

Feature Writing/Reporting

JOUR 4165-001

Fall 2023

Class Meeting: TR 2:40-4:05 p.m., MJ 208

Prof. David Waters

Office: 316 Meeman Journalism Building

Office Hours: By appointment

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COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

Advanced practice in reporting, writing, and editing feature stories for magazines, newspapers, and the Web; finding and developing publishable ideas; advanced reporting skills; writing techniques with emphasis on clarity, focus, structure, word choice, narrative, and explanatory approaches; critiques of student work, editing and revision; freelance techniques.

Prerequisites

JRSM 2121

JRSM 3526 or PBRL 3421

Course requirements

- There is no required textbook. Required readings will be posted on Instructure.
- Daily access to the World Wide Web. All course materials and instructions will be available at memphis.instructure.com. As well as Web access, students will need Microsoft Word. All writing assignments must be completed in Microsoft Word.
- Your online portfolio should be updated regularly during the semester, adding your best writing from this class. Your portfolio is graded and worth 5% of your grade.
- It is important for your development as a feature writer to read and study well-written features. Class discussions will include:
 - Read a feature story in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, or an equivalent national newspaper at least once a week.
 - Read your local daily newspaper(s) every day.
 - Read, at your own discretion, from magazines and websites that publish top-notch feature writing such as "The New Yorker," "Esquire," "Vanity Fair," "National Geographic," "Rolling Stone," "Sports Illustrated," and "Memphis" magazine.

Attendance

You get **three free passes** during the semester. After you cash in the passes, missed classes are reflected in your final grade. For example, if you miss one additional class, your final grade drops a letter grade (e.g. A- to B+). If you miss two more classes, your grade drops again. So, if you miss

six classes, your final grade drops two letters.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis eLearn home page: memphis.instructure.com
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for JOUR 3130-001 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page
4. Please do not use the internal Canvas email system on the course web page. Use your regular University of Memphis email to correspond with me at dwaters@memphis.edu.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT: Computers and network access can be problematic. However, short of a massive power outage, tech problems are not an acceptable reason for missing deadlines. As a University of Memphis student, you can get help from the IT helpdesk. 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) to open a service ticket.

Class format

This class will focus on developing students' reporting and writing skills. The classroom will be run like a newsroom with the instructor acting as editor and the students as reporters. Professional reporting and writing standards and deadlines will be set and must be met. The class consists of both lecture and laboratory time to be determined by the instructor.

Students must have Internet access and Microsoft Word or other word processing software that generates a ".doc" or ".docx" extension. All assignments MUST be filed in a ".doc" format; type must be double spaced with indented paragraphs.

- The classroom will be run like a newsroom. We will spend most of our time discussing, evaluating, and making decisions about story assignments and stories – stories written by others and by members of the class.
- Students will complete at least 5 writing assignments during the semester. If it is determined there is plagiarism or fabrication with an assignment, that assignment will receive an automatic zero.
- Meeting deadlines is essential for media professionals, so story deadlines are firm. Late stories and assignments will not be accepted, except with prior approval from instructors BEFORE posted deadlines.
- All assignments must be filed in a Word document in 12 pt. type in a professional font that is double spaced with indented paragraphs. Do not put extra space between paragraphs. **If assignments do not follow this format, they will not be graded.** Feature writing requires knowledge of Associated Press style. Therefore, all writing assignments for JOUR 4165 will be written in correct AP style.
- **All** class writing assignments must be accompanied by a proposed multimedia component – an infographic, photograph, photo slideshow, video, audio, or podcast.

Grading

Assignment categories and points or percentage weights.

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 = 72.5-76.4%; C- = 69.5-72.4%
D+ = 66.5-69.4%; D = 59.5-66.4%
F 0-59.4%

Grading system:

- A: Final drafts publishable in a reputable newspaper or magazine
- B: Final drafts publishable with minor editing
- C: Final drafts publishable with editing/revision
- D: Final drafts not publishable
- F: Failure to complete assignments, meet deadlines

Additionally, instructors grade story assignments in Track Changes — the editing component of Word — to encourage effective feedback and learning. All students are responsible for learning how to use this software, as well as how to navigate course materials on Canvas. You can find tutorials in the “Getting Started” link for this class

Grade Distribution:

Assignment	Percentage
Feature stories & assignments	80%
Classroom discussion/participation	15%
Online portfolio	5%

AI/ChatGPT

ChatGPT and similar AI tools, though useful in many contexts, are inappropriate for use in this course. An important outcome of this course is to strengthen your own abilities as a thinker and writer. That is only possible when you do your own work. You may not submit work that is written wholly or partially by an AI tool. Assignment submissions may be run through AI detection software. If your submission appears to have been written using AI, you may either receive a failing grade or be asked to resubmit the assignment.

