

FEATURE WRITING  
MCOM 3301.001, Fall 2025

Class Meets: 12:30 to 1:50 p.m. Tuesdays, Thursdays in WT Brookshire Hall 236

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Office Hours: 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. I welcome and encourage office visits.

### **DEPARTMENT SYLLABI**

Use this link to access the syllabi for all Department of Communication courses

<https://www.uttyler.edu/communication/syllabi>Links to an external site.

### **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course is a study of the purposes, characteristics, story forms and subject matter of feature stories -- most notably creative nonfiction narrative writing. Emphasis is placed on writing and analyzing the feature story in its many forms, including alternative storytelling forms. Students learn feature writing techniques; how to find story ideas, plan, write and revise features; and how to market writing.

Prerequisite: MCOM 2311

### **STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Students will be able to identify literary devices, story structures and techniques of compelling storytelling; write nonfiction narratives targeting specific audiences; explain the role of storytelling as part of a media strategy to entertain and inform; and use a multimedia approach to storytelling that incorporates photography, graphics and videography.

### **COMMUNICATIONS COMPETENCY**

Students will gain knowledge and skills mastery in the following areas.

#### **a. Media Literacy**

- The ability to identify different types of media and messages.
- The ability to analyze, evaluate and create media products in different forms.

- The ability to gauge the impact of media messages.

#### b. Legal and Ethical Principles

- The ability to apply the First Amendment and other legal principles involving strategic communication and multimedia journalism.
- The ability to identify legal and ethical issues involving multimedia journalism and strategic communication.
- The ability to act ethically when gathering, writing and selling information.

#### c. Writing/Storytelling

- The ability to apply correct grammar, spelling and punctuation.
- The ability to apply literary techniques more commonly used in fiction to create compelling true stories.
- The ability to use interviewing skills, research and observation to gather information for true stories.
- The ability to use timelines, outlines and subheads to organize the writing process.
- The ability to adapt writing to the needs of different markets and audiences.

#### d. Analysis and Systematic Inquiry

- The ability to conduct research and evaluate information using methods appropriate to multimedia journalism and strategic communication.
- The ability to explain differences in writing styles, goals and outcomes of feature writing versus news writing.
- The ability to determine whether nonfiction narrative is the proper format for delivering the message.
- The ability to understand how narratives shape culture and viewpoints.

#### e. Grammar Proficiency

- The ability to use words properly in a sentence.
- The ability to spell words correctly
- The ability to punctuate sentences properly in English grammar.

- The ability to write clearly by avoiding ambiguity and not leaving out essential information.

#### e. Media Ecology

- The ability to adjust the presentation of the story based on the platform it appears in.
- The ability to adjust the story based on the likely setting it will be received.
- The ability to adjust the story based on how the story will be used.
- The ability to consider the influences of print, video and presentation as part of how the story will be perceived.

#### SUGGESTED TEXTBOOK

- Associated Press Stylebook. New York: Associated Press. Also available online at [www.apstylebook.org](http://www.apstylebook.org) (Links to an external site.). No older than 2024 edition. You will be required to write using AP Stylebook guidelines.

#### ADDITIONAL LEARNING GUIDES

Select readings and videos are posted in Canvas.

#### MEDIA CONSUMPTION

Immerse yourself in mass media to get the most out of this class. Read newspapers and magazines in print and online. Watch news programs and listen to NPR. Look at YouTube, Facebook and other social media sites in the context of this class. Good sources for captivating narratives include Texas Monthly and Vanity Fair.

Other recommendations:

- Clark, Roy Peter. (2006) Writing Tools, 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer.
- Strunk Jr., W., & White, E.B. The Elements of Style (4th Ed.), New York: Longman.

#### SPECIAL COURSE NOTES

##### **Basic Requirements**

You will need access to a computer and a reliable internet connection. You will be required to go off campus to collect information for some stories. There are additional expenses, such as admission to Caldwell Zoo, required for this class.

##### **Communication**

If you have a question, concern or want to talk about something, call or send me a text at 903-617-8196. Tell me your name, what class you are in and why you are reaching out to me. I will get back to you as soon as possible.

- You also can send me an email at [jmogle@uttyler.edu](mailto:jmogle@uttyler.edu).
- Check the Announcements tab of Canvas regularly.
- If there is a valid reason that you cannot turn in work on time (such as becoming sick), contact me.

