

COMM 221: Mass Media Writing

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Official Course Description

Course Title: COMM 221 Mass Media Writing

An introduction to mass media writing formats, styles, and conventions for print journalism, broadcasting, advertising, and public relations. The basic formats, techniques, and professional principles needed to develop skills in writing news stories, press releases, broadcast, advertising, and Web copy.

Credits

3 credits

Course Prerequisites

Internet access.

Overview

This course will cover 14 weeks and is divided into eight modules. Each module includes readings, videos, discussion, and assignments. Please pay close attention to the Course Schedule for the dates for the modules and the discussions and assignments contained within them.

1. Introduction to Mass Media Writing
2. Writing Style and the AP Stylebook
3. Writing for the Media
4. Writing for Print Journalism
5. Writing for Broadcast Journalism
6. Writing for Advertising
7. Public Relations and Media Law
8. Final Thoughts

Each module consists of documents which contain module-at-a-glance, reading assignments, learning activities, and a discussion area. The module-at-a-glance will detail the module start and end dates, an overview of the module and the reading and learning activities are to be completed. The average study time for a 3 credit course is 9 to 12 hours per week (reading, writing, research, discussions, etc.) over the next 14 weeks to complete this course. I believe you will find this course interesting, challenging, thought provoking and fun. I look forward to getting to know each of you and working with you throughout this term.

This course will be delivered online using the Blackboard Learning Management System. All interactions and content for the course will take place within Blackboard. It is important that you actively participate online at least three times a week. Delivery of instruction will include lecture, facilitated discussion, peer review critiques, and writing assignments.

Required Course Materials

Textbooks:

- Stovall, James Glen. Writing for the Mass Media. 9th ed. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2015 ISBN: 0133863271
- Christian, Darrell; Jacobsen, Sally and Minthorn, David. Eds. The Associated Press 2015 Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 2015 ISBN: 978-0-917360-58-9

Texts and additional course materials will provide you with the foundation readings for this course. In addition to the required texts, you will read articles and other online materials.

To purchase course materials, you may purchase them through the bookstore or through Amazon.com.

Periodicals:

You will find it essential during your academic program, as well as in your professional career later, to stay up-to-date on current events. Those events, as reflected in mass media, change constantly. To maintain current knowledge, you should read a major newspaper every day, either online or in print. You might select the New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today or other major daily. You also will find it helpful to read a regional newspaper each day and a weekly newsmagazine such as Time or Newsweek.

Now is the time to start reading professional journals such as PR Reporter (public relations) Editor & Publisher (newspapers), Broadcasting & Cable (radio and TV), Folio (magazines), Publisher's Weekly (books), Advertising Age (advertising). All of the above have affiliated websites and blogs.

- PR Reporter <http://www.ragan.com>
- Editor & Publisher <http://www.editorandpublisher.com>
- Broadcasting & Cable <http://broadcastingandcable.com>
- Folio <http://www.foliomag.com>
- Publisher's Weekly <http://publishersweekly.com>
- Advertising Age <http://adage.com>

Required Software/Hardware

You may be asked to explore interactive, media rich websites using the Internet. Some may use multimedia components, such as audio tracks, video, etc. The multimedia features provide a richer experience for the viewer by using sound and movement to make content come alive. Your computer should have a sound and video card. Some of these sites require you to download special software programs called plug-ins. Plug-ins allow your web browser (Internet Explorer, Firefox, etc.) to view or play certain types of files. The plug-ins are free and download quickly.

Additional Resources

One of the great advantages of online learning is the access to a wealth of resources. Locate library and research information for topics covered in this course using the links at the MBC Grafton Library at <http://libguides.marybaldwin.edu/home/>.

Research Tips

Should you be required to conduct some research during this course, don't wait until the night before your assignment is due to begin to search for information such as journal articles, books, web sites, etc. to support your work in this course. The Grafton Library can help you locate much of the information you need, either online or at a library near you.

