

JOU 4308: MAGAZINE AND FEATURE WRITING

Instructor: **Moni Basu (Prof B)**

Email: mbasu@ufl.edu; Phone: 352.273.3529

Office: 3108 Weimer Hall

Office hours: **Wednesdays, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.**

and by appointment on **Zoom**: <https://bit.ly/3AKmc7c>

Need to talk about class? The pandemic? Anything that is bugging you? I will make myself available during office hours or by phone or Zoom to meet with you. Please email me on your UF account or use the Canvas mail tool. I will try my best to respond within 24 hours.

* * * * *

WELCOME!

I love storytelling and am excited to be guiding you this semester as you report and write feature stories for magazines, newspapers and online publications.

You've learned the basics of news reporting. Now it's time to get creative and write compelling human-interest stories. Feature writing can be lots of fun and I hope that by the end of the semester, you will have built a few journalistic muscles you may not have used so far.

This is an **interactive class** and **your participation is paramount** to your success. Together, we will read and analyze good writing to help you become better storytellers. You will meet professional writers and editors who will share their real-life experiences with you. You will often work with a partner to edit and revise your work.

This is not a lecture class. It's my hope that this class functions much like a magazine staff and therefore, critical thinking and collaboration, vital ingredients in newsrooms across America, will be key to your success.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Let me be upfront with you: 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. You must come prepared to class.

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
- Framing and focusing your story
- Making sure your reporting is fair and balanced and includes diverse voices
- Techniques for conducting detailed reporting and high-yield interviews
- Powerful writing that is clear, concise and vivid
- Using sensory details and metaphors
- Developing your own style and voice
- Good story structure and organization
- The importance of recognizing your audience
- How to self-edit and give constructive feedback to others
- How to receive peer feedback, revise drafts, fact-check and very importantly, meet deadlines

You are expected to stay up to date with the news and occasionally, you will be quizzed on current events. You cannot get strong ideas for stories unless you know what is happening in the world around you. You will also be assigned a magazine to read throughout the semester.

The book for this class is *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer* by Roy Peter Clark. It is available on Bookshop.org, Amazon and other online sellers.

You must have access to *The Associated Press Stylebook*, 2020 or later.

Recommended but not required: *On Writing Well*, by William Zinsser

You will also be doing a lot of other readings, mostly from magazines and online publications, which will be posted on Canvas on a weekly basis. You cannot improve your writing unless you read, read and read some more. You will be required to post on Canvas reflections on the readings and must do so by the designated deadline.

Please **open an account on Medium.com**, where you may publish your stories if you are unable to place them elsewhere.

Prerequisites

You must have taken Professor Mike Foley's JOU 3101 and preferably, Professor Herb Lowe's multimedia reporting class. You must have **strong reporting and writing skills** in order to succeed.

Minimum technology requirements

The University of Florida expects students to acquire appropriate computer hardware and software. For this class, you must have Zoom capability, a smartphone or a recording device, and Microsoft Word. You will be required to download the Canvas app on your phone and turn on notifications.

COURSE POLICIES

Accuracy, fairness and style

This is a class in journalism and 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 expected to have a strong command of spelling and grammar and **will lose points 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 to diversity in your reporting.

Professionalism, 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 transparency. I cannot stress this enough: **Plagiarism, fabrication and conflicts of interest will not be tolerated, and you will FAIL the class and lose credibility** as a journalist. By now, I'm sure all of you know the basic ethics code of journalism. But just in case: Plagiarism is stealing someone else's ideas or work, including 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 without divulging those connections. 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/>

You are expected to act like a professional journalist. You should demonstrate initiative; establish priorities; interact professionally with instructors, peers and classmates; deal with unusual reporting challenges and more.

Deadlines

In the world of professional journalism, **meeting deadlines is mandatory** as it will be in this class. Deadlines will be clearly noted in Canvas, usually by the end of the day on the deadline date. (That's 11:59 p.m.) After that, your piece will be considered a day late and you will lose points unless you have cleared it with me. Please submit your assignments as **Microsoft Word files** (NOT PDFs) through Canvas. **Do not send me links to One Drive or Google Drive.** The name of each file should begin with your last name and contain the name of the assignment. Example: SmithScene1.

