

Syllabus

COM 110-K (MW 3:35 - 5:15 p.m.)

Media Writing

Spring 2017

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Office hours: Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, 11:30 a.m. - 1 p.m., or, preferably, by appointment

DESCRIPTION

Clear, logical writing is necessary to communicate effectively to an audience. This course focuses on background research, interviews, accuracy, attribution and styles of writing (print, broadcast, online, news releases). Grammar and language skills are refined, and Associated Press style is introduced.

GOAL

Teach accepted practices and skills used in writing for mass media.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- gather information from multiple sources and critically evaluate the credibility of sources.
- incorporate truthful, accurate and fair information into written, aural or visual forms consistent with professional requirements.
- create content that reflects domestic and global diversity of sources, words and images and that avoids the use of stereotypes.
- demonstrate proficiency in content organization, grammar, spelling and mechanics, including the ability to use Associated Press style.
- compare and contrast writing for different audiences, different media and across multimedia platforms.
- write with accuracy and clarity in forms appropriate to the topic, audience and medium.
- apply numerical concepts such as percentages and proportions.

REQUIRED TEXTS

- *Inside Reporting* by Tim Harrower
- *The 2016 Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* (The stylebook is also available as an app or online subscription.) Bring this to class.

Reading assignments are listed in the calendar on Moodle. Please ensure assigned chapters are read before the beginning of the prescribed date's class.

REQUIRED READING

Keep well informed through exposure to a variety of news sources including, but not limited to:

- Elon News Network and the Times-News
- A selection of major newspapers (As an Elon student, you have free digital access to the New York Times. To obtain an Academic Pass, register at [NYTimes.com/Passes](https://nytimes.com/Passes). It's a simple registration process tied to your elon.edu address.)
- National Public Radio's Morning Edition and All Things Considered
- Nationally televised news broadcasts

ACCESSORIES

This class meets in a computer lab, but you may wish to bring a thumb drive to save any files you create.

Take notes during each of your interviews, and keep those notes in case there are questions regarding the accuracy of your quotes or information. Some students find it helpful to purchase separate notebooks for each of their assignments.

You might also consider purchasing a voice recorder or voice recorder app for your interviews.

QUIZZES

There will be a quiz every day during the first five minutes of class. Mondays will be style quizzes (open book) and Wednesdays will be news quizzes (closed book). It's strongly suggested that you bring your AP Stylebook on Wednesdays. Quizzes must be taken in class and cannot be made up; they are worth only five points apiece, so missing one or two is unlikely to dramatically affect your grade.

BUDGET MEETINGS

Each Monday, time permitting, we will have a budget meeting to talk about news from local, national and international sources. This will help guide your judgment about news values (and likely help your scores on news quizzes). I will facilitate the conversation, but it's up to you to have fodder to talk about. Please ensure to include your sources with any news items you share during budget meetings.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Students will complete four major, publishable writing assignments: An in-depth personality profile, a news story covering an important speech, a news story covering a meeting, and an in-depth feature story into an academic research project at Elon University. Please do not wait until the last minute to start or complete these assignments. Assignments are always welcome to be turned in early.

All story assignments should be uploaded to Moodle as PDF files — typed and double-spaced. Please do not email assignments or bring printouts to class. Assignments should be free of misspellings, grammatical errors and typographical errors.

The writing assignments include both a draft and final version, in between which you will sign up to meet with the instructor for a story conference outside of class. Note that on the second writing assignment, the draft is actually worth more points than the final version of the story.

EXERCISES

Students will complete several mock exercises, some of which will be completed in class:

1. an obituary (in class)
2. a broadcast news script
3. a sample news release
4. coverage of a television script (in class)
5. an open records request letter (in class)
6. a breaking news simulation (in class)

In addition, students will complete a grammar exercise outside of class that takes the form of a quiz.

DEADLINES

Deadlines are considered as important as in a newsroom. Late assignments will receive 0 percent.

Please remember that all assignments other than quizzes and the breaking news simulation can be turned in early. If it helps to give yourself deadlines earlier than those listed, you are strongly encouraged to do so.

GRADING

Assignments will be evaluated on factors that include quality of the lede, completeness, structure and organization, writing style, accuracy, spelling, grammar and adherence to AP style rules. Misspelled names and major errors in fact will result in significant reductions in the assignment's grade, so double-check everything. Stories do not have length requirements (quite the opposite, actually — concise writing is a trademark of good journalism). Yet a variety of sources and comprehensive reporting are paramount for successful stories.

Your four writing assignments will have a draft version and a final version, although the point totals for the draft and final versions switch from one assignment to the next. If you elect to not turn in a final version of your story, the graded percentage you received on your draft will apply to your final.

Writing Assignments (1,000 points)

- Personality Profile Draft: 50 points
- Personality Profile Final: 200 points
- Speech Story Draft: 75 points
- Speech Story Final: 175 points
- Meeting Story Draft: 125 points
- Meeting Story Final: 125 points
- Research Story Draft: 200 points
- Research Story Final: 50 points

Mock Exercises (350 points)

- Obituary: 25 points
- Broadcast news script: 100 points
- Sample news release: 50 points
- Coverage of a television script: 50 points
- Open records request letter: 25 points
- Breaking news simulation: 100 points

Quizzes (90 points)

- Style Quizzes (5 points x 8): 40 points
- News Quizzes (5 points x 10): 50 points

This class does not use the +/- system. Instead, the following grading scale is used:

A: 90 percent (1,296 out of 1,440 points)

B: 80 percent (1,152 out of 1,440 points)

C: 70 percent (1,008 out of 1,440 points)

D: 60 percent (864 out of 1,440 points)

F: Below 60 percent (863 or fewer points out of 1,440)

REQUIRED STATEMENTS

The following statements are required for inclusion — either by the university, school or department — on all course syllabuses.

