Introduction to News Writing

COMM 1610-005 | Spring 2017 | Tuesdays 2-5 p.m., LNCO 2840

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Office hours: By appointment
Office location: LNCO 2413 (behind the Communication Department front office)

Overview

Materials

• Required: The Associated Press Stylebook (2014 or newer)
  Other versions available at: http://www.apstylebook.com/
• Required: The Elements of Style (illustrated edition or 4th edition)
• Required: A USB drive, memory card, or reliable cloud storage for your work.
  You will need to save and revise your work for your Final Portfolio.
• All other materials will be accessible via Canvas or online.

Prerequisite:
Writing 2010 or equivalent. (You must have passed WRTG 2010 to take COMM 1610.)

Goals:
By the end of this class, you should be able to:
1. Gather information, verify facts and write on deadline.
2. Write well, with correct grammar, style, mechanics and structure.
3. Write clear, compelling leads for news and feature stories.
4. Build on leads to write more complex stories.
5. Use a variety of sources to provide context, accuracy and balance in your stories.
6. Use quotations and description to bring a narrative to life.
7. Write stories that engage with public audiences.

Your Responsibilities

► Commit to be in class, every week and on time (at 2 p.m. Tuesdays).
► Commit to reading and online work, every week and on time (by 2 p.m. Mondays).
► Commit to lots of writing. This is an intensive class with many written assignments.
► Be professional and respectful in discussions. Our primary rule is civility.
► Keep food out of the classroom. Finish lunch outside.
Policies

Accommodation
► ADA: The University of Utah seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities for people with disabilities. If you need such accommodation in this class, provide reasonable prior notice to the Center for Disability Services, 162 Olpin Union Building, 801-581-5020 (V/TDD), http://disability.utah.edu/.
► Content: I will not make accommodations in course requirements or expectations. http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-100.php (See Section Q)

Policies and Deadlines
► Attendance: http://regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-100.php (See Section O)
► You must attend Tuesday classes. You get zero (0) free days. You earn points for attending and participating. You don’t if you don’t. (If you have a genuine emergency, contact me within 24 hours of missing class.)
► Academic conduct: http://www.regulations.utah.edu/academics/6-400.html
► Withdrawals: http://registrar.utah.edu/handbook/withdrawal.php
► Semester calendar: http://registrar.utah.edu/academic-calendars/spring2017.php

Grades

Where Your Course Grade Comes From
Online Participation (5 pts. x 11 weeks) .................. 55 points
In-Class Attendance/Participation (5 pts. x 15 weeks) .......... 75 points
Quizzes (20 pts. x 6 quizzes) .............................. 120 points
In-Class Stories (26 pts. x 5 stories) ......................... 130 points
Out-of-Class Story ........................................... 60 points
Final Story .................................................... 80 points
Final Portfolio ................................................ 80 points
Total: ....................................................... 600 possible points

Quizzes, Stories and Portfolio
► Unless I specify otherwise, these will be submitted on paper, not Canvas.
► All stories must be your original work for this class, not repurposed material.
► Each graded assignment will have a rubric.
► Writing on deadline is a key part of this course. So, I cannot accept late assignments.
► Everything you submit should be serious, professional work for a public audience.

Required Grammar Quizzes
► To earn a grade in this course, you must pass 10 short online grammar quizzes.
► These quizzes will not affect your course grade.
► See Grammar Test Instructions in Modules.
Grading Scale

When I calculate your course grade at the end of the semester, I will use these percentages:

- 100-94 A
- 90-94 B+
- 89-77 B
- 79-77 C+
- 69-67 D+
- 76-74 C
- 66-64 D
- 73-70 C-
- 63-60 D-
- 59-0 E

WEEKLY SCHEDULE

All Canvas readings are posted in weekly Modules.

« WEEK 1: WHY LEARN NEWS WRITING? »

► Before Tuesday, Jan. 10

**Read:** This syllabus; “How to Comment and Contribute.”

**Optional:** Update your Canvas profile with a recent photo (for my reference only).

► In class Tuesday, Jan. 10

Syllabus, schedule, expectations.

