

MCOM 2311.002 Writing for Mass Media ~ Tuesdays and Thursdays, 8 – 9:20 a.m.
Syllabus – Fall 2023 ~ CAS 106

Instructor: Lorri Allen

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OFFICE hours: Mondays 11:15 a.m. – 2 p.m., Tuesdays 2-5 p.m. and by appointment at your convenience. Any meeting can be held in person or by the virtual method you prefer.

Course Overview: An in-depth exploration of writing for the mass media. You'll learn techniques to gather information and write for different audiences. You'll practice objectively observing, interviewing, researching and analyzing. You'll get real-world assignments for which you must meet deadlines.

How does this course help you?

Communicating clearly and efficiently helps in any career.

Writing is key to working in communications. Master it and you'll 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 compelling 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: Writing)

- Produce web, advertising and PR materials in an appropriate format.
- Identify different formats used in the various media covered. (Competency: Analysis)
- Demonstrate proficiency in grammar, spelling, punctuation and the 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 and be able to apply First Amendment and other legal principles for public relations and multimedia journalism. (Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry)
- Demonstrate understanding of professional ethical principles and issues for public relations and multimedia journalism. (Competency: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry)

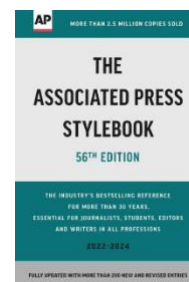
Another way to look at the semester's goals:

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, 56th Edition 2022-2024
- Handouts, 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.

Listening: NPR’s “Morning Edition” and “All Things Considered.” Hear NPR locally on 99.7 FM, stream at <https://kvut.streamguys1.com/live>

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

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

Special Course Notes:

- 1) *Alternate Class Locations and Field Trips* –We may visit a TV station, a radio station and the UT Tyler Archives and Special Collections.
- 2) *Special guests:* To familiarize you with careers available to those who write for mass media, we’ll have several professionals visit. Be polite to them. Take notes, ask questions. Their material reinforces our lessons and will likely be found on quizzes or exams.

Assignments and point values

- **Quizzes** (10 at 10 points for 100 total):

Designed to encourage you to learn AP Style and know current events. Expect questions about reading assignments and guests, too.

- **Five writing/multimedia exercises** (100 points each for a total of 520):

The assignments develop multimedia journalism skills and prep you for upper-level classes: news story, radio story, news release, ad spot, crisis PR.

- **Prep and practice** (150 points):

Easier assignments help you develop skills for assignments worth more points.

- **Reflection questions** (Three at 10 points each for 30 total):

Recent learning retention research indicates you keep lessons longer if you reflect on how they’re helpful or how they contribute to a bigger goal.

- **Mid-Term** (100 points):

The test checks your comprehension and application of assignments.

- **Final** (100 points):

The final tests your application of skills learned throughout the semester.

****Note:** I'll give you a detailed rubric for each assignment. The rubric will also show 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, extra credit points aren't added to Canvas; I keep a separate spreadsheet. Keep track of scores on your own and come to my office if you want 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 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. If this is a problem, see me soon to discuss your options.
- Include your name, date, assignment name, course name and **word count** on the upper left of page 1.

Katie Morrow

Sept. 3, 2022

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 won't be accepted and earns a grade of zero.

WHY?

Being a journalist requires good observation skills. 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 will be 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.

The University requires its community to follow copyright and fair use requirements. You are 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. See me about them.

One makeup quiz may be offered at the end of the course. If you've missed a quiz due to an *unexcused* absence, that's a chance to make up the points. Makeup Exams (mid-term, final) are not offered.

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

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 three points to your final total. You could go from an 897 (B) to 900 (A).

- Class attendance is required and expected.
- Work does **not** qualify as an excused absence.
- If you're sick, provide a doctor's note to earn 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 understand the challenge of a sick pet, you can still carve 80 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. Allowing a phone or other device to ring disrupts class. No text messaging or checking the time on your phone. Keep devices in your backpack unless notified otherwise.
*Take notes by hand. *Engaged = not using your laptop unless it's part of the day's work.*
- 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.

#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 the instructor's 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" on page 6.

#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 lost 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.

Have fun! Ask questions! Talk to me and your classmates! Learn!