select readings assigned in class over the course of this semester.

III. Recommended Media Consumption:

A. Immerse yourself in mass media to get the most out of this class. Read newspapers and magazines daily in print and online. Watch news programs regularly. Examine press releases and advertising campaigns. Look at YouTube, Facebook and other social media in the context of this class. Share clips and articles and ideas on Canvas for discussion.
UT Tyler students can now register for free access to the New York Times online.

Special Course Notes:

1) I strongly recommend students back up electronic notes, assignment files or content, and other important digital files in three locations: A resident storage drive on your computer, laptop, or mobile device; a removable storage drive (such as a portable hard drive or USB flash drive); and a cloud-based storage account like Dropbox, iCloud, or Microsoft OneDrive.

Assignments and weights/point values

1. AP Style and Grammar Exams	15%
2. In-class deadline writing	20%
3. Outside writing assignments	30%
4. Community Issue Project (final)	35%

Grading Scale:

A	90% or greater
B	80 – 89%
C	70 – 79%
D	60 – 69%
F	below 60%

Note: Department of Communication majors must earn a grade of “C” or higher in order to receive credit toward the degree for MCOM courses.

Course grades will be calculated to the first decimal point and rounded up or down according to rounding standard (.4 or below rounded down; .5 or above rounded up). of Texas at Tyler.

Standard grading rubric for written assignments

Fairly evaluating news writing consists of both objective and subjective components, the latter involving an evaluation of the story's content, organization, reader engagement level and overall presentation. Written comments will be provided on each writing assignment to communicate the level at which these elements were sufficiently present. For the objective components, which refer to AP style, punctuation, grammatical correctness, and accuracy, the following standard rubric will be in place:

AP style and punctuation errors – deduction of 2 points each.

Grammar errors, misspelled words, sentence fragments/incomplete sentences – deduction of 5 points each.

Factual errors – deduction of 20 points each.

Proper name misspellings (people or places) – deduction of 25 points each.

I reserve the right to adjust the overall score based on subjective components as stated above.

In other words, if your story has quite a number of style or punctuation mistakes, but is very thorough in content, organization and other elements, you may receive a higher score than would be indicated by the above rubric. Likewise, a relatively error-free story does not necessarily guarantee a high score if the content, organization and other elements are lacking.

AI usage policy: Most of the outside work I will assign you will not and should not involve content generated by AI programs, chatbots, or sites. **The only exception will be with data or statistical information used in your community issue story.** I will check sources on all stories you turn in, so do not be tempted to use AI to generate story content.

Attendance Policy:

1. Attendance is mandatory, especially for an upper-division skills course such as this one. I will excuse an absence for one of only three reasons: a. An illness documented by a hospital, clinic, or physician; b. A death in the immediate family or first branch of relatives (aunts, uncles, first cousins) and documented by a copy of an obituary or funeral service program; c. A university-sponsored event/activity or a religious observance that would require the student to miss the class period (notification of which should be made at least three (3) days in advance of the expected absence). Three to four unexcused absences will result in an automatic half grade deduction (5 percent). Five or more unexcused absences will result in a full grade deduction. Students 10 or more minutes late or leaving early may be considered absent.

2. You are responsible for turning in all assignments by deadline even though you may be absent.

3. You are also responsible for lecture materials, announcements and assignments made during any absence.

4. No make-up quizzes will be allowed except under extreme circumstances causing absence of more than a week, such as a death in the family or an extended illness.

5. Recording of Class Sessions: Class sessions may be recorded by the instructor for use by students enrolled in this course. Recordings that contain personally identifiable information or other information subject to FERPA shall not be shared with individuals not enrolled in this course unless appropriate consent is obtained from all relevant students. Class recordings are reserved only for the use of students enrolled in the course and only for educational purposes. Course recordings should not be shared outside of the course in any form without express permission.

B. Assignment Policy:

1. Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due at the announced time via Canvas. Late assignments will be penalized by one grade level per day late. (i.e. if it is one day late, you lose 10 percent off the top.). In-class deadline writing assignments will be deducted by 10 points if turned in between 1-10 minutes late and will not be accepted (score of zero) more than 10 minutes late.
2. Assignments must be typed and submitted using the format required for the assignment.
3. Assignments and due dates may change at the instructor's discretion with fair notice.
4. Students must complete all assignments in order to pass the course. This does not mean, however, that merely completing all assignments guarantees a passing grade.
5. All assignments must include student name, date, assignment name, course name and word count.