**Exercise:** Interview your neighbor and write a profile (ungraded).

« WEEK 2: NEWS WRITING BASICS & LEADS »

► By 2 p.m. Monday, Jan. 16 (Yes, it’s Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Do this anytime before 2 p.m.)

**Read:** Oxford, Ch. 3, “Newswriting Style”; Lloyd, Ch. 4, “Writing Simply”; Brooks, Ch. 14, “Writing News That’s Fit for Print” (partial).

**Comment:** On all three readings.

**Contribute:** An example of an ineffective lead paragraph in a news story. Yes, provide a bad lead paragraph. (Copy and paste text/source or provide the URL.)

► In class Tuesday, Jan. 17

Discussion: News writing basics; grammar preview; examples of bad leads.

**Handouts:** The P-Sheet; Rubric for In-Class Stories.

**Exercise:** Practice writing news leads (ungraded).

« WEEK 3: NEWS WRITING BASICS & LEADS »

► By 2 p.m. Monday, Jan. 23

**Read:** Kershner, Ch. 14, “How to Write a Strong Lead”; Oxford, Ch. 7, “Basic News Leads.”

**Comment:** On both readings. Describe at least one specific thing that is clearer for you. Describe at least one other thing that you’re still unsure about.

**Contribute:** An example of an effective lead paragraph in a news story. This week, provide a good lead paragraph. (Copy and paste text/source or provide the URL.)

► In class Tuesday, Jan. 24

**Read for Quiz 1:** The P-Sheet; AP Stylebook/Punctuation Guide (entries for apostrophe, comma, dash, semicolon); *Elements of Style*, Ch. I, “Elementary Rules of Usage.”

**Quiz 1:** Punctuation.

Discussion: More on grammar; examples of good leads; review practice leads.

**Exercise:** Write news leads (graded).
WEEK 4: ORGANIZING A STORY

By 2 p.m. Monday, Jan. 30

Read: Kershner, Ch. 13, “How to Write a News Story in 15 Steps”; Kershner, Ch. 15, How to Structure a News Story”; Oxford, Ch. 4, “The Language of News.”

Comment: On all three readings. For Oxford, Ch. 4, Describe at least one specific grammatical thing that is clearer for you. Then, describe at least one other grammatical thing that you’re still unsure about.

Contribute: A specific example of a well-organized news story. (Copy and paste text or provide the URL.) Write 2-3 sentences explaining exactly how/why it’s well-organized.

In class Tuesday, Jan. 31

Review Quiz 1.
Discussion: Grammar Review; Flipping the Pyramid; preview AP Style.
Exercise: Practice writing from a news release (ungraded).

WEEK 5: WRITING A SHORT STORY

By 2 p.m. Monday, Feb. 6

No Reading: See “Contribute” below.

Contribute: A specific example of a compelling short news story. (Copy and paste text or provide the URL.) Write 2-3 sentences explaining exactly what aspects of this story make it compelling.

In class Tuesday, Feb. 7

Read for Quiz 2: AP Stylebook entries listed in AP_Style_to_Really_Know.pdf.
Quiz 2: AP Style to Really Know.
Discussion: More on grammar; review last week’s practice stories.
Exercise: Write a short story from a news release (graded).

WEEK 6: REPORTING, INTERVIEWING, & VERIFYING

By 2 p.m. Monday, Feb. 13

Read: “Interviewing Tips”; Lloyd, Ch. 7, “Using Quotations Well.”

Comment: On both readings.

Contribute: A specific example of a bad interview. (Copy and paste text or provide a URL. Hint: Try YouTube.) Exactly why is this a bad interview?

