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JRNL 170.50: Elements of News Writing

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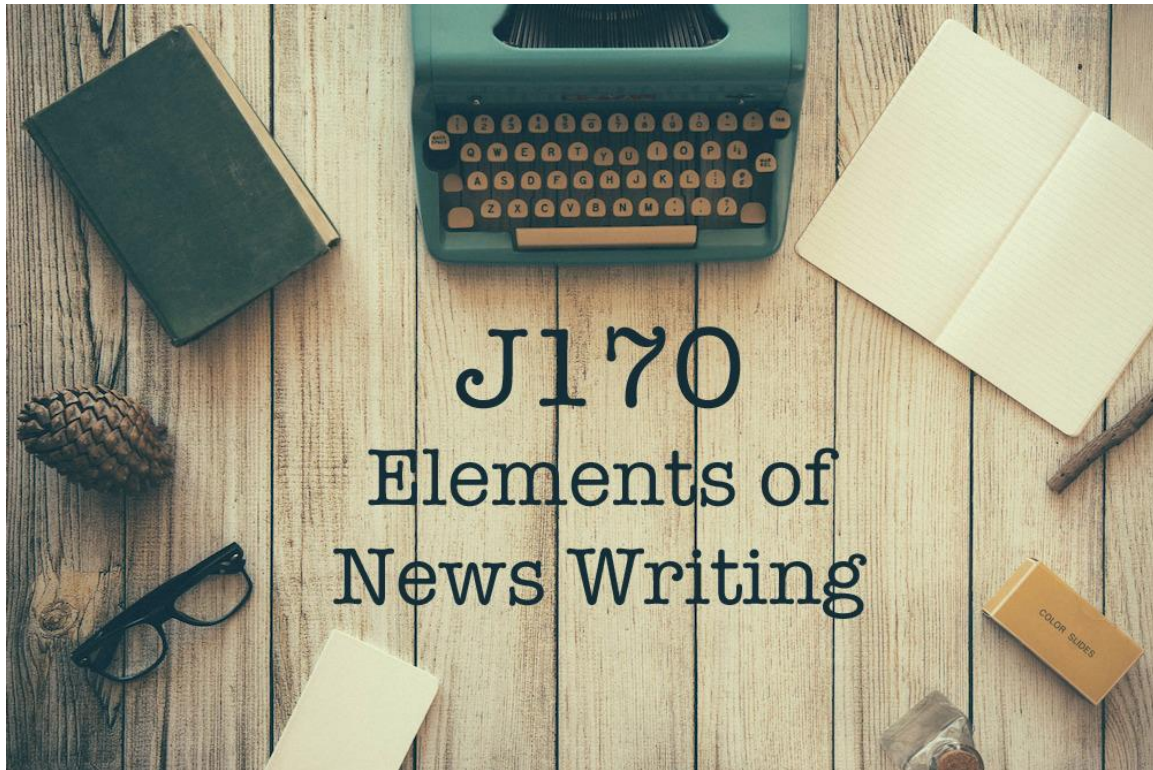
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JRNL 170/Elements of News Writing

Section: 50

Professor Courtney Cowgill

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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) watching video lectures/chats, watching online videos and lectures and getting acquainted with the AP Stylebook.
2. Taking regular quizzes to both assess and deepen your understanding of these topics and give you a chance to recall what you've learned.
3. Discussing and exploring news writing in the weekly online forums.
4. Practicing, practicing, practicing through regular assignments writing the news.
5. Participating in occasional video chats which will be offered once or twice throughout the semester. You do not need to attend every chat, but you do get extra credit for each chat you attend.

This course also means you'll need to follow the news. Be prepared to discuss what's happening globally and locally by reading or listening to local news and national or international news. Start following journalists you admire on social media.

Building Access

For after-hours access to Don Anderson Hall, [complete and submit this form before 5 p.m. Sept. 7](#). Complete only one request form per semester – be sure to list all courses.

Texts

Please buy “Inside Reporting” by Tim Harrower and the Associated 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: roughly 38 percent of total grade
- Discussion participation – 10 points each – roughly 26 percent of total grade
- Final assignment: roughly 17 percent

(Note: These estimates have been updated to reflect the removal of points for optional video chats.)

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 (before the deadline) if there are extenuating circumstances in your life. I will address these on a case by case basis. I'm very flexible and understanding of life getting in the way of course work, but you must communicate with me early if you want to experience that flexibility.

Instructor feedback and availability:

You can expect all quizzes and writing assignments to be graded within 14 days. You do have the option to rewrite any writing assignment (except the final) to practice and for a better grade. Rewrites are due seven days from the day you get the first graded version back.

Forums will be graded within 14 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 48 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 anytime during regular hours for phone or Skype conversations and prefer those to be set up by email so I can carve out the time.

Academic Conduct:

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#). More on academic honesty is available at this link.

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.

Technical support for UMOonline:

umonline-help@umontana.edu

(406) 243-4999 | (866) 225-1641 (toll-free)

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.