

# Precision Language

JRSM 1750-003

Fall 2021

Class meeting: MW 9:10 - 10:35, Meeman 212

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Office: 308 Meeman Journalism Building

Office Hours: 9:30 a.m.-noon Thursdays; noon to 2:30 p.m. Fridays and by appointment

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog description

Introduction to grammar and writing style for use in journalism and mass communication; foundations of research and information gathering, media literacy, and plagiarism.

### Prerequisites

None

### Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

**Required:** [Arnold, G.T. \(2019\). \*Media Writer's Handbook 6th ed.\*](#) New York: McGraw Hill.

ISBN: 978-1087236926

**Strongly recommended:** [Associated Press Stylebook. 2019 or 2020 Edition.](#)

### Classroom format

This course teaches the basic skills of writing and grammar. Sometimes, this will be a review for you. Other times, this will address new material. Weekly quizzes also coincide with each chapter. Students may take quizzes twice. The highest score will be recorded.

**Assignment instructions and all deadlines are posted on eCourseware at the beginning of the semester.** There are no surprises. Students are expected to follow instructions and submit work on time.

### Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis eLearn home page: <http://elearn.memphis.edu>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the fall 2021 course list, click on the link for JRSM 1750 to enter the course and read the instructions on the welcome page.
4. **Please do not use the internal eCourseware email system on the course web page.** Use your regular University of Memphis email to correspond with me at [thrach@memphis.edu](mailto:thrach@memphis.edu).

## Course Requirements

- Exercises and writing assignments to be completed via eCourseware
- Weekly quizzes
- Final news story

## Grading

A+ = 96.5-100%; A = 92.5-96.4%; A- = 89.5-92.4%  
B+ = 86.5-89.4%; B = 82.5-86.4%; B- = 79.5-82.4%  
C+ = 76.5-79.4%; C = 69.5-76.4%; D+ = 66.5-69.4%;  
D = 59.5-66.4% F 0-59.4%

## Grade Breakdown

Quizzes: 50%

Writing assignments: 30%

News story and story rewrite (WA5 and 6): 20%

## Other issues

This course is essential to your success in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media. It builds the grammatical skills necessary for clear and effective writing. Although some of these concepts might seem elementary to a university student, a perfected sense of grammar is essential in our profession.

Audio and video lectures coincide with the assigned textbook chapters. You must take the time to read the book and be prepared to study the online content. These assignments, along with instructions and examples of how to successfully complete them, are available in eCourseware on the first day of class.

None of the assignments should be particularly difficult, but waiting until the last minute to get started on them is not advised.

**DEADLINES:** Unless otherwise specified, all assignment deadlines are Sunday at 11:59 p.m. Deadlines for this course are firm and posted from the first day of the semester. All work must be turned in via eCourseware.

**LATE WORK:** I will accept one assignment up to three days late without penalty. No explanation is needed. Subsequent late work will be penalized ten points per calendar day, up to three days, starting immediately after the work is due. After three days, I will not accept your assignment without evidence of extenuating circumstances.

**TECHNICAL SUPPORT:** Computers and network access can be finicky. However, tech problems are not an acceptable reason for missing deadlines. As a University of Memphis student, you are entitled to help from the IT helpdesk. It is in your best interests to call as soon as you are aware of the problem. There are two ways to access the University of Memphis IT helpdesk: call 901-678-8888, or log in to the website ([umhelpdesk.memphis.edu](http://umhelpdesk.memphis.edu)) to open a ticket.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### Unit One: Writing with Accuracy and Precision

#### *Week 1, Aug. 23: Nuts and Bolts*

Course Intro; Avoiding Plagiarism; 25 Ways to Improve Writing Immediately

Podcast lectures (or read transcript)

Reading: Arnold, Ch. 1-2

Assignments: Quiz 1

#### *Week 2, Aug. 30: Seeking Clarity*

Precision (in) Language; The Trouble with “Only;” One Potato Two Potatoes

Podcast lecture (or read transcript)

Reading: Arnold, Ch. 3-6

Assignments: Quiz 2, Quiz 3

#### *Week 3, Sept. 6: Less Is More*

Podcast lecture (or read transcript)

Reading: Arnold, Ch. 7-8

Assignments: Quiz 4

#### *Week 4, Sept. 13: Sentence Building Blocks, Part I*

Nouns, Pronouns and Agreement

Podcast lecture (or read transcript)

Reading: Arnold, Ch. 9-11

Assignments: Quiz 5

#### *Week 5, Sept. 20: Sentence Building Blocks, Part II*

Verbs and Verbals. Adjectives and Adverbs.

Podcast lecture (or read transcript)

Reading: Arnold, Ch. 12-16

Assignments: Quiz 6, Quiz 7

#### *Week 6, Sept. 27, Sentence Building Blocks, Part III*

Prepositions. Conjunctions. Interjections. Sentences and Syntax.

Podcast lecture (or read transcript)

Reading: Arnold, Ch. 17-20

Assignments: Quiz 8

#### *Week 7, Oct. 4: Punctuation and More*

Punctuation. Interviewing. Sensitivity in writing.

Podcast lecture (or read transcript)

Readings: Arnold, Ch. 21-31

Assignments: Quiz 9, Quiz 10.

## Unit Two: Preparing for Media Writing

*Week 8, Oct. 11: Crushing It in JRSM (and life!)*

News judgement. Elements of Newsworthiness.

Podcast lecture (or read transcript)

Assignments: WA 1 (Newsworthiness)

*Week 9, Oct. 18: Anatomy of an Article*

What News Looks Like

Watch video/lecture

Assignment: WA2

*Week 10, Oct. 25: News Summary Leads*

News summary leads.

