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Spring 2-1-2022

JRNL 170.50: Writing the News

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Recommended Citation

Cowgill, Courtney L., "JRNL 170.50: Writing the News" (2022). *University of Montana Course Syllabi*. 12616.

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JRNL 170/Writing the News

Section: 50

Professor Courtney Cowgill

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Office hours: By Zoom, Tuesdays and Wednesdays 10 a.m. – 12 p.m. (Set up here: <https://calendly.com/umjschool/cowgill-office-hours>)

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 four main ways:

1. Learning about news writing through assigned readings, (some in the

- textbook, some online) 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.

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.

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 discussions: 18 percent of total grade
- Quizzes and practices: 22 percent of total grade
- Writing assignments (including final assignment): roughly 45 percent of total grade
- Final assessment: 15 percent of total grade

Grades will be based on a scale of 100 percent and will use the University of Montana's plus/minus system.

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

Deadlines:

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 within a day 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 video chat conversations and prefer those to be set up by email so I can carve out the time.

Additional policies:

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:

Moodle Technical Support:

The Help Desk is open **Monday through Friday, 8 AM - 5 PM Mountain Time** (excluding University holidays).

- [Moodle Help Request Form](#)
- [Email UOnline Help](#)
- Phone: [\(406\) 243-HELP](#) (4357)
- [UM Solutions Center](#)

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. [The Office of Disability Equity](#) 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.

COVID-19 Mitigation and Best Practices:

This is an online-only course with no mandatory in-person meetings.

However, you may be in other classes that do meet face-to-face so please take every precaution to keep yourself, your classmates, your teachers and your families and loved ones safe during this pandemic. Below are some guidelines and best practices regarding the use of the journalism building, Don Anderson Hall. **If you are doing field reporting for other journalism classes please first review any and all reporting guidelines given to you by your professors.**

Don Anderson Hall:

- Don't come inside Don Anderson Hall if you're not feeling well

- Don't come inside until just before your class is to begin
- Enter through West doors (front doors) only
- Mask up before entry and stay masked when in the building
- West stairwell is for going up only
- East stairwell is for going down only
- Stay right in the hallways
- Two people to a bathroom only
- One person in the elevator at a time (please don't use the elevator unless you need it)
- Wipe down your classroom space when you enter
- Sit in the same place in your classroom each meeting
- Wipe down your classroom space as you leave
- Don't linger in the classrooms or in the hallways
- Don't bunch up before or after class
- Maintain social distance always
- No eating or drinking in the building

If you are not comfortable/cannot wear a face covering, talk to your professor about remote options. You will not be allowed in Anderson Hall without a mask. Please be considerate of your classmates, your professors and your staff. Maintain healthy practices when you are not on campus to avoid exposing others to COVID-19.