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JRNL 170.50: Elements of News Writing

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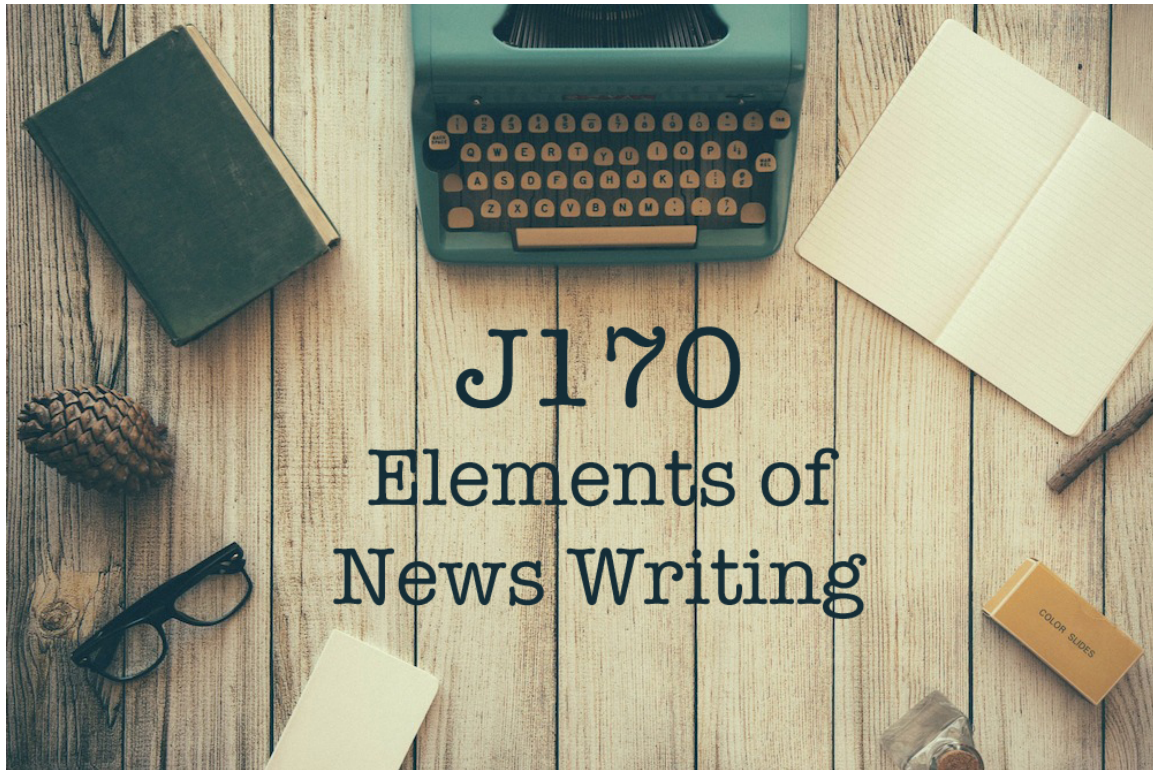
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JRNL 170/Elements of News Writing

Section: 50

Professor: Courtney Cowgill

Email: courtney.cowgill@umontana.edu

Phone: 406.531.4794

Office hours: I am not on campus but you can always schedule a phone or web chat with me for any day of the week. To set up a call, email me.

Journalistic writing is unlike any other. It values clarity and frugality. It demands active language and vivid details. It hates wordiness, jargon and bureaucratese. The best of it sounds conversational but is always grounded in good grammar and impeccable style.

Successful students in this course will learn the fundamentals of news writing, from commas to captions, from what makes the news to how its shaped into a readable story, from the correct handling of quotations to the proper use of semicolons, from The Associated Press' rules on ages (always a numeral, unless it starts a sentence) to its insistence that Xerox is never a verb.

Your understanding of the elements of news writing will become the foundation for your reporting adventures to come.

Course outcomes

By the end of this course, successful students will have:

1. Sharpened their news judgment.
2. Demonstrated an understanding of the basic ethics of journalism.
3. Honed their skills in grammar, usage and punctuation.
4. Explored AP style and learned how to use the stylebook as a resource.
5. Identified and written news stories in online, print and broadcast formats.
6. Developed an ear for good quotations and learned to use them effectively.
7. Written captions that went beyond the obvious.
8. Crafted headlines that reflected the essence and tone of news stories.