### **Completing Work on Time**

Each assignment is in Canvas and has a deadline. You must meet the deadline to receive full credit. Late work will only be accepted under extraordinary circumstances.

### **Rights of Pregnant and Parenting Students**

As required by SB 412, SB 459, and SB 459/HB 1361, passed by the 88th Legislature in 2023, pregnant and parenting students are afforded different supports and rights. Part of the support afforded pregnant students includes excused absences. Faculty members who are informed by a student that they need this support should make a referral to the Parenting Student Liaison. Students must work with the Parenting Student Liaison to receive these supports and rights. Students should contact the Parenting Student Liaison at [parents@uttyler.edu](mailto:parents@uttyler.edu) and complete the Pregnant and Parenting Self-Reporting Form.

### **Academic Honesty**

The University's academy honesty policies apply. You, and only you, must do the work that you submit. However, you can receive help in organizing your stories and proofreading.

Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to, cheating, unattributed use of others' work, disruption of class, and discourtesy to, or harassment of, other students or your instructor. Anyone caught cheating will earn a "0" for that assignment and will be subject to academic and disciplinary action.

### **Fabrication**

Fabrication includes making up things that do not exist or happen. In feature writing, this includes citing dialogue or quotes that were never spoken; including people in stories who do not exist; including descriptive passages that you never witnessed. Fabrication will result in getting a 0 for the assignment and could lead to academic discipline.

### **Plagiarism**

Plagiarism 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. Go here for more: <http://www.uttyler.edu/judicialaffairs/scholasticdishonesty.php> (Links to an external site.)

AI in the form of ChatGPT or Copilot -- much like search engines -- can be used to identify sources. If you use AI to generate writing, then it is not your work. This is a form of plagiarism. If it is deemed that an assignment has a large portion of AI generated content, then you could face disciplinary action.

### **UT Tyler's Statement on AI**

UT Tyler is committed to exploring and using artificial intelligence (AI) tools as appropriate for the discipline and task undertaken. We encourage discussing AI tools' ethical, societal, philosophical, and disciplinary implications. All uses of AI should be acknowledged as this aligns with our commitment to honor and integrity, as noted in UT Tyler's Honor Code. 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. Consequently, an AI tool should not be considered a substitute for traditional approaches to research. You are ultimately responsible for the quality and content of the information you submit. Misusing AI tools that violate the guidelines specified for this course is considered a breach of academic integrity. The student will be subject to disciplinary actions as outlined in UT Tyler's Academic Integrity Policy. Refer to the About This Course section of the UT Tyler Syllabus Module for specific information on appropriate use of AI in your course(s).

### **ASSIGNMENT WEIGHTS/POINTS VALUE**

Each assignment has an assigned value, instructions and information on how the grade is determined.

The graded work falls into five categories:

- **Capstone project -- 310 pts.; 19% of grade:** Your Capstone project demonstrates extraordinary effort combining writing, photography, video and magazine design. It comes in four parts: 1) the story pitch (30 pts); draft (100 pts); class presentation (30 pts.); final version (150 pts.). Competencies: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry, Media Literacy, Legal and Ethical Principles, Grammar Proficiency, Media Ecology

- Pitches -- 30 pts. -- due Sept. 10 -- in class presentations Sept. 11
- Draft -- 100 pts. -- Nov. 16
- Project Self-Evaluation -- 30 pts. -- Dec. 1 -- In-Class Presentations -- Dec. 2, 4
- Final Project -- 150 pts. -- Dec. 6
- **Jobs -- 700 pts., 42%:** Jobs require you to present features using multiple-media storytelling or alternative storytelling forms. These are structured as freelance writing jobs from an employer with considerations of length, style, content and target audience.
  - Competencies: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry, Media Literacy, Legal and Ethical Principles, Grammar Proficiency, Media Ecology
- **Assignments -- 340 pts., 21%.** Assignments provide opportunities to improve skills by evaluating the work of others and putting skills into practice.
  - Competencies: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry
- **Blogs -- 200 points; 12%.** Students write a blog for four weeks. Each is worth 50 points. The grading is based on grammatical accuracy and quality of writing.
  - Competencies: Media Literacy, Writing and Storytelling, Analysis and Systematic Inquiry, Grammar Proficiency
- **Attendance -- 100 points: 6%.** Start with 100 pts. and receive 5 pts. off for each unexcused absence.