In class Tuesday, Feb. 14

Review Quiz 2.
Read for Quiz 3: Elements of Style, Ch. IV, “Words and Expressions Commonly Misused.”
Quiz 3: Misused words and expressions.
Discussion: Interviewing and verifying information.
Assignment Given: Out-of-Class Story (due March 8).
Exercise: Generate reference materials, human sources, and interview questions for the Out-of-Class story.
«  WEEK 7: SPEECHES AND MEETINGS  »

► By 2 p.m. Monday, Feb. 20  *(Yes, it’s Presidents Day. Do this anytime before 2 p.m.)*
  Read: Rich, Ch. 18, “Speeches, News Conferences and Meetings.”
  Comment: On the reading. Specifically, how useful is the checklist on p. 351?
  *(No Contribution this week.)*

► In class Tuesday, Feb. 21
  Review Quiz 3.
  Discussion: Writing about speeches and meetings.
  Exercise: Write a short story from a speech *(graded).*

«  WEEK 8: THE STORY  »

► By 2 p.m. Monday, Feb. 27
  Comment: On both readings.
  Contribute: An example of good writing. (It can be from anything.) *Why* is this good?

► In class Tuesday, Feb. 28
  Read for Quiz 4: AP Stylebook entries listed in More_Useful_AP_Style.pdf.
  Quiz 4: More Useful AP style.
  Discussion: Review speech stories; examples of good writing.
  Reporting and workshop time: For your Out-of-Class story.

«  WEEK 9: WORKSHOP FOR OUT-OF-CLASS STORY  »

► No Canvas Readings, Comments, or Contributions—Work on your Out-of-Class story.

► In class Tuesday, March 7
  Review Quiz 4.
  Workshop time: For Out-of-Class story—due in class, on paper, by 5 p.m. *(graded).*

«  WEEK 10: SPRING BREAK  »

«  WEEK 11: PROFILES & OBITUARIES  »

► By 2 p.m. Monday, March 20
  Read: Rich, Ch. 17, “Profiles and Obituaries.”
  Comment: On the reading.
  *(No Contribution this week.)*

► In class Tuesday, March 21
  Read for Quiz 5: AP Stylebook (entries for capitalization, Facebook, Google, holidays and holy days, Instagram, Tweet, Twitter); Brooks, Ch. 3, “Subjects and Objects” (partial).
  Quiz 5: Proper use of proper names.
  Discussion: Review Out-of-Class stories; preview Final Story and Final Portfolio.
  Exercise: Workshop time to revise Out-of-Class stories for your portfolio.
Week 12: Polls & Surveys

By 2 p.m. Monday, March 27
Read: AP Stylebook (entry for polls and surveys); Scanlan, Ch. 9, “Numbers.”
Comment: On both readings.
(No Contribution this week.)

In class Tuesday, March 28
Review Quiz 5.
Discussion: Polls and surveys.
Exercise: Survey story (graded).

Week 13: Opinion Writing

By 2 p.m. Monday, April 3
Read: Columns TBA (they will be posted on Canvas).
Comment: On the readings (they will be short columns).
(No Contribution this week.)

In class Tuesday, April 4
Read for Quiz 6: AP Stylebook/Briefing on Media Law. Skip to heading “Legal Principles of Publication” and read through “The five things a successful libel plaintiff must prove.” Then, skip to “Invasion of privacy” and read through the end section, “limitations on copyright.”
Quiz 6: Libel, privacy, copyright—and—earlier AP quiz entries. (Cumulative AP quiz.)
Discussion: Opinion columns—they’re different from news writing.
Exercise: Determine a topic for your opinion column, do basic research, and submit a 1-page proposal and outline (ungraded but required).

Note! Today is the deadline for passing the required grammar quizzes.

Week 14: Opinion Writing

No Canvas Readings, Comments, or Contributions—Work on your opinion columns.

In class Tuesday, April 11
Review Quiz 6.
Assignments Given: Final Story and Final Portfolio (both due April 26).
Exercise: Finish and submit your opinion column (graded).

Week 15: Final Story Proposal

By 2 p.m. Monday, April 17
No Reading: See “Contribute” below.
Contribute: Propose a topic for your Final Story. (We’ll build on this in class.)

In class Tuesday, April 18
Discussion: Review opinion columns.
Exercise: Refine the topic for your Final Story, do basic research, and submit a 1-page proposal and outline (ungraded but required).
WEEK 16: LAST DAY OF CLASS

► No Canvas Readings, Comments, or Contributions—Work on your Final Story.

► In class Tuesday, April 25
   Workshop time: Final Story and Final Portfolio—both due in class, on paper, by 5 p.m. (graded).