

# **COM 110D MEDIA WRITING**

Spring 2009 (MWF, 12:15-1:25 p.m.; McEwen 207)

**"If your mother says she loves you, check it out."**

-- Old journalism standard

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**Office hours:** 10 a.m. – Noon, M-F, and by appointment. E-mail is the fastest and easiest way to reach me.

Please read the syllabus carefully. **NOTE:** Actively check your e-mail. I will often send class notices via e-mail.

## **Catalog Description**

Clear, logical writing is necessary to communicate effectively to an audience. This course focuses on background research, interviews, accuracy, attribution and styles of writing (print, broadcast, online, news releases). Superior grammar and language skills are expected, and Associated Press style is introduced. Prerequisite: C- or better in ENG 110.

## **Course Goal**

Teach accepted practices and skills used in writing for mass media.

## **Course Objectives**

Throughout this course, you are expected to:

- Build awareness and understanding of professional writing standards on matters such as truth, accuracy, fairness, objectivity and meeting deadlines.
- Write clearly and accurately through study and practice of established conventions in grammar, style, organization and communications formats.
- Exercise critical thinking and evaluation skills in topic/story selection, information-gathering, content development, writing and editing media copy for target audiences.

- Become more sensitive to the diversity of audiences through writing and research activities.
- Develop an understanding of data, statistics and skills using research tools (including the Internet, libraries and public documents).
- Gain and demonstrate a proficiency in AP Style.
- Practice and improve interviewing skills through assignments requiring gathering information through interviews.
- Develop self-assessment and copy editing skills by reviewing your own work and the work of others

### **Course Materials**

- Tim Harrower, *Inside Reporting* (McGraw Hill: New York, 2007).
- *Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* (2007 or 2008 edition), Norm Goldstein, ed.
- Patricia T. O’Conner, *Woe Is I* (Riverhead Books: New York, 2003).
- Reporter’s Notebook
- Jumpdrive or Flashdrive: You’ll be doing a lot of writing in this class. You will be required to save all your assignments because you’ll be resubmitting corrected versions in a final portfolio at the end of the semester. REMEMBER: We use Mac computers in our lab.
- A new 1-inch to 2-inch binder and clear-plastic pages for your work portfolio. It must be new because your final portfolio must evoke an air of professionalism.

### **School of Communications Professional Standards Policies**

The School of Communications has adopted the following minimum policies to provide students with a clear understanding and consistent application of course expectations, since journalism and communications are disciplines with rigorous professional standards. Teachers may designate more stringent policies on their course syllabi.

**Attendance Policy:** Students in the School of Communications are expected to attend all classes. Just as professionals go to work each day, we expect students in a professional school to come to class on time and be prepared to work. A student who misses more than 20 percent of scheduled classes in a term (more than eight absences for classes meeting three times a week, more than five absences for classes meeting twice a week) automatically receives an F because the student has missed too much content and participation to pass a course in a professional school. Teachers

will lower the final grade in a class for each absence beyond the equivalent of one week of class (three absences for classes meeting three times a week, two absences for classes meeting twice a week, and one absence during winter term or a summer session) as indicated in the course syllabus. An exception may exist for a student who misses more than a week of classes for a sanctioned university activity, such as presenting research at a national forum, class travel or university athletic travel. Students participating in such events must submit a written request in advance to the professor.

**Coursework:** If students miss a class because of illness, participation in a university-sponsored activity, job interview or other causes, they have missed valuable content and engaged learning. In this sense, excused and unexcused absences are no different. To ensure that students avoid gaps in the progression of a course, professors may assign additional work. For example, a professor may require a student to write a 400-word summary of material covered in a missed class session or complete an additional lab assignment that demonstrates comprehension of material covered.

**Tests and Examinations:** If students miss a quiz, test or examination they must submit a written request for a makeup to the professor. Students who miss a final examination must secure permission for a makeup from the department chair. As indicated in the Elon University Faculty Handbook, "students are not guaranteed permission to make up examinations and have no guarantees about the impact of the absence on their final grade for the course."

