

University of Texas at Tyler
Department of Communication
MCOM 4325
Multimedia Writing and Storytelling
MW 3:30-4:50 p.m., CAS Room 102 (inside studio)
Fall 2021 Syllabus

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Fall 2021 Office Hours: W 10-11 a.m., Th 11 a.m.-noon, or by appointment

· *Information for Classrooms and Laboratories:* Students are expected to wear face masks covering their nose and mouth in public settings (including classrooms and laboratories). The UT Tyler community of Patriots views adoption of these practices consistent with its [Honor Code \(Links to an external site.\)](#) and a sign of good citizenship and respectful care of fellow classmates, faculty, and staff.

Students who are feeling ill or experiencing symptoms such as sneezing, coughing, digestive issues (e.g. nausea, diarrhea), or a higher than normal temperature should stay at home and are encouraged to use the [UT Tyler COVID-19 Information and Procedures \(Links to an external site.\)](#) website to review protocols, check symptoms, and report possible exposure. Students needing additional accommodations may contact the Office of Student Accessibility and Resources at University Center 3150, or call (903) 566-7079 or email saroffice@uttyler.edu.

Course Overview

Multimedia Writing/Storytelling teaches basic skills to create multimedia journalism projects. Multimedia stories will incorporate text, images, audio, video and data visualizations. You will apply standards of journalistic reporting and writing to your work throughout the semester. Whether you plan to work at a newspaper, television station, radio station, production studio or PR/advertising agency, you need to be able to produce content for multiple platforms in multiple ways. Multimedia Writing and Storytelling provides you those skills. This course has a specific emphasis on writing for broadcast and the web.

Prerequisites: MCOM 3303 or MCOM 3395.

Student Learning Objectives – Upon completion of the course, you will be able to:

A. Competency: Writing/Storytelling:

1. Write correctly and clearly using formats and styles appropriate for public relations/integrated communication or multimedia journalism for the audiences and purposes required.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of digital medium requirements through written assignments, including research, scripts and projects.

3. Demonstrate the ability to develop news stories for different media.

B. Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry:

1. Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to public relations/integrated communication or multimedia journalism professions. Analyze writing practices, strategies and procedures for multiple forms of news production.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of and ability to apply the First Amendment and other legal principles for public relations/integrated communication and/or multimedia journalism.
3. Show an understanding of professional ethical principles and issues for public relations/integrated communication and/or multimedia journalism.
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of telling journalistic stories with different media and apply those skills to analyzing and developing your own content.

C. Competency: Mediated Presentation:

1. Apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information using tools and technologies appropriate for public relations/integrated communication or mediated journalism.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of and proficiency with the skills needed to make practical producing decisions.
3. Demonstrate skills using multiple software and hardware for creating multimedia stories.

D. Competency: Argument:

- Construct a persuasive message, adapted to the audience, purpose and context of the situation.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- 2020 *Associated Press Stylebook*. New York: Associated Press; or AP Stylebook Online subscription.
- Tomkins, Al (2017). *Aim for the Heart: Write, Shoot, Report and Produce for TV and Multimedia* (Third Edition). Thousand Oaks, California: CQ Press. ISBN-13: 978-1506315256
- Articles and tip sheets to be assigned.

Equipment used in this class is available for checkout (make sure you're aware of the equipment checkout policy at UT Tyler).

REQUIRED MEDIA CONSUMPTION:

To understand and complete assignments, you **MUST** watch and listen to news programs, promotional campaigns and podcasts. Immerse yourself in mass media.

Suggested sources:

Newspapers: *The New York Times* (free digital subscription through UT Tyler), *The Dallas Morning News*, *The Washington Post*

Magazines: *The New Yorker*, *Texas Monthly*, *Atlantic Monthly*

Viewing: 60 Minutes, CBS Sunday Morning News

Online: Politico.com, bbc.com, *TexasTribune.org*, <https://www.propublica.org>

Listening: KVUT (99.7) – new UT Tyler radio station and NPR and APM affiliate; NPR.org online; feature-story based podcasts.

WHAT TO KNOW:

Attendance: All classes are mandatory. Since we only meet twice a week, each discussion and activity build toward the next. Attendance and participation are a part of your grade.