Watch video/lecture

Assignments: WA3

*Week 11, Nov. 1: What's Good Information?*

Source Types. Information Gathering. Media Literacy.

Assignments: WA4

*Week 12, Nov. 8: Direct quotes*

Interviewing. Introduction to quoting expert sources. News story assigned.

Watch video/lecture.

Assignments: WA5

## Unit Three: Practice

*Week 13, Nov. 15: News story*

You've done the interviews. Now what?

Watch video/lecture

Assignments: WA6

*Week 14, Nov. 22: Editing*

Editing and rewriting news stories. Rewrite assigned.

In-class editing workshops

*Week 15, Nov. 29: Story rewrites due.*

Assignment: WA6 (Revision)

## JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

### Portfolio requirement

All students in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of their work. Undergraduate students are to begin the portfolio in JRSM 3900 and graduate students are to begin in JRSM 7002. Students are to contribute to it in every skills course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from courses and/or professional

experiences and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in their capstone courses.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. Students may use any content management system, but students are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix or Squarespace. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but they must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

Students should have a professional email address they plan to use throughout their professional lives, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Social media links

Students might wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, SoundSlides presentations, design PDFs, audio files and writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career the student seeks after graduation. Thus, each student's portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

### Email

Students must have their UofM email accounts activated. Students using another provider, such as Google, are required to have all UofM email forwarded to that account. Students should go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UofM email. Students are required to check their email daily. They are responsible for complying with any email sent to by professors or others in the University.

### Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

### Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism and Strategic Media. Students may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements with the class professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g. with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary). Journalism and Strategic Media is a professional program, and students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students who have some problem making it to class on time should make arrangements to correct the problem or consider taking another class. Students should consider this class as a "job" in the educational process and be on time just as they would elsewhere.

## Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (“C-”) in a class required by their program of study in Journalism and Strategic Media more than three times will be dropped from the program.

Students may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. If students wish to substantially rework the original submission, or to work with the same general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from the professor of the current course. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence by the professor, and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is the student’s online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo).

## Academic integrity

In addition to University-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or students receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on their own, as acts of cheating punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, as this is a journalism and strategic media class, students are expected to comply with copyright law and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas. Also to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. As part of this process, you may require to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your work. Other instructions to follow may also be given. By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all. (*Office of Legal Counsel, October 11, 2018*)

## Online SETEs

Students are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once the instructor has posted grades, student can immediately see that grade, provided they have completed a the SETE for that class. To access evaluation forms, students should log in to MyMemphis using their UUIDs and email passwords; click on the gray “Student” tab; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the “Submit” button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Student feedback is essential and is appreciated.

## Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

## AP Style and grammar

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. Students are responsible for learning these rules and checking their work for errors.

## Disability and accommodations

Students who need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office for Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

## Diversity and inclusivity

Students are required to respect the differences of others and treat all persons with respect. Discriminatory, derogatory and threatening language or behavior will not be tolerated. Further, students are expected to consider their work through a diverse mind. Media reach a mass audience, and students should be aware of how those messages are received by a diverse audience.

## Weather policy

Always check with local media and the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather. If the University is closed or classes are canceled, this course will not meet. However, students will still be responsible for that day's work.

## Student support

Student who are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, should visit the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/saos/sos/crisis-resources.php>. Any student who faces personal challenges including, but not limited to securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support (901-678-2187) located in the University Center, Suite 359 for assistance. Students may also talk with course instructors about the challenges they are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting with campus or community support.

## COVID-19 protocols for this course

### COVID-19 Health and Safety Policy - Masks and Social Distancing

Faculty, staff, students and visitors are expected to monitor current health and safety measure requirements posted to our website and shared through other official communication channels including, but not limited to University email. Definitions related to those requirements and enforcement mechanisms appear in the [COVID-19 Health and Safety Policy \(GE2040\)](#). **Please be reminded that the University currently requires that all persons, regardless of vaccination status, wear masks indoors and in places where appropriate social distancing is not possible.**

Classroom experiences from recent semesters have shown that the campus community

generally understands and complies voluntarily with the mask requirement. The policy does permit faculty members to take action for non-compliance of mask use. Additionally, if students have concerns about faculty or staff mask use, contact Human Resources at [hr@memphis.edu](mailto:hr@memphis.edu) or 901.678.3573. Faculty who are delivering on-campus instruction may remove their face mask to teach, provided they are located within a delineated teaching area that is no less than 6 feet from students.

### **Student Health**

Students who are experiencing symptoms such as sneezing, coughing or a higher than normal temperature should inform me by email so they can be excused from class and should stay home. Students should contact their health care provider or the Student Health Center at <https://www.memphis.edu/health/>.

Students who have a positive COVID-19 test should contact the Dean of Students at [deanofstudents@memphis.edu](mailto:deanofstudents@memphis.edu) or 901.678.2187.

### **Testing & Notification**

The University will continue to provide testing for the entire campus community. The details regarding test availability and locations can be found [here](#). Do not come to campus if you are experiencing symptoms, are in isolation or quarantine due to positive test results or exposure, pending test results, or have reason to believe you have come in contact with the virus.

### **Student Resources**

Students who need additional resources can contact the Dean of Students Office at <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php>.

### **Guidelines for classes, labs and equipment in Meeman Journalism Building in Fall 2021**

- Anyone feeling sick should stay home.
- Social distance from all others at least 6 feet when possible.
- Wear a mask at all times when in University buildings and outside when social distancing isn't possible.
- Wash hands or use hand sanitizer regularly.
- No more than one person in the elevator at a time.
- Disinfect your workstation before and after use, including desks, keyboards, mice and screens. Wash your hands after cleaning.
- Air purifiers must run at all times during class meetings.