

9-2009

JOUR 415.01: Feature Writing

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J415 – Feature Writing

Instructor: Pamela J. Podger	Semester: Fall, 2009
Email: pam.podger@mso.umt.edu Phone: (406) 721-3831	Class dates and location: This online course runs from Aug. 30 to Dec. 12. The class is available through Blackboard.
Availability: I will be available for telephone calls and will check my email daily, Monday-Friday. I also will make office appointments in DAH Room 432 or by web chat (my Skype ID is pjpodger).	Tech Support: UOnline: 406 243-6367; courseware-support@umontana.edu ; or http://umonline.umt.edu (Contact Us tab)

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

Students will gain an understanding of the differences in interviewing, reporting and writing required in feature stories and build on the traditional “hard news” style they’ve encountered in prior classes. This class will teach the various genres of feature writing and help them develop style and nuance and further their foundation in news writing to prepare them for working in newsrooms, online operations and elsewhere.

PREREQUISITE SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Students must have successfully passed J270. Any experience writing feature stories for online or print publications is desirable, but not mandatory.

LEARNING OUTCOME	ASSESSMENT METHOD
Understand the difference between hard and soft news articles.	Discussion board, synthesis papers
Write a wide variety of feature stories in the genre.	Discussion board, synthesis papers
Become adept at recognizing and practicing the nuances of strong writing, including voice, pacing, tone, mood, narrative, use of lively verbs, dialog, metaphors, similes, precision, clarity and repetition.	Discussion board, synthesis papers, writing exercises.

COURSE PARTICIPATION/COMPLETION CRITERIA

- Complete all course readings, activities, assignments and assessments.
- Participate regularly in asynchronous discussions via the discussion board – posts should be thorough, thoughtful and timely.
- Regular and active participation in small group activities.

ASSIGNMENTS

Your final grade is based on the following and the distribution is subject to change:

Each paper: 15 percent (75 percent total)

Discussion board and writing exercises: 25 percent

With an online class and limited face-to-face engagement, your learning from other students and sharing of ideas will happen on the discussion boards. You will comment twice a week on the lectures and readings, and also once a week in response to an observation of a classmate. Treat the discussion board as a public square where analytic, creative and courteous responses are invited. Please double check your spelling, grammar and punctuation *before* you hit the submit key to publish your posts to the discussion board.

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF PAPERS

We'll do five stories during the semester, including one as a two-part narrative. They are due at midnight on Sunday of the assigned week.

Each assignment will be specified as you progress through the learning units. Most papers are about 500 words and should be double spaced in 12 pt. type.

News feature: Second-day spins, people & places behind the news.

Narrative stories (two papers): What is going on behind/around/during the main event? At a gubernatorial convention, who is hawking buttons and bumper stickers? Who cleans up the dining room after the keynote speech?

Profiles: Getting to the intimate details and heart of a subject.

Trends: How to make relevant what is happening across the nation.

GRADING RUBRICS

- See Grading Criteria in the navigation bar for the online course.

GRADING SYSTEM

- Five papers, discussion board and participation. Grading is done with both numbers and letters: A+=98 and above, A = 93 to 97, A- = 90-92, B+ 87-89, B =83 to 86, B - = 80 to 82, etc.

Grading scale

Letter	A+	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
Test	98-100	93-97	90-92	87-89	83-86	80-82	77-79	73-76	70-72	67-69	63-66	60-62	0-59