Attendance and participation

This is not a lecture **class but a writing workshop.** My hope is that you will learn much from our in-class writing and discussions. You are encouraged to be self-directed and take responsibility for your learning. We are a small class that meets once a week. As such, your attendance is mandatory.

catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/

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. You will be required to post comments on the Canvas discussion board for this class. Your insights and comments should be respectful to all.

Writers learn from one another, so you are expected to come to class each week **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.

Communication

Journalists are in the business of communication and you **must communicate** with me in this class. **You must check your UF email and Canvas** regularly for discussions and announcements. **You should download the Canvas app on your phone and turn on notifications.**

If you are having problems with your assignments, you must email me immediately and not wait until class to discuss them. Good communication is extremely important, especially during the pandemic when we will not be able to meet in person. I am here to help you but cannot unless you let me know.

GRADING POLICY

I will make every effort to have each assignment graded and posted in a timely manner.

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

Draft: 50 points

Final: 50 points

Profile (1,300-1,500 words): 200 points

Draft: 100 points

Final: 100 points

Other writing assignments: 100 points (This includes Canvas discussions, in-class writing and quizzes. Points delineation TBD)

In-class participation and discussion: 100 points

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	% Equivalency	GPA Equivalency
A	93-100%	4.0
A-	90 – 92%	3.67
B+	87 – 89%	3.33
B	83 – 86%	3.00
B-	80 – 82%	2.67
C+	77 – 79%	2.33
C	73 – 76%	2.00
C-	70 – 72%	1.67
D+	67 – 69%	1.33
D	63 – 66%	1.00
D-	60 – 62%	.67
E, I, NG, S-U, WF	0 – 59%	0.00

See the [current UF grading policies](#) for more information.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Please take careful note of this section of the syllabus. These are principles that have always been extremely important to me and given the current climate in the United States, I believe them to be critical.

The UF Department of Journalism embraces a commitment toward an intellectual community enriched and enhanced by diversity along a number of dimensions. UF journalism courses are expected to help foster an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.

One of the topics we will be discussing in this class is how to report stories – **with empathy** -- about people who are vastly different from you or people who have been underrepresented in every segment of society, including in the media. By that I mean not only differences in **race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation but also class, age, religion, nationality, disability, culture and other visible and non-visible differences**. I consider our differences to be a great asset and this class is intended to realize the greatest potential of that asset. You will be exposed to a diverse array of reading materials and speakers.

I will show the utmost respect for you, no matter your background or perspective, and I expect that you will do the same for me as well as your fellow students. I hope to foster a Zoom classroom environment in which you will feel free to voice your thoughts and opinions without fear, intimidation, embarrassment, or shame. Please let me know if you have any thoughts on how to improve inclusivity or if someone or something has made you feel uneasy.

Diversity in journalism is vital, as we have seen from issues that have surfaced over the last few months over police killings and the mass protests in American cities and towns. I expect you to engage in storytelling that is fair, complete and based on information gathered from diverse sources. That means conducting interviews that may feel uncomfortable or daunting even. But that is a fundamental objective of this class and I hope you will lean on me and your classmates to help you navigate the reporting process.

ABOUT ME

If you are an intrepid reporter, you will have Googled me by now. I began my career as a journalist in Tallahassee (home of that “other” university) and have been reporting and editing now for 38 years. I covered presidential elections, hurricanes, earthquakes and 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 superhero but I was featured in Marvel Comics’ “Civil War” series. Most recently, I was a senior writer at CNN. I began teaching at UF in 2018 and in 2020, I was named the Undergraduate Teacher of the Year. I also teach in a low-residency MFA program in narrative media at the University of Georgia.

Most students at UF know me as Prof B. Those who have taken my class will tell you that I love storytelling and am here to help you become better writers. I want you to reach out and ask for help. I will make myself available.