Goals

Mass Media Writing introduces you to the challenges of writing for the mass media and develops your basic skills in producing copy for newspapers, television, advertising, public relations and the internet. This course introduces the basic formats, techniques and professional principles needed to develop skills in writing news stories, press releases, broadcast copy and to undertake news media analysis. This course will raise your awareness of writing standards in the communications industries, including Associated Press print style.

Another purpose of the course is to provide a medium for the student to develop as a critical and analytical thinker, as an observer, and as a communicator. The course fosters critical thinking, careful viewing, and writing skills through discussion and written assignments.

Objectives

Mass Media Writing is designed to enable you to:

- Demonstrate the basic formats, styles and conventions for writing copy for broadcasting, print journalism, advertising, public relations, and the web.
- Write news stories and press releases using inverted pyramid structure and Associated Press style.
- Analyze news content, including print, broadcast and web news structures.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional news values, principles, ethics, codes, standards and practices.

Learning Activities

You will be asked to complete the following types of learning activities in this course, each with its own purpose:

Readings

The texts for this course were specifically chosen for readability and usefulness. The readings and other materials are intended to help you understand the nature of mass media writing, and how they relate to course topics and society. You'll read and learn about various types and styles of writing and its impact upon society.

The course readings are required and tie into the discussions and assignments throughout the course.

Discussions

The discussions are intended to help you further explore and think critically about the information you are studying. I expect you to be an active participant. There are one to two discussion areas in each module. In each discussion, I expect you to respond to the initial question, respond to at least 2 other students, and reply to others who reply to your comments. Also, I expect you to properly cite your references both in discussions and other assignments. Participation in all discussion areas is mandatory.

Written Assignments

There are short news stories in each module based upon the readings, discussions, and personal reflection.

When you submit your written assignments, please submit them in the appropriate assignment area in Blackboard as double spaced WORD file attachments. You will be required to document sources using the MLA Format. For help with writing, contact the Writing Center at http://www.marybaldwin.edu/writing_center/.

Final Course Evaluation

METHOD AND CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION: Through discussion and written assignments, students were expected to show understanding of main concepts presented in the texts and course materials. They were expected to discuss these concepts using the vocabulary of the field and to apply the concepts to your writing. Written work was evaluated using the following criteria: sufficient depth of thought and careful analysis; synthesis of information from various sources; accurate and complete response to the assignment; adequate comprehension and application of vocabulary and writing styles; and clear and coherent writing (clear thesis, structure, language use, and correct documentation).

Your semester grade will be based on the total point score for work you do during the course.

Participation in Course Discussion Area	20%
<i>Please Note: Each discussion response must have a minimum of 125 words, spell checked, well written and citing references in support of arguments.</i>	
AP Stylebook Exam	10%
Final Draft – Print News Story	15%
<i>Please Note: There is a required first draft for the Print News, Broadcast News, Ad Copy and Press Release assignments. It is 15% of the final grade for each of these assignments.</i>	
Final Draft – Broadcast News Story	15%
Final Draft – Ad Copy (Group Project)	15%
Final Draft – Press Release	15%
Original News Story	10%
Total:	100%

Criteria I will be using to evaluate your performance:

Hierarchy of Evaluation Categories: Vermont Portfolio Project

Exceptional Achievement: The student produces convincingly argued evaluation or proposal; identifies a subject, describes it appropriately, and asserts a judgment of it; gives reasons and specific evidence to support the argument; engages the reader immediately, moves along logically and coherently and provides closure; reflects awareness of reader's questions or alternative evaluations. Assignment demonstrates extensive mastery of facts, skills, and concepts, including concepts from different readings and authorities whose ideas are examined. Writing quality in terms of grammar, punctuation, usage, structure, etc., as well as reader engagement is excellent. Evidence of originality, creative thinking. Evidence of mastery of course content --- including readings and other resources.

