

JOU 4308-1336
Magazine and Feature Writing
Tuesday periods 6-8 (12:50 p.m. to 3:50 p.m.), 2058 Weimer Hall

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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 10 a.m. to noon. or by appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVES

You've learned the basics of news reporting. Now it's time to get creative and have some fun writing human-interest stories. In this course, you will report and write various types of compelling 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.

This class is challenging. 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 by 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. Grades will be posted on Canvas. Your final grade will be determined based on the following points:

Reported essay (800-1,000 words): 100 points

First draft: 40 points

Final draft: 60 points

Profile (1,000-1,200 words): 200 points

Pitch: 30 points

First draft: 70 points

Final draft: 100 points

In-depth feature (1,500 words): 300 points

Pitch: 50 points

First draft: 100 points

Final draft: 150 points

In-class and other writing assignments: 100 points

Quizzes: 100 points

Class participation: 200 points

Magazine presentation: 50 points

PackBack: 100 points

Class discussion: 50 points

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 in a reputable media outlet. You must clear this with me.

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 you will be expected to keep up with the news and we will be **reading a LOT**. You will be quizzed on current events as well as on the reading 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 magazine or website of your choice, to read through the semester. You will be expected to present your magazine to the class. Some suggestions: *The New Yorker*, *New York Times Magazine*, *New York*, *Time*, *Narratively*, *The Bitter Southerner*, *The Atavist Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, *Fast Company*, *Bustle*, *The Economist*, *Sports Illustrated*, *GQ*, *Esquire*, *Oxford American*, *Mother Jones*, *Harper's*, *The Atlantic* and *The Hollywood Reporter*.

SUPPLIES

You will need notebooks and a recording device, if your phone does not have a voice recorder. You will also need to bring a pen with **red ink** to class for peer editing sessions. You will use email for filing your work but you may be asked to print copies of your main writing assignments and bring them to class on the due date for peer review.

You should have by now received an email which guides you on how to sign up for a **PackBack** account, which you will use for online discussions. The fee is \$25.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

You will be writing **a reported essay, a profile 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 will be asked to discuss or brainstorm these in class.

All your stories must have at least four human sources; you must have six sources for the in-depth feature. You must list the names and contact information for your sources so that I am able to reach put to them if necessary.

You must type all your stories in Microsoft Word with either 1.5 or 2 line spacing. Each file must be named with your last name and the assignment. **Example: SmithProfileDraft.** Please email your assignments to me as Word attachments. Do not send me links to OneDrive or Google Drive.

COMMUNICATION

Journalists are in the business of communication and you MUST communicate with me in this class. **You must check your UF email every day. You must check Canvas and PackBack** regularly for discussions and announcements. If you are having problems with your assignments, you must email me immediately and not wait until class to discuss them.

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 and void of any errors. **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. All your assignments must adhere to AP style. You will lose points for every style, spelling and grammar error in your writing assignments.

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 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.

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. You must meet the deadline (time and date) set for each assignment. You will lose points for failing to meet deadlines.

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. Please keep laptops closed unless you are asked to write in class. Your class notes must be handwritten. Also, please refrain from eating food and other distractions in class.

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.

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 200 points of your final grade. Of those, 100 points are for class discussions and exercises. You will lose 25 points for every unexcused absence. Absences for serious illness, family emergencies and other urgent matters will be excused only if you speak with 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. Instructions for all assignments will be given in class so it's in your best interest to make it to class each week.

The other 100 participation points is for [Packback Questions](#), an online discussion platform powered by artificial intelligence. This platform is specifically designed to encourage curiosity and increase critical thinking & writing skills. On Packback, you'll be encouraged & rewarded for asking complex questions about how what we're studying relates to the real world.

How to Register on Packback:

If you were on the original roster for this course, your account has already been created by Packback & added to the correct community!

1. Search your inbox for an email from holla@packback.co with the subject line "Finish registration for JOU 4308." This may be hiding in spam, so search thoroughly!
2. Click "set account password" to get started! (If you already have a Packback account, just log in)
3. Once you're logged in, click "join a community". When this course's community appears, click "join community"
4. Input payment information & follow the prompts to complete checkout.
5. Enter the community & start asking questions!

If you did not receive a welcome email, head to packback.co, create an account (use your school email!), and find our community with the community look-up key. (Note: this is not a payment or free access code!)

Every week, you must ask one PackBack question and post two responses by Sunday at 11:59 pm. Note: On Packback you can't post early or late, you must post within the designated posting interval. Packback is worth 100 points, and is 10 percent of your overall course grade. So please take this seriously. You will receive six points for every question and two points for every response. You can earn extra credit for extra posts.

Note: Packback utilizes Artificial Intelligence that will moderate (remove) posts if they don't meet the [Community Guidelines](#). If your post is moderated, you will receive a coaching email, prompting you to edit & re-submit for credit. However, it can take up to 24 hours for the Packback team to moderate a post and send a coaching email. This is why it is important that you complete your Packback questions and responses far before the deadline!

