

MCOM 2311.002 Writing for Mass Media ~ MWF 9:05 – 10 a.m.

Syllabus – Fall 2025 ~ CAS 106

Instructor: Lorri Allen

Office: FAC 2009, 903-566-6120 Email: LorriAllen@UTTyler.edu – preferred method of contact, not through Canvas.

Student hours: Mondays 3-5 p.m., Tuesdays 9:30-11:30 a.m. and by appointment.
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Overview: An in-depth exploration of writing for the mass media. Learn techniques to gather information and write for different audiences. Practice objectively observing, interviewing and researching. Complete real-world assignments on deadline.

How does this course help you?

Communicating clearly and efficiently and meeting deadlines are imperative in any career. Writing is key to working in communications. Master it and master your future.

"If you improve your communication skills, I will guarantee you that you'll earn 10% to 50% more money over your lifetime." – Warren Buffett

Improve your **critical thinking, communication, writing** and **deadline** skills in this rigorous course by paying attention to details and keeping up with assignments.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1) Writing
2) Storytelling
3) Analysis
4) Systematic Inquiry

By the end of this course, you'll be able to:

- Write correctly using the formats and storytelling styles appropriate for the audiences and purposes of public relations or multimedia journalism. (Competency: Writing/Storytelling)
- Write accurate news stories in an appropriate format when given sets of facts. (Competency: Systematic Inquiry/Writing)
- Produce advertising and PR materials in an appropriate format. (Competency: Writing)
- Identify different formats used in the various media covered. (Competency: Analysis)
- Demonstrate proficiency in grammar, spelling, punctuation and use of the Associated Press Stylebook. (Competency: Writing)

- Conduct research and evaluate information using methods appropriate to public relations or multimedia journalism. (Competency: Analysis, Systematic Inquiry)
- Understand First Amendment and other legal principles for public relations and multimedia journalism. (Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry)
- Demonstrate understanding of professional ethical principles for public relations and multimedia journalism. (Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry)

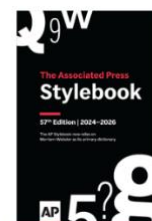
Another way to look at the semester's goals:

Learning outcomes	Assignments	Marketable Skills
Storytelling, writing	News story, release	Interviewing, writing
Analysis	Finding stories, sources	Research
Systematic Inquiry, writing	Quizzes, scavenger hunt, social/online	Following directions, photography, digital
Analysis, storytelling	Ad spot, crisis PR	Persuasion
Writing	Reflections, pitches	Meeting deadlines

Every assignment helps you develop *employable* skills.

Required Textbooks and Reading:

- The Associated Press Stylebook, 57th Edition 2024-2026
- Handouts and articles provided on Canvas



Required Reading/Viewing/Listening:

Immerse yourself in mass media, from news and podcasts to commercials and ads. Notice word usage, storytelling, objectivity. Consume a variety of sources for a healthy media diet. Suggestions:

Viewing: “PBS NewsHour,” – stream if you don’t have TV access; CNN, “60 Minutes,” “CBS Sunday Morning” – the latter two can also be watched in their entirety online after the initial airing. News/current events podcasts.

Listening: NPR’s “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered,” News/current events podcasts.

Reading (hard copy or online): “The Dallas Morning News,” “USA Today,” “The New York Times”

Free News Apps: NPR, Associated Press, The New York Times

Assignments and point values

- **Quizzes** (10 at 10 points for 100 total): Designed to help you learn AP Style, GSP and to encourage you to follow current events. Expect questions about reading assignments, too.
- **Six writing/multimedia exercises** (100 points each): The assignments develop multimedia journalism skills and prep you for an internship and upper-level classes and include two news stories, news release, ad spot, crisis PR.
- **Prep and practice** (70 points): Easier assignments develop skills for assignments worth more points.
- **Reflection questions** (Two sets at 10 points each for 20 total): Learning retention research indicates you keep lessons longer if you reflect on how they're helpful or how they contribute to a bigger goal.
- **Midterm exam** (100 points): checks your comprehension and application of assignments.
- **Final exam** (100 points): tests your application of skills learned.

***Note:** I'll give you a detailed rubric and an assessment for each assignment. The rubric also shows you how the assignment relates to student learning outcomes as well as real-world skills.

Grading Scale:

A	900 -- 1,000 points
B	800 -- 899 points
C	700 -- 799 points
D	600 -- 699 points
F	599 points or below

I'll grade your assignments as soon as I can; however, I keep extra credit points on a separate spreadsheet. Keep track of scores and come to my office to confirm totals.

I use multiple assessment strategies so you can earn points in several ways—it helps those who suffer from test anxiety, and I get a more accurate measure of how much you have learned.

Grading rubrics: Even though each assignment has a rubric to guide you, the following apply to all assignments:

- **Clean, correct copy.** Your grade for each assignment will be reduced depending on how many grammar, spelling, punctuation or AP errors you have.
- **Facts are important.** An error of fact results in a zero.
- **Names are just as important.** If you misspell a name (including mine), you will get a zero for the assignment. Many brand names are listed in the AP Stylebook.

In accordance with **Bloom's Taxonomy**, assignments increase in difficulty.

Assignment policy

- Use **Microsoft Word** to complete your writing projects.
- Include your name, date, assignment name, course name and **word count** on the upper left of page 1.

Kaysha Morrow
Feb. 3, 2025
Story Pitches, MCOM 2311
Word Count: 320

- You must turn in all assignments by deadline. **No late assignments accepted.**

Assignments **must be turned in the way the rubric states.** If the assignment is not *submitted correctly*, it earns a zero.