You can find me on:

www. monibasus.com

Twitter: @TheMoniBasu

Instagram: @evilreporterchick

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

(I’m not doing the **TikTok thing**, though I have an account to see what you are up to.)

UF POLICIES

University Policy on Accommodating 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 that must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

University Policy on Academic Conduct:

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty 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 either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any

condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Communication Courtesy:

All members of the class are expected to follow [rules of common courtesy](#) during, before and after class, in all email messages, threaded discussions, and chats.

GETTING HELP

Technical Difficulties:

For issues with technical difficulties for Canvas, please contact the UF Help Desk at:

- <http://helpdesk.ufl.edu>
- (352) 392-HELP (4357)
- Walk-in: HUB 132

Any requests for make-ups due to technical issues should be accompanied by the ticket number received from the Help Desk when the problem was reported to them. The ticket number will document the time and date of the problem. You should e-mail your instructor within 24 hours of the technical difficulty if you wish to request a make-up.

Health and Wellness

- **U Matter, We Care:** If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit umatter.ufl.edu to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.
- **Counseling and Wellness Center:** Visit counseling.ufl.edu or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.
- **Student Health Care Center:** Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit shcc.ufl.edu.
- **University Police Department:** Visit police.ufl.edu or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).
- **UF Health Shands Emergency Room/Trauma Center:** For immediate medical care in Gainesville, call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; ufhealth.org/emergency-room-trauma-center.

ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SUPPORT

Career Connections Center: 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services career.ufl.edu/.

- **Library Support:** Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask

- **Teaching Center:** 352-392-2010 General study skills and tutoring: teachingcenter.ufl.edu/
- **Writing Studio:** 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers: writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/

COURSE EVALUATIONS

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

You will do well in this class if you:

- Read, read, read. And keep up with the news. This will help generate story ideas.
- Don't wait to do your reporting all at once. Pace yourself. Be prepared for unresponsive sources.
- Keep your notes organized. Transcribe interviews as soon as you conduct them.
- Schedule writing time for yourself when you can be relaxed and feel your "zen."
- Write drafts and revise them.
- Read ALL of the course materials carefully.
- Ask for help or clarification of the material if you need it. Ask for help if you need it. Do not wait to ask questions! Waiting to ask a question might cause you to miss a due date.
- Do your work well before the due dates. Sometimes things happen. If your computer goes down when you are trying to submit an assignment, you'll need time to troubleshoot the problem.
- To be extra safe, back up your work to an external hard drive, thumb drive, or through a cloud service.
- Participate in class.

PRIVACY AND ACCESSIBILITY

For information about the privacy policies of the tools used in this course, see the links below:

- Instructure (Canvas)
 - [Privacy Policy](#)
 - [Accessibility](#)
- Zoom
 - [Privacy Policy](#)
 - [Accessibility](#)
- YouTube (Google)
 - [Privacy Policy](#)

- [Accessibility](#)
- Microsoft
 - [Privacy Policy](#)
 - [Accessibility](#)
- Adobe
 - [Privacy Policy](#)

COVID-RELATED PRACTICES

In response to COVID-19, the following policies and requirements are in place to maintain your learning environment and to enhance the safety of our in-classroom interactions.

- You are expected to wear approved face coverings at all times during class and within buildings.
- This course has been assigned a physical classroom with enough capacity to maintain physical distancing (6 feet between individuals) requirements. Please utilize designated seats and maintain appropriate spacing between students. Please do not move desks or stations.
- Sanitizing supplies are available in the classroom if you wish to wipe down your desks prior to sitting down and at the end of the class.
- Follow your instructor's guidance on how to enter and exit the classroom. Practice physical distancing to the extent possible when entering and exiting the classroom.
- If you are experiencing COVID-19 symptoms ([guidance from the CDC on symptoms of coronavirus](#)), please use the UF Health screening system and follow the instructions on whether you are able to attend class. Find more information in the [UF Health guidance on what to do if you have been exposed to or are experiencing Covid-19 symptoms](#).
- Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work. Find more information on the [university attendance policies](#).

