

MCM 360W: Specialized Writing  
Online Class Requirements  
Credit: 3 Hours - Fall 2009

Instructor: Cheryl Eschenfelder

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Online office hours: Tuesdays, 3-5 p.m., or by appointment.

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### Required materials

- Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual (You may subscribe to the AP Stylebook online instead of purchasing the book.)
- Strunk & White, The Elements of Style
- A good dictionary and thesaurus

### Course Objectives

- To learn how to identify good stories and report them in detail, with accuracy, precision and in a highly organized and readable way;
- To understand a reporter's responsibility to handle subjects and sources with respect and care, while always maintaining ethical standards beyond reproach;
- To learn to write solid, well-crafted stories – on deadline.

### Methods

This course will be heavy on practical experience – that is, we will focus on how to find the story, dig for it and get it reported for publication or broadcast. This means mastering the basics – from interviewing and document research, to dealing with difficult sources to the writing/rewriting and editing of a story. In other words, we will approach this course much like we would if you were working in a professional newsroom.

You will be expected to keep up with news of the day, and I will be testing you on current events periodically. So read every chance you can the local newspapers, including the Houstonian, the Huntsville Item and the Houston Chronicle. Get in the habit of reading the New York Times as much as possible; the Sunday paper would be a good start. The Wall Street Journal and USA Today are also important to keep up with. (While reading these stories, study the writers' styles and techniques for producing engaging, informative and often entertaining articles.) Read news on the Internet, watch TV news, local, network and cable. News programs on the radio also can be beneficial. We will also use daily news stories in occasional exercises and for analysis.

This class includes, posted readings, exercises, writing assignments, writing projects, quizzes, exams and vigorous online discussion periods in which I expect all to participate.

Emphasis is on developing a level of writing suitable for publication. Course may be repeated as topics vary. (Prerequisites: MCM 132, 6 hours of ENG. Credit 3.)

This class is self-driven. That means that your ability to finish the work and do well depends entirely on your efforts to discipline yourself and manage your own time. While this course is arranged to allow you to work at your own pace, it is also designed to

“manage” your progress. This means that you must complete each module within a given time frame in order to participate in scheduled online discussions, quizzes and tests. It is therefore extremely important that you keep up with the assignments that are posted and don’t fall behind. I would strongly suggest that you schedule and keep an appointment with yourself (or several) each week to work specifically on this class. I strongly encourage you not to "put off" daily assignments until the week of Module deadlines. A good general rule for meeting larger deadlines is to set intermediate deadlines for yourself. If you submit several assignments each and every week, Module deadlines will not pose problems for you.

### Daily Exercises, Exams and Grading

**Daily work:** Do not underestimate the importance of daily assignments in this class. Every assignment is designed to be part of a framework that will ultimately ensure your success in this class. Final projects, papers and exams will be graded based on your ability to master the elements practiced in these individual assignments and to put those techniques to work in your own writing. Daily work will include online discussions, writing assignments, quizzes and writing projects. Daily work will count for 40 percent of your final grade.

**Note:** I make every effort to grade all daily assignments within 10 days of submission. While no late assignments will be accepted for this class, at various points during the semester, as time allows, I will allow you all to make up missed daily assignments with a 20-point penalty per assignment. At various times during the semester, I may also allow students to resubmit assignments to improve a low assignment grade. A maximum of 3 (three) make-up or resubmitted assignments will be allowed for each student.

**Mid-term Exam:** The mid-term exam for this class will cover the first four chapters of Strunk and Whites’ *The Elements of Style*, and AP Style Rules from the Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual. It will also include a short writing (essay) assignment. It will count for 30 percent of your final grade.

**Final Exam:** The final exam will be comprehensive. Section 1 of the final exam will be a written test. It will cover the first four chapters of Strunk and Whites’ *The Elements of Style*, and rules from the Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual. It also will include questions on the writing techniques and practices that we study throughout the semester. The written portion of the final will count for 25 points. Section 2 of the final will be a final writing project. Section 2 will count for 75 points. Points from both sections will be combined for your final exam grade, and that grade will count for 30 percent of your final grade for this class.

