

**JOU 4308**  
**Magazine and Feature Writing**

Fall 2017  
M: Period 7 - 9 (1:55 PM - 4:55 PM)  
Classroom: [WEIM 1094](#)

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**Office Hours:**  
Thursdays: 12:30 – 2:30 p.m.  
Other times by appointment

*“The difference between the right word and the nearly right word is the same as the difference between lightning and the lightning bug.” -- Mark Twain*

Welcome to Magazine and Feature Writing!

Feature story writing is one of the most enjoyable forms of journalism. Feature-style writing is commonly found in magazines, newspapers, newsletters, and various genres of Web sites. Whereas news articles provide a reader with a straight-to-the-point account of the facts, a feature story takes the reader on a narrative, non-fiction journey. The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the art and craft of writing feature stories, which includes developing story ideas and utilizing the key components of feature writing to tell a vivid and compelling story. Throughout this semester, we will focus on techniques and skills needed to become competent in producing, editing, and (hopefully) publishing a variety of feature stories for magazines and/or local news outlets.

**Required texts & materials:**

- William E. Blundell. *The Art and Craft of Feature Writing: Based on The Wall Street Journal Guide* (ISBN-10: 0452261589)
- Access to Google Docs to submit assignments. I do not accept assignments via email.
- A colored pen (for peer review grading).

**Google Docs:** You will use Google Docs to submit **all** of your coursework in this class. The only information you will find on Canvas are your grades for the assignments. Otherwise, all submissions, drafts, assignment guidelines, syllabus, and feedback will be contained in Google Drive. Each of you will receive a Google Doc shared only between me and you on the first day of class, and we will go over the ins and outs of how to use it extensively then.

**Readings:** In addition to the course text, I will give you selected readings – mostly feature stories written and published by others – throughout the term. You will be expected to read all of these articles and be prepared to discuss them in class. I believe that the best way to learn

how to write well is to read good writing. **You should bring copies of the assigned readings with you to class, either in digital or paper form, but please don't try and read it from your phone.**

Additionally, I'm always happy to read examples of great feature story writing that you've read. Please feel free to email me links to any stories that you think would be valuable to this course.

**Podcasts:** Throughout the semester, you will be assigned a weekly podcast to listen to. Most often, it will be a 10-minute story from the Moth. Sometimes they will be from a different outlet, but the objective will still be the same – to get you familiar with storytelling to better prepare you for writing your own personal narrative at the close of the semester. You don't need a special app or anything to listen to podcasts, just a computer (or phone or tablet) and an internet connection.

**Peer Critiques, Homework, Quizzes, and Other Exercises:** As you will note on the schedule, you will be reviewing your classmates' feature stories during the semester. You are required to be in class on the day of these critiques. You will also have an evaluation form to complete as part of these exercises in which you will indicate what you, the writer, gained from the peer critique. You will be required to turn in these forms at the end of the class period. Except in extreme and unforeseeable circumstances, if you are not in class on the days we do the peer critiques, you will receive a zero for this portion of your grade. Likewise, we will be doing in-class exercises and quizzes at various points in the course. Again, except in extreme and unforeseeable circumstances, if you are not in class on the days we do these exercises, you will receive a zero for this portion of your grade. Finally, you will occasionally be asked to turn in short assignments as homework. Please see the schedule and Google Docs for more details on these assignments.

**Publication:** If you can get your story published in a reputable newspaper, magazine or Web site, I'll bump your grade up a letter grade for that assignment. You must clear this with me before you submit your story to the publication. Your friend's blog, your own personal Web site, pay-to-publish outlets or other similar publications are not acceptable.

**Reporting:** You'll notice that this course has three major writing assignments that require reporting. **Feature writing requires more reporting, not less, than news writing.** This is why you have more time to work on the stories – because they take longer to do. Students often come to this class after having just taken foundational news reporting classes, so they are used to cranking out copy on quick deadlines. Then, when they come into feature writing classes and find out they have three or four weeks until the final deadline, they tend to procrastinate. Most of the time, no matter how much I say it, students won't internalize this fact until they turn in their first round of shallow fluff and get a low grade. You cannot get by on style alone in this course. Please do not neglect reporting. It will be strongly reflected in your grade.

**Mechanics, etc.:** This is a journalism class. More specifically, this is a writing class. That means you will be expected to write with a command of spelling, grammar and style, just as you would as a working journalist. It also means that you will be expected to conduct yourself with professionalism, integrity and courtesy both in and outside the classroom. Let's go over some basics.

*Spelling and grammar:* You may have been the citywide 8<sup>th</sup> grade spelling bee champion when you were younger. Or you may be one of those people who seems to trip over every word you type. Regardless of which category you fall into, your readers expect your work to be done well – no spelling errors, no grammar mistakes. Therefore, I also expect you to turn in clean work. You are expected to take **as much time with your stories as you must to make sure that they are free** of all spelling errors, including typographical errors, and grammar errors.

