

Syllabus
MCOM 3303 Section 001
Spring 2022

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(The best way to contact me is by email.)
Office Hours: M 2:30-3:30 p.m., Th 10 a.m.-noon, and by appointment

Note: Syllabus is subject to change. Any changes will be posted under “Announcements” on the class Canvas site, by email through Canvas, and verbally announced in the next class meeting.

Course Description: Introduction to fundamental journalistic writing skills for the print, digital and broadcast media, with an emphasis on interviewing, source development and research.
Prerequisites: MCOM 2307 and MCOM 2311.

I. Student Learning Outcomes:

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

A. Competency: Writing and Storytelling

1. Write correctly and clearly using the formats and compelling storytelling styles appropriate for the audiences and purposes for print/digital news and multimedia journalism.
2. Produce accurate news stories in the appropriate format when given sets of facts.
3. Demonstrate proficiency in writing including basic grammar and style and the use of the Associated Press.

B. Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry

1. Research and Evaluation

- a. Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to print/digital or multimedia journalism professions.
- b. Evaluate newsworthiness of events, issues, and people, and develop reporting angles appropriate to the story.
- c. Develop peer review skills in evaluating stories for content, organization, mechanics, and Associated Press style.

2. Legal and Ethical Principles

- a. Demonstrate an understanding of and be able to apply the First Amendment and other legal principles for public relations/integrated communication and/or multimedia journalism a. Recognize what constitutes libel, appropriation, intrusion, false light, and publicity about private facts.

b. Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and issues for public relations/integrated communication and/or multimedia journalism. a. Demonstrate an understanding of ethical behavior in mass media industries.

C: Competency: Mediated Presentation

1. Apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information using tools and technologies appropriate for print/digital or multimedia journalism.
2. Produce engaging, informative, and accurate news stories and print/digital media story packages in appropriate format when given sets of facts.
3. Produce news-style, on-camera video interviews pertaining to a story and appropriate to a web-based or multimedia story presentation.

II. Required Reading:

1. The Missouri Group. News Reporting and Writing, 13th edition. Bedford/St. Martin's.
2. Associated Press Stylebook. New York: Associated Press. Also available online at www.apstylebook.com.
3. Select readings assigned in class over the course of this semester.

III. Recommended Media Consumption:

A. Immerse yourself in mass media to get the most out of this class. Read newspapers and magazines daily in print and online. Watch news programs regularly. Examine press releases and advertising campaigns. Look at YouTube, Facebook and other social media in the context of this class. Share clips and articles and ideas on Canvas for discussion. UT Tyler students can now register for free access to the New York Times online.

Special Course Notes:

- 1) Due to the rise of COVID-19 cases in Smith County and other areas of East Texas, **we will meet online via Zoom for class sessions in the first two weeks of the semester, Jan. 10-21.** Unless otherwise notified, we will begin face-to-face class meetings in CAS 106 on Jan. 24.
- 2) I strongly recommend students back up electronic notes, assignment files or content, and other important digital files in three locations: A resident storage drive on your computer, laptop, or mobile device; a removable storage drive (such as a portable hard drive or USB flash drive); and a cloud-based storage account like Dropbox, iCloud, or Microsoft OneDrive.

Assignments and weights/point values

1. Quizzes	10%
2. AP Style and Grammar Exams	15%
3. In-class deadline writing	15%
4. Outside writing assignments	25%
5. Community Issue Project (final)	35%

Grading Scale:

A	90% or greater
B	80 – 89%

C	70 – 79%
D	60 – 69%
F	below 60%

Note: Department of Communication majors must earn a grade of “C” or higher in order to receive credit toward the degree for MCOM courses.

Course grades will be calculated to the first decimal point and rounded up or down according to rounding standard (.4 or below rounded down; .5 or above rounded up). of Texas at Tyler.

Standard grading rubric for written assignments

Fairly evaluating news writing consists of both objective and subjective components, the latter involving an evaluation of the story’s content, organization, reader engagement level and overall presentation. Written comments will be provided on each writing assignment to communicate the level at which these elements were sufficiently present. For the objective components, which refer to AP style, punctuation, grammatical correctness, and accuracy, the following standard rubric will be in place:

AP style and punctuation errors – deduction of 2 points each.

Grammar errors, misspelled words, sentence fragments/incomplete sentences – deduction of 5 points each.

Factual errors – deduction of 15 points each.

Proper name misspellings (people or places) – deduction of 25 points each.

I reserve the right to adjust the overall score based on subjective components as stated above.

In other words, if your story has quite a number of style or punctuation mistakes, but is very thorough in content, organization and other elements, you may receive a higher score than would be indicated by the above rubric. Likewise, a relatively error-free story does not necessarily guarantee a high score if the content, organization and other elements are lacking.

