

**COURSE SYLLABUS**  
**MCM 132.03 -- INTRODUCTION TO MEDIA WRITING**  
**SPRING 2008**

**Class Meetings: MCM 132.03 MWF 12-12:50 P.M., Dan Rather Bldg, Room 205**

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**Office: Rm. 208, DR Bldg.**  
**Office Hrs: MWF 9:30-11 a.m., or by**  
appointment between 2:30-3:30 p.m.;  
TTh 10-11:30 a.m., 2:30-3:30 p.m. or by  
appointment.

**REQUIRED MATERIALS**

**James G. Stovall, *Writing for the Mass Media, 6<sup>th</sup> Ed.***

**Bring the above workbook to class every day!**

**Kessler & McDonald: *When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed.***

Begin by bringing the above book to class daily. I'll tell you when you can stop.

**CATALOGUE DESCRIPTION**

Our program emphasis is on the preparation of ethical and technologically proficient communication professionals who are capable of making a positive impact on their environment and on society. Our graduates will acquire skills for today's media marketplace and also develop the broader, theoretical background for:

- Negotiating convergence in the communications fields;
- Communicating with and servicing diverse populations;
- Understanding the economic and political pressures on professional integrity; and
- Intelligently assessing and interpreting unfolding events.

**PREREQUISITE: ENGLISH 164 with at least a C.**

**CREDIT: 3 hours**

**METHODS**

This Mass Communication core course is a beginning level course in writing for American mass media. The skills stressed in this class are applicable in a wide variety of situations, including traditional print journalism, broadcast journalism, public relations, and online journalism. Good writing, however, in the sense of using the language for effective communications, is a valuable tool in almost any vocation. So this is **not** purely a journalism course.

Good writing cannot be learned from a book. The best way to learn to write well is to do a lot of it, have it critiqued, and apply the suggestions from the critiques. We will write a lot in this class—nearly every day that we meet. Much of your homework will involve writing as well. This means a lot of work for you (as well as for your instructor, who must read it all). You **MUST** organize your life to handle the workload and not fall behind in the class.

In the class we will often use discussion as our method of understanding new information. That **DEMANDS** that you do the required reading **PRIOR** to coming to class, and that you be prepared to contribute to the class discussion. If you have nothing to say, I shall

assume that you did not do your homework, and I shall adjust your daily grade accordingly—**DOWNWARD**, of course.

*“Good work habits help develop an internal toughness and a self confident attitude that will sustain you through every adversity and temporary discouragement.”*

**--Paul Meyer, 1975**

## **PURPOSE**

This course serves as the foundation for the sequence of writing courses required of mass communication majors, whether they are pursuing print, broadcast, online, or public relations.

Objectives include the following:

- To develop creative capacities in writing for print and broadcast media, public relations, and online;
- To learn to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view;
- To develop a clearer understanding of, and commitment to, personal values;
- To reinforce effective, grammatical use of the English language;
- To achieve a broader understanding of the American media environment.

## **CLASS STRUCTURE**

This course will include a combination of lectures, drills, quizzes, laboratory work and exams. Since this is almost entirely a writing lab, you will have the opportunity for individual attention if you need help. Do not hesitate to ask questions about material you do not fully understand. This course is the basis for all of your future mass communication writing classes, and it is essential that you master these skills during this course.

Reading good writing is also important to developing strong writing skills. To do well in this class, read textbook assignments before coming to class. Also, try to read a daily newspaper or news online and watch/listen to radio and TV newscasts regularly. We will refer to what's happening in the news as part of our class and look for examples of the types of stories you are writing. We will also have at least eight (8) daily quizzes on material being studied in class as well as current events—based on stories in *The Houstonian*, daily newspapers, news magazines, online, and broadcast accounts of the daily news.

## **ATTENDANCE**

You are expected to attend class regularly and to keep up with assignments. **You will be responsible for any assignments made during class in your presence or absence.** You are expected to be **on time** for class, to be prepared, to meet deadlines, and to participate in class discussions.

Class attendance is expected and will be noted. After three (3) absences, you will be referred to First Alert or the Advising Center and 5 points may be deducted for each additional absence (unless there is a documented family or personal emergency). **Remember:** You are responsible for dropping if you stop attending class.

You are responsible for making up missed work as soon as you return to class, if you have a valid excuse. You will receive a **0** daily grade for class work or a daily quiz done in class when you're absent. Homework grades will convert to **0** if not turned in by the next class after an absence—with a lower grade because of tardiness—if you do not have a documented excuse.

If you miss a class, you have until the beginning of class on the next class day to get the work to me without it counting as late.