C. Classroom Courtesies:

1. No cellphone use during class. No calls, no texts, no status update checks. In an emergency, please exit the classroom to use your device.
2. NO FOOD OR DRINK IS ALLOWED IN THE COMPUTER LAB AT ANY TIME. IF YOU MUST EAT, STAND IN THE DOORWAY.
3. Laptop and tablet use is for note taking and class-related research. Other uses will be noted and these devices can be restricted in class.
4. Talk, debate, ask questions and challenge but stay on topic.

D. Access to Technology: I use Canvas to communicate, post assignments and readings, present feedback, and provide a space for you to communicate with your classmates. Check Canvas regularly.

E. Email Policy: On weekdays, you should expect my response within 24 hours, though in most cases I will respond within two hours of receiving the email if before 8 p.m. On weekends, I will do my best to answer your questions within 24-48 hours.

Graded Course Requirements Information:

MCOM 3303 is intended to be a more intensive writing course with a greater emphasis on developing and producing original news journalism content, building on the media writing basics you learned in MCOM 2311. The course assignments address a greater scope and depth of news writing topics, including covering news events, interviewing, people as news, and research/data-based news topics. These assignments will require a greater amount of planning,

research, time management, source-seeking, and story organization than those in the prerequisite course. You will be writing, at minimum, 2,000 words for all news writing assignments and brief proposals for all outside writing/reporting assignments. These constitute a total of 65% of the course grade (regular reporting assignments plus the final project).

Regular Reporting Assignments (30% of course grade)

You will be required to complete the following reporting assignments at various points throughout the semester:

1. **Profile story** – This is a 500-750-word story spotlighting a newsworthy person – the subject can be anyone from a university administrator or faculty member (Department of Communication faculty are not eligible) to a local city official or small business owner. The big requirement is that the person must be one who will provide you as the reporter with an engaging, timely story. A minimum of two interviewed sources (including the subject) is required, but three or more interviewed sources will likely lead to a better story and a higher grade as a result. A story proposal is required for instructor approval. This assignment will also include a peer review session in which you will read and critique the first draft of a fellow student's story, checking for AP Style and grammar as well as content and organization (participation in the peer review and submission of a first draft will count as a quiz grade).

Assignment covers learning outcomes A1-3 and B1-2.

2. **24-hour story** – You will select an upcoming event on the UT Tyler campus or one off-campus event and submit a story proposal. If approved, you will cover that event – typically, a public meeting, press conference, or speech – and you will contact me by email immediately after the event has concluded. That is when your deadline clock begins; you have exactly 24 hours to turn in a 500-750-word story with at least two interviewed sources.

This story is to be written as a “hard news” story, highlighting the decisions and their impact in the case of a public meeting, and the topics, statements, and reactions in the cases of a press conference or speech. **This assignment must be completed no later than Monday, April 1, 2024. Assignment covers learning outcomes A1-3 and B1-2**

3. **Live blogging** – Being able to effectively report news through a variety of media is now quintessential to a successful media career, so one of your reporting assignments will have you check out an iPad Pro to cover an event (must be different from your 24-hour story), on or off campus, with your reporting work as a series of live blog posts (3-5), supplemented by photos and video (an interview or look-live segment w/extended voice-over and footage) taken with the iPad Pro camera. You can post the content to your personal blog (if applicable) or you can upload the files to an assignment link on Canvas.

I recommend submitting an assignment proposal as early in the semester as possible. We have a limited number of iPad Pro devices and working on this earlier in the semester than later will probably increase chances of a device being available when you need it. Once your content is finished and posted, you must return the iPad Pro to the equipment lab in CAS 102. I recommend backing up any files you want to keep because the devices will have to be reset to factory default status before being issued to another student. **This assignment must be completed no later than Monday, April 1, 2024. Assignment covers all learning outcomes.**

4. Broadcast writing assignment (paired assignment) – With an assigned classmate as your assignment partner, you will determine a news story topic suitable for a 60-90-second broadcast media report segment; both partners will select a different topic. For your selected topic, you will write the following in broadcast style:

- Studio anchor or news director intro: Should effectively introduce the story and its importance and be readable with 10-15 seconds.
- Field reporter intro: Should clearly and precisely convey the most important aspects of the story and include a reference to interviewed sources that would follow in an actual broadcast report. This should also be readable in 10-15 seconds.
- Field reporter wrap-up and sign-off: Should provide a clear summary of the story's outcome or possible next phase(s), followed by a sign-off statement along the framework of "This is (your name) reporting for MCOM 3303 at UT Tyler."