Attendance Policy:

1. Attendance is mandatory, especially for an upper-division skills course such as this one. I will excuse an absence for one of only three reasons: a. An illness documented by a hospital, clinic, or physician; b. A death in the immediate family or first branch of relatives (aunts, uncles, first cousins) and documented by a copy of an obituary or funeral service program; c. A university-sponsored event/activity or a religious observance that would require the student to miss the class period (notification of which should be made at least three (3) days in advance of the expected absence). Three to four unexcused absences will result in an automatic half grade deduction (5 percent). Five or more unexcused absences will result in a full grade deduction. Students 10 or more minutes late or leaving early may be considered absent.
2. You are responsible for turning in all assignments by deadline even though you may be absent.
3. You are also responsible for lecture materials, announcements and assignments made during any absence.
4. No make-up tests will be allowed unless you must be absent the day of the exam and have notified the instructor at least three (3) days in advance, other than an illness or death in the

family, in which case notification should be made as soon as possible. Any make-up test must be arranged with the instructor. Make-up tests and quizzes will be allowed for absences due to illness only with documentation from a clinic, hospital, or physician.

5. Students more than five minutes late to class on quiz/test days may not be allowed to take the quiz/test in class. Excessive tardiness may result in a course grade deduction.

6. Recording of Class Sessions: Class sessions may be recorded by the instructor for use by students enrolled in this course. Recordings that contain personally identifiable information or other information subject to FERPA shall not be shared with individuals not enrolled in this course unless appropriate consent is obtained from all relevant students. Class recordings are reserved only for the use of students enrolled in the course and only for educational purposes. Course recordings should not be shared outside of the course in any form without express permission.

B. Assignment Policy:

1. Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due at the announced time via Canvas. Late assignments will be penalized by one grade level per day late. (i.e. if it is one day late, you lose 10 percent off the top.). In-class deadline writing assignments will be deducted by 10 points if turned in between 1-10 minutes late and will not be accepted (score of zero) more than 10 minutes late.

2. Assignments must be typed and submitted using the format required for the assignment.

3. Assignments and due dates may change at the instructor's discretion with fair notice.

4. Students must complete all assignments in order to pass the course. This does not mean, however, that merely completing all assignments guarantees a passing grade.

5. All assignments must include student name, date, assignment name, course name and word count.

C. Classroom Courtesies:

1. No cellphone use during class. No calls, no texts, no status update checks. In an emergency, please exit the classroom to use your device.

2. NO FOOD OR DRINK IS ALLOWED IN THE COMPUTER LAB AT ANY TIME. IF YOU MUST EAT, STAND IN THE DOORWAY.

3. Laptop and tablet use is for note taking and class-related research. Other uses will be noted and these devices can be restricted in class.

4. Talk, debate, ask questions and challenge but stay on topic.

D. Access to Technology: I use Canvas to communicate, post assignments and readings, present feedback, and provide a space for you to communicate with your classmates. Check Canvas regularly.

E. Email Policy: On weekdays, you should expect my response within 24 hours, though in most cases I will respond within two hours of receiving the email if before 8 p.m. On weekends, I will do my best to answer your questions within 24-48 hours.

Graded Course Requirements Information:

MCOM 3303 is intended to be a more intensive writing course with a greater emphasis on developing and producing original news journalism content, building on the media writing basics you learned in MCOM 2311. The course assignments address a greater scope and depth of news writing topics, including news events (24-hour story), news story interviewing (on-camera interview), people as news (profile story), and research/data-based news topics (community issue package). These assignments will require a greater amount of planning, research, time management, source-seeking, and story organization than those in the prerequisite course. You will be writing, at minimum, 2,000 words for all news writing assignments, plus interview questions for the on-camera interview assignment, and brief proposals for all outside writing/reporting assignments. All of the assignments noted above constitute a total of 60% of the course grade (regular reporting assignments plus the final).

Regular Reporting Assignments (25% of course grade)

You will be required to complete the following reporting assignments at various points throughout the semester:

1. Profile story – This is a 500-750-word story spotlighting a newsworthy person – the subject can be anyone from a university administrator or faculty member (Department of Communication faculty are not eligible) to a local city official or small business owner. The big requirement is that the person has to be one who will provide you as the reporter with an engaging, timely story. A minimum of two interviewed sources (including the subject) is required, but three or more interviewed sources will likely lead to a better story and a higher grade as a result. A story proposal is required for instructor approval. This assignment will also include a peer review session in which you will read and critique the first draft of a fellow student's story, checking for AP Style and grammar as well as content and organization (participation in the peer review and submission of a first draft will count as a quiz grade).
2. 24-hour story – You will select an upcoming event on the UT Tyler campus or one off-campus event and submit a story proposal. If approved, you will cover that event – typically, a public meeting, press conference, or speech – and you will contact me by email immediately after the event has concluded. That is when your deadline clock begins; you have exactly 24 hours to turn in a 500-750-word story with at least two interviewed sources. This story is to be written as a “hard news” story, highlighting the decisions and their impact in the case of a public meeting, and the topics, statements, and reactions in the cases of a press conference or speech.
3. Live blogging – Being able to effectively report news through a variety of media is now quintessential to a successful media career, so one of your reporting assignments will have you check out an iPad Pro to cover an event (must be different from your 24-hour story), on or off campus, with your reporting work as a series of live blog posts (3-5), supplemented by photos and video (an interview or look-live segment w/extended voice-over and footage) taken with the iPad Pro camera. I will set up a class blog on WordPress for your content; however, you may post the content on your own blog, if you wish, and provide me with a link. I recommend submitting an assignment proposal as early in the semester as possible. We have a limited number of iPad Pro devices and working on this earlier in the semester than later will probably increase chances of a device being available when you need it. Once your content is

finished and posted, you must return the iPad Pro to the equipment lab in CAS 102. I recommend backing up any files you want to keep because the devices will have to be reset to factory default status before being issued to another student.

Final (35% of course grade)

The final for this course will be a community issue story package you will create and consisting of three components as follows:

1. Main story – This is a 750-1,000-word story focusing on a particular news issue within the UT Tyler, city of Tyler, or Smith County communities. **It must have at least three (3) interviewed sources, along with any relevant documented sources.** You will submit a proposal for instructor approval, which will include a list of possible interview subjects and other sources as well as a short (about a paragraph) summary of your story issue and the angle you intend to take with it. This assignment will also include a peer review session in which you will read and critique the first draft of a fellow student’s story, checking for AP Style and grammar as well as content and organization (participation in the peer review and submission of a first draft will count as a quiz grade).
2. Sidebar – This is a 250-400-word companion story to the main story, highlighting a particular aspect, person, or example connected to the community issue in the main story. It must have at least two interviewed sources; however, one of the sources can also be one of the sources in your main story. You want this story to be built around an example or illustration of the community issue in your main story, or perhaps highlight an interesting or unusual aspect of the issue.
3. Infographic – Because your main story will necessarily need to be on an issue for which you can find statistical data, records, or demographic information, you will create an infographic to go with your main story. The format will be up to you – it can be a bar chart, line chart, pie chart, map, timeline, or “interesting facts” graphic – but it is vital that you choose a format that best illustrates the information. Infographics must be properly labeled, accurate in depiction, and cite the source of the data or information.

Quizzes (10% of course grade)

For most weeks in the semester, you will have one short quiz covering assigned readings from the textbook, major points we’ve discussed in class and a few AP Style or grammar questions, particularly anything I see as problematic from submitted assignments. These weekly quizzes will be online via Canvas and will be due that Friday by 11:59 p.m. No makeup quizzes will be offered except in cases of excused absences as noted earlier in the syllabus.

For the profile story and community issue main story, there will be a peer review session that requires both your attendance in class on the designated days and the submission of a first draft of the respective stories. For this, you will receive a quiz grade based on the following criteria on your first draft:

At least 400 words written and two interviews completed: 100

At least 300 words written and one interview completed: 75

At least 200 words written and no interviews completed: 50

Anything less than 200 words written: 0

I will drop the lowest quiz grade.

In-class deadline assignments (15% of course grade) There will be occasional in-class deadline writing assignments (at least five) with information provided to you. The goal is to construct a well-written, informative, and engaging news story and file it via Canvas before the deadline of 10 a.m. (the end of our class period). I will discuss the expectations and parameters of each in-class deadline writing assignment in the class meeting prior to the day of the assignment, which should give everyone ample opportunity to ask questions in advance.

AP Exam and Grammar Exam (15% of course grade combined)

On two of the class days this semester, the entire class time will be devoted to special exams, one covering AP Style and the other covering general grammar issues. At this point in your degree program, it is imperative that you be able to demonstrate mastery of AP Style and correct grammar in written media content. The AP Style exam will be open book (bring your AP Stylebook or connect to AP Stylebook Online); the grammar exam, however, will be closed to assistance online or from books or notes.