**Assignments:** Professionals meet deadlines. All assignments should be submitted on time, and they are due on the assigned date even if the student is absent from class. A teacher may choose not to accept late work, or to lower a grade by one letter for each weekday it is late.

## **What Say I?**

There are course requirements specific to my section of Media Writing. I have outlined them below.

### **Course Requirements**

To accomplish the goals laid out for this course, you must demonstrate proficiency in and completion of the following tasks.

**Weekly Quizzes:** You will take a quiz every Monday during the semester to test your knowledge of assigned readings, grammar, AP style and current events.

**Reading Assignments:** This course is writing and reading intensive. Because we cover a lot of ground in Media Writing, you will be required to read an abundance of material. That means reading the entire text book, a grammar book, the AP Style Book, newspapers and other outside pieces, as assigned. All readings should be completed before you come to class. Be prepared to absorb a great deal of information, all of it enriching and foundational. It will be important to you as you continue advancing in this field. You will be tested on your readings through the weekly quizzes and the final examination. So don't think once you finish a quiz on a text book chapter you'll never see the material again. It will show up on the final. Be prepared.

**Writing Assignments:** Media writing accurately implies that you will learn how to write across multiple media platforms. In this class, you will learn how to compose basic print, broadcast, online and PR pieces. The only way for you to become competent in all these forms is to write, write, write. You will be expected to complete a number of writing assignments both in and outside of class. **All writing assignments MUST be typed and double-spaced, unless otherwise indicated. Deadlines are firm and final.** You are preparing for a career in which late work could cost you your job. In this course, late work will cost you your grade. **Late work will not be accepted.** Anything that comes in past deadline receives a zero.

**Final Portfolio:** Heed my copy editing suggestions. I will line edit your work, correcting for grammar, style, clarity, etc. You are required at the end of the semester to resubmit your class writings to me in a NEW 1- to 2-inch binder. This will serve as a professional product that you can show to potential internship coordinators and media professionals when you apply for summer positions. So make it look superior: Put all stories in clear plastic pages. The portfolio is not simply a busy work add-on to this course. It is a vital component because it provides you with a product to display to employers. It will help you land an internship if you put in the proper work to edit your material. The portfolio is worth 10 percent of your grade. Update it throughout the semester.

**Final Exam:** The exam will consist of AP/grammar questions, true/false, multiple choice, short essay and comprehensive writing components. It will test you on what you learned throughout the ENTIRE semester. We will take time during the last class session before the final to review.

**Homework:** Obviously, your reading assignments are homework. But occasionally, I will ask you to do work in addition to the readings. You are expected to complete the homework and turn it in the next class. These are short, but important, assignments.

**Participation:** I expect you to participate in classroom activities. Many times students provide unique insights into class material that have lasting impressions on the other students taking the course. While this is not a seminar, there will still be opportunities to engage in class discussions, and I will expect you to participate actively. Participation and homework combine to form 10 percent of your final grade.

### **Grading Procedures**

The university defines grades as follows.

- A** indicates *distinguished* performance,
- B** indicates above-average performance,
- C** indicates an average performance in which a basic understanding of the subject has been demonstrated,
- D** indicates a passing performance despite some deficiencies, and
- F** indicates failure.

### **In this course, the grading works like this:**

Writing/Reporting assignments	45 percent
Quizzes/In-class work	10 percent
Participation	10 percent
Final examination	25 percent
Final Work Portfolio	10 percent

### **Number grades translate into these letter grades:**

- A: 93-100
- A-: 91-92
- B+: 89-90
- B: 85-88
- B-: 83-84
- C+: 81-82
- C: 77-80
- C-: 75-76
- D: 70-74
- F: less than 70

## Grading Template:

Accuracy and truth are the core principles of all journalists. Factual errors and misspelled names in your articles will cost you 50 points, forcing an automatic failure. **Triple check all factual claims and names in your stories before you turn them in.** As the old journalism standard goes, "If your mother says she loves you, check it out." You will also lose points for other spelling, grammar, punctuation and AP Style mistakes. And remember, missing a deadline will result in a zero.

