

MCM 360 SPECIALIZED WRITING SPRING 2009

(Writing for magazines and newspaper columns)

Tuesday - Thursday, 3:30 p.m. – 4:50 DAN Room 205

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Office Hours:
TuThur: 2:30 – 4; 5 – 6 p.m.
Wed: 2:00 – 5:00 p.m.
Other times by appointment

REQUIRED MATERIALS:

There is presently no textbook dedicated to this course. We will use instead all available, appropriate media: Magazines, newspaper Sunday supplements; motion picture and television features and book anthologies -- to be indicated and with proper notice; A.P. Stylebook, small, pocket dictionary.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

To sharpen your understanding of quality opinion writing, and applying it to your own level, to better serve you in your particular interest -- writing, broadcasting, or public relations.

To develop and refine your judgment of news and feature subjects.

To improve writing, reporting and interviewing skills necessary to produce readable articles for magazines and periodicals, skills also usable in radio-TV and public relations.

To learn organization and self-discipline to meet deadlines.

To improve the ability to observe and describe.

METHODS:

The art of good writing can be reduced to one sentence: blending the meaning of the words with the rhythm of the sentence. There is no formula: writers write, and rewrite, strive for clarity and purpose.

This course will emphasize writing in class, on people and subjects not always chosen in advance. Ideas will include politics, sports, gossip, business, editorial and humor. Homework will relate to more in-depth essays and features. Pop quizzes will require you to be aware of current events. Lectures will stress style and technique, and often anecdotal in nature, an important part of the writing experience.

To be competitive in this course, you will need to read at least one popular magazine and stay aware of people and events in the news. We will attempt to schedule special speakers, who will share their experiences as writers and authors and provide you with material to develop real-time stories. We will also view selected videos for the purpose of analyzing them as material for magazines.

REQUIRED WORK:

All class, homework and quizzes will be critiqued and rated and form part of your grade. Class discussion will be important. A mid-term and final exam will count, but won't sink you. All of these together may account for half your grade.

The other half, or more, will be judged on the basis of your improvement, effort and contributions to class discussion and ideas. You can't take excessive credit for being born with a talent and talent can't be taught. Good habits can be developed, hard work encouraged, and solid fundamentals can be taught. Do not obsess over grades early in class. You will be judged on how far you have come at the end of the semester. Those who need help with grammar or spelling problems can get help from the writing center. If you sense other problems in your basic skills, consult with me so we can seek solutions.

If you attend class you can't fail this course. If you are absent for a significant period of time, you must have a valid explanation to be allowed to make up the work. I will tolerate an occasional tardiness to class, given that the campus is a beehive of activity, traffic and pressure, but will expect you to do so with regret and an explanation, out of fairness to the class. Time will have to be taken to give late arrivals an update of whatever has been discussed or exercise started.

GRADING:

Writing assignments: 25 percent

Class involvement 20 percent

Exams 25 percent

Improvement 30 percent (this actually encompasses much of your writing assignments and classroom participation.)

An “A” means you came into the course at a high level and sustained it, or that you were a C student who did B-quality work; a “B” reflects a good effort, steady if not dramatic improvement; a “C” means you showed up, were attentive and made modest improvement; a “D” means you attended every class and didn’t snore while you slept.

You will receive extra credit for any work outside the classroom that involves sports reporting, print or air or team-related.

An expert will be brought in to lecture on plagiarism and explain the computer programs that recognize it. As Dr. Fullerton put it so well, “copying is not a technique, it is cheating, and will earn you a zero for an assignment and possibly an F for the course. It’s not worth it.”

LINKS TO THIS SYLLABUS WILL BE PROVIDED ON:

Americans with Disabilities Act

Religious Observance

Classroom Rules of Conduct

Q Drops