- Students who anticipate being absent due to university-sponsored activities should inform me by the second class meeting.
- Work is NOT considered an excused absence. It is your responsibility to arrange work hours to accommodate class hours.
- You are responsible for turning in all assignments by deadline. You are also responsible for lecture materials, announcements and assignments made during any absence.
- Please be in class (virtually or in-person) no later than 10 minutes past the start of the class; anyone arriving later than that may be considered absent. Do not ask to leave class early.
- Quizzes for the class will be administered online and therefore must be completed by each due date – please arrange time to sign in to Canvas and complete the assigned quiz by the due date. Make-up quizzes will not be offered except in an unanticipated lengthy illness or a death in the family.
- To qualify for an excused sick absence, you must provide a doctor's note.
- You may be excused for a death in the family if the person who died is your parent, grandparent, sibling, spouse or child. Please provide a copy of the obituary or service program to the instructor.

Assignment Policy:

- Unless otherwise specified, assignments are due **before** the start of class.
- Assignments and due dates may change – in your favor - with fair notice.
- You must complete all assignments to pass the course. This does not mean, however, that merely completing all assignments guarantees a passing grade.
- Rubrics for the project-based assignments will be distributed via Canvas. Please read each one carefully; if you have questions, the time to ask is before you begin work on the project, not after you are well into production or on the day of the assignment deadline.

Classroom Courtesies:

- No cellphone, tablet or other device use during class unless the assignment specifically calls for the use. Violation of this policy may result in loss of the device until after class.
- No eating or drinking is allowed in any of the MCOM labs. If you must finish a beverage or food, do so before entering the lab area, classroom, or studio.
- When in classroom discussion, be respectful of your colleagues. Debating and challenging of points are welcome, but personal attacks, verbal bullying, and slurs are not only unwelcome but also subject to disciplinary action.

Course Content, Announcements and Communication

- I use Canvas to communicate, post assignments and readings, present feedback and provide a space for you to communicate with your classmates.
- Email response policy: In most cases, if you contact me by email on a weekday before 10 p.m. you can expect a response the same day (usually within two hours). Emails after 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday will usually be answered the following morning. On weekends (Fridays 10 p.m.-Sundays 10 p.m.), I will try to answer emails as soon as possible, but you should not expect a reply before the following Monday morning.
- **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.

Academic Honesty

- You are responsible for your own work or your portion of work if within a group. Be honest, forthright, and accept responsibility.
- Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, unattributed use of others' work (including test and paper banks), disruption of class, and discourtesy to, or harassment of, other students or your instructor.
- Anyone caught cheating will earn a zero for that assignment and will be subject to academic and disciplinary action.
- **Plagiarism will not be tolerated.** This includes, but is not limited to, the appropriation, buying, receiving as a gift, or obtaining by any means another's work and the submission of it as one's own academic work offered for credit. Students caught plagiarizing will fail the assignment, may fail this class and will be subject to academic and disciplinary action.

Assignments and course grade weights

In-class assignments and workshops (15%): You are expected to prepare for and be at all classes. On many class dates, you will work on a specific multimedia storytelling skill based on a prompt I will provide you, and you will turn in that work at the end of class. **This assignment group addresses learning outcomes A, B, and C.**

News and course content quizzes (10%): You will have 10 quizzes (via Canvas), due by 5 p.m. each Friday starting Sept. 4 and continuing through Nov. 6. These quizzes will contain a mix of questions on current news events and concepts from the textbook and in-class discussion each week. **This assignment group addresses learning outcome B.**

(Rubrics TBA for each of the following assignments)

Video skills projects (20%): These will consist of two packages of a voice-over, interview, sound-on-tape and standup. Both packages will be assigned; one will focus on a news story, the other will focus on a public relations/promotional matter. In today's media job market, it's essential you have some experience and familiarity with both sides of the news journalism/advertising and PR fence (and potentially something to include in a work portfolio). **This assignment addresses learning outcomes A and C.**

Broadcast package (Midterm project) (25%): As a course midterm, you will produce a video report (60-90s TRT), audio story (3-4m TRT) and scripts for both. The topic and emphasis (news story, product/service advertisement, or public relations content) are up to you, but need instructor approval before proceeding. You may secure the services of others as on-screen or on-air talent (talent agreement forms required), but the recording work, editing, and reporting work or narration must be you solely. **This assignment addresses learning outcomes A, B(1), B(4), and C.**

Capstone project (Course final) (30%): The course final will be a multimedia capstone project on a pre-approved (deadline for proposals on Sept. 25) subject as a news story package, in-depth advertisement package, or public relations content package. Again, you may recruit talent, if applicable (talent agreement forms required), but the writing and production work must be solely your own. The project will include building a webpage (through a free, basic account on Wix) to house your content and must include the following:

- A main story of 1,000-1,500 words
- One main photograph and one secondary photograph
- An infographic directly pertaining to the chosen subject.
- A video (3-5m TRT) on the subject or spotlighting a main aspect of the subject.
- Three social media entries of your choice, housed on official class accounts that will be set up.
- ONE of the following – either a supplemental photo gallery of 7-10 images OR an audio story or promotional between 3-5 minutes TRT.

