

Course Syllabus

JOU 4308: Magazine & Feature Writing

Section: 1B18

Term: Spring 2016

Period: M 7-9, Mondays 1:55 p.m. to 4:55 p.m.

Room: Florida Gym, Rm. 275

Instructor: Sarah L. Stewart

Contact: stewart.sarahlynn@gmail.com; 352-514-4244 (cell); sarahlstewart.com

Office hours: Tuesdays 2 to 4 p.m., Reitz Union

Course Description & Objectives

In this course, you'll build upon what you've already learned about reporting and writing hard news in order to craft compelling, creative, well-researched and factually sound feature articles. You'll learn how to identify various types of features; how to generate ideas and refine angles for feature articles; how to pitch your ideas to magazines and newspapers; how to use research, reporting and observation to gather the details that will make your feature stories sing; how to use non-fiction storytelling techniques to keep your readers engaged; and ultimately, how to write feature articles worthy of publication.

Required Reading

There is no textbook for this course. I strongly recommend you make a habit of reading at least one daily newspaper and as many magazines as you can get your hands on. The best way to learn how to write for magazines is to read them critically. Each issue is like a chapter in the instruction manual for how to write for that magazine, full of insight into the types of ideas the editors are looking for and the tone and style of its prose. You'll also be expected to read various samples that I'll provide you throughout the semester.

Attendance/Tardies

Attendance is mandatory. Each student will be permitted one unexcused absence during the semester; each unexcused absence beyond the first will result in a deduction of 5 points from your final grade. Absences for serious illness, family emergencies or other urgent situations may be excused, at my discretion, with notification **prior** to the start of the class that will be missed. If you miss class on a day when something is due, you are still responsible for submitting the assignment by the start of class (via email, if you won't be there in person to submit a hard copy) to avoid late assignment penalties.

Class will start promptly at 1:55. Consistent or excessive tardiness will result in a deduction from your participation grade.

Cell Phones & Laptops

Before you come into class, please turn the sound and vibration completely off on your phone and put it away. We're only together a few hours a week, and I'd like to make the most of it. Texting, social media, online shopping and otherwise tinkering with your phone during class will result in a deduction from your class participation grade.

Bring your laptop to class every week, as we will have in-class writing exercises. Using your laptop during class for non-course-related activities will result in a deduction from your participation grade.

Late Assignments

Unless otherwise instructed, all writing assignments are due at the start of class on the date marked in the course schedule. Some freelance magazine contracts stipulate a fee reduction for late submissions, and this class will operate the same way: Every day an assignment is late will incur a 10-point reduction in your grade for that assignment. This applies to all components of the feature writing assignments (ideas, the query letter, first drafts and revisions) that are outlined with deadlines in the course schedule. Assignments submitted on the due date but after the start of class (2 p.m. or later) will be considered one day late.

I understand things can happen to delay the completion of an assignment—an idea falls through, a source stands you up, etc. I've found most of these situations can be avoided by starting early in contacting sources (i.e., as soon as your idea is approved) so there's plenty of time to adjust before the deadline. If an issue does arise, it is your responsibility to contact me right away so we can discuss a course of action. Don't wait until the day before the assignment is due. Short extensions may be granted, at my discretion, in rare cases when circumstances are truly beyond your control and you can prove to me it's not merely a result of procrastination.

Submission Guidelines

Unless otherwise instructed, all assignments should be submitted in **both** print and digital (emailed) versions. Failure to submit both versions by the start of class on the due date will result in late assignment penalties. Please use double-spaced 12-point font and include your name, the assignment title and a suggested headline.

Grading

Your grade will derive from a combination of class participation and writing assignments. There will be no midterm or final exam.

Class Participation = 10%

Your participation grade will be based on the following factors: Arriving to class on time; taking part in class discussions, readings and activities; giving me and your fellow students your full attention when others are speaking; not using your phone or laptop in class for any purpose not directly related to the course; not creating distractions during class (this includes eating).

Writing Assignments:

Feature #1, The Front of Book (F.O.B.) = 30%

(Idea: 5%, Query Letter: 5%, First Draft: 10%, Revision: 10%)

Often the best tactic for breaking into a magazine is by way of the short articles published in the front section, aka the front of book. You'll master the challenge of writing an engaging, meaningful article in 400 words or less—and you'll pitch it to a carefully targeted publication.

Feature #2, The Profile = 30%

(Idea: 5%, First Draft: 10%, Revision: 15%)

Hone key skills including interviewing, observation and storytelling by reporting and writing a 1,000- to 1,200-word profile. You'll be required to interview a minimum of three sources for this story (in person or by phone—email doesn't count!)

Feature #3, The News Feature = 30%

(Idea: 5%, First Draft: 10%, Revision: 15%)

Go beyond the headlines to find a feature angle that will bring more depth and meaning to the day's news and trends. You'll learn to use statistics to make your feature stories stronger and will rely upon at least two human sources and one primary written source for this 1,000- to 1,200-word feature.

