

COMM 200: Introduction to Media Writing

TuTh, 9:30 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. – Section 9261 – Spring 2011 – 3 credits

Instructor: Dennis Owen Frohlich

Catalog Description

Introduction to writing in the styles and forms required in journalism, broadcasting and public relations.

Course Goal

This course is intended to jumpstart a student's career as a media writer by learning how to successfully write for print journalism, broadcast journalism, and public relations. Students will engage in all facets of the writing process, including writing, critiquing, editing and revising, with the ultimate goal of becoming more effective writers and readers of media messages.

Prerequisite Classes

COMM 112: Understanding Media and Social Change, ENGL 120: College Composition II

Undergraduate Learning Outcomes

- The student will understand what communication professionals do and the relationship between academic theory and professional practice.
- The student will demonstrate critical thinking skills when generating, consuming, and evaluating messages in relevant communication contexts.
- The student will create written messages demonstrating command of relevant communication constructs and industry/professional standards.

Objectives

- The student will develop basic critical and analytical media writing skills and learn to effectively structure messages for a specific audience.
- The student will understand the similarities and differences among all forms of media writing.
- The student will recognize, critique, and produce writing that delivers accurate, clear and concise information to a mass audience.
- The student will learn Associated Press style and use it correctly when writing media messages.
- The student will develop interviewing and researching skills that will enable them to gather accurate information.

Required Textbooks

1. Stovall, J. G. (2009). Writing for the Mass Media: 7th Edition. Boston: Pearson.
2. Associated Press Stylebook (current edition)

You are expected to read the assigned chapters in the textbook, understand the material and apply the writing concepts and style rules in your writing. I will go over key material in class; much class time will be spent on writing, revision via writing coaching and discussion.

Suggested Reading

1. A good dictionary, thesaurus, and grammar reference book.
2. Local and national newspapers
3. Strunk Jr., W. & White, E. B. The Elements of Style.

Course Requirements

○ Small Writing Assignments	100
○ Hard News Story	50
○ Online Story	50
○ Feature Story	75
○ Press Release	50
○ Broadcast Script	50
○ <u>Broadcast Presentation</u>	<u>25</u>
Total	400

Grading

All graded work will conform to the traditional grading scale. Points needed for each grade are as follows:

A	360—400
B	320—359
C	280—319
D	240—279
F	0—239

The grading scale is non-negotiable. A final grade of 359 points, for instance, is a B. All grades are final unless questions about grades are addressed in writing within 2 weeks after the grade is posted on Blackboard. Assignments may be regraded but the new grade may be higher or lower than the original.

If you have concerns about your grades please check with me sooner in the semester rather than later.

Late Work

Late work will not be accepted. Any work turned in after the due date will receive a grade of zero. Treat this class like a workplace with concrete deadlines. An editor will not accept a story turned in after deadline, so I will not accept work after the due date. If you can let me know ahead of time about an upcoming excused absence (military leave, sickness, funeral, sports), I will work with you on determining an alternative time to turn in a story.

Small Writing Assignments

Throughout the semester, different writing assignments will be given to be completed either during class or due by the next class period (points vary). Some assignments will be graded—others will be for practice. These exercises are usually not announced ahead of time and cannot be made up unless for an excused absence.

(100 points)

Articles

You will be expected to produce publication-worthy articles throughout the semester. The types of articles you will produce are: hard news story, online story, feature story, press release, and broadcast script.

Detailed assignment sheets will be provided for each assignment.

(300 points)

Extra Credit

Up to 15 extra credit points may be earned during the semester. Extra credit can be earned by publishing stories and/or finding AP errors in newspapers, or any combination up to 15 points.

Students can earn points by getting work published in any legitimate news publication (The Spectrum, The Forum, your hometown newspaper, etc.). A hard copy of the article from the publication must be handed in along with a one-page reflection on the article. Broadcast stories published with SU TV also count: turn in a copy of your script and give me a way to watch the video (send a link to me online, burn your story onto a DVD, etc.).

The reflection should touch on the writing process of the article, how it feels to have your writing published for others to read/watch and how this process has helped you as a writer. Each publication is worth up to five points, so no more than three articles will be accepted. All extra credit submissions must be turned in no later than the end of class on Thursday, May 5.

Extra credit can also be earned by finding AP style mistakes in published newspapers (The Spectrum, the Forum, your hometown newspaper). For every three AP errors you find, you will get 1 extra credit point. Please bring in the newspaper article, circle the mistake, write in the margin or on a separate piece of paper how the mistake should be corrected, and note the page in your AP stylebook where it says that. AP style mistakes can be turned in throughout the semester, but no later than the end of class on Thursday, May 5.

Attendance and Participation

Class begins promptly at 9:30 a.m. I will take attendance every day. Each student is allowed two absences throughout the semester. After these have been used, I will deduct three points from your final course grade for each day you are gone. You cannot learn the fundamentals of media writing if you are not in the classroom. Please also note that if you are more than 15 minutes late to class, this will be considered an unexcused absence, not a tardy. Writing coaching days are not optional and must let me know ahead of time if you cannot make your scheduled appointment. If you know you are going to miss class or be late to class, please let me know ahead of time. If you are absent due to a University-sanctioned activity, emergency, or health issue, I need written proof.