ADDITIONAL COURSE POLICIES

- All assignments, unless otherwise noted in the learning units section of the course site, are due by midnight MST on Sunday of the week listed.
- Discussion board posts are due by midnight on Monday, Wednesday and Sunday of the week listed.
- Please use Explorer or Firefox as your browsers (per advice of Blackboard tech folks)
- Please write in Word and save your story as a "doc" item, then upload your completed paper. This way, I can edit the Word document using "track editing /changes" and you can compare what you've written with my comments.
- Always check your spelling, punctuation and syntax. This is a writing course. Students may find it helpful to read their assignments out loud and, thereby, catch awkward phrases.
- Assignments must be labeled consistently: For example, the first paper would be named like this: Podger _ Trend.doc. Please use an underscore (_) not a dash (-) to separate your name from the name of the assignment or other symbols.
- Late work marked down a half grade for each day late. Please contact me immediately if you have an emergency or extenuating circumstances that you feel warrants an extension.
- Rewrites are allowed and encouraged for all stories, and must be submitted within one week of the original deadline. *Rewrites must be done on a new Word document, marked Podger _ TrendRewrite.doc and you must submit your original with the tracked editing remarks so I can gauge how fully you've reworked the article.* You must rewrite two stories.
- Be sure to follow AP style. There is a partial online AP guide here:
<http://www.wvu.edu/journalism/syllabi/207labmanual.htm>
- Reread your paper for spelling, punctuation and grammar before you file your copy to me. Three misspellings or a misspelled name is an automatic F.
- Most of the reading assignments are linked to my online blog for this class:
<http://j415.blogspot.com>

DSS STATEMENT

Students with disabilities and/or special needs should notify the instructor at his or her earliest convenience and contact Disabilities Services for Students, <http://www.umt.edu/dss/> or x2243.

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 www.umt.edu/SA/VP/SA/Index.cfm/page/1321.

And, more on academic honesty, is available here:
http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php

PLAGIARISM: Have pride in your work and banish the idea of turning in something written by someone else. Penalties range from flunking this class to expulsion from school.

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

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week One 8/30 to 9/5: Introductions

Assignment: Build a profile for your home page.

Find a childhood photograph and post it to your home page for an exercise later in the class.

Week Two 9/6 to 9/12: Differences between hard news and feature stories.

Week Three 9/13 to 9/19: Interviewing techniques for feature stories.
Interviewing exercise.

Week Four 9/20 to 9/26: Organizing notes into clear, succinct writing.

Week Five 9/27 to 10/3: Capturing what is new in a trend story.

First paper: Trends paper of about 500 words is due by midnight Sunday 10/4.

Week Six 10/4 to 10/10: Profiles and unearthing the vital details.

Second paper: Profile paper of about 500 words is due by midnight 10/11.

Week Seven 10/11 to 10/17: Elements of strong story telling.

Childhood photo exercise: Write a 200-word story on the emotions, memories and descriptions in your picture. Swap with a classmate and write a 200-word story on what you envision is happening in their picture. Both are due by midnight 10/18.

Week Eight 10/18 to 10/24: Handling difficult subjects and emotionally tough interviews.

Week Nine 10/25 to 10/31: Other types of features, anniversary stories, brights, etc. *Post a “bright” feature story to the discussion board early in the week so others can comment on it.*

Week Ten 11/1 to 11/7: Trends (continued).

Week Eleven 11/8 to 11/14 : News features
Third Paper: News feature of about 500 words is due by midnight 11/15.

Week Twelve 11/15 to 11/21: Narratives overview and short-form articles.
Select someone or a situation for your 1000-word narrative early in this week. This cannot be a relative, friend or someone you already know. You may select an acquaintance, someone who intrigues you or someone you’ve heard about at a campus group/activity. It’s important to get the right person. Feel free to contact me / set up an appointment to talk about subjects, questions, etc.

Week Thirteen 11/22 to 11/28: Cliff hangers, gold coins and propelling long narratives forward.
Fourth Paper: First part of your 1,000-word narrative story is due by midnight 11/29.

Week Fourteen 11/29 to 12/5: Narratives, long-form articles.
Fifth Paper: Second part of your 1,000-word narrative story is due by midnight 12/6.

Week Fifteen 12/6 to 12/12: Recap and review.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required: “Feature Writing for Newspapers and Magazines” by Edward Jay Friedlander and John Lee.

Optional: “The Art and Craft of Feature Writing” by William E. Blundell.

“Intimate Journalism” by Walt Harrington.

OTHER

Online learning is different from the face-to-face encounters and discussions most of you have experienced. We'll do our best to build an online community and share our insights,

observations and appreciation of feature writing. You'll find yourself clicking through the various "learning units" for the content of the course and each "learning unit" has several pages (arrows in the upper right-hand corner will help you scroll through the pages). Please email me or post to the General Discussion board if you have a question – especially if other classmates might benefit from the answer, too.