Although I am not requiring a minimum score for either exam, any score below 75 on the grammar exam will result in a referral to the UT Tyler Writing Center. **If you complete at least two hours of work at the Writing Center with one of its tutors, I will allow you to retake the grammar exam at an agreed time and place for a chance at replacing the score on your first attempt.**

Extra Credit: Patriot Media Story:

You will attend one Patriot Media staff meeting and complete one written news, sports or feature assignment for the Patriot Media in print or online. You will either pitch a story to the Patriot editor, or you will take a story at his/her discretion. You will meet all deadlines as directed by the editor. Turn in the published story for extra credit. Points to be determined by instructor and added to the Writing Assignments category.

Extra Credit: Research participation:

This offer is pending the availability of an open research study conducted by me or another professor in the Department of Communication. You will need to provide proof of participation (typically, a sign-in sheet and/or informed consent document). Points awarded will be determined by the instructor, but you can probably expect it to be points added to either the final exam or the writing assignment category, since those are the largest weighted categories in the course grade.

Calendar of Topics, Readings, and Due Dates (subject to change)

Week 1 (online via Zoom)

Jan. 10 – Personal introductions and icebreaker activity

Jan. 12 – Overview of writing assignments and other syllabus notes

Jan. 14 – NRW Chapter 1; discussion on the nature of news content

Week 2 (online via Zoom)

Jan. 17 – No class; Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday

Jan. 19 – Guidelines for 24-hour story; determining newsworthy events; in-class writing guidelines

Jan. 21 – Quiz 1 due; Live blogging assignment guidelines and use of iPad Pro.

Week 3 (in-class meetings begin)

Jan. 24 – In-class deadline writing #1

Jan. 26 – NRW Chapter 14; covering press conferences and speeches

Jan. 28 – Quiz 2 due; Chapter 14 continued – public meetings as news; in-class exercise on finding news items in meeting agendas

Week 4

Jan. 31 – NRW Chapter 3 – Interviewing

Feb. 2 – NRW Chapter 4; advanced techniques for quotes and attributions

Feb. 4 – Quiz 3 due; NRW Chapter 5; finding and verifying information

Week 5

Feb. 7 – Discussion continued on NRW 4 and 5; in-class exercise

Feb. 9 – NRW Chapter 8; Mastering the inverted pyramid; in-class writing guidelines

Feb. 11 – Quiz 4 due; In-class deadline writing assignment #2

Week 6

Feb. 14 – NRW Chapter 9; Creating engagement with your audience

Feb. 16 – **AP Style Exam**

Feb. 18 – Quiz 5 due; in-class exercise (social media and audience engagement)

Week 7

Feb. 21 – NRW Chapter 10; other types of story leads and when to use them

Feb. 23 – Chapter 10 discussion continued; in-class writing guidelines

Feb. 25 – Quiz 6 due; in-class deadline writing #3

Week 8

Feb. 28 – NRW Chapter 11; Writing for Digital Media

March 2 – Profile story proposals due; profile story guidelines; Chapter 11 discussion continued

March 5 – Quiz 7 due; in-class exercise

March 7-11 – Spring break; no classes

Week 9

March 14 – **Community issue package proposals due**; NRW Chapter 13; Beat reporting and developing sources

March 16 – Chapter 13 discussion continued; in-class exercise

March 18 - **Grammar Exam**

Week 10

March 21 – **First draft of profile story due**; Profile story peer review workshop

March 23 – NRW Chapter 15; other types of news stories; in-class writing guidelines

March 25 – Quiz 8 due; In-class deadline writing #4

Week 11

March 28 – **Profile story due by 11:59 p.m. via Canvas**; NRW Chapter 6 – using news releases to help build stories

March 30 – Chapter 6 discussion continued

April 1 – Quiz 9 due; in-class exercise on finding sources and information in news releases

Week 12

April 4 – **Community issue main story first draft due; Community issue story peer review workshop**

April 6 – NRW Chapter 16; writing business and consumer news; in-class writing guidelines

April 8 – Quiz 10 due; In-class deadline writing #5

Week 13

April 11 – NRW Chapter 17; Writing investigative and data-driven stories

April 13 – Chapter 17 continued; in-class exercise

April 15 – **All 24-hour stories and live blogging assignments must be turned in no later than this date!**; NRW Chapter 19 and Chapter 20; Media law and ethics refresher

Week 14

Note: I will be available to schedule one-on-one conference times (30 minutes) throughout this week for students who would like to submit new drafts of the community issue story and sidebar.

April 18 – Work day for community issue stories (I'll be available in the classroom for questions and guidance on the stories)

April 20 – NRW Chapter 2; course wrap-up; where do we go from here in news reporting?

April 22 – Infographics due by start of class; Work day for community issue stories (I'll be available in the classroom for questions and guidance on the stories)

Week 15 (Finals week)

Community issue package main story and sidebar due by 10 a.m. Friday, April 29, via Canvas.