If you have ANY questions or concerns regarding Packback registration or throughout the semester, please contact the customer support team at holla@packback.co!

[Packback FAQ](#) ◆ [Coaching & Question Tutorial Video](#) ◆ [Curiosity Score FAQ](#) ◆ [Terms of Use](#)

UF 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 extremely 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/

ABOUT ME

I began my career as a journalist in Tallahassee (home of that “other” university) and have been reporting and editing now for 37 years. I have been covering 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 Marvel Comics’ “Civil War” series. Most recently, I was a senior writer at CNN. This is my second year teaching in Gatorland.

You can find me on:

www.monibasu.com

Twitter: @TheMoniBasu

Instagram: @evilreporterchick

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

SCHEDULE

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

Week 1:

1/7: Introductions, syllabus and discussion of the characteristics of a good feature story (ledes, anecdotes, structure, interviews, details, color).

Assignment: Begin thinking about ideas for a personal essay and what magazine you will read this semester.

Reading assignment: Part 1, *Writing Tools*

Week 2

1/14: Dissecting a feature story. Differences between news and features. Types of feature stories. What is a reported essay?

Assignment: Ideas for your essay.

Reading assignment: “Dumb Kids’ Class” by Mark Bowden:

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/06/dumb-kids-class/308981/>

Podcast: “Modern Love,” New York Times

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/20/style/modern-love-podcast-greta-gerwig.html>

Week 3

1/21: Generating strong ideas. How to write a successful magazine pitch. In-class brainstorm: Pitch your essay idea in class.

Assignment: You should be reporting your personal essay this week and come to the next class with finessed ideas.

Due: Come to class prepared to speak about your magazine choice and discuss a story you like from that magazine.

Week 4

1/28: Writing clearly and concisely. Developing voice and style.

Reading assignment: Part 2, *Writing Tools*

Week 5

2/4: Editing. What to look for in a feature story. Peer review session.

Due: First draft of essay. Bring a printed copy with you to class.

In-class assignment: Peer review of essay.

Reading assignment: “The Most American Terrorist: The Making of Dylan Roof” by Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah. <https://www.gq.com/story/dylann-roof-making-of-an-american-terrorist>

“Dead Man Walking nun: ‘Botched’ executions unmask a botched system” by Moni Basu. <https://www.cnn.com/2014/08/06/us/executions-dead-man-walking-nun/index.html>

Week 6

2/11: Elements of a good profile. Researching and reporting your story and the art of the interview. Proust questionnaire.

Due: Final draft of essay.

Assignment: Begin thinking about who you might want to profile.

Reading assignment: Part 3, *Writing Tools*

Week 7

2/18: Discussion of Writing Tools, Parts 1-3. How to grab a reader’s attention. Writing great ledes and killer kickers.

In-class assignment: Brainstorm profile ideas

Reading assignment: Part 4, *Writing Tools*

Week 8

2/25: Guest speaker.

Assignment: In the magazine you are reading, find one lede that grabbed you and one you thought was poorly written. Come to the next class prepared to discuss.

Due: Profile pitch. Bring two copies to class with you. Peer review session.

Week 9

3/4: SPRING BREAK. Enjoy but keep reading!

Assignment: Write three or four descriptive grafs about your Spring Break.

Week 10

3/10: Descriptive writing. Using all your senses and details, details, details.

Due: Draft of profile. Bring a printed copy to class.

In class activity: Peer review of profile draft.

Reading Assignment: Part 5, *Writing Tools*

Week 11

3/17: Storytelling. What makes a compelling story? Elements of a strong feature story.

Due: Ideas for in-depth feature. Come prepared to brainstorm in class.

Due: Final draft of profile.

Reading assignment: “A sliver of Haiti in Boca” by Liz Balmaseda

<https://www.palmbeachpost.com/entertainment/dining/sliver-haiti-boca-raton-the-chef-artistic-dishes-made-him-instagram-star/3KK8WNJgunY2knGdiWjzrN/>

“For families of Parkland shooting victims, awful truth came hours after waiting” by Michael Mayo and Megan O’Matz. <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/parkland/florida-school-shooting/fl-reg-parkland-shooting-notification-20180300-story.html>

“Buying Black, Rebooted” by Anthonia Akitunde.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/25/style/buying-black-rebooted.html>

Week 12

3/24: In-depth feature writing. Build your story. Stay organized.

Due: Draft of feature story pitch. Bring a printed copy with you.

Due: Come prepared to discuss the three assigned feature stories.

In class activity: Peer review of feature pitch

Week 13

3/31: Individual story conferences. We will use class time to do these.

Due: You should have enough reporting for your feature story to discuss it in detail.

Week 14

4/7: Magazine presentations. Self-editing and rewriting. Questions to ask yourself.

Due: Final pitch for in-depth feature.

Week 15

4/14: Magazine presentations. How to get published.

Due: Draft of in-depth feature. Bring a printed copy to class. Peer review session.

Week 16

4/21: Magazine presentations. Open discussion.

Due: Final draft of in-depth feature story.

Week 17

4/28: Final exams. No class. Use this time to polish your final draft.