How we'll do that

We will get to these outcomes in five main ways:

1. Learning about news writing through assigned readings, (some in the textbook, some online) taking part in video lectures/chats, watching online videos that highlight news writing and getting acquainted with the AP Stylebook.
2. Taking regular current events, style and grammar quizzes to assess your understanding of these topics.
3. Discussing news writing in the weekly online forums.
4. Participating in video chats via Blackboard Collaborate, which will be offered every first Monday of the month from 5-6 p.m. and at several other times throughout the semester for those who cannot make those Mondays. You do not need to attend every chat, but you must attend **one** throughout the semester.
5. Practicing, practicing, practicing through regular assignments writing the news.

It also means that you'll need to follow the news. Be prepared to discuss what's happening globally and locally by reading the Missoulian, the Kaimin and a national/international site like the New York Times, the Washington Post, the BBC, NPR, CNN. Start following journalists you admire on social media.

Building access

For after-hours access to the rooms and doors listed below, please complete and [submit this form](#). Complete only ONE request per semester. Be sure to select all courses you are taking which pertain to Don Anderson Hall.

Texts

Please buy “News Reporting and Writing” by the Missouri Group and the Associated Press Press Stylebook. (I use the online AP Stylebook edition because it’s constantly updated.)

Grading

- Weekly quizzes: 10 points each – roughly 19 percent of total grade
- Writing assignments: 30 points each – roughly 29 percent of total grade
- Discussion participation – 10 points each – roughly 21 percent of total grade
- Video chats: 1 throughout the semester worth 10 points/ea – roughly 3 percent
- Midterm: roughly 14 percent
- Final: roughly 14 percent

Grades will be based on a scale of 100 percent and will use the University of Montana’s plus/minus system. Letter grades will not be used in this course, although the final grade (per requirement) will be given as a letter grade. The equivalents are as follows:

90 - 100 percent: A
80 - 89 percent: B
70 - 79 percent: C
60 - 69 percent: D
0 - 59 percent: F

UM's plus/minus system also makes the following distinctions:

A: 95-100
A-: 90-94
B+: 87-89
B: 83-86
B-: 80-82
C+: 77-79
C: 73-76
C-: 70-72
D+: 67-69
D: 63-66
D-: 60-62
F: Below 60

❏ Fair warning: Expect to receive a zero on any assignment you fail to upload or post by the deadline. Your course grade can’t survive many zeroes.

Plan ahead when submitting your assignments or hitting a discussion deadline. Computer malfunction is not a legitimate reason for a late assignment or post. I expect you to get in touch with me (ideally before the deadline) if there are extenuating circumstances in your life. I will address these on a case by case basis.

Instructor feedback and availability:

You can expect all quizzes and writing assignments to be graded within 10 days. Forums will be graded within 5-7 days after the close of the forum. (Forums close on Sundays.) Per the guide on how to participate in forums, I will facilitate the discussions by weighing in on themes and connecting the dots and asking you further explore some ideas but I will not respond to each individual post.

I will be available on email Monday-Friday between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. and you can expect a reply email from me less than 24 hours after sending me an email within those working hours unless I'm away – which I will notify you about as necessary.

I'm available for phone or Skype conversations and it's up to you to take the initiative to set up those conversations. Please set those up by email so I can carve out ample time.

Additional requirements

Academic honesty: Misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the university. Students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#).

No double dipping

You may not submit for this course any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class unless you receive prior approval from the professor of this course. Doing so without permission will result in an F for the assignment, and could result in an F for the course.

Tech Resources:

For help with Moodle, the platform we use in this course, contact: UMOOnline (406) 243-6367, umonline-help@umontana.edu, <https://umonline.umt.edu/tech-support/default.php>. [You can also access a short tutorial on using Moodle here.](#) Occasionally, we may use Google Docs for revising work. Click [here for more information and support on Google Docs](#).

Academic Support:

If you need academic assistance in this course, there is help available through

the [Office for Student Success](#), which includes tutoring resources and [help through the Writing Center](#).

Accommodation for students with disabilities:

This course is accessible to otherwise qualified students with disabilities. To request reasonable program modifications, please consult with the instructor. [Disability Services for Students](#) will assist the instructor and student in the accommodation process. [Click here for more information on accessibility in Moodle](#), the platform we use in this course. You can find information [here for the accessibility information for Google Docs for Android platforms](#) and [here for the accessibility information for Google Docs on iPad or iPhone](#).