

FEATURE WRITING

MCOM 3301.001, Fall 2026

Class Meets: 12:30 to 1:50 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays in CAS 257

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The best way to contact me is to text or call me at 903-617-8196

Office Hours: 10 a.m. to 11 a.m. Monday, Tuesday and 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

In this course, you will learn how to tell true stories in compelling ways. You will identify engaging story ideas, gather information, write feature stories, and revise them. Along the way, you will write about personal experiences, interesting people, fascinating places, and entertainment.

Prerequisite: MCOM 2311

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

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

- Identify literary devices, story structures, and techniques used in compelling nonfiction storytelling.
- Write creative nonfiction narratives for specific audiences.
- Explain the role of storytelling in informing and entertaining audiences as part of a broader media strategy.
- Produce multimedia stories that incorporate writing, photography, graphics, and video.

COMMUNICATIONS COMPETENCY

Students will gain knowledge and tools to develop competency in the following areas.

Media Literacy

- Identify different types of media and the messages they communicate.
- Analyze, evaluate, and create media content in a variety of formats.
- Assess the impact of media messages on audiences.

Legal and Ethical Principles

- Apply the First Amendment and other legal principles related to multimedia journalism and strategic communication.
- Identify legal and ethical issues in multimedia journalism and strategic communication.
- Gather, write, and market information ethically.

Writing/Storytelling

- Apply narrative techniques commonly used in creative nonfiction.
- Use interviews, research, and observation to gather information for stories.

- Use timelines, outlines, and headings to organize the writing process.

Analysis and Systematic Inquiry

- Conduct research and evaluate information using methods appropriate to multimedia journalism and strategic communication.
- Explain how feature writing differs from other forms of writing in style, purpose, and outcomes.
- Determine when nonfiction narrative is the appropriate format for delivering a message.

Language and Writing Proficiency

- Use words accurately and effectively.
- Apply the conventions of English grammar, sentence structure, and punctuation.
- Write clearly by being concise, avoiding ambiguity, and including essential information.

Media Ecology

- Adapt the presentation of a story based on the platform where it appears.
- Adapt storytelling choices based on the context in which the story will be received.
- Adapt stories based on their intended purpose and use.

LEARNING MATERIALS

Required course materials, including readings and videos, will be posted on Canvas.

The Associated Press Stylebook is not required, but it is highly recommended. Students will find it useful throughout the course. The online version is available at www.apstylebook.org. Students must follow AP Stylebook guidelines for course assignments. Do not use an edition older than 2024.

Additional recommended resources:

- *The Art of Feature Writing* by Earl R. Hutchison
- *The New New Journalism* by Robert S. Boynton
- *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer* by Roy Peter Clark
- *The Elements of Style* by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White

MEDIA CONSUMPTION

Immerse yourself in media to get the most out of this class. Effective writers are also active readers and viewers. Study compelling narratives in publications such as *Texas Monthly*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Sports Illustrated*. Read newspapers and magazines in print and online. Watch programs that focus on narrative storytelling, such as *Dateline*, and listen to programs such as NPR.

SPECIAL COURSE NOTES

Basic Requirements

You will need access to a computer and reliable internet connection. Some assignments will require you to travel off campus to gather information for stories. Additional expenses may be required, including admission fees for locations such as the Caldwell Zoo.

COMMUNICATION

If you have a question, concern, or want to discuss something, contact me. When you text, include your name, the class you are in, and the reason you are reaching out. I will respond as soon as possible.

- You may also email me at jmogle@uttyler.edu.
- Check the Announcements tab in Canvas regularly.
- If you have a valid reason you cannot meet a deadline, such as illness, contact me as soon as possible.
- You are welcome to visit me during office hours.

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 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 - 22%
- "Jobs" (Writing Assignments) - 38%
- Skills Training - 20%
- Blogs - 12%
- Attendance - 8%

Capstone Project

Your capstone project requires you to produce one multimedia story that incorporates writing, photography, video, and an alternative storytelling element, such as a graphic. You will develop this project in stages throughout the semester. The capstone project serves as the final exam.

The project has four parts and four deadlines:

- **The Pitch:** Present your story idea and a plan for reporting, producing, and completing the project on time.
Due Sept. 10; 25 points
- **The Draft:** Submit a complete draft of the project. I will provide feedback and return it to you for revision.
Due Nov. 20; 200 points
- **The Presentation/Reflection:** Present your project to the class and submit a self-evaluation reflecting on your work and the storytelling process.
Due Dec. 1; 25 points
- **The Final Project:** Submit the final revised version of your project.
Due Dec. 3; 100 points

You may use work completed in the semester for your capstone project. A human-interest story you produce earlier in the course may become part of the final project.

Competencies: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry, Media Literacy, Legal and Ethical Principles, Grammar Proficiency, Media Ecology

Writing Assignments, "Jobs"

Writing assignments are structured like those from freelance writers for an editor or client. Each assignment requires you to develop a story for a specific audience, meet a deadline, and make editorial decisions based on the needs of the publication and expectations of the audience.

Competencies: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry, Media Literacy, Legal and Ethical Principles, Grammar Proficiency, Media Ecology

Skills Training

These tasks are designed to develop writing and storytelling skills through practice, analysis, and the study of professional writers.

Competencies: Analysis and Systematic Inquiry

Blogs

Students will use blogs to practice self-reflection and storytelling. Topics may include personal experiences, meaningful places, and people who have influenced their lives.

Competencies: Media Literacy, Writing and Storytelling, Analysis and Systematic Inquiry, Grammar Proficiency

Attendance

Because this course includes discussions, workshops, and in-class activities, regular attendance is important to your success. Students start with 100 and receive a 5-point deduction for the first unexcused absences and 20-point deduction for any additional unexcused absence. Students begin the course with 100 attendance points. A 5-point deduction will be applied for the first unexcused absence. Each additional unexcused absence will result in a 20-point deduction.

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 work has a deadline. Late work will receive a deduction stated on the assignment. 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 2026 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.

Some of the Holidays observed by the college occur during the fall semester. No classes are held on holidays.

WEEK BY WEEK AND GRADED COURSE WORK

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. 25, 27: The World of Narratives; blogs

Blog 1
Show Me Narrative

Sept. 1, 3: Writer’s Toolbox

Blog 2
Using Your Tools
I’ll Use That Tip

Sept. 8, 10: Power of Observation

Blog 3
Job: Harvey Lake
Capstone

Sept. 15, 17: Visual Storytelling

Blog 4
Job: The Photo Essay

Sept. 22, 24: Prepare, Write, Revise

Case Study "Tigers"
Job: Caldwell Zoo - Job
Zoo Evaluation

Sept. 29, Oct. 1: Opening, Nut Graph, Ending

Headlines and Subheads - Training
Case Study "My Baby" - Training
Evaluating the Nut Graph - Training

Oct. 6, 9: Human Interest Story

Writing About People - Job
Case Study "She Can Do It Too" - Training

Oct. 13, 15: Alternative Storytelling

Choosing the Alternative - Job

Oct. 20, 22: The Critical Review

Job: So, You Want to be a Critic
Case Study "Top Gun" Training

Nov. 3, 5: Writing in First Person

Job: The First-Person Feature
Case Study "Haunted Jefferson" - Training

Nov. 10, 12: Writing Checkup

I'll Use that Tip - Training
Quick Fixes - Training

Nov. 17, 19: Capstone Work Week

Capstone Draft - Capstone

Nov. 25, 27: Thanksgiving Holiday

Dec. 2, 4: Capstone Week

Capstone Presentations
Capstone Final