**Extra Credit:** Extra credit is not likely. Should it be offered, it will be offered to all students.

### Missed Assignments or Exams

Most of the elements of this class will remain posted over an extended period of time to allow you to work at your own pace. However, the elements that are time sensitive will need to be completed within the scheduled time frames, and all of the elements for this class will need to be completed by the last class day of the semester (see SHSU academic calendar). Once you advance from one module to the next, you acknowledge that you have completed all the elements from the previous module, and you will be graded on that module accordingly. No late assignments will be accepted, and all tests must be

taken within scheduled posting times. If you cannot meet the timeframe for this class, you must have an excusable circumstance (such as an extended illness, injury or family emergency). If you have an emergency or circumstances that prevents you from keeping up with your work in this class, please contact me immediately for counsel and assistance.

### Worth remembering

Don't get behind in this class, for we will cover a lot of landscape quickly. Be respectful of your classmates. Pay attention, work hard, mind your manners and don't look for an easy or convenient way to build your stories. You deal with facts – that's your job – and you must dig diligently for them and handle them with all the care you can muster.

Make a pledge to yourself: Your work will be error-free. You will check and double-check, and sometimes, just to be dead-solid-perfect sure, you'll check again.

Further, you'll never shade a story angle for sake of dramatics or tinker with a quote for convenience and readability. You fudge, that means you lie, and nobody likes a liar. If you don't care about others' reputations – if you twist your subjects' words to make them look smarter, dumber, sillier, meaner, drunker, etc – you surely should think of your own good name. So hard to build, so easy to lose – your good name. Accuracy and precision – these are your lifelines in the reporting and writing trade.

Finally, don't become so enamored with your own prose you can't bear to edit it. If you don't edit your own work ruthlessly, if you don't take the time to rewrite to get the phrasing, that word picture, just right, some indelicate editor will, taking unbridled delight in retooling your precious writing. Keep these thoughts in mind and you'll do well. Don't be afraid to ask questions or take a chance. Good luck.

### Academic Dishonesty

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in their academic experiences, both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The university and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

The profession into which you are seeking entrance requires that you observe a clear understanding and practice of journalistic ethics. The credible exchange of information is based on this foundation, and any cracks in that foundation endanger everyone who works in the field. You risk your reputation, your credibility and your career if you engage in unethical behavior, and the best way to avoid it is to learn to be absolutely honest. My criterion for academic honesty is as follows:

Do your own work. This includes daily work as well as tests. If you don't, I will know it, and I will penalize you or issue you a failing grade for this class. This includes "tag-teaming" this class with a friend or classmate.

We will be looking at a lot of copyrighted materials online this semester. These resources are the product of others' hard work and time. DO NOT copy or share online resource materials with anyone not enrolled in this class. This constitutes theft, and you will be subject to disciplinary action if you do so.

DO NOT plagiarize. This means, in essence, that you do not copy anything, from any source, and pass it off as your own work. It also means that you do not use an idea, argument, thought or theory formulated by someone else as your own. It means that if you do reference someone else's work, that you give them full credit for their contribution to your writing. Plagiarism will not only earn you disciplinary action, or a failing grade. It could very well earn you permanent expulsion from this institution.

The following definition of plagiarism – about as clear as you will find for our journalistic purposes, from the home of one of the nation's leading journalism schools – is borrowed from the University of Indiana Student Handbook:

Plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else's work, including the work of other students, as one's own. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged, unless the information is common knowledge. What is considered "common knowledge" may differ from course to course.

- a. A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, opinions, theories, formulas, graphics, or pictures of another person without acknowledgment.
- b. A student must give credit to the originality of others and acknowledge an indebtedness whenever:
  1. Directly quoting another person's actual words, whether oral or written;
  2. Using another person's ideas, opinions, or theories;
  3. Paraphrasing the words, ideas, opinions, or theories of others, whether oral or written;
  4. Borrowing facts, statistics, or illustrative material; or
  5. Offering materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or collections without acknowledgment.