Your writing assignments will be graded based on the following criteria:

- 1. Accuracy:** All your work must present factual matter correctly. All names must be spelled correctly. All stories should not present a bias, but rather should be an accurate portrayal of events. Again, misrepresenting false information as factual and spelling names wrong will cost you 50 points.
- 2. Clarity:** You may have done some of the finest reporting work known to man, but if you can't present your information in a clear and coherent manner, then it will have no effect on your audience. Word choice, organization and simplicity all contribute to clarity. Be sure to use active voice. Get to the point. Give the details. Get out. People will always ask, "Why should I care?" If your article is clear, they'll know right away.
- 3. Style and Grammar:** AP Style is the industry standard. Grammar rules always apply to whatever you write. You should be proficient in English grammar.
- 4. Organization:** Is your nut graf readily available? Do ideas flow naturally? Are your transitions intuitive and clear? Does the story move easily from idea to idea? All these questions are at the heart of a story's organization.
- 5. Completeness:** You must cover completely any event to which you are assigned. Include all pertinent information. A cursory examination of a topic will leave readers questioning your credibility and your ability.
- 6. Ledes, Quotes and Kickers:** Always be sure to write a lede that best describes the event or situation. Don't back-in to your story. Find telling quotes that advance a story and give some flavor to your readers. And be sure to end on a strong note. The lede sucks readers in. The quotes add the spice. The kicker leaves an imprint.

## **Classroom and Course Policies**

**Attendance Policy:** You are required to be in class every day. Media professionals are expected to be at work every day—the news doesn't stop—and you will be treated no differently. You will be completing graded assignments and writings during class, so if you miss a session, it will have a negative impact on your grade. The School of Communications attendance policy is attached above, but to reiterate, it says: "A student who misses more than 20 percent of scheduled classes in a term (more than eight absences for classes meeting three times a week, more than five absences for classes meeting twice a week) automatically receives an F because the student has missed too much content and participation to pass a course in a professional school. Teachers will lower the final grade in a class for each absence beyond the equivalent of one week of class (three absences for classes meeting three times a week, two absences for classes meeting twice a week, and one absence during winter term or a summer session) as indicated in the course syllabus. An exception may exist for a student who misses more than a week of classes for a sanctioned university activity, such as presenting research at a national forum, class travel or university athletic travel. Students participating in such events must submit a written request in advance to the professor."

**Coursework:** This includes all in- and out-of-class assignments and examinations. If you miss a class because of illness, participation in a university-sponsored activity, job interview or other causes, your professor may assign additional work. If you have an excused absence, you will have one week upon your return to make up the work you missed. You may not, however, make up work if you have an unexcused absence.

You are required to take the final exam at the scheduled time. You will know far in advance the date and time of the final. There's rarely an excuse for missing a final. Students who know they will miss a final exam must secure permission for a makeup from the associate dean or dean of the School of Communications.

**Preparation:** Follow the syllabus closely. Be sure to complete all assignments before you come to class. Be sure not to miss your deadlines, which are rigid for a reason. You are training to become a professional communicator. You will be expected to turn in assignments on time in the professional working world. I expect the same from you in class.

**Honor Code:** All work done in this class is expected to be your own. **DO NOT PLAGIARIZE OR FABRICATE!** I will spot-check your work periodically

throughout the semester to ensure that all work is original and not lifted or completely made up. You may not recycle someone else's work or your own. You may not lift material from another source without proper attribution. If you plan to paraphrase material, the words you write must be substantially different from the material from which you're working. Even in that instance, though, give credit where credit is due. Attribution is key. If you do one-on-one interviews for an outside assignment, you must provide me with names and contact information so I can ensure that all quoted material is accurate. If you are caught plagiarizing or fabricating or simply masquerading someone else's ideas as your own, you will receive a failing grade for that assignment. If you deliberately fabricate a story, I will fail you for the course.

All students are expected to uphold the four fundamental values of the Elon Honor Code:

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Responsibility
- Respect

Breaches of these values will result in an academic or social honor code violation report. Honor code violations include: plagiarism, lying, cheating, stealing or vandalism, and facilitating academic dishonesty. These violations may result in the lowering of a grade or failure of a class. While "intent" may be considered in assigning sanctions, it is not a factor in determining responsibility for an offense. Students should consult with their professor if they are uncertain about whether specific activities are violations of the honor code.