## **REQUIRED WORK**

All class work and homework will be critiqued and graded, and form part of your grade. Deadlines are critical in the media; therefore, we shall observe them in this class.

Early in the term, don't be too concerned about grades. Many students improve rapidly as they master the skills. I am primarily concerned about your ability when you complete the course. If you have English grammar, composition or spelling problems, get help from the Writing Center in the Farrington Building (next to the Estill Bldg.), Room 111. If you have other problems, please confer with me before they become crises.

Learning to write is like a sport: The more you do it, the more you will improve. You will get a lot of practice, and you must make time in your personal schedule to do the work. You should expect to spend at least two out-of-class hours of preparation for every hour you spend in class.

**GRADES** are weighted as follows:

Daily attendance and participation 10%;

Class exercises/daily quizzes 20%;

Homework 20%;

Two midterm exams and two major projects 30%;

Final exam 20%.

Grades are assigned on the following scale: 9.8=A+; 9.4=A; 9.1=A-; 8.8=B+; 8.4=B; 8.1=B-; 7.8=C+; 7.4=C; 7.1=C-; 6.8=D+; 6.4=D; 6.1=D-; 5.0=F; 0=0. An A level means nearly professional quality; a B is very good, but with some problems; C is adequate quality; D is barely acceptable.

I start grading everyone at a C. Based on past experience, I expect two to three of you to reach an A level and a few of you a B level. That means the majority of you will make Cs. Throughout the semester I shall announce extra-credit assignments, which are not required. If they are not replacements for missed work, they provide true extra credit and help your grade.

**A WORD ABOUT COPYING AND PLAGIARIZING:** These are not leaning techniques! **THEY ARE CHEATING!** At the least, cheating will earn you a zero on your work in progress. See **ACADEMIC HONESTY** in "Classroom Policies" for what else may happen to you. In order to be a success in any field of Mass Communications, you must have a strong sense of ethics on the job as well as throughout your life.

**There will be no eating, drinking, or using any electronic equipment unless it is a part of the lesson for the day!**

**YOU WILL RECEIVE A "0" ON DAILY WORK FOR ANY DAY YOUR CELL PHONE GOES OFF DURING CLASS.** You will also receive a "0" on daily work if I observe you playing games, doing homework or work for another class.

**Do not wear hoods or any other head gear, including ball caps, during class. I wish to see your eyes at all times. Participation in classroom discussions and other activities is mandatory if you wish to learn all that is available to you in this class. Some of the**

**material that we will cover is not included in your textbook. If you are not paying attention or are asleep or absent, you will not get it.**

## **EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES**

Our classroom is equipped with Dell GX270 computers, with a 2.6 GHz processor, 1GB memory, a 40GB hard drive, and a Read/Write CD. Computer orientation and software training will be available for those of you who have not used the computers previously.

You will have storage space on the lab server; however, you may also wish to purchase a CD for backup storage.

## **Classroom Policies**

### **ACADEMIC HONESTY**

Ethical behavior is the cornerstone of responsible journalism. Honesty is expected—and demanded—of all students.

The University expects all students to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. Furthermore, the University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work that is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

Students found guilty of dishonest behavior in this class will be asked to leave the class and will be given the grade of F for the entire course.

### **PROPER CLASSROOM DEMEANOR OR CONDUCT**

According to the Student Handbook, “Students will refrain from behavior in the classroom that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process and, thus, impedes the mission of the university. Please turn off or mute your cellular phone and/or pager before class begins. Students are prohibited from eating in class, using tobacco products, making offensive remarks, reading newspapers, sleeping, talking among themselves at inappropriate times, wearing inappropriate clothing, or engaging in any other form of distraction. Inappropriate behavior in the classroom shall result in, minimally, a directive to leave class, or being reported to the Dean of Students for disciplinary action in accordance with university policy.”

### **FREEDOM OF SPEECH**

The students’ right to speak on the topics of their choice will be upheld in the class. Choice of topic, values and beliefs will not be judged. Audience members are expected to respect the views of their classmates.

### **STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that no otherwise qualified disabled individual shall, solely by reason of his/her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the

benefits of, or be subjected to discriminations under any academic, Student Life program or activity. Students with disabilities may request academic assistance when needed from a Committee for Continuing Academic Assistance for Disabled Students by visiting the director of the Counseling Center, located in the annex of the Lee Drain building across the sidewalk from Farrington Building, or call 936-294-1702. Accommodations for disabled students are decided based upon documentation and need on a case-by-case basis by the Counseling Center.

