

COM 210 – Introduction to Media Writing

Fall 2006 - #2638
M-W 10:00-11:50 a.m.
SA 111

Instructor: Deborah A. Silverman, Ph.D., APR

Office: 225 Bishop Hall

Phone: 878-3606

E-Mail: silverda@buffalostate.edu

Office Hours: M & W 9:00-9:45 a.m., T & Th 10:45 a.m.- noon or by appointment

Course Description. This is the beginning course in media writing and is a foundation for the print, broadcast and public relations courses in later semesters. It is designed to provide exposure to the fundamentals of print news writing and reporting, broadcast news, and public relations writing. Students should be able to type at least 20 words per minute, must have completed ENG 101 with a grade of C or better, and be ready to write – often under deadline pressure! This will be a fun but fast-paced course that will use discussions of current events, class exercises, and field encounters to introduce you to the world of journalism and public relations.

Course Objectives. Upon completion of the course, students will:

- Understand and be able to demonstrate basic reporting and writing skills
- Write ‘tight and bright’ – clear, concise writing aimed at keeping the readers’ interest throughout the piece
- Understand the critical importance of factual writing, confirmation, and attribution
- Understand concepts such as the nature of news, responsible print and broadcast journalism, ethical public relations, and the importance of the free flow of meaningful information in a democratic society.

The class will be conducted in a lecture/discussion format, supplemented by guest speakers and in-class writing that will give students practice in journalistic and PR writing.

Required Textbook. W. Richard Whitaker, Janet Ramsey and Ronald D. Smith,
MediaWriting: Print, Broadcast and Public Relations

- *Please bring the textbook to class, since we will be using it for in-class writing exercises.*

Recommended Texts & Equipment. The *Associated Press Stylebook*
Webster’s Dictionary
Floppy disc formatted for Mac (not PC)

Note: Since journalists cover current news events, it is important to be informed about topics making news each day. **Please come to class each day with knowledge of the day’s headlines**—whether via newspaper, radio, TV, or online publications. This will count toward your class participation grade.

Assignments and Exams. To get your media writing skills up to speed, you will complete: 1) A series of print, broadcast, and PR writing assignments as homework to be graded – approximately one assignment per week; 2) One in-depth feature story, also graded; and 3) Ungraded writing exercises in class. To test your knowledge about writing concepts, there will be four unit exams, but no final comprehensive exam, during the semester. Save your best writing samples in a writing portfolio to show to prospective employers!

Class Participation and Attendance. The class participation grade will include attendance, assignments completed in class, and your participation in discussions about current events and assigned readings. Attendance will be taken. Missing more than four classes means you miss more than 15 percent of the semester, which will prevent you from getting higher than a C grade for the course. Be actively involved in this class! Take careful notes, participate in discussions and small group work, and ask questions. Don't hesitate to see me after class, during office hours, or contact me via e-mail.

Grading. Final grades will be calculated as follows:

Writing Assignments	50%
Exams	30%
In-Depth Feature	10%
Class Participation	10%

TOTAL 100%

Your final grade will be based on your composite average.

A	94-100	C	65-69
A-	90-93	C-	60-64
B+	85-89	D+	58-60
B	80-84	D	55-57
B-	75-79	E	Less than 55
C+	70-74		

Incompletes. In order to receive an incomplete, students must be passing the course at the time of their crisis, must have completed most of the coursework, and provide a valid medical or legal reason that has been accepted by the communication department chair.

Late Assignments and Missed Tests. Deadlines are critical in a newsroom!

Assignments are due on the assigned day. Late assignments will be accepted only until the next class meeting, with a 10-point late penalty. No paper will be accepted more than one class period late. If you must miss a test, you must call in advance, or no makeup will be given. Students requesting a make-up test or an incomplete will be asked to provide documentation.

Grading Criteria. It is expected that your written work will be of the same quality as that demanded from a beginner by a newspaper editor or broadcast news producer:

properly done news and feature stories, with well-written sentences and paragraphs, correct spelling and grammar. Student assignments will be evaluated on the basis of quality of writing, content, knowledge of the *Associated Press Stylebook*, clarity of expression, extent of research, analysis of material where applicable, and professional appearance.

Academic Integrity: Each student is expected to make an honest effort in this class and to be scrupulous in maintaining academic integrity. Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated, and college guidelines on academic misconduct will be enforced. For more information, see “Tips for Avoiding Plagiarism” at <http://www.buffalostate.edu/library/research/plagiarism.asp>.

Disruptive Behavior: Disruptive behavior by students will not be tolerated. If a student behaves in a disruptive or threatening manner, I will exercise my right to ask that individual to leave the classroom. If refused, I will exercise my right to notify the University Police. The responding officer will determine whether an arrest should be made or whether a referral to medical or counseling staff is appropriate. If a student is perceived as a danger to him/herself or others, the Dean of Students may propose an interim suspension until a hearing is held. Any student removed from class will have a right to a hearing.

