

MCM 360: Feature Writing  
Credit: 3 Hours  
Fall 2007

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**Office hours:** Monday: 3-7 p.m; Tuesday: 3-6 p.m. Wednesday: All day (by appointment). Thursday: noon-1:30 p.m.; Friday: by appointment.

### Required materials & Readings

Strunk and White: *The Elements of Style*

AP Stylebook (latest edition)

Weekly Reading – stories provided by M. Blackman

### Course Objectives

To learn the art of feature writing, including news features, personality profiles, and opinion pieces (columns and editorials).

To reach a level of skill that you may produce publishable stories.

### Methods

In this course, we will approach the stories from the ground up, e.g., starting with the origin of story ideas, what distinguishes a feature from a news story, how to research and interview; how to organize and find the right approach to the story. Then: how to write a good lead, develop it, and then transition into the body of the story, and, finally, how to properly end the story with a “kicker” that say *The End* with a flair. Then comes the fun part: editing and rewriting. All along we will learn how to make good use of quotes and attribution, background material and scenes that illustrate and pull the reader forward. We’ll learn how to get to the point, write tight, write precisely and in active voice. We’ll learn why it’s unwise to mix voices in a story – remember, unless you’re writing a column or personal essay, you’re telling someone else’s story, not yours. (Keep your *I* and *me* to yourself.)

These things we’ll learn by doing – by practicing writing techniques through frequent exercises, by studying the work of other good writers, and by writing several full-length stories during the semester. We’ll talk a lot about writing: discussions in which I expect you to vigorously engage. We’ll also have occasional professional writers speak to our class.

Read every chance you can the local newspapers, including *The Houstonian*, *Huntsville Item* and the *Houston Chronicle*. Seek out writers whose stories you enjoy and study how they put their words together, make their points, entertain you – i.e., how they tell a good story.

## Required Work

This class includes lectures, writing exercises, quizzes (Strunk & White), and at least four full-length stories that should be publishable in *The Houstonian* or the *Huntsville Item*.

## Grading

**Writing assignments:** 30 percent; **Attendance/exercises/class participation:** 30 percent; **Mid-term exam:** 15 percent; **Final exam:** 25 percent.

## Worth remembering

Don't miss class, don't be late. If you miss more than a three classes, your grade will likely suffer. Be respectful of your classmates – don't be a distraction: please stay off the computer unless you're doing a story exercise. Hold off on your text messages. Don't be afraid to ask questions, or to take chances with your writing. And don't take shortcuts, ever, when it comes to fairness, accuracy and ethics: you do so, you risk your reputation and career. And remember: We're all in this together, and we're all still learning. The neat thing about writing: you can improve every day, for the rest of your days. . What could be more fun? Good luck.

## SHSU Student Syllabus Guidelines

You may find online a more detailed description of the following policies. These guidelines will also provide you with a link to the specific university policy or procedure:

<http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus/>

**Academic Dishonesty:** Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines.*

**Classroom Rules of Conduct:** Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. Students are to treat faculty and students with respect. Students are to turn off all cell phones while in the classroom. Under no circumstances are cell phones or any electronic devices to be used or seen during times of examination. Students may tape record lectures provided they do not disturb other students in the process.

**Student Absences on Religious Holy Days:** Students are allowed to miss class and other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Students remain responsible for all work. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines.*

**Students with Disabilities Policy:** It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance should visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. *See Student Syllabus Guidelines.*

**Visitors in the Classroom:** Only registered students may attend class. Exceptions can be made on a case-by-case basis by the professor. In all cases, visitors must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. Students wishing to audit a class must apply to do so through the Registrar's Office.