Any student in MCM 360 who plagiarizes will receive a failing grade on the assignment for the first offense. A second offense will result in a more severe final semester grade penalty, up to and including an F for the course and/or disciplinary referral to the dean.

### Americans with Disabilities Act

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the

student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

### Religious Holidays

Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence. "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20, Tax Code.

### Instructor Evaluations

Near the end of the semester, students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation form.

### Rules of Conduct

The Code of Student Conduct and Discipline can be found on the SHSU Website.

### Submitted Materials

Materials submitted by students for this class become the legal property of the instructor and can be used with subsequent classes and published for educational use. The personal privacy of each student will be strictly protected on all materials.

### Acceptance of Class Requirements

Copy and e-mail the following verification to me at [jrn\\_cje@shsu.edu](mailto:jrn_cje@shsu.edu). Provide your signature (name) and SHSU I.D. to ensure proper access to this class.

I hereby confirm that I have read the Online Class Requirements document for MCM 360W - Specialized Writing and understand all of the terms and conditions presented therein. I further guarantee that the signature provided below is my own and does not belong to anyone serving as proxy for me or acting in my stead, that I am registered for and/or approved to take this class and that I am a registered student at Sam Houston State University.

Online Signature \_\_\_\_\_

SHSU I.D. \_\_\_\_\_

This course is constructed in a modular design. Learning units (Modules) are broken down into assignments that are designed to help the student accumulate knowledge and techniques that will increase performance in subsequent assignments. Skipping or backtracking on assignments is therefore not advised. This course should be taken in the sequence in which it is posted and arranged.

All work for this course must be completed by the last scheduled class day of the Fall 2009 semester. Once you advance from one module to the next, you acknowledge that you have completed all the elements from the previous module, and you will be graded on that module accordingly.

Module deadlines and schedule follow:

Module I Schedule

Aug. 24-Sept. 1 - Features Writing and Ethics

Sept. 2-9 - Pre-writing and Interviewing

Sept. 10-18 - Grammar and Style Review

Module I deadline - September 18

Module I Grammar Quiz Posted - Sept. 15-Dec. 11

Module II Schedule

Sept. 21-30 - Features Stories and Techniques

Oct. 1-8 - Feature and News Leads

Oct. 9-16 - Story Construction

Module II deadline - October 16

Module II (Mid-Term) Test posted - October 9-21

Module III Schedule

October 19-27 - Research

October 28-Nov. 6 - Profile Features

Nov. 6-13 - News Features

Module III deadline - November 13

Module IV Schedule

Nov. 13-30 - Columns and Editorials

Dec. 1-8 - Feature Projects

Dec. 1-11 - Editing Feature Projects

Module IV deadline - December 11

Online Final Exam Posted - December 9-16

The best advise you will get this semester is to keep up. You will be well-served by creating a schedule for yourself each week that includes at least five hours of work time to complete the assignments, readings and discussions for this class. I would recommend you plan to finish one Module every 3 weeks.

Some assignments will be time sensitive, meaning that they will need to be completed within a pre-scheduled one-week timeframe. When you log on to each module, look carefully at both the sequence of the assignments and the pre-scheduled assignments to ensure that you are well-prepared to take part in the time-sensitive assignments.

In addition to online work for this class, you will be required to keep up with daily events and stories in the news and watch assigned news programs, either on television or online, that correlate with posted assignments.

As stated before, please do not assume you can complete the assignments for a Module at the last minute or in a few short days. You should plan to turn in several assignments for this class each and every week, using the Module deadlines as emergency deadlines for missed or resubmitted assignments.

If you have any questions or problems with computer access to this class or problems with Blackboard, please contact the Blackboard helpdesk.

If you have any questions or problems with class materials or problems that prevent you from meeting scheduled assignments, please contact me at [jrn\\_cje@shsu.edu](mailto:jrn_cje@shsu.edu)