This assignment addresses learning outcomes A, B(1), B(4), and C.

Extra credit opportunities: I will offer each student in this course 5 points added to the lowest assignment grade(s) for the semester for the following:

1. Patriot Talon published story, video, or audio story – For the first time in the publication's history, the Patriot Talon is moving to an all-digital format. This is an excellent time for you to get involved with student media and put your media production skills to work. You must successfully pitch a story idea to the editor-in-chief, produce the story, and have it published on the Patriot Talon website or e-newsletter.

2. Participation in media research project – During the semester, there may be a media research project conducted by myself or another Department of Communication professor. To

encourage participation in these projects, I will offer extra credit for documented participation prior to the week of final exams.

Course grade table

A: 90-100%

B: 80-89%

C: 70-79%

D: 60-69%

F: 59% and below

For the purpose of course grades, I round up at a decimal of .5 and above. All students majoring within the Department of Communication must pass with a grade of C or better to receive credit for department courses.

Course schedule (subject to change)

Week 1

8/23 – Course orientation and icebreaker activity

8/25 – Thinking in the language of multimedia (Dr. Britt); discussion of video skills projects

Week 2

Readings: Tompkins Ch. 1-3

8/30 – Evaluating story ideas and treatments

9/1 – Story pitch workshop

9/3 – Quiz 1 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas; Pitch for Video Skills Project 1 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas.

Week 3

Readings: Tompkins Ch. 4-5

9/6 – No class meeting; Labor Day holiday

9/8 – Finding characters (subjects) to bring your story to life

9/10 - Quiz 2 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas; Pitch for Video Skills Project 2 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas.

Week 4

Readings: Tompkins Ch. 6 and assigned articles TBA

9/13 – Writing: Engaging styles and writing for broadcast media

9/15 – Writing workshop session

9/17 - Quiz 3 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas; Pitch for Broadcast Package due, 5 p.m. on Canvas.

Week 5

Readings: Tompkins Ch. 8-9

9/20 – Nailing the voice-over and on-camera standup; practice session.

9/22 – Getting the impactful interview and utilizing sound-on-tape; practice session.

9/24 - Quiz 4 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas; Pitch for Final – Capstone Project due, 5 p.m. on Canvas.

Week 6

Readings: Tompkins Ch. 7 and 10

9/27 – Working with lighting

9/29 – Using photography and infographics to tell the story

10/1 - Quiz 5 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas

Week 7

Readings: Tompkins Ch. 11 and assigned articles TBA

10/4 – Audio editing and selecting soundbites

10/6 – Video editing – sequencing and using B-roll

10/8 - Quiz 6 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas; Video Skills Project 1 due, 11:59 p.m. via Canvas

Week 8

Readings: Tompkins Ch. 15-17

10/11 – Ethics issues in multimedia storytelling, Part I

10/13 – Ethics issues in multimedia storytelling, Part I

10/15 - Quiz 7 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas

Week 9

10/18 – Researching and producing the broadcast package

10/20 – The news feature – structure and content

10/22 – Video Skills Project 2 due, 11:59 p.m. via Canvas

Week 10

Readings: Tompkins Ch. 13

10/25 – Workshop session for Broadcast Package

10/27 - Workshop session for Broadcast Package

10/29 – Quiz 8 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas

Week 11

Readings: Tompkins Ch. 18-19

11/1 – Enterprise reporting and multimedia package planning

11/3 – Multimedia package – putting it all together

11/5 – Quiz 9 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas; Broadcast Package due, 11:59 p.m. via Canvas

Week 12

Readings: Tompkins Ch. 14 and assigned articles TBA

11/8 – Using social media to your advantage; in-class social media writing exercise

11/10 – Promoting your content – social media and video

11/12 – Quiz 10 due, 5 p.m. on Canvas

Week 13

11/15 – Capstone package workshop session

11/17 – Capstone package workshop session

Week 14

11/22-26 – Thanksgiving Break, no classes

Week 15

11/29 – Capstone package workshop session

12/1 – Course wrap-up: Why all this matters for your media career

Week 16

12/8 – Capstone Package due, 5 p.m. via Canvas (Wix webpage link upload)