

Syllabus

COM 110-B (MTWUF 8:30-11:30 a.m.)

Media Writing

Winter 2017

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Office hours: Tuesdays, Wednesday and Thursdays, 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 through Thursday will be style quizzes (open book) and Fridays will be news quizzes (closed book). It's strongly suggested that you bring your AP Stylebook on Mondays through Thursdays. 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.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Students will complete two major, publishable writing assignments: A news story that covers an important speech and an in-depth profile of a person. 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:

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

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 two 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

- Personality Profile Draft: 25 points
- Personality Profile Final: 75 points
- Speech Story Draft: 75 points
- Speech Story Final: 25 points

Mock Exercises

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

Quizzes

- Style Quizzes (5 points x 10): 50 points
- News Quizzes (5 points x 3): 15 points

To compute your final grade, the following grading scale is used:

A: 90 percent (463 out of 515 points)

B: 80 percent (412 out of 515 points)

C: 70 percent (360 out of 515 points)

D: 60 percent (309 out of 515 points)

F: Below 60 percent (308 or fewer points out of 515)

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.

Tuesday, Jan. 3

Introduction. Review syllabus. News values. Reporting overview.

Wednesday, Jan. 4

News writing. Feature/profile writing.



Style Quiz A-D

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Reading: Harrower, Chapters 3-4

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Thursday, Jan. 5

Lede writing. Speech coverage.



Style Quiz E-G

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Reading: Harrower, Chapter 5

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Friday, Jan. 6

Obituary writing.



News Quiz

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Obituary revision and final

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Reading: Harrower, Chapter 6

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Monday, Jan. 9

Strategic communications. Writing news releases.



Style Quiz H-K

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Grammar Exercise

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Reading: Harrower, Chapter 10

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Tuesday, Jan. 10

Copyright and advertising law.



Personality profile draft

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Style Quiz L-O

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Reading: Harrower, Chapter 7

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Wednesday, Jan. 11

Libel and privacy law.



Style Quiz P-R

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News release exercise

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Thursday, Jan. 12

Professional ethics guides and basic principles. Ethical case studies.



Style Quiz S-T

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Story conference

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Sign up for a story conference either Jan. 12 or Jan. 13.

Friday, Jan. 13

Writing for the web and social media.



News Quiz

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Story conference

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Sign up for a story conference either Jan. 12 or Jan. 13.



Reading: Harrower, Chapter 8

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Monday, Jan. 16

No class today. Martin Luther King Day.

Tuesday, Jan. 17

Script coverage.



Style Quiz U-Z

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Personality profile final

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Script coverage exercise

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Wednesday, Jan. 18

Radio news reporting. Television news reporting.



Style Quiz Fashion

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Speech story draft

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Reading: Harrower, Chapter 9

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Thursday, Jan. 19

Diversity in news coverage. Thinking visually.



Style Quiz Food

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Story conference

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Sign up for a story conference either Jan. 19 or Jan. 20.

Friday, Jan. 20

Covering tragedy. Covering breaking news.



Broadcast writing exercise

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News Quiz



Story conference



Sign up for a story conference either Jan. 19 or Jan. 20.

Monday, Jan. 23

Data journalism. Open records laws.



Style Quiz Punctuation



Open records request letter



Tuesday, Jan. 23

Breaking news simulation.



Breaking news exercise



Wednesday, Jan. 25

Careers in media.



Speech story final