Definitions and examples of each of Honor Code violations above may be found at [http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/handbook/aca\\_honcode.xhtml](http://www.elon.edu/e-web/students/handbook/aca_honcode.xhtml).

**Students with Challenges:** Students with challenges, including physical challenges, learning disabilities or serious health concerns, should discuss their needs with me and provide me with the Elon documentation available to students with special needs. If you have a concern, and you do not have documentation, contact Priscilla Lipe for more information. Office phone: 336-278-6500. E-mail: [plipe@elon.edu](mailto:plipe@elon.edu). Necessary accommodations can be arranged.

## COM 110D Media Writing Spring Course Schedule

Wk#	Day	Date	Topic	Readings	Notes
1	Wed	2/4	Introduction		In-Class Writing
	Fri	2/6	Style (Bring AP book to all classes)	- AP letter "A" & Punctuation Style section in back	Diagnostic Grammar Test today; sample, ungraded quiz
2	Mon	2/9	Communication Basics	- Harrower Preface, Ch. 1, 2, pg. 190-191 - AP letters "B, C" - Woe Ch. 1	Monday Quiz <b>OUTSIDE ASSIGNMENT:</b> Exploring Careers with School of Communications Alumni, McEwen 011, 1:40 p.m. <b>TURN IN YOUR NOTES TO ME AFTER THE EVENT.</b>
	Wed	2/11	Researching		In-Class Writing
	Fri	2/13			In-Class Writing
3	Mon	2/16	Reporting Basics, All the President's Men	- Harrower Ch. 4, pg. 203-209, 213, 234-235, 192-194 - AP letters "D, E" - Woe Ch. 2	Monday Quiz
	Wed	2/18	Interviewing, Quotations		<b>OUTSIDE ASSIGNMENT THURSDAY FEB. 19:</b> Parvez Sharma speaks, LaRose Digital Theatre, Koury Business Center, 7:30 p.m. <b>STORY DUE BY E-MAIL BY 2 A.M.</b>
	Fri	2/20			Bring 2 Printouts of Your Sharma Stories to Class Today. In-Class Writing
4	Mon	2/23	Print Writing Ledes	- Harrower Ch. 3, pg. 202, 279, 195 - AP letters "F, G" - Woe Ch. 3	Monday Quiz
	Wed	2/25	After the Lede, Story Structure		<b>OUTSIDE ASSIGNMENT THURSDAY FEB. 26:</b> Bill Schulz speaks, McCrary Theatre, 7:30 p.m. <b>STORY DUE BY E-</b>

					<b>MAIL BY 2 A.M.</b>
	Fri	2/27			Bring 2 Printouts of Your Schulz Stories to Class Today.
<b>5</b>	Mon	3/2	Story Forms	- Harrower Ch. 6, pg. 253-267, 268-275 - AP "H, I and J" - Woe Ch. 4	Monday Quiz <b>OUTSIDE ASSIGNMENT:</b> Attend Town of Elon agenda-setting meeting at 6 p.m. <b>STORY DUE BY E-MAIL BY 2 A.M.</b>
	Wed	3/4			In-Class Writing Bring 2 Printouts of Your Meeting Stories to Class Today.
	Fri	3/6	Generate Story Ideas/Budget Meeting		<b>MEET IN MCEWEN 213 FOR CLASS.</b>
<b>6</b>	Mon	3/9	Specialized Reporting/Beats	- Harrower Ch. 5, pg. 210-212, 220, 222, 228-230, 238-243 - AP "K, L and M" - Woe Ch. 5	Monday Quiz <b>OUTSIDE ASSIGNMENT:</b> Leonard Pitts speaks, McCrary Theatre, 7:30 p.m. <b>STORY DUE BY E-MAIL BY 1 A.M. YOU MUST HAVE A TICKET TO THIS EVENT. TICKETS AVAILABLE FEB. 16.</b>
	Wed	3/11			Bring 2 Printouts of Your Pitts Stories to Class Today.
	Fri	3/13			Fly-out-the-door assignment
<b>7</b>	Mon	3/16	Feature Writing	- Harrower pg. 196-197 - AP "N, O and P" - Woe Ch. 6 - Communication Terms "A-O"	Monday Quiz
	Wed	3/18			<b>OUTSIDE ASSIGNMENT:</b> All-Day Feature Assignment. <b>STORY DUE BY E-MAIL BY 10 P.M.</b>
	Fri	3/20	Work on Portfolio		Bring 2 Printouts of Your Feature Story to Class Today.
<b>8</b>	<b>Mon</b>	<b>3/23</b>	<b>No class</b>		<b>No class</b>
	<b>Wed</b>	<b>3/25</b>	<b>No class</b>		<b>No class</b>

