

MCM 132: Introduction to Media Writing

Fall 2007

Classes: Section 06 meets from 8-9:20 a.m. TTh in CB 205
Section 07 meets from 2-3:20 p.m. TTh in LD 203

Instructor: Beverly Narum Roth, adjunct instructor of Mass Communication
Office: Room 128, Dan Rather Communication Building
Office hours: 9:30-11 a.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays or by appointment
Phone: 713.256.6533 (cell); 936.294.3977 (office); 936.327.2107 (Livingston)
E-mail: JRN_BXR@shsu.edu (You can click this in Blackboard along with email addresses for all your classmates.)

Required materials

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

When Words Collide by Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald. We will use this as our grammar supplement and as a reference tool.

Access to a daily newspaper and/or daily newspaper Web site.

Catalog description

Designed to introduce writing for media across a wide spectrum of disciplines, this course will provide hands-on practice in basic writing skills for news, broadcast, the Web and public relations. Emphasis is placed on the enhancement of language and grammar skills. Credits: 3. *Prerequisite:* 'C' in ENG 164 or equivalent.

Purpose

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

- Mastering basic forms of writing for print, the Internet, PR and broadcast;
- Reviewing and reinforcing effective, grammatical use of English;
- 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. The best way to learn to write well is to write, have the work critiqued and apply lessons learned. For many classes we will have both writing and homework assignments to review. **Keeping up is essential for success in learning journalistic writing and in passing this class.**

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 to readers clearly. From this foundation, we will explore other types of writing.

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

Class structure

This course includes lectures, drills, quizzes, lab work and exams. **Come to class or risk falling behind.** This is a class where each session builds on the previous ones, and mass communication is a business built on deadlines. For those reasons, **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 to find out about homework. It is your responsibility to keep up with assignments.

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 for *each* additional absence. Advice: Save your absences for illness or emergencies.

In addition to writing assignments and quizzes, we will have two mid-semester exams, a trio of small projects and a final.

Grading

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-; 8.8-9 =B+; 8.4 =B; 8.1 =B-;

7.8-8 =C+; 7.4 =C; 7.1 =C-; 6.8-7 =D+; 6.4 =D; 6.1 =D-; 5.9 or below =F

An A means nearly professional quality; B is very good, but with some problems; C is adequate quality; D is barely acceptable.

The final grade will be weighted as follows:

Class exercises/quizzes/homework: 50 percent

Mid-semester exams: 20 percent

Three projects: 10 percent

Final exam: 20 percent

Plagiarizing or cheating on any of these assignments will result in a grade of zero and possible failure of the course.

Equipment and supplies

This classroom is equipped with Dell computers. You will have storage space on the lab server. However, you may wish to purchase a USB drive for backup storage. You will need pencils with erasers for copy editing. **Note: No eating, drinking or use of tobacco products is permitted. Protect our computers.**

Academic Honesty

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

Students should be aware that the instructor examines all assignments and exercises for evidence of plagiarism and/or collaborative work and may use computer programs such as Turnitin.com or Internet search engines to check student papers. Be sure to give credit to any sources by using proper attribution.

While it is sometimes appropriate and encouraged for students to discuss concepts and ideas, it is never permissible to work collaboratively on written or production assignments unless they are part of a group project.

Evidence of plagiarism in a written assignment or cheating on a test will result in a zero for that assignment or test. (Students may appeal any penalty to the department chair, the dean and to the vice president for academic affairs (whose decision shall be final) before imposition of the penalty.

Classroom Conduct

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 to avoid penalties. Do NOT send text messages or answer a vibrating phone during class or you will be penalized.

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.

Students who are especially disruptive may be reported to the dean of students for disciplinary action in accordance with university policy.

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.

Student Absence on Religious Holy Days Policy

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. Section 51.911(a)(2) defines religious holy days as: "a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code..." 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.

University policy 861001 says a student desiring to miss a scheduled class in order to observe religious holy day(s) shall present a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will notify the student of a reasonable time frame in which complete missed assignments and/or exams.

Americans with Disabilities Act

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that students otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participating in any academic program. Also, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs or 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. No accommodations can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with instructors to develop appropriate strategies and helpful procedures 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.

Q-Drops

A Q-drop is a class dropped after the last date for tuition refunds (12th class day for fall/spring) but before the date for which a drop would result in the grade of F. For **Fall 2007, Sept. 5** is the last day to drop without getting a Q-drop. **Oct. 10** is the last day to drop without a grade of F and the last day to resign without receiving WP or WF. **Dec. 6** is the last day to resign.

SHSU students are allowed only FIVE Q-drops during their academic careers. Students over the limit must petition their respective deans for drops. *Note:* A class dropped prior to the Q-drop date will not count toward the limit.

Visitors in the Classroom

Any unannounced visitor to class must present a current, official SHSU identification card to be permitted in the classroom. If the visitor is not a registered student, please ask me a day or two in advance if the person may come to class. Do not bring pets to class.