*Accuracy:* While the literary nature of feature writing provides you with a certain degree of freedom to tell a story with perspective and point of view, **it is still journalism**, and it is expected to be accurate. Get your facts right.

*Style:* In general, we will use the style rules listed in the Associated Press Stylebook. If you don't have the AP stylebook already, get one immediately. If you plan to submit your story to a specific publication that uses a different style, talk to me about it first. I'll expect you to know and point out specifically where your article deviates from AP style in favor of the style used by your target publication.

**Deadlines:** Your stories are due at the beginning of class on the day that they are due, but since we will be using Google docs for the submission process, there will be slight wiggle room here. We will discuss the specifics of this policy in class. As journalists, you will be expected to meet strict deadlines, so please get your stories in when the schedule says they are due. No e-mail submissions will be accepted.

**Plagiarism and Academic Honesty:** IF YOU PLAGIARIZE ANY ASSIGNMENT IN THIS CLASS, YOU WILL FAIL THE CLASS. Journalists make their living on credibility. They fulfill a special role in society to provide the public with information about the world around them. There is no greater offense for a journalist than STEALING someone else's work and lying to his or her readers. You wouldn't want someone to take credit for all the hard work you did, so don't do it to someone else. Again, if you plagiarize you will fail the class – not the assignment, but the entire class. I should note here that plagiarism also includes self-plagiarism. Do not turn any work that you have previously turned in for another class or that has already been published elsewhere. You are expected to do original work for this course. If you are interested in doing an assignment on a topic that you have covered before, it is possible that this will be acceptable if you speak with me beforehand and get permission in advance. I will report any incidents of plagiarism to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs as academic dishonesty.

In accordance with UF policy, I'm also including in this syllabus the definitions of the types of academic dishonesty that seem most likely to be potential problems for students in this class,

listed below. If you are unclear on any of these definitions or uncertain if something you are doing or plan to do falls under one of these categories, ASK ME.

*Plagiarism.* The attempt to represent the work of another as the product of one's own thought, whether the other's work is published or unpublished, or simply the work of a fellow student. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, quoting oral or written materials without citation on an exam, term paper, homework, or other written materials or oral presentations for an academic requirement; submitting a paper which was purchased from a term paper service as your own work; submitting anyone else's paper as your own work.

*Misrepresentation.* Any act or omission with intent to deceive a teacher for academic advantage. Misrepresentation includes using computer programs generated by another and handing it in as your own work unless expressly allowed by the teacher; lying to a teacher to increase your grade; lying or misrepresenting facts when confronted with an allegation of academic honesty.

*Fabrication.* The use of invented or fabricated information, or the falsification of research or other findings with the intent to deceive for academic or professional advantage.

#### **GRADING:**

Grades will be posted on Canvas. It is the only thing we will use Canvas for this semester. Assignment guidelines are posted to Google Docs, detailing the objectives, expectations, and criteria for each project.

Subculture story: 20%

Round-up: 20%

Personal Narrative + Moth submission: 25%

Query Letter: 10%

Peer review, homework, quizzes, in-class assignments: 15%

Attendance and class participation: 10%

#### **Grading Scale**

Grades are based on results, not effort. It is unlikely grades will be curved.

A 100 to 89.5%

B+ 89.4 to 86.5%

B 86.4 to 82.5%

B- 82.4 to 79.5%

C+ 79.4-77.5%

C 77.4-73.5%

C- 73.4-69.4%

D 69.4-60%

F 59% and below

### **Grading standards for content of writing assignments:**

**A** = outstanding; the work, which demonstrates originality and excellent story structure, meets professional publishing standards.

**B** = good work but still needs additional revising; the work achieves the objectives but lacks some basic elements that would make it an outstanding piece.

**C** = satisfactory but needs *a lot* of revising; story meets minimum requirements but may have problems with story structure, with appeal to targeted readership/audience, and with mechanical errors of grammar, spelling, punctuation and usage/style errors.

**D** = unsatisfactory; work does not display a grasp of basic writing skills; story has significant problems with story structure, mechanical errors, and/or an unclear understanding of the targeted readership/audience.

**F** = unacceptable, failing; story has flaws in research, story structure, basic reporting, writing elements, and comprehension of target audience.

**Attendance:** This class meets once a week for three hours. Please attend class. If you miss, it will be hard to keep up and attendance counts as part of your class participation grade. Additionally, you'll note on the schedule that I have canceled a number of dates for our collective class meetings in favor of individual conferences and to give you extra time to work on your stories. That means the days that we do all meet together for class are that much more important.