	<b>Fri</b>	<b>3/27</b>	<b>No class</b>		<b>No class</b>
<b>9</b>	Mon	3/30	Landing an Internship		No Quiz <b>OUTSIDE ASSIGNMENT</b> <b><u>TUESDAY MARCH 31</u></b> <b>SPRING</b> <b><u>CONVOCATION:</u></b> Madeleine Albright speaks, Alumni Gym, 4 p.m. <b>STORY DUE BY E-MAIL BY MIDNIGHT. YOU MUST HAVE A TICKET TO THIS EVENT. TICKETS AVAILABLE MARCH 10.</b>
	Wed	4/1	Careers; Resumes and Cover Letters		Work on resumes and cover letters Bring 2 Printouts of Your Albright Stories to Class Today.
	Fri	4/3	Broadcast	- <i>Harrower</i> Ch. 9 - <i>AP</i> "Q,R and S" - <i>Woe</i> Ch. 7	Friday Quiz
<b>10</b>	Mon	4/6	Broadcast		<b>OUTSIDE ASSIGNMENT</b> <b><u>TUESDAY APRIL 7:</u></b> Anderson Cooper speaks, Alumni Gym, 4 p.m. <b>STORY DUE BY E-MAIL BY MIDNIGHT. YOU MUST HAVE A TICKET TO THIS EVENT. TICKETS AVAILABLE MARCH 17.</b> In-Class Writing
	Wed	4/8	Broadcast		In-Class Writing Bring 2 Printouts of Your Cooper Stories to Class Today.
	Fri	4/10	Broadcast		Meet in Studio A
<b>11</b>	<b>Mon</b>	<b>4/13</b>	<b>No class</b>		<b>No class</b>
	Wed	4/15	PR	- <i>Harrower</i> Ch. 10 - <i>AP</i> "T, U and V" - <i>Woe</i> Ch. 8	Wednesday Quiz
	Fri	4/17	PR		In-Class Writing

<b>12</b>	Mon	4/20	PR		In-Class Writing
	Wed	4/22	Online/Multimedia Reporting	- Harrower Ch. 8, pg. 103, 198-201 - AP "W-Z" - Woe Ch. 9	Wednesday Quiz In-Class Assignment <b>OUTSIDE ASSIGNMENT</b> <b>THURSDAY APRIL 23:</b> Thomas Moore speaks, Whitley Auditorium, 7:30 p.m. <b>STORY DUE BY E-MAIL BY MIDNIGHT.</b>
	Fri	4/24	Future of News Portfolio Work		
<b>13</b>	Mon	4/27	Final Touches on Portfolio	-Woe Ch. 10	No quiz <b>Writing Portfolio Due Today</b>
	Wed	4/29	Media Convergence, Interactivity		
	Fri	5/1			Fly-out-the-door assignment
<b>14</b>	Mon	5/4	Media Law	- Harrower Ch. 7 - Woe Ch. 11	Monday Quiz
	Wed	5/6	Libel Law		In-Class Exercise
	Fri	5/8	Media Ethics		
<b>15</b>	Mon	5/11	Final Review		
<b>Final Exam</b>	<b>Th</b>	<b>5/14</b>	<b>FINAL for Media Writing COM110D</b>	<b>11:30 a.m. starting time</b>	<b>2:30 p.m. ending time</b>