Attendance Policy

Students in the Department of Communications are expected to attend all classes. Just as professionals go to work each day, we expect students in a professional school to come to class on time and be prepared to work.

A student who misses more than 20 percent of scheduled classes in a term (more than eight absences for classes meeting three times a week) automatically receives an F because the student has missed too much content and participation to pass a course in a professional school.

Teachers will lower the final grade in a class for each absence beyond the equivalent of one week of class (three absences for classes meeting three times a week).

Exceptions exist for individual class absences for observance of a recognized religious holiday and for absences for participating in sanctioned university activities. Students participating in such events must follow policy as stated in the student handbook.

Honor Code

All students are expected to uphold the four fundamental values of the Elon Honor Code:

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Responsibility
- Respect

Breaches of these values will result in an academic or social honor code violation report. Honor code violations include: plagiarism, lying, cheating, stealing or vandalism, and facilitating academic dishonesty. These violations may result in the lowering of a grade or failure of a class. While “intent” may be considered in assigning sanctions, it is not a factor in determining responsibility for an offense. Students should consult with their professor if they are uncertain about whether specific activities are violations of the honor code.

Academic Honesty

The School of Communications takes plagiarism seriously, just as businesses and other media organizations and scholars do.

All forms of dishonesty mentioned above may result in an F in a course and expulsion from the university. Although all of these are clear violations of the university Honor Code, plagiarism is a special concern for communications professionals and scholars.

What is plagiarism? It is using someone else’s work such as passages, photographs, music, video, graphics and other images, and claiming it as your own. It can be copying work that has appeared in a journal, a magazine, a newspaper or online – anywhere, really – and presenting it as your own. Cutting and pasting passages from the web into your work, for example, is plagiarism unless you credit the source of the material or images. Take this as your guiding principle: If you quote someone else’s words or appropriate their image, attribute the source.

In brief, you may not adopt or reproduce the ideas, words or statements of another person without acknowledgment or attribution. In many cases, such work is copyrighted. Acknowledgment is required when borrowing facts, statistics, images or illustrative material, unless that information is common knowledge or in the public domain. (Example: China is the most populous nation on Earth. Or: Jupiter is the largest planet in our solar system.)

If you quote someone else’s words or use information or material acquired or created by someone else, then you must attribute the source. Definitions and examples of Elon Honor Code violations above may be found online.

Disability Services

If you are a student with a documented disability who will require accommodations in this course, please register with Disabilities Services in the Duke Building, Room 108 (278-6500), for assistance in developing a plan to address your academic needs.

Monday, Jan. 30

Introduction to media writing. Review syllabus. News values.

Wednesday, Feb. 1

Reporting overview.



Reading: Harrower, Chapter 4

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Monday, Feb. 6

News writing and lede writing.



Reading: Harrower, Chapter 3

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AP Style Quiz - Punctuation

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Wednesday, Feb. 8

Writing features and profiles.



Reading: Harrower, Chapter 6

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News Quiz 2/8

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Grammar Exercise

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Monday, Feb. 13

Obituary writing.



Reading: Harrower, Chapter 5

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AP Style Quiz - A-D

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Obituary Revision and Final

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Wednesday, Feb. 15

Speeches, meetings and news conferences.



News Quiz 2/15

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Personality Profile Draft

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Monday, Feb. 20

No class today. Sign up for a story conference to review your personality profile either on Monday, Feb. 20, or Tuesday, Feb. 21.

Wednesday, Feb. 22

Copyright law and fair use.



Reading: Harrower, Chapter 7

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News Quiz 2/22

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Monday, Feb. 27

Libel law.



Personality Profile Final

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AP Style Quiz - E-G

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Wednesday, March 1

Privacy and advertising law.



News Quiz 3/1

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Monday, March 6

Strategic communications. Public relations writing.



Reading: Harrower, Chapter 10

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AP Style Quiz - H-K

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Wednesday, March 8

Writing press releases.



Speech Story Draft

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News Quiz 3/8

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Monday, March 13

No class today. Sign up for a story conference to review your personality profile either on Monday, March 13, or Tuesday, March 14.

Wednesday, March 15

Thinking visually.



News Quiz 3/15

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News Release Exercise

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Monday, March 20

Spring break. No class today.

Wednesday, March 22

Spring break. No class today.

Monday, March 27

Radio news reporting.



Reading: Harrower, Chapter 9

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AP Style Quiz - L-O

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Speech Story Final

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Wednesday, March 29

Television news reporting.



News Quiz 3/29

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Meeting Story Draft

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Monday, April 3

No class today. Sign up for a story conference to review your personality profile either on Monday, April 3, or Tuesday, April 4.

Wednesday, April 5

Script coverage.



News Quiz 4/5

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Script Coverage Exercise

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Monday, April 10

Ethics.



AP Style Quiz - P-R

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Meeting Story Final

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Wednesday, April 12

Ethical case studies.



News Quiz 4/12

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Broadcast Writing Exercise

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Monday, April 17

Easter break. No class today.

Wednesday, April 19

Open records and meetings.



Open Records Request Letter

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AP Style Quiz - S-T

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Monday, April 24

Writing for the web.



Reading: Harrower, Chapter 8

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AP Style Quiz - U-Z

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Wednesday, April 26

Covering tragedy and breaking news.



News Quiz 4/26

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Research Story Draft

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Monday, May 1

Breaking news simulation.



Wednesday, May 3

No class today. Sign up for a story conference to review your personality profile either on Wednesday, May 3, or Thursday, May 4.

Monday, May 8

Careers in media.

Friday, May 12

We will not have a final in the class. The final version of your research story is due at 6 p.m.



Research Story Final