The written segments will be turned in as a Word document via Canvas. The second part of this assignment involves you and your partner, in turn, recording the segments on video, with your partner acting as studio anchor/news director and you as the field reporter. This recording will be uploaded in MP4 or MOV format to Canvas. You and your assignment partner will receive identical scores for the assignment. **This assignment must be completed no later than March 31, 2024. Assignment covers learning outcomes A1-3 and C1.**

NOTE: You may NOT use family members or relatives, close friends or roommates, or UT Tyler Department of Communication faculty or staff as interview sources for any outside writing assignment, including the final project. Exceptions will ONLY be made in cases of specific expertise in a field, and only then with prior approval by me.

CONCURRENT MCOM CLASSES: Please be aware that you cannot turn in one assignment for multiple assignment credit in this class or any other MCOM courses you are taking this semester. Turning in previously written work for assignment credit in this course is also strictly prohibited. If you are unsure if you may be running afoul of this policy, please talk to me about your proposed assignment work.

Final (35% of course grade)

The final for this course will be a community issue story package you will create and consisting of three components as follows:

1. Main story – This is a 750-1,000-word story focusing on a particular news issue within the UT Tyler, city of Tyler, or Smith County communities. **It must have at least three (3) interviewed sources, along with any relevant documented sources.** You will submit a proposal for instructor approval, which will include a list of possible interview subjects and other sources as well as a short (about a paragraph) summary of your story issue and the angle you intend to take with it. This assignment will also include a peer review session in which you will read and critique the first draft of a fellow student's story, checking for AP Style and grammar as well as content and organization (participation in the peer review and submission of a first draft will count as a quiz grade).
2. Sidebar – This is a 250-400-word companion story to the main story, highlighting a particular aspect, person, or example connected to the community issue in the main story. It must have at

least two interviewed sources; however, one of the sources can also be one of the sources in your main story. You want this story to be built around an example or illustration of the community issue in your main story, or perhaps highlight an interesting or unusual aspect of the issue.

3. Infographic – Because your main story will necessarily need to be on an issue for which you can find statistical data, records, or demographic information, you will create an infographic to go with your main story. The format will be up to you – it can be a bar chart, line chart, pie chart, map, timeline, or “interesting facts” graphic – but it is vital that you choose a format that best illustrates the information. Infographics must be properly labeled, accurate in depiction, and cite the source of the data or information. **Assignment covers all learning outcomes.**

AP and Grammar Exams (15% of course grade)

On two scheduled class dates in the semester, you will have an Associated Press Stylebook exam and a Grammar Exam, respectively. The AP Stylebook exam is open-book (learning to refer to the stylebook is the objective), but the Grammar Exam is closed-book/closed-notes. I will post practice tests for both on Canvas; I would strongly recommend taking time to complete these prior to each exam.

In-class deadline assignments (20% of course grade) There will be regular in-class deadline writing assignments (expect at least eight) with information provided to you. The goal is to construct a well-written, informative, and engaging news story and file it via Canvas before the deadline of 10 a.m. (the end of our class period). I will discuss the expectations and parameters of each in-class deadline writing assignment in the class meeting prior to the day of the assignment, which should give everyone ample opportunity to ask questions in advance.

Peer review sessions: For the profile story and community issue main story, there will be a peer review session that requires both your attendance in class on the designated days and the submission of a first draft of the respective stories. For this, you will receive a quiz grade based on the following criteria on your first draft:

At least 400 words written and two interviews completed: 100

At least 300 words written and one interview completed: 75

At least 200 words written and no interviews completed: 50

Anything less than 200 words written: 0

Note: I will drop your lowest grade in this assignment category.