WHY?

Being a journalist requires good observation skills. And you can use your job for missing one deadline or making one big error. Being a great employee in any field requires noticing details and following instructions. To reinforce these skills, assignments *and deadlines* will differ, *so read each rubric carefully.*

Truth, Honesty, Originality are important in any coursework.

But they are hallmarks of Journalism and Public Relations. So, committing the following are especially egregious.

- **Plagiarism or fabrication in any form.** Students caught plagiarizing or fabricating **fail** the assignment, may fail the class and are **subject to academic and disciplinary action.**

Thanks to Emily Scheinfeld, Ph.D., for the following nuances:

- **Intent:** When reviewing a possible case of plagiarism, intent will *not* be taken into consideration. In other words, an act of plagiarism is plagiarism.
- **Mistakes and accidents:** The possibility you mistakenly or accidentally fabricated or committed plagiarism will *not* be taken into consideration.
- **Appeal to ignorance:** Your claim to ignorance about this policy is *not* a valid justification to plagiarize.

Forms of academic dishonesty include: Collusion— lending your work to another person to submit as their own; Fabrication— deliberately creating false information, and Plagiarism— the presentation of another person's work as your own.

While the use of AI (artificial intelligence) is developing and could be a part of your job someday, it's considered plagiarism in this class.

The University requires us to follow copyright and fair use requirements. You're individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. The University will neither protect nor defend nor assume any responsibility for *student* violations of fair use laws. Violations of copyright laws could subject you to *federal and state civil penalties and criminal liability, as well as disciplinary action*.

Academic dishonesty is never tolerated by the University or the Department of Communication.

NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS are accepted. So, it's better to turn in unfinished work and get some points rather than none.

****However**, if you're having challenges not related to procrastination or time management, *talk to me at least 36 hours ahead of the due date*. I may extend your deadline.

MISSED QUIZZES-Quizzes will be given *in class*. If you have an *excused* absence, you have options. Don't have unexcused absences.

One makeup quiz is planned at the end of the course to replace your lowest grade. Makeup *Exams* (midterm, final) are not offered.

Note: Students late to class on exam/quiz days will **not** be allowed to take the exam/quiz if others have already completed it.

Attendance Policy: Please read the UT Tyler [Class Attendance policy](#).

At the end of the semester, **if you've attended every class, you've come prepared, participated in discussions and remained engaged***, I'll add 5 points to your final total. For instance, you could go from an 895 (B) to 900 (A).

- Class attendance is required and expected. Plus, it helps you learn.
- Work does **not** qualify as an excused absence.
- If you're sick, provide a **doctor's note** for an excused absence.
- If a close family member dies, send the obituary or funeral program for an excused absence. "Close" = *your* siblings, parents, child or grandparents.
- My children are my dogs, so while I empathize with the challenge of a sick pet, you can still carve 55 minutes out of your day to attend class.

Rude, disrespectful or disruptive actions may result in **points subtracted** from your final grade—at my discretion.

Class Policies:

- A. Devices: Turn **off** all devices unless part of our class work. Keep devices in your backpack unless notified otherwise. *Take notes by hand*. **Engaged = not using your laptop unless part of the day's work*.

(If you have a documented reason to use a laptop when doing so is not part of the day's work, you **must** talk with me about your seat assignment.)

- B. No eating or drinking in the lab. Water in a container with a lid is permitted at

the desks away from the computers.

C. Treat your classmates and me with respect and kindness.

Tips to succeed in this course:

#1 – Come prepared. You’ve read, watched or listened to the assigned content so you can use class time to discuss, ask questions or work. You’re up on current events.

#2 – Attend class. We move fast and missing even one class means you may miss crucial instruction or that Aha! Breakthrough.

I offer flexibility for real-world emergencies such as COVID-19 and don’t want you in class if you’re contagious. I’ll take appeals on a case-by-case basis.

#3 – Understand the assignment policy. You’re responsible for turning in all assignments by deadline. You’re responsible for following instructions on how to submit assignments.

- Assignment due dates may change at my discretion with fair notice and always to your benefit.
- You must complete all assignments to pass. This does not mean, however, that merely completing all assignments guarantees a passing grade.

#4 – Practice classroom courtesies, described in “class polices” above.

#5 – Stay in touch. I use Canvas and email to communicate.

- Email policy: on weekdays, I’ll do my best to answer you in 24 hours. On weekends, give me 48 hours.
- Text my personal cell if you have an emergency: 214-878-8610.

#6 – Realize Academic Honesty is the most important trait you can protect. Careers – and grades – are ruined when people cheat.

- Practice academic integrity and accept responsibility for your actions.
- 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 me.

Artificial Intelligence policy

We encourage discussing AI tools’ ethical, societal, philosophical and disciplinary implications. *Faculty and students must not use protected information, data or copyrighted materials when using any AI tool.*

Additionally, users should be aware that AI tools rely on predictive models to generate content that may appear correct but is sometimes shown to be incomplete, inaccurate, taken without attribution from other sources and/or biased (racist).

Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You're ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course (see below) is considered a breach of academic integrity. You'll be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy.

AI policy for MCOM 2311.002

For this course, **AI is not permitted unless it is part of your rubric for an individual assignment.** In other words, do not use AI unless I have given you written permission.

At this stage of learning to write for mass media, you need to go through the critical thinking process of learning the basics. Research, writing, design and any other facets of the assignment process *must be your own without any assistance from any of AI programs or apps.*

We don't want AI to think for you.

Thanks for paying attention to the syllabus details!