

**JOU 4308-1336**  
**Magazine and Feature Writing**

Monday periods 7-9 (1:55 p.m. to 4:55 p.m.), 1092 Weimer Hall

**Professor: Moni Basu**

**Office: 3327 Weimer Hall**

**Email: [Mbasu@ufl.edu](mailto:Mbasu@ufl.edu)**

**Phone: 352.273.3529** (Best to email me first and set up a time to talk.)

**Office Hours: Mondays, 10-noon or by appointment**

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

You've learned the basics of news reporting. Now it's time for some creativity and fun. It's time to write compelling stories. You will report and write various types of feature stories for magazines, newspapers and online publications. You will be expected to produce several stories of various formats and lengths. You will meet visiting professional writers and editors who will share their real-life experiences with you. And, together, we will read and analyze good writing to help you become better storytellers. It's my hope that this class functions much like a magazine staff and you will collaborate with each other in producing your stories.

Strong feature writing is more difficult to pull off than straight news and requires **solid reporting and writing skills**. The most compelling stories evoke the reader's imagination and emotions. You can only grow as a writer through practice and reading as much as you can. So, our class time together will be a combination of lectures, discussion, peer editing and writing activities.

By the end of the semester, I hope you will be able to produce stories worthy of publishing.

**Here are a few things we will focus on:**

- How to identify and develop relevant and interesting stories
- Ways to refine and articulate your ideas and pitch them to editors
- Clear, concise and vivid writing

- Techniques for detailed reporting and thorough interviews
- Developing your own style and voice
- Good story structure and organization
- How to self-edit, receive peer feedback, fact-check and very importantly, meet deadlines

## **GRADING**

There are no shortcuts in this class. You will be judged on the quality of your work. I will discuss the grading structure for each assignment before you begin them. Your final grade will be determined based on the following points:

### **Profile (700-1,000 words): 200 points.**

Pitch: 30 points

First draft: 70 points

Final draft: 100 points

### **Essay (800-1,200 words): 200 points**

Pitch: 30 points

First draft: 70 points

Final draft: 100 points

### **In-depth feature (1,500-1,800 words): 300 points.**

Pitch: 50 points

Story outline: 50 points

First draft: 100 points

Final draft: 200 points

### **In-class and other writing assignments: 100 points**

#### **Quizzes: 100 points**

**Class participation: 100 points. 30 points will be based on your magazine presentation.**

### **Grading scale:**

A 925-1000

A- 900-924

B+ 875-899

B 825-874

B- 800-824

C+ 775-799

C 725-774

C- 700-724

D+ 675-699  
D 625-674  
D- 600-624  
F 623 and below

**Bonus:**

Your final grade for a story assignment will be bumped up by a letter if you succeed in publishing your work.

More information on grades and grading policies is here:

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

**REQUIRED READING:**

There are no textbooks for this class. But we will be **reading a LOT** and you will be quizzed on the material. Good writers are voracious readers! Here is the reading list:

*Writing Tools: 55 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*, by Roy Peter Clark (available on Amazon)

*The Associated Press Stylebook and Manual*. (either the online version or print edition available on Amazon).

One feature story every week, assigned by me.

One weekly magazine of your choice, to read through the semester.

Suggested magazines: *The New Yorker*, *New York Times Magazine*, *New York, Time*, *The Economist*, *People*, *Entertainment Weekly*.

Note: You will be required to offer a critique of your magazine in class.

**SUPPLIES**

You will need notebooks and a recording device, if your phone does not have a voice recorder. We will use Canvas for filing your work but you will have to print two copies of your main writing assignments and bring them to class on the due date.

**WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

You will be writing a **profile**, a **reported essay** and an **in-depth feature**.

Those are in addition to writing exercises – both in and out of class -- throughout the semester.

You may find in your reporting that an idea is not working out. That's why you will be expected to come up with more than one idea for each story format. You may be asked to discuss or brainstorm these in class.

You will then submit a written story pitch for approval along with a plan of action that includes your sources, anticipated interviews and background research. The pitch will constitute 20 points of your final story.

### **ACCURACY, FAIRNESS AND STYLE**

This is a class in journalism, not fiction. While you are encouraged to take creative liberties with your writing, your stories must be factually correct. You must review your stories and double check every fact. That includes the names of people, places and organizations. You are expected to have a strong command of spelling and grammar and will lose points (at my discretion) for mistakes. Your copy should be clean and polished when you turn it in.