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 and you should come to class ready to discuss them.

Week 1, January 11:

Introductions and syllabus. The Real You. Please upload before class a photo that you believe shows the essence of you.

- **Read for next class:** Part 1, *Writing Tools*

Week 2, January 18:

How is a feature story different than news? We will discuss different types of feature stories including the personal essay.

- **Read for next class:** “Dumb Kids’ Class” by Mark Bowden:
<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/06/dumb-kids-class/308981/>
- **Listen to this episode of the** “Modern Love,” podcast by the New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/20/style/modern-love-podcast-greta-gerwig.html>

Week 3, January 25:

The personal essay. What goes into writing a piece with broad appeal?

- Come to class with an idea for your essay. Be prepared to discuss.
- **Writing assignment:** Read an essay in one of these magazines: New York Times Magazine, The Atlantic, Bitter Southerner, New Yorker, The New Republic, Outside Magazine or Vanity Fair. Write 300 words about why you liked it. Submit on Canvas. **10 points**

Week 4, February 1: Discussion of Mark Bowden essay and Modern Love. Pitch your essay idea in class. Get with a partner and discuss how to focus your essay.

- **In class today:** Quiz 1. **10 points**
- **Assignment:** You should be reporting your personal essay this week

Week 5, February 8: How to write clearly and concisely. Show don’t tell.

- **In-class assignment:** Rewrite sentences for clarity. On paper. **10 points.**
- **Reading assignment:** Part 2, *Writing Tools*
- **Due February 17:** First draft of your essay. Submit on Canvas and bring two sets of printed copies of your essay with you to class for peer review.

Week 6, February 15: Writing a profile. What makes for a good profile?

- **Reading assignment:** “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>

- The Girl in the Kent State photo by Patricia McCormick.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/magazine/2021/04/19/girl-kent-state-photo-lifelong-burden-being-national-symbol/>

Week 6, February 22: The art of the interview, part 1. Proust questionnaire. Discussion of assigned readings.

- **Reading assignment:** Part 3, *Writing Tools*
- **Due March 1:** Final draft of your essay

Week 7, March 1: Open discussion of Writing Tools, Parts 1-3. Come to class with a question. The art of the interview, part 2. Begin brainstorming profile ideas. Come to the next class ready to discuss.

- **In-class assignment:** Interview a classmate and tell us something surprising. **10 points.**
- **Reading assignment:** Part 4, *Writing Tools*
- **Writing assignment:** Read a profile in a magazine or website of your choice (must be at least 800 words) and write 300 words on what worked and what didn't. Submit on Canvas. **10 points.** Due February 27.

Week 8, March 8: Spring Break. No class. Have fun, but stay safe!

Week 9, March 15: What makes a compelling story? Elements of a strong feature story. Descriptive writing. Using all your senses and details, details, details. Using voice and style.

- **Quiz 2: 10 points**
- **Due:** Ideas for your profile. Come prepared to brainstorm in class.
- **Reading assignment:** TBD

Week 10, March 22: Great beginnings and endings. How to grab a reader's attention: Writing great ledes and killer kickers.

- **Writing assignment:** Find an online feature story lede that grabbed you and one you thought was poorly written. Submit the url for each story as well as 300 words about the ledes. **10 points. Due March 20.**
- **Reading Assignment:** Part 5, *Writing Tools*

Week 12, March 29: Build your story. Stay organized. In-class workshop with your writing buddy. Bring a printed copy of your profile to class with you.

- **Due:** Draft of your profile story. **100 points**
- **Reading assignment:** TBD

Week 13, April 5: Reading assignment: TBD

- **Schedule individual story conference**

Week 14, April 12: How to pitch your story and get published.

- **In-class assignment:** Write a pitch for your story. **20 points.**
- **Due:** Final draft of your profile. **100 points**

Week 15, April 19: Last day of class

- Write 300-400 words on what you learned in this class. **10 points.**