Please note that in-class assignments will not be announced ahead of time. An unexcused absence will result in a zero for any in-class assignments that are missed.

Academic Dishonesty/Plagiarism

Work submitted for this course must adhere to the Code of Academic Responsibility and Conduct as cited in the Handbook of Student Policies:

The academic community is operated on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. Occasionally, this trust is violated when cheating occurs, either inadvertently or deliberately. This code will serve as the guideline for cases where cheating, plagiarism [written or oral], or other academic improprieties have occurred...Faculty members may fail the student for the particular assignment, test, or course involved, or they may recommend that the student drop the course in question, or these penalties may be varied with the gravity of the offense and the circumstances of the particular case. (p. 65)

Academic Honesty Defined

All written work and oral presentations must respect the intellectual rights of others. Statements lifted word-for-word from the publications must be cited as quotations. Ideas, summaries or paraphrased material, and other information taken from the literature must be properly referenced. (Guidelines for the Preparation of Disquisitions, The Graduate School, NDSU: p. 4)

Grievance Procedure

Occasionally, students are dissatisfied with some dimension of the course. In such cases, students should first schedule a meeting with the instructor. If the student and instructor cannot reach a satisfactory resolution, the student should schedule a meeting with the Basic Course Director to discuss the issue. Students who remain dissatisfied should schedule a similar meeting with the Head of the Department of Communication.

Special Needs

Any students who need special accommodations for learning or who have special needs are invited to share these concerns or requests with the instructor as early as possible. Personally I was very sick one semester and missed a lot of school, so I know things happen, big and small. I'm very understanding of students who have special needs but you need to make an effort to tell me about any issues you have sooner rather than later in the semester.

Blackboard

This course requires the use of Blackboard and email. Assignments, the syllabus, grades, and other course information will be found on Blackboard. Students are responsible for reading announcements and emails from the class.

Email

As a media writer, you will do much professional communication via email. It's imperative that you appear competent in your emails, as you represent a larger organization (for this class, you represent NDSU when you speak with people in the community). Emails are often your first contact with a source, so you want to appear as credible as possible.

Guidelines for professional emails include:

- Proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation (no text speak)
- Clear subject lines
- Proper address. Use the person's real name (don't start with "Hey!") and use a title if warranted.
- Close the email as you'd close a letter, and be sure to put your name!

These guidelines apply to any emails you send me as well. I respond to student emails promptly and will gladly answer any questions you have about the course, but you must write a proper email. For instance, I am not a professor, so address me by my first name, not "Professor Frohlich." If your email suggests that you have the writing competency of a 10-year-old, I will not respond.

Tentative Daily Schedule – COMM 200 – Spring 2011 – Tu/Th

Major assignments are listed in capital letters. Quizzes, worksheets, in-class activities and other smaller assignments will be announced throughout the semester.

Please note that this schedule will probably change before the semester is over

Date	Topic	Assignment/Have Read
T, Jan. 11	Course & Instructor Introduction	
R, Jan. 13	Why is Journalism Important? What is News?	Chapter 1
T, Jan. 18	Grammar	Chapter 2
R, Jan 20	AP Style	Chapter 3
T, Jan. 25	AP Style 2; Assign Hard News Story	
R, Jan. 27	Topic Selection; Interviewing	Chapter 4
T, Feb.1	Lead Writing	Chapter 5
R, Feb. 3	Story Structure and Using Quotations	
T, Feb. 8	Writing Coaching on Hard News Story	
R, Feb. 10	In-class work day	
T, Feb. 15	HARD NEWS STORY DUE; Assign Online Story	
R, Feb. 17	Writing Online 1	Chapter 7
T, Feb. 22	Writing Online 2	Chapter 8
R, Feb. 24	Grammar and AP Style 3	
T, March 1	In-class work day	
R, March 3	Journalism Ethics	Chapter 12
T, March 8	ONLINE STORY DUE; Assign Feature Story	
R, March 10	Features and Profiles	Chapter 6
T, March 15	No Class: Spring Break	
R, March 17	No Class: Spring Break	
T, March 22	Nontraditional/Soft/Feature Lead Writing	
R, March 24	Writing Coaching on Feature Story	
T, March 29	In-class work day	
R, March 31	FEATURE STORY DUE; Assign Press Release	
T, April 5	Advertising and Public Relations	Chapter 10
R, April 7	Public Relations 2	Chapter 11
T, April 12	Writing Coaching on Press Release	
R, April 14	In-class work day	
T, April 19	PRESS RELEASE DUE; Assign Broadcast Presentations	Chapter 9
R, April 21	Possible Guest Speaker	
T, April 26	Broadcast Writing 1	
R, April 28	Broadcast Writing 2	
T, May 3	Group Writing Coaching on Broadcast Scripts	
R, May 5	Group work day	Last day for Extra Credit
May 11, Wednesday 1 p.m.	Final Exam Period: Broadcast Group Presentations	Email your broadcast script to me BEFORE class starts