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### JRNL 362.01: Feature Writing

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# feature writing

JRNL 362 / Spring 2022 / TTH / 9:30-10:50 / DAH 316

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*To write to your best abilities, it behooves you to construct your own toolbox and then build up enough muscle so you can carry it with you. Then, instead of looking at a hard job and getting discouraged, you will perhaps seize the correct tool and get immediately to work.*

–Stephen King, “On Writing”

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES**

This class is about building that toolbox. To accomplish that essential task, we will read great examples of feature writing and break them down to study the reporting and writing techniques that make them great. Our reading will be vast and encompass examples by the most influential journalists in history as well as today’s top features writers.

Students will also pitch, report and write their own feature stories, which we will then workshop as a class.

In the process (if things go well), you will gain the tools necessary to write a compelling feature. You will also gain an appreciation of the rich history of journalistic non-fiction. Most importantly, you will learn to “write for story.”

## **LEARNING OUTCOMES**

By the end of the semester, successful students will:

- Write feature stories of publishable quality.
- Develop an eye for detail and a command of language and style.
- Learn how to write dialogue, create dramatic tension and use feature techniques including pacing, flashbacks, foreshadowing, etc.
- Develop an eye for structure.
- Learn how to create and follow a feature outline.
- Learn to write different types of features.
- Learn to provide constructive critiques to classmates in a workshop setting.

- Read and analyze the work of professional feature writers.
- Understand the value diverse sources and voices bring to feature writing.

### **PREREQUISITE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE**

Students must be in good standing in the J-School's professional program.

### **MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS**

There will be four major assignments in this class that will have several associated, minor assignments attached. All must be filed by deadline via email as an attached Word doc. *All deadlines and word counts subject to change.*

The major assignments, in order, are:

- **A Day/Hour in the Life:**  
Word Count: About 1,000  
Pitch: TK – Early Jan  
Workshop Draft: TK Early Feb  
Final Draft: TK Early Feb
- **The News Feature:**  
Word Count: 2,000 or so  
Pitch: Feb. 17, midnight  
Workshop Draft: March 15, in class  
Final Draft: March 17, midnight
- **The Event Story:**  
WORD COUNT: 1,000  
Pitch: March 29, midnight  
Workshop Draft: April 5, in class  
Final Draft: April 7, midnight
- **The Profile:**  
WORD COUNT: 1,500 -5,000  
Pitch: April 14, midnight  
Workshop Draft: May 3, in class  
Final Draft: May 6, midnight

### **MINOR ASSIGNMENTS**

Throughout the semester, I'll assign minor assignments. I reserve the right to quiz you on reading and listening assignments. Minor assignments might include writing exercises, listening to podcast episodes about writing, finding a feature similar to one you're working on and dissecting it. These types of assignments will be graded on a 100/zero scale. Did you do it? Great! You get 100. Did you blow it off? You get a Zero.

## **READING ASSIGNMENTS**

You'll do a good amount of reading in this class from materials provided to you by me. There are no required books. Take the money you saved and get a subscription to the magazine of your choice.

## **GRADING**

**Major Assignments: 80 percent**

**Attendance, Participation and Final Assessment by Instructor: 9 percent**

**Publication Requirement: 11 percent**

**Scoring an A in the class requires the publication of at least one story or a commitment to publish by an editor. The highest grade possible without publication is a B+**

Rewrites: Not accepted after final deadline. Your assignments will benefit from instructor feedback and peer-to-peer workshops prior to the assignment I grade.

Attendance: **COME TO CLASS AND COME ON TIME.** The only excused absence is one communicated to and accepted by the instructor via e-mail at least one hour prior to class. Three unexcused absences will result in the loss of a full letter grade.

Engagement in class: Except when otherwise noted, this classroom is a device-free zone. Active participation requires your attention to the topic at hand. Texting and traveling in the online world will harm our discussion and hinder your grade.

Grades are based on a scale of 100 percent and will use the University of Montana's plus/minus system. The final grade (per requirement) will be given as a letter grade.

A+: 97-100

A: 93-96

A-: 90-92

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: 59 or lower

Please note: Only stories that are exceptional will receive a score of 90 or above. But all stories that are published during the course of the class will receive an A. Average stories will receive a C.

## ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES

- In this course, you will not write about yourself, people you are related to, friends or people who you know well. Likewise, you are not allowed to write about organizations that you belong to.
- Always check your spelling, punctuation, grammar and syntax. This is a writing course. **Sloppy copy errors will be reflected in final grades.**
- Again: **Reread your assignments for spelling, punctuation and grammar before you file your copy to me.**
- **All major assignments must include a list of sources and contact information for them.** Most editors reserve the right to call your sources and check accuracy. That is true in this class, as well. **Failure to provide a source list will result in at least a 10-point reduction in the final grade.** I'm not kidding about this.
- I expect you to know the basics of AP Style and follow its rules. Buy an AP Stylebook if you don't have one.
- The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction by supporting collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors and Disability Services for Students. If you have a disability that requires an accommodation, please let me know **during the first week of the semester** so that proper accommodations can be discussed and provided. Please contact [Disability Services for Students](#) if you have questions, or call DSS for voice/text 406.243.2243.
- Academic Misconduct and the Student Conduct Code: 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. The code is available for review online at <http://www.umt.edu/vpesa/Dean%20of%20Students/default.php>.
- PLAGIARIASM: Have pride in your work and banish the idea of turning in something written by someone else. Penalties range from failing this class to expulsion from school.
- DOUBLE-DIPPING: **You may not submit for this course any assignment or variation on an assignment that was, or will be concurrently, submitted for another class unless you receive prior approval from the professor for this course.** To do so without **documented** permission will result in an F for the assignment.