You are also expected to engage in storytelling that is fair, complete and based on information gathered from diverse sources. A greater understanding of societal differences will help you become reporters who are sensitive, culturally aware and better equipped to write across differences. Please pay attention not just to race, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation but also to things like class, age, education, geography, occupation and religion.

It's always best to conduct interviews in person. You may also speak with people by phone but avoid email interviews.

All your assignments must adhere to AP style. You will lose 5 points for every style error made in your three main writing assignments.

### **HONESTY AND INTEGRITY**

The media plays a vital role in our democracy. The public depends on journalists for news and a deeper understanding of the world around them. As such, there is nothing more important than our honesty, fairness and credibility.

I cannot stress this enough: Plagiarism, fabrication and conflicts of interest will not be tolerated and **you will fail** not just the assignment but the entire class.

Plagiarism is stealing someone else's ideas or work, including chunks of copy from the Internet. Fabrication is the use of invented information or the falsification of material. Conflicts of interest include writing about your roommate, boyfriend, parents, business partners or others with whom you have close relationships or financial ties. If you are unsure about whether you are facing a conflict of interest, please discuss with me.

You are expected to abide by the **UF Honor Code**, which you can read here: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

## **DEADLINES**

In the world of professional journalism, deadlines are critical, as they will be in this class. On deadline dates, your writing assignments will be due within the first 5 minutes of class. After that, your piece will be considered a day late and you will lose 30 points per day on that assignment.

## **ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION AND DEMEANOR**

As I mentioned earlier, this class will function much like a magazine staff. As such, your attendance is mandatory. You are expected to arrive to class on time and behave in a manner that is respectful to me and your fellow students. Please refrain from using cell phone or any other devices that ring, chirp, beep or make any other sounds. You may use laptops but please limit their use to material pertinent to class. Also, please refrain from eating food and other distractions in class.

Writers learn from one another, so you are expected to come to class each week and come fully prepared to participate in activities and discussions. Because your contribution is important, class participation makes up 100 points of your final grade. You will lose all 100 points for participation after two unexcused absences and 300 points from your final grade if you miss three classes or more.

Your insights and comments should be respectful to all. Please note that participation doesn't just mean speaking a lot; you will be judged on the quality of what you say and how focused you are in class, even when you are not speaking.

Absences for serious illness, family emergencies and other urgent matters will be excused only if you notify me before class begins. If you need to miss multiple classes, you will be required to provide appropriate documentation of the problem. You will still be responsible for submitting on time all assignments on their due dates and for material covered in class. Do not ask for a deadline extension unless you have a true emergency. Instructions for all assignments will be given in class so it's in your best interest to make it to class each week.

## **STUDENT RESOURCES**

If you need a little extra help with writing, organizing and editing your stories, the **UF Writing Studio**, located at 302 Tigert Hall, may be able to help. You can also get online tutoring. For more information, go to:

<https://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/>

Mental health is important. The **UF Counseling and Wellness Center** is free for all students. Please use this fantastic resource if you are having trouble coping. You can reach a support staff member between 8am-5pm Monday through Friday at [352-392-1575](tel:352-392-1575). The center's address is 3190 Radio Road. You can see all the services the center provides at:

<https://counseling.ufl.edu/>

Students with disabilities requesting accommodations should first register with the **Disability Resource Center** 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. Call 352-392-8565 or go to:

[www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/)

## **ABOUT ME**

I began my career as a journalist in Tallahassee (home of that “other” university) and have been reporting and editing now for 35 years. I covered the Iraq War since its inception in 2003. On several trips, I was embedded with the U.S. Army and earned the moniker, Evil Reporter Chick -- affectionately, of course. My e-book, *Chaplain Turner’s War* (2012, Agate Publishing) grew from a series of stories on an Army chaplain at war. I’m not a super hero but I was featured in a Marvel comics’ “Civil War” series. Most recently, I was a senior writer at CNN. This is my first semester teaching in Gatorland.