Grading criteria:

Ideas:

Quality and originality of angle: 50 points

Success in targeting specific market: 50 points

Query Letter:

Writing mechanics (spelling, grammar, punctuation, structure, AP style): 50 points

Content (strength of lede; description and development of angle; effectiveness in targeting market; clarity of targeted magazine, department and editor): 50 points

First Drafts:

Writing mechanics (spelling, grammar, punctuation, structure, AP style): 50 points

Content (strength of lede, nut graf and ending; use of transitions; quality of reporting; use of storytelling techniques; use of active, non-superfluous language): 50 points

Revisions:

Writing mechanics (spelling, grammar, punctuation, structure, AP style): 50 points

Content (strength of lede, nut graf and ending; use of transitions; quality of reporting; use of storytelling techniques; use of active, non-superfluous language; improvement upon first draft): 50 points

Deductions:

Spelling and fact errors indicate a lack of attention to detail—and attention to detail is the bread and butter of feature writers. A spelling error in your query letter, first drafts or revisions will result in an automatic **10-point deduction** from your grade for that assignment. Fact errors (misspelling of a proper noun, incorrect numerical figures or any untruth) in your query letter, first drafts or revisions will result in a **25-point deduction** from your grade for that assignment.

Extra Credit:

The primary purpose of this course is for you to be able to write publishable feature stories. It is my goal for each of you to get at least one of your assignments from this course published. I'll add **5 points** to your grade on any assignment published in the Alligator or other student-run publication and **10 points** on an assignment published in any other local or regional magazine, newspaper or website.

To encourage you to swing for the fences, you'll earn a **25-point bonus** on any assignment published in a national magazine or website—or with proof of planned publication, if publication date is beyond the end of the semester. If you're unsure whether your targeted publication would be considered student, local/regional or national, check with me before pitching.

Grading Scale

See current UF policies for assigning grade points at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

A 93-100	B- 80-83	D+ 67-69
A- 90-92	C+ 77-79	D 64-66
B+ 87-89	C 74-76	D- 60-63
B 84-86	C- 70-73	E 0-59

Course Schedule

Schedule is subject to change.

Jan. 11

Introductions, syllabus. What is a feature story? How to generate and refine story ideas for your target market. Discuss Feature #1.

Jan. 18

MLK Day. No class.

DUE (VIA EMAIL): Three ideas and target publication for Feature #1.

Jan. 25

How to pitch. Writing query letters, figuring out where to send them. Schedule conference times for next week. Discuss Feature #2.

Feb. 1

Individual conferences. I'll talk one-on-one with each of you for 15 minutes to iron out your ideas and answer any questions at this stage.

DUE (VIA EMAIL, BY 9 A.M.): Three ideas and target publication for Feature #2.

We'll be discussing these at your conference.

Feb. 8

How to write short. Choosing your words carefully. Strong ledes, nut grafs and endings.

DUE: Query letter with target editor (name and contact info) for Feature #1.

Feb. 15

Reporting skills: Interview techniques and the power of observation.

DUE: First draft of Feature #1.

Feb. 22

Storytelling techniques. Scene-setting, anecdotes, narrative thread.

Feb. 29

Spring Break. No class. Have fun and be safe!

March 7

What makes a great news feature. Q&A with a special guest from the magazine industry. Discuss Feature #3.

DUE: First draft of Feature #2.

March 14

Sources: How to find them, what makes a good (and bad) source. Using statistics and written sources to make stories stronger. Schedule conference times for next week.

DUE: Three ideas and target publication for Feature #3.

DUE: Revision of Feature #1.

March 21

We'll reconvene for one-on-one conferences to discuss progress on Feature #3 and answer any other questions at this stage.

March 28

Making a living as a freelance writer. Q&A with a special guest who does just that.

DUE: Revision of Feature #2.

April 4

The key elements of other types of features, including service pieces, roundups and first-person narratives.

DUE: First draft of Feature #3.

April 11

Thinking (and writing) like an editor. We'll turn the tables and you'll critique a sample of my work for a change.

April 18

Semester wrap-up. Review key topics. Class party!

DUE: Revision of Feature #3.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

Online Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.

Academic Honesty

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge: "We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions, including plagiarism: *A student shall not represent as the student's own work all or any portion of the work of another. Plagiarism includes but is not limited to: 1. Quoting oral or written materials including but not limited to those found on the internet, whether published or unpublished, without proper attribution. 2. Submitting a document or assignment which in whole or in part is identical or substantially identical to a document or assignment not authored by the student.* **Plagiarism or academic deception of any kind will result in a failing grade for the course.** Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult the instructor.

About Me

A little over a decade ago, I sat exactly where you do now, as a student in Magazine & Feature Writing at UF. Since then I've made a career of writing features, first for local newspapers and later for national magazines and websites. I practice what I teach: I'm currently both an adjunct lecturer and a full-time freelance writer for publications including *Travel + Leisure*, *Outside*, and *Backpacker*.