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JRNL 170.02: Elements of News Writing

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JRNL 170 Elements of News Writing

ABOUT THIS COURSE:

Journalistic writing is unlike any other. It has a particular style that emphasizes both clarity and an economy of words. It's active in voice and vivid in detail. And here's something crucial: It's grammatically correct. Successful students in this class will gain a solid grasp of the fundamentals of print/digital news writing. We'll travel from commas to captions, from what makes the news the news to how it's structured into a readable story, from direct quotes to paraphrases, from the Associated Press' rules on ages (always a numeral, unless it's the start of a sentence) and ZIP codes (yep, all caps. It's actually an acronym for Zone Improvement Plans). Your understanding of the basics from this class will be the foundation you'll build on during your college years and beyond with adventures in reporting TK (that's journo-speak for "to come").

PLEASE NOTE: Every class will include hands-on work. Most classes will include a quiz. Neither can be made up outside of class unless under extreme circumstances. What this means: **THIS IS A CLASS THAT REQUIRES YOU TO SHOW UP.** You will not be successful if you skip. Missing class will also affect (not *effect*, by the way) your grade.

REQUIRED READING:

1. The AP Stylebook

Edition must be no older than 2012. Online editions acceptable but not preferred. If you are logged into a university computer, you can access the online version for free from the Mansfield Library's site at www.apstylebook.com/umontana.edu. But just do me a favor and buy the stylebook. We'll all be better for it.

2. Clean, Well-Lighted Sentences: A Guide to Avoiding the Most Common Errors in Grammar and Punctuation by Janis Bell. Copies available in the UM Bookstore.

3. Additional readings as provided and/or assigned.

OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this course, you will be better writers than you are right now. You will also:

- Understand what makes something newsworthy.
- Learn key areas of the AP Stylebook and how to use it as a resource.
- Show proficiency in grammar, usage and punctuation.
- Know how to identify and write different types of news stories.
- Know and be able to demonstrate in your own stories the basic structure of written journalism, including leads, nut graphs, quotes, supporting facts and kickers.
- Figure out how to use quotes effectively.



- Write captions that go beyond obvious information.

Part I:

We'll first talk about newsworthiness. What makes an event or a person compelling enough for others to care? What types of stories are there? In addition to class discussions and assigned readings, you'll dig in on your own and come up with examples that answer those questions.

You'll learn the basic structural elements of news stories and demonstrate that knowledge in exercises and assignments.

We'll also dig deep on grammar and usage. Classes will focus on weak areas and general copy skills that include, but are not limited to:

- Clauses and phrases
- Punctuation
- Parts of speech
- Noun/verb agreement
- Proper use of often-confused pairs (that and which, who and whom, who and that)
- Punctuating quotes
- Proper use of titles, addresses, abbreviations and other basics of AP Style
- Common errors and misspellings.

There will be a midterm exam at a date TBA

Part II:

You will build on the basics to better understand where stories originate, how they're reported and how they should be written. You'll also learn how captions, headlines and news tailored to different media work together to draw an audience. You'll explore feature writing, how and why it's different from hard news. You'll continue in class and out of class to practice what you're learning by taking the rudiments and crafting stories.

We'll also revisit any areas of grammar, usage and style that need work.

The final exam will cover all aspects of the course. Test date TBA.

GRADING:

Attendance, Participation, In-Class Work: 30 percent

Quizzes and assignments: 40 percent

Midterm: 10 percent

Final: 20 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. You must receive at least a C-/70 as a final grade for this class to count toward your journalism degree. If you do not, you will be required to repeat it.

Equivalents to numbered grades are as follows:

90 - 100 percent: A
80 - 89 percent: B
70 - 79 percent: C
60 - 69 percent: D
50 - 59 percent: F

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

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

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

- Attendance: I will take it every day. *The only excused absence is one communicated to AND ACCEPTED BY the instructor via e-mail at least one hour prior to class.* Unexcused absences will factor into the final grade. If you have more than three unexcused absences, you will fail the Attendance/Participation/In-Class portion of your final grade, which counts for 30 percent. Regularly missing this class is not an option if you want to pass.
- Missed in-class quizzes and work cannot be made up.
- Participation: You're expected to do that. No one wants to hear me talk for 50 minutes three times a week. Please speak up. Please expect to be called on. It's how I roll as a teacher.
- Professionalism: Nothing sinks a young journalist in the workplace faster than a lazy approach to work and deadlines. Likewise, that approach will sink your grade in this course.
- Academic honesty: Misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the university. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code at life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php.

In addition: 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. To do so without permission will result in an F.

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. For more information, visit <http://life.umt.edu/dss>.

After-hours Access to Building:

For after-hours access to the rooms and doors listed below, please complete and submit the form available in the second-floor office of Don Anderson Hall. Complete only ONE request per semester. Be sure to select all courses you are taking which pertain to Don Anderson Hall.

A keypad access code will be assigned and provided to you via email, after submitting this form. This request will also activate your GrizCard for the building. All codes will remain active until the last day of the semester. All requests must be submitted by 5 p.m. Friday, September 5th.