

MCM 132: Writing for Mass Media

Spring 2008 (3 hours credit)

Classes: Section 04 meets from 9:30-10:50 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays in CJC A111.

Section 07 meets from 11 a.m. to 12:20 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays in CJC A111.

Instructor: Beverly Narum Roth, adjunct instructor of Mass Communication

Office: Room 128, Dan Rather Communication Building

Office hours: 8:30-9:20 a.m. and 2-3 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays or by appointment

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Course Description

As stated in the catalog, *Writing for Mass Media* is designed to introduce writing for media across a wide spectrum of disciplines. This course will provide hands-on practice in basic writing skills for print, broadcast, the Web and public relations. Emphasis is placed on the enhancement of language and grammar skills. (Prerequisite: Grade of C in ENG 164 or equivalent.)

Course Objectives

This course will serve as the foundation for writing courses required of mass communication students whether they are pursuing an emphasis in print, public relations or broadcast. The key objectives include:

- Writing basic news stories for print, the Internet, PR and broadcast;
- Reinforcing effective, grammatical use of English;
- Specific grammar emphasis will include identifying different types of sentences; mastering subject-verb agreement and general agreement throughout sentences; and using active voice and vivid verbs in sentences;
- Achieving a broader understanding of American media;
- Fulfilling personal goals for this class.

Our Approach

Two things are critical in learning to write journalistically – writing and reading good work. The best way to learn to write well is to write, have the work critiqued and apply lessons learned. Thus we often will write in class and have writing assignments for homework.

We will start with an emphasis on writing basic news stories for newspapers or Web sites. This type of writing requires an ability to gather information, organize it and present it clearly to readers. From this foundation, we will explore other types of journalistic writing.

We will refer to what's happening in the news as part of our class and look for examples of types of stories we are writing. So try to read a daily newspaper (in print or online) and/or a weekly news magazine. Monitor radio and television newscasts. Current events may be included in quizzes. (Note: Free copies of newspapers are available on campus Monday through Friday.)

Class structure

This course includes lectures, writing assignments, grammar practice and quizzes. We will have two mid-semester exams, a trio of short projects and a final.

Information discussed in each class lays the foundation for future classes so **it is essential to come to class regularly and punctually**. Also, mass communication is a business built on deadlines. For these reason, **NO LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED** without advance permission from me, a doctor's note confirming illness or other documentation to justify an excused absence. If you are absent, check Blackboard for homework assignments. *It is your responsibility to keep up with assignments.*

Textbooks, etc.

Our main text is *Writing for the Mass Media* by James Glen Stovall (sixth edition). Bring this text to class each day since we often will do exercises.

Our grammar text is *When Words Collide* by Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald (sixth or seventh edition). We will use this as our grammar supplement and as a reference tool.

You also need access to a daily newspaper and/or daily newspaper or television news Web site.

Attendance Policy

Class attendance will be recorded. Anyone with perfect attendance (also never tardy) will receive five bonus points added to the classwork/homework total. Anyone absent more than **three times** will lose five points from the classwork/homework total for **each** additional absence. Advice: Save your absences for illness or emergencies.

Exams

We will have two mid-semester exams and a final in this class. All three will include objective questions (multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, editing for grammar and style, short answer) and a writing section (story leads, short stories, stories based on in-class interviews).

If you miss an exam, you must have a doctor's note or some other verifiable explanation for your absence to be able to make up the exam. You must be prepared to take the exam as soon as you return to regular classes.

Grading Plan

Grading for daily and homework assignments will be done on a 10-point scale as follows:
9.8-10 = 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-; 5.9 or below = F

A grade in the A range means nearly professional quality; B is very good but with some problems; C is adequate quality but needs some work; D is barely acceptable.

Please keep copies of all graded assignments for review on tests or for dispute resolution. You may ask to review your grades or review how an assignment was graded during my office hours.

Here's the breakdown for your final grades:

- Class exercises/quizzes/homework: 50 percent
- Mid-semester exams: 20 percent (10 percent each)
- Three short projects: 10 percent
- Final exam: 20 percent

Academic Dishonesty

All students are expected 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.

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 which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

In this class, plagiarizing or cheating on an assignment or test will result in a grade of zero for that work and possible failure of the course. If you use any material in a written assignment that is not general knowledge, the information should be properly attributed. If you are uncertain about whether you might be plagiarizing, please discuss this with me.

Americans with Disabilities Act

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded from participation in any academic program solely because of their disability. 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 are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state and local laws, regulations and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

Religious Holidays

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

"Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

Visitors in the Classroom

Unannounced visitors to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted into 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. This policy is not intended to discourage the occasional visiting of classes by responsible persons. Obviously, however, the visiting of a particular class should be occasional and not regular, and it should in no way constitute interference with registered members of the class or the educational process.

Instructor Evaluations

Each student will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form toward the end of the semester.

Classroom Rules of Conduct

This class will adhere to the Code of Student Conduct and Discipline found at <https://www.shsu.edu/students/guide/dean/codeofconduct.html>.

Here are the specific things that are important to me:

Students will refrain from behavior in the classroom that intentionally or unintentionally disrupts the learning process.

Cellular telephones, pagers, iPods and any other electronic devices must be **turned off and put away** before class begins. I will give a warning for a first offense; **repeated offenses will result in loss of points from your classwork/homework grade at a rate of five points per offense.**

Do NOT send text messages or answer a vibrating phone during class or **I will ask you to put your phone on my desk until the end of class.**

Please turn off the computer screen while instructors or guests are talking unless otherwise instructed or by permission.

Avoid reading newspapers (unless part of an assignment), sleeping, talking at inappropriate times and wearing inappropriate clothing. Do not wear hats that shade faces. Plan ahead to avoid disrupting class for restroom breaks.

Engage in lively discussion, but respect the opinions of others.

Sam Houston Writing Center

The Writing Center provides free services to SHSU students, faculty and staff. It is located in Farrington Building, Room 111. Use this resource to improve your writing skills and perhaps your grades.