You can find me on Twitter: @TheMoniBasu

Instagram: @evilreporterchick

And my journalist Facebook page: <https://bit.ly/2KCXScJ>

## **SCHEDULE**

This is **an estimation** of how we will proceed this semester and **subject to change** depending on guest speakers and other needs of the class. Some readings are listed below; others will be assigned in class. All readings and assignments should be completed by the start of the due date class.

### **Week 1:**

**8/27:** Introductions, syllabus and discussion of the characteristics of a good feature story (ledes, anecdotes, structure, interviews, details, color).

**Assignment:** Begin thinking about who you might want to profile. Come to class next time with notes on three people and your plans to report the story. Come prepared to discuss your choice of a magazine you will read this semester and bring to the next class a magazine story you enjoyed reading.

**Reading assignment:** Parts 1 and 2, *Writing Tools*

“Zoo Hopes New Polar Bear Makes Love Connection With Female” by Margaret Moffett, (Greensboro, N.C.) *News & Record*

### **Week 2:**

**9/3:** Labor Day. No class. Grill out, head to the beach and enjoy the last of the summer. But remember, this class meets only once a week. So please use this time to read Part 2, *Writing Tools* and jot down ideas for stories.

### **Week 3:**

**9/10:** Writing clearly and concisely. How to write a successful magazine pitch.

**In-class writing assignment:** Profile pitch

**In-class activity:** Discussion of your choice of magazine and your favorite stories

**Reading assignment:** "The Centerfold Next Door by Larry Aydlette, *Palm Beach Post*

#### **Week 4**

**9/17:** Researching and reporting your story and the art of the interview. Proust questionnaire.

**Due:** Final draft of profile pitch (30 points)

**Quiz and in-class discussion:** "The Centerfold Next Door" **Reading assignment:**

#### **Week 5**

**9/24:** Generating strong ideas. What is a reported essay? Developing voice and style.

**Due:** Draft of profile. (80 points. Please bring two printed copies to class.)

**Quiz:** "You have a Thousand Angels Around You."

**In class activity:** Peer feedback on profiles

**Reading assignment:** Part 3, *Writing Tools*

"From Gandhi to guns: An Indian woman explores the NRA convention."  
By Moni Basu, *CNN*

#### **Week 6**

**10/1:** How to grab a reader's attention. Writing great ledes. The end is just as important as the beginning.

**In-class assignment:** Write a pitch for your reported essay and peer feedback.

**Assignment:** In the magazine you are reading, find one lede that grabbed you and one you thought was poorly written.

**Reading assignment:** "The Fighter" by C.J. Chivers, *The New York Times Magazine*

#### **Week 7**

**10/8:** Open class discussion. Come to class with your questions and concerns.

**Reading assignment:** Part 4, *Writing Tools*

Story TBD by Jan Winburn



**Due:** Final draft of profile (100 points) and essay pitch (30 points)

### **Week 8**

**10/15:** Guest speaker: CNN Digital editor Jan Winburn.

### **Week 9**

**10/22:** Storytelling. What makes a compelling story?

**Due:** Draft of personal essay (80 points. Please bring two printed copies to class)

**In-class activity:** Peer feedback on essays

**Reading assignment:** "Sherry Johnson was raped, pregnant and married by 11. Now she's fighting to end child marriage in America." By Moni Basu, *CNN*

### **Week 10**

**10/29:** Long-form feature writing. Build your story. Stay organized.

**Due:** Personal essay (100 points)

**In class activity:** Brainstorming ideas for in-depth feature

**In-class assignment:** Write pitch for in-depth feature story.

### **Week 11**

**11/5:** Descriptive writing. Using all your senses and details, details, details.

**In-class activity:** Magazine presentations

**Due:** Final pitch for in-depth feature story (50 points)

**Reading assignment:** "My Family's Slave" by Alex Tizon, *The Atlantic*

### **Week 12**

**11/12:** Veterans Day holiday. Stop to remember the sacrifices of our men and women in uniform. There will be no class but keep reading, reporting and writing! Your feature story draft will be due in the next class.

### **Week 13**

**11/19:** Self-editing and rewriting.

**Due:** Draft of in-depth feature (100 points)

**Quiz:** "My Family's Slave"

### **Week 14**

**11/26:** How to get published. Guest speaker. TBD

**Week 15**

**12/3:** Last class. Open discussion.

**Due:** Final draft of in-depth feature story (200 points)