Assignment group covers learning outcomes A1-3 and B2.

Extra Credit: Patriot Media Story:

You will attend one Patriot Media staff meeting and complete one written news, sports or feature assignment for the Patriot Media in print or online. You will either pitch a story to the Patriot editor, or you will take a story at his/her discretion. You will meet all deadlines as directed by the editor. Turn in the published story for extra credit. Points to be determined by instructor and added to the Writing Assignments category.

Extra Credit: Research participation:

This offer is pending the availability of an open research study conducted by me or another professor in the Department of Communication. You will need to provide proof of participation

(typically, a sign-in sheet and/or informed consent document). Points awarded will be determined by the instructor, but you can probably expect it to be points added to either the final exam or the writing assignment category, since those are the largest weighted categories in the course grade.

Calendar of Topics, Readings, and Due Dates (subject to change)

Week 1

Jan. 15 – No class; Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday
Jan. 17 – Personal introductions and icebreaker activity
Jan. 19 – Overview of writing assignments and other syllabus notes

Week 2

Jan. 22 – NRW Chapter 1; discussion on the nature of news content in current society
Jan. 24 – Guidelines for 24-hour story and live blogging assignments; determining newsworthy events
Jan. 26 – Writing efficiently on deadline; in-class deadline writing guidelines

Week 3

Jan. 29 – In-class deadline writing #1
Jan. 31 – NRW Chapter 14; covering press conferences and speeches; in-class exercise on finding news items in meeting agendas
Feb. 2 – AP Stylebook Exam in class

Week 4

Feb. 5 – NRW Chapter 4 – Interviewing; **24-hour story and live blogging assignment proposals due**
Feb. 7 – NRW Chapter 5; advanced techniques for quotes and attributions
Feb. 9 – In-class deadline writing #2

Week 5

Feb. 12 – NRW Chapter 3; finding and verifying information; in-class exercise
Feb. 14 – NRW Chapter 8; Mastering the inverted pyramid
Feb. 16 – In-class deadline writing assignment #3

Week 6

Feb. 19 – NRW Chapter 9; Creating engagement with your audience
Feb. 21 – Social media in news reporting: Strategies, norms, and concerns
Feb. 23 – In-class deadline writing assignment #4

Week 7

Feb. 26 – NRW Chapter 10; other types of story leads and when to use them
Feb. 28 – Chapter 10 discussion continued
March 1 – Grammar Exam in class.

Week 8

March 4 – NRW Chapter 11; Writing for Digital Media
March 6 – **Profile story proposals due**; profile story guidelines; Chapter 11 discussion continued

March 8 – NRW Chapter 12; Writing for broadcast media; broadcast writing assignment guidelines

March 11-15 – Spring break; no classes

Week 9

March 18 – NRW Chapter 13; Beat reporting and developing sources

March 20 – Chapter 13 discussion continued; in-class exercise

March 22 – In-class deadline writing #5

Week 10

March 25 – **Community issue package proposals due**; NRW Chapter 15; other types of news stories

March 27 – In-class deadline writing #6

March 29 – **First draft of profile story due**; Profile story peer review workshop

Week 11

April 1 – NRW Chapter 6 – using news releases to help build stories

April 3 – Guest lecture – Hannah Buchannan, UT Tyler Marketing and Communications

April 5 – In-class exercise on finding sources and information in news releases

Week 12

April 8 – **Profile story due by 11:59 p.m. via Canvas**; NRW Chapter 16; writing business and consumer news; in-class writing guidelines

April 10 – In-class deadline writing #7

April 12 – NRW Chapter 17; Writing investigative and data-driven stories

Week 13

April 15 – NRW Chapter 19 – Media law and news writing

April 17 – NRW Chapter 20 – Ethical considerations in writing and reporting news

April 19 – **Community issue main story first draft due; Community issue story peer review workshop**

Week 14

Note: I will be available to schedule one-on-one conference times (30 minutes) throughout this week for students who would like to submit new drafts of the community issue story and sidebar.

April 22 – Work day for community issue package

April 24 – Work day for community issue package

April 26 – Work day for community issue stories

Week 15 (Finals week)

Community issue package due by 11:59 p.m. Wednesday, May 1, via Canvas.