## GRADING SCALE

The final grade represents the number of points earned as a percentage to the total points available.

- A: 90-100%
- B: 80-89%
- C: 70-79%
- D: 60-69%
- F: 59% and below

Check Canvas frequently to learn the status of your grade.

## LATE WORK AND MAKEUP EXAMS

All assignments have a deadline. Late assignments will receive a deduction. Most assignments will not be accepted if they are turned in more than 48 hours after they are due. Work can be made up for illnesses, family emergencies or an excused absence recognized by the University.

## CALENDAR

**Census Date:** The census date for the fall 2025 semester is Sept. 8. This is the final date for many enrollment-related actions, including adding new courses, changing sections, or dropping courses without incurring grades of “W” or “Q”. Census is also the second drop for non-payment date each academic session. See the Office of the Registrar website page for details.

**Final exam:** No final exam is given for this course.

## WEEK BY WEEK AND GRADED COURSE WORK

Here is the week-by-week schedule. Sometimes circumstances require changes in the schedule. Any changes will be announced in class and on Canvas. All deadlines and point values are posted in Canvas.

### **Aug. 26, 28: The World of Narratives; blogs**

- Show Me a Narrative -- Assignment -- 30 pts. -- due Aug. 27
- Blog 1 -- Blog -- 50 pts. -- Aug. 31

### **Sept. 2, 4: Writers Toolbox**

- Blog 2 -- Blog -- 50 pts. -- Sept. 7
- Using Your Tools -- Assignment -- 40 pts. -- Sept. 6
- I'll Use That Tip -- Assignment -- 20 pts. -- Sept. 7

### **Sept. 9, 11: Power of Observation**

- Blog 3 -- Blog -- 50 pts. -- Sept. 14
- Harvey Lake -- Job -- 100 pts. -- Sept. 17
- Pitches -- Capstone -- 30 pts. -- due Sept. 10 -- in class presentations Sept. 11

### **Sept. 16, 18: Visual Storytelling**

- The Photo Essay -- Job -- 100 pts. -- Sept. 28

**Sept. 23, 25: Prepare, Write, Revise**

- Case Study "Tigers" -- Assignment -- 30 pts. -- Sept. 27
- Caldwell Zoo -- Job - 100 -pts. - Oct. 4
- Zoo Evaluation -- Assignment -- 20 pts. -- Oct. 5

**Sept. 30, Oct. 2: Opening, Nut Graph, Ending**

- Headlines and Subheads -- Assignment -- 20 pts. -- Oct. 4:
- Case Study "My Baby" -- Assignment -- 20 pts. -- Oct. 4

**Oct. 7, 9: Human Interest Story**

- Writing About People -- Job -- 100 pts. -- Oct. 19
- Case Study "She Can Do It Too" -- Assignment -- 20 pts. -- Oct. 11

**Oct. 14, 16: Alternative Storytelling**

- Choosing the Alternative -- Job -- 100 pts. -- Oct. 19

**Oct. 21, 23: The Critical Review**

- So, You Want to be a Critic -- Job -- 100 pts. -- Nov. 2
- Case Study "Top Gun" -- Assignment -- 20 pts. -- Oct. 25.

**Oct. 28, 30: Improving Your Writing**

- Quick Fixes -- Assignment -- 40 pts. -- Nov. 1
- Thanks for the Tip -- Assignment -- 20 pts. -- Nov. 1

**Nov. 4, 6: Writing in First Person**

- The First-Person Feature -- Job -- 100 pts. -- Nov. 16
- Case Study "Haunted Jefferson -- Assignment -- 20 pts. -- Nov. 8

**Nov. 11, 13: Capstone Work Week**

- Capstone Draft -- Capstone -- 100 pts. -- Nov. 16

**Nov. 18, 20: Perfect Pitch**

- Pitching and Persuading -- Assignment -- 40 pts. -- Nov. 20

**Nov. 25, 27: Thanksgiving Holiday**



**Dec. 2, 4: Capstone Week**

- Capstone Presentations -- Capstone -- 40 pts. -- Dec. 1
- Capstone Final -- Capstone -- 150 pts. -- Dec. 6