Students with Disabilities or Special Needs: Students with disabilities or special needs should contact the Office of Disability Services (878-4500). Based on recommendations from that office, students may receive needed assistance, such as additional time or a quiet space to take exams, a reader for exams, and so on.

CLASS SCHEDULE for COM 210

1. Aug. 28	Introduction, Course Requirements, What is News?
2. Aug. 30 Read:	The Nature of News and Newswriting Preface & Chapter 1, "Communication Theory and News Values"
<hr/>	
Sept. 4	Labor Day (no class)
3. Sept. 6 Read: <u>Due:</u>	Is Social Responsibility Dead? Chapter 2, "Ethical and Legal Issues in Media Writing" 1.1/Media Activities Log
<hr/>	
4. Sept. 11 Read: <u>Due:</u>	Introduction to Research; Computer-Assisted Reporting Chapter 3, "Research in Communication," pp. 59-80 2.3/Newsletter Editing
5. Sept. 13 Read:	Statistics, Surveys, Questionnaire Construction, & Plagiarism Chapter 3, pp. 80-93
<hr/>	
6. Sept. 18 Read: <u>Due:</u>	Writing Effectively, Standard Usage, and Simple Language Chapter 4, "Basics of Writing and Editing," pp. 95-111 3.5/Survey Reports
7. Sept. 20 Read:	Principles of Meaningful Language Chapter 4, pp. 112-133
<hr/>	
8. Sept. 25 Read: <u>Due:</u> <u>Exam:</u>	Writing and Editing: Leads, News Briefs Chapter 5, "Basic News Stories," pp. 135-146 4.8/Simple Words; 4.10/Word Pairs Exam #1 (chapters 1-4)
9. Sept. 27 Read:	Beat Reporting: Writing about Accidents, Fires, and Crimes Chapter 5, pp. 147-159
<hr/>	
10. Oct. 2 Read: <u>Due:</u>	Interviews: Preparing for an Interview Chapter 6, "Interviewing," pp. 161-172 5.4/Expanding Your Writing
11. Oct. 4 Read:	Interview Questions and Conducting Interviews Chapter 6, pp. 172-184
<hr/>	

Oct. 9	Columbus Day Recess (no class)
12. Oct. 11	Speeches, Interviews, Surveys, and Official Documents
Read:	Chapter 7, "Reporting What Others Say"
<u>Due:</u>	6.7/New President
13. Oct. 16	Obituaries
Read:	Chapter 8, "Obituaries, Rewrites, and Roundups," pp. 219-226
	Guest Speaker
14. Oct. 18	Rewrites and Roundups
Read:	Chapter 8, pp. 226-235
<u>Due:</u>	7.6/Group Interview
15. Oct. 23	Features: Characteristics and Leads
Read:	Chapter 9, "Feature Writing," pp. 237-242
<u>Due:</u>	8.4/Writing the Roundup
<u>Exam:</u>	Exam #2 (chapters 5-8)
16. Oct. 25	Types of Feature Stories
	Guest Speaker
Read:	Chapter 9, pp. 243-255
17. Oct. 30	Broadcast Copywriting
Read:	Chapter 10, "Writing Broadcast Copy," pp. 257-266
<u>Due:</u>	9.5/Guest Speaker Profile
18. Nov. 1	Clarity in Broadcast Copy; News Judgment
Read:	Chapter 10, pp. 267-280
19. Nov. 6	Field trip to WBEN Radio
20. Nov. 8	Broadcast Newsrooms and Reporting
Read:	Chapter 11, "Reporting for Radio and TV," pp. 283-318
<u>Due:</u>	10.2/Comparing Newscasts
21. Nov. 13	Introduction to Public Relations; Guest Speaker
Read:	Chapter 12, "PR Writing in Organizational Media," pp. 321-335
<u>Exam:</u>	Exam #3 (chapters 9-11)
22. Nov. 15	Speechwriting
<u>Due:</u>	11.2/Writing a Mini-Newscast

23. Nov. 20 Fliers, Brochures, Newsletters & Web Sites
Read: Chapter 12, pp. 335-347
Due: In-Depth Feature

Nov. 22 **Thanksgiving Break (no class)**

24. Nov. 27 Making News; Writing News Releases and Fact Sheets
Read: Chapter 13, "Public Relations Writing in the News Media"
Due: 12.7/Brochure

25. Nov. 29 Position Statements, Opinion Pieces & Appeals Letters
Read: Chapter 14, "PR Writing in Promotional Media," pp. 381-390
Due: 13.10/News Conference

26. Dec. 4 Advertising Copy
Read: Chapter 14, pp. 390-397

27. Dec. 6 What's Ahead
Read: "Afterword: You and the Future"
Due: 14.4/Print Advertisement

Critique & Evaluation Period (Final Exam Week)

28. Dec. 13 Wrapping It Up (9:40-11:30 a.m.)
Exam: Exam #4 (chapters 12-14)

Grades will be submitted by Dec. 18th.

The instructor may modify the course outline and requirements during the semester as dictated by class conditions and progress. Revisions will be announced in class. If you miss a class, you are responsible to ensure that you have the most up-to-date course information including assignments and deadlines.