Commendable Achievement: The student produces well-argued evaluation; identifies, describes, and judges its subject; gives reasons and evidence to support the argument; is engaging, logical, attentive to the reader's concerns; is more conventional or predictable than the writer of an exceptional assignment. Evidence of mastery of course content.

Adequate Achievement: The student produces adequately argued evaluation; identifies and judges its subject; gives at least one moderately developed reason to support the argument; lacks the authority and polish of the writer of an exceptional or commendable assignment; produces writing that, although focused and coherent, may be uneven; usually describes the subject more than necessary and argues a judgment less than necessary. Less evidence of mastery of course content. Weak in terms of analysis, dealing conceptually and critically with ideas.

Source: Vermont State Department of Education (1991). *This is My Best: Vermont's Writing Assessment Program*. Montpelier, VT: Vermont State Department of Education.

Discussion evaluation

Your discussion grade, in general, is based upon participation, relevance, depth, and completeness of responses. You are expected to understand and apply concepts. More specifically, I will evaluate your discussion work based on the following:

- **Frequency:** Log on at least 3 times a week for a reasonable amount of time (e.g., very short log-ons are not enough!). Use this time to participate in the discussions and to post assignments. For "attendance" purposes, make sure you post every time you log on to the course.
- **Amount:** In the discussions, post at least 1 response to the initial questions and respond to at least 2 submissions posted by others (at a minimum). You are also expected to reply to other students who respond to your comments as appropriate.

- **Timing:** Maintain currency in discussions. Post your discussion responses in the discussions starting within the first few days the module is open.
- **Content:** This is the most important criterion! Maintain quality in the discussion questions you ask and answer. A high quality post contains information from the course materials or another valid source, or applies a concept or process from the materials in a meaningful way, or facilitates understanding of the course material. In other words, ask serious, thoughtful questions, and answer in the same way. Use good grammar, not "Internet Slang." If other students are not participating in your discussion threads, find out why and do something about it.

Written Assignments

Written assignments will be evaluated for:

- Attention to the characteristics of the style of writing
- Specificity of response
- Clarity of response
- Correct grammar, punctuation, and sentence structure
- Clear introduction, body, and conclusion in essays
- Clear linkage of ideas

The written work for this course involves writing new stories in a variety of formats as well as a presentation. All papers require two types of thinking, both of which characterize advanced-level work: ANALYSIS and SYNTHESIS.

ANALYSIS means that you need to be able to break something down, examine its parts, and then put those parts back together in a meaningful way.

Class Attendance Policies

Regular class attendance is important to the educational experience of each student and to the academic integrity of the college curriculum. Students are expected to be active on a weekly basis at least three times a week from the beginning of the semester. Regular class attendance is a student responsibility. A student is responsible for all the work, including tests and written work.

MBC E-mail Requirement

You are required to keep your MBC email account active. Your account must be active by the start of classes. After registering for this course, the professor will send an e-mail to your MBC account, welcoming you to this course.

ET Policy

An extension (ET) for this course will be given only under unusual circumstances. ETs will only be granted if at least 50% of the required coursework has been submitted and received “acceptable” grades (>70% per assignment). In addition, students seeking ETs must have been in communication with me to apprise me of their situation.

Disability Policy

Any student with a documented disability needing academic adjustments is requested to speak directly to Learning Skills Center. Students who need these services Can find more information at http://www.marybaldwin.edu/learning_skills/swd/.

Student Honor Code

Students have the responsibility to know and observe the MBC Honor Code at <http://www.marybaldwin.edu/student/sga/honorcode/>.

Believing in the principles of student government, I pledge myself to uphold the ideals and regulations of the Mary Baldwin College community. I recognize the principles of honor and cooperation as the basis of our life together. I shall endeavor faithfully to order my life accordingly. I will not lie, cheat, steal, plagiarize, or violate my pledge of confidentiality. I will encourage others to fulfill the ideals of the honor system and will meet my responsibility to the community by reporting incidents of honor offenses.