### **RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS**

University policy states that a student who is absent from class for the observance of a religious holy day must take the examination or complete any assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence. The student, not later than the 15<sup>th</sup> calendar day after the first day of the semester, or the 7<sup>th</sup> calendar day after the first day of a summer session, must notify the instructor of each scheduled class that he/she would be absent for a religious holy day (Faculty Handbook, 1.02-2).

### **VISITORS IN THE CLASSROOM**

Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted in the classroom. They must not present a disruption to the class by their attendance. If the visitor is not a registered student, it is at the instructor's discretion whether or not the visitor will be allowed to remain in the classroom.

### **BE AWARE OF THE DROP POLICY**

A Q-drop is a drop made after the last date for tuition refunds (the 12<sup>th</sup> class day for fall/spring; the 4<sup>th</sup> class day for summer sessions), but before the date for which a drop would result in the grade of "F" as published in the Academic Calendar.

Students will be allowed no more than five (5) Q-drops during their academic career at Sam Houston State University. Classes that are dropped prior to the Q-Drop date will not count toward the limit. Students who have used their limit of (5) Q-Drops will need to petition their respective dean to drop a class. If the dean refuses permission to drop a class, a student will be required to remain in the class.

This limit took effect at the start of the fall 2004 semester. Any drops accumulated prior to the fall of 2004 will not be included in the five Q-Drop limit, nor will Q-Drops from other universities.

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**MCM 132.03 TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE  
SPRING 2008**

Week 1—Jan. 16	Intro to course and lab; write autobiography	
Jan 18	Grammar review, active/passive voice	WMM --Ch. 2
Week 2 – Jan 21	MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY	
Jan 23	Grammar Diagnostic	WMM—Ch. 3
Jan. 25	How does JRN writing differ from English?	WMM—Ch. 4
Week 3 Jan 28	News values	WMM—Ch. 5
Jan 30	Writing news leads	
Feb. 1	Let’s write more leads!	
Week 4 Feb. 4	Story body, attribution, sources	WMM—Ch. 5
Feb. 6	Quotations, paraphrases	Handout
Feb. 8	Copyediting symbols, AP style	WMM—Ch. 3, handouts
Week 5 Feb.. 11	Let’s write another news story!	
Feb.. 13	Complex stories	TBA
Feb. 15	Revising stories—localize, update, rewrite	WMM, Ch. 4-5
Week 6 Feb. 18	Speech and meeting stories	WMM, Ch. 5 exercises
Feb. 20	Review for FIRST MID-SEMESTER EXAM	
Feb. 22	FIRST MID-SEMESTER EXAM	Review Sheet
Week 7 Feb. 25	How does a feature differ from a hard news story?	WMM, Ch. 5
Feb. 27	Delayed leads	WMM, Ch. 5, news clips
Feb. 29	Write more delayed leads	
Week 8 Mar 3	Write with color and imagery	Handout
Mar 5	Interviewing techniques	WMM, pp. 84-89

	Mar 7	Feature writing, transitions	WMM, pp. 140-144
	Mar 10-14	SPRING BREAK	
Week 9	Mar 17	Practicing feature elements in class	
	Mar 19	IN-CLASS GUEST INTERVIEW	
	Mar 21	EASTER HOLIDAY	
Week 10	Mar 24	Differences in writing for the WWW	WMM, Ch. 6
	Mar 26	Web summaries, leads, headlines, labels	WMM, Ch. 6
	Mar 28	Web page writing, design	
Week 11	Mar 31	Review for <b>2<sup>nd</sup> Mid-Semester Exam</b>	Review sheet
	Apr 2	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Mid-Semester Exam</b>	
	Apr 4	Reporting and writing for radio and television	WMM, Ch. 7
Week 12	Apr 7	Writing a radio newscast	
	Apr 9	Radio terminology	
	Apr 11	Writing 3-minute radio news shows	
Week 13	Apr 14	Patter, timing, lead-ins and -outs on actualities	
	Apr 16	Critiquing others' radio performances	
	Apr 18	How is news for TV different from news for radio?	
Week 14	Apr 21	Blocking, documentaries, snappers and other terms	
	Apr. 23	Team Anchoring: 12-minute broadcasts—choose stories carefully, practice!	
	Apr. 25	Complete team presentations	
Week 15	Apr 28	Writing for public relations	WMM, Ch. 9
	Apr 30	PR news releases	WMM, Ch. 9
	May 2	Communication law	WMM, Ch. 10

Week 16	May 5	Media ethics	WMM, Ch. 10
	May 7	FINAL EXAM review	Review sheet
	May 9	ALL CAMPUS STUDY DAY (no classes)	

**FINAL EXAMINATION**

MCM 132.03                      2-4 p.m.                      .                      Monday, May12, 2008