Attendance will be taken for every class. You get one free absence, which means that having one absence will not negatively impact your participation points. If you wake up one day and decide to go to the beach instead of this class, that is your choice. However, missing two or more class periods will result in a reduction of your participation points by a third, so be sure to use your one free absence wisely. You are adults. I don't need your excuses for why you missed class. Sporting events, best friend's weddings, hangovers, etc. are not viable reasons for missing this course and do not need to be documented with me. You knew when this class was going to meet when you signed up to take it. **FOUR absences or more will automatically result in failure for the course regardless of performance.** It is your responsibility to keep track of your own absences in this course. You may ask me for your number of recorded absences at any time throughout out the semester, but do not assume I will email you if you are nearing the absence limit. If a situation arises during the semester that will affect your ability to attend class regularly (such as an extended illness), please contact me as soon as possible so we can discuss your options.

**Behavior:** I expect you to be courteous and attentive to classmates and to me. Multitasking is a myth, [just ask Dr. Cliff Nass](#). Please turn off your cell phone before class starts, and keep your laptop away unless I've asked you to get it out for something we're working on.

**Student Resources:** Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, [www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://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.

Mental health is important. The UF Counseling and Wellness Center is a terrific, free resource for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. The center, at 3190 Radio Road on campus, is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call (352) 392-1575.

**UF Writing Studio:** The Writing Studio, located at 302 Tigert Hall, is a free service for current UF students for working through editing and revision, problems of getting started or organizing scattered materials or on any other difficulty you may be experiencing as a writer. Although you should not expect consultants to correct your paper for you, they can assist you in learning to edit and revise your work. They also offer online tutoring hours, which vary from term to term. For more information, consult the Writing Studio website at <https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/> or contact them at (352) 846-1138.

**Office Hours and Email:** I keep regular office hours each week, and this time is reserved for you to discuss with me any issues, concerns, or suggestions you have about your work or about the course. I have an open door policy, so please don't hesitate to visit me during office hours. If you can't make the hours posted, email me or talk with me before or after class. I am flexible to meet at other times. I will respond to all emails within 72 hours. Please don't use Canvas to message me, because I won't get it in a timely manner. In this course, we will only use Canvas for grades. Please email me or drop by my office if you need me.

## SCHEDULE

Here is the basic schedule for this semester. All readings scheduled are due on the date listed on the syllabus, meaning you need to have read them prior to coming to class that day. The schedule below is subject to change based on things like possible guest speakers and the unique needs of the course this semester.

### Week 1:

8/21: Syllabus, introductions, what makes a good feature story, and how to use Google Docs. Brainstorming for subculture piece.

### Week 2:

8/28: Researching and interviewing for features. Structure of a feature story. What makes a good lead?

Due: Three pitch ideas for subculture piece due on Google Docs and for class discussion.

### Week 3:

9/4: Labor day, **no class**. Feel free to schedule a time to meet with me about your draft for subculture piece sometime during the week, if you want.

### Week 4:

9/11: Peer critique day. Rewriting your stories. Do you need to do more interviews?

Due: First draft of subculture piece due on Google Docs and hardcopy. BRING TWO HARDCOPIES OF DRAFT TO CLASS.

### Week 5:

9/18: No class. Schedule individual conference with me, required.

### Week 6:

9/25: What is a round-up article? How is a round-up different from the subculture piece?

Due: Final draft subculture due on Google Docs only.

### Week 7:

10/2: Developing your story ideas. Critique example student round-up in class.

Due: Three pitch ideas for round-up due on Google Docs and class discussion.

### Week 8:

10/9: Peer critique day.

Due: First draft of round-up due on Google Docs and hardcopy. BRING TWO HARDCOPIES OF DRAFT TO CLASS.

### Week 9:

10/16: No class. Individual conferences with me, required.

Week 10:

10/23: Storytelling. Elements of what makes a good story.

Due: Final draft round-up due on Google Docs only.

Week 11:

10/30: Steps for getting published! Guest speaker? Example query letter critique in class.

Due: Three pitch ideas for personal narrative due on Google Docs and for class discussion.

Week 12:

11/6: Peer critique day.

Due: First draft of query letter due on Google Docs and hardcopy. BRING TWO HARDCOPIES OF DRAFT TO CLASS.

Week 13:

11/13: Using your senses – descriptive writing. Adding length without adding fluff to the personal narrative. How to end your stories.

Due: Final Draft Query letter due on Google Docs only.

Week 14:

11/20: Peer critique day.

Due: First draft of personal narrative due. BRING TWO HARDCOPIES OF DRAFT TO CLASS.

Week 15:

11/27: No class. Individual conferences with me, required.

Week 16:

12/4 Course wrap-up. Last day of class.

Due: Personal narrative + moth submission due.