COURSE SCHEDULE

This is a basic schedule for topics and major assignments this semester. Other assignments are explained on Canvas. Every effort will be made to stick with this schedule, but changes to the schedule may occur. All changes will be announced in class or Canvas updates.

Week 1, Aug. 29, 31: Understanding the feature story.

- What is a feature story?
- News reports vs. storytelling
- Building observational and listening skills: showing vs. telling

Week 2, Sept. 5, 7: Finding/reporting feature stories:

- Story ideas and choices that are relevant, useful, informative, interesting
- Considering audience, purpose

- Reporting choices and techniques
- Discussion/Approval of ideas for first feature story

Week 3, Sept. 12, 14: Writing feature stories:

- Story structures, focus, word choice
- Leads, anecdotes, quotes
- Sources and attribution

Week 4, Sept. 19, 21: Types of feature stories:

- Personality Profiles
- Explanatory features
- Narrative features
- News/Issues features
- Place/Time features

DUE: First feature due 6 p.m. Sept. 22.

Week 5, Sept. 26, 28:

- Discussion/Approval of ideas for second feature story
- Critique of first features. We will review each one in class.

Week 6, Oct. 3, 5:

- Interview procedures, techniques, pitfalls

DUE: Second feature due 6 p.m. Oct. 6.

Week 7, Oct. 10, 12:

- Critique of second features. We will review each one in class.
- Discussion/Approval of ideas for third feature story

Week 8, Oct. 17, 19: Fall Break

Week 9, Oct. 24, 26:

- Print, digital and multimedia opportunities, and challenges
- Freelance methods – selling your stories

DUE: Third feature due 6 p.m. Oct. 27

Week 10, Oct. 31, Nov. 2

- Critique of third feature story. We will review each one in class.
- Discussion/Approval of ideas for fourth feature story

Week 11, Nov. 7, 9

- Magazine, newspaper, and online features
- Freelance methods – pitching and selling your stories

DUE: Fourth feature due 6 p.m. Nov. 10

Week 12, Nov. 14, 16

- Critique of fourth feature story
- Discussion/Approval of ideas for final feature story

Week 13, Nov. 21

- The ethics, efficacy, and responsibilities of a journalist

Week 14, Nov. 28, 30

- The ethics, efficacy, and responsibilities of a journalist

DUE: Final feature due 6 p.m. Dec. 5.

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in JOUR 4165

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, both in a global context and in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

How professional values and competencies will be met

Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)

- Acquire the technical knowledge necessary to write feature stories.
- Use interviewing skills to develop information needed to write feature stories.
- Practice higher order critical thinking skills by analyzing published feature stories for style, structure, and focus.
- Enhance retention and transfer of information from class discussions to the real world by researching and writing feature stories.
- Be familiar with AP style and appropriate magazine styles.

Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)

- Students will write at least four newspaper features and one magazine feature. Story length will vary based on the assignment.
- Students are responsible for developing the story idea and researching and writing the story within the stated deadline.
- Students will analyze award-winning features for class discussion.
- Students will use the AP Stylebook in writing news feature stories.
- Magazine articles will be extensively researched with multiple and multi-cultural sources.

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Demonstrate the importance of diverse sources.

Understanding

- Analyze targeted publication and write query letter, then produce multiple-sourced article appropriate to publication market.

Application

- Require a list of sources with contact information so professor can do spot-checks for accuracy.
- Required to gather and analyze secondary data.
- Required to write at least five newspaper and/or magazine stories, including one article for a specific publication.

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

Portfolio requirement

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or Squarespace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, 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
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

Email

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

Electronic devices

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

AI/Chat GPT

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You 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. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

Academic integrity

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and 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, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws 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 and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). 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.

Online SETEs

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; 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 seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. 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.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

AP Style and grammar

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

Disability and accommodations

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Diversity and inclusivity

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such,

faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

Weather policy

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website and the LiveSafe App regarding inclement weather.

Student support

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.