

JOU 4308: MAGAZINE AND FEATURE WRITING

Fall 2022 | Section 14380 | T 12:50-2:45; R 12:50-1:40



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Office Hours: By appointment.*

* Since this is an online class, please let me know ahead of time when you plan to attend office hours so that I can send a link to a Google video chat. My work schedule is quite flexible, and I'm always willing to accommodate. Just email me to set something up.

Welcome to a new kind of storytelling

Up until now in your budding journalism careers, you've likely focused on perfecting two tenets: accuracy and clarity — the two pillars undergirding our profession, and for good reason. Great journalism must always be factually correct and accessible, and those facts won't change in this course. But now, it's time to go beyond those pillars and explore the rich pantheon of journalistic possibilities collectively called feature writing.

To do this, we will together explore features of various lengths, forms and purposes. You will practice identifying and reporting the critical, minute details and anecdotes that often provide feature stories with their gravity; you will write and revise, then revise again to familiarize yourself with the feature editing process; and ultimately, you will (hopefully, at least) exit this class with an appreciation for why human-interest stories are worth telling, and the ability to tell them yourself.

Success will require three main traits, aside from the many already endemic to students at this great university. They are:

- 1) **Curiosity.** The best ideas, in terms of stories and how to tell them, come from looking into the world (often, as a form of habit) and asking what, who, how and — especially — why.

- 2) **Determination.** Feature writing often gets a bad rep as the unimportant cousin of hard news/investigative reporting. It's often the first department cut at struggling newspapers, the first casualty of the attention economy. But to be great at it requires as much hard work as those other "important" fields, if not more. It takes a willingness to call sources three or four times to get every necessary detail, and the humility to accept criticism throughout the revision process. If this starts to feel burdensome, that probably means you're doing a good job (although please don't be shy about reaching out if your workload from this class becomes *over*burdensome, either).
- 3) **Participation.** I was a college student myself, and not too long ago at that. Therefore, I know this class will not be your first priority, and I don't expect it to be; I know that "life happens," and things will come up that make completing reading assignments impossible or story submissions late. I accept all of that. But what I ask in return is simply that absent any of those complications, you stay engaged — with the reading, with the lectures, with the guest speakers and, certainly, with the reporting/writing process. This course, after all, is for your benefit. You're here, presumably, because you want to be. And the more you participate, the more you will carry away with you.

Now then, with my introductory diatribe finished, let's talk specifics.

Course Objectives

This class will combine lectures, guest speakers, readings, short writing assignments and longer writing assignments, all geared toward teaching you to tell rich, emotional, nuanced stories. The course is designed to force you to habitually read, write and *think* about the stories you want to tell and how you want to tell them. If you follow along, then by semester's end, you'll hopefully not only be ready to publish your own feature stories, but know *how* to get them published, too.

Here's a sampling of some ideas/topics we'll discuss:

- How to find interesting story ideas
- How to pitch your ideas to editors
- Writing for a specific audience
- Leaning into your unique voice

- Feature story structure
- Asking the right questions
- The many types of features
- Receiving and offering constructive criticism
- Fact checking
- Fairness vs. balance

Prerequisites

Reporting (JOU 3101) or instructor approval. I welcome anyone who has interest in learning to write and report human-interest stories as long as they can demonstrate writing/reporting competency, whether through completion of Reporting or through prior experience at student publications, internships, etc.

Minimum technology requirements

The University of Florida expects students to acquire appropriate computer hardware and software. For this class, you must have video chat capability, a smartphone or a recording device, and access to Google Docs.

Readings

There is **no required textbook** for this class. I will send out weekly reading assignments via email and/or Canvas every Thursday afternoon. Sometimes these assignments will be longform pieces; sometimes they will be several shorter pieces. I'll warn you ahead of time that my background is in sports journalism, so your reading assignments will likely skew toward that bias simply because it's the world I know. That said, even if you hate sports, these stories are chosen for general-interest readers and will only tangentially be related to sports. Plus, as you'll soon learn, the best feature stories are a joy to read regardless of topic.

Additionally, each student will be responsible for submitting one reading assignment for the entire class and will lead a discussion about it. I know many of you are new to feature writing, so if you need help selecting a piece, please don't hesitate to reach out for guidance.

Be warned: This is a reading-intensive class. As an introductory course, my main job here is to expose you to the possibilities of feature writing and bring you to a level of competency. The only way to do that is for you to read, read, read. Readings — whether chosen by me or your classmates — will form the basis of our class discussions and will often preface guest speakers, so please do them. Your participation grade will largely reflect your engagement in these discussions. Given that as a student, I myself was hesitant to speak up in class even when I had done the readings, I will sometimes call on students without warning, so be prepared to contribute something — anything — to the conversation.

Assignments/Grading breakdown

Profile (~1,500 words): 150 points; 50 for first draft, 100 for revision(s)

Short feature (300-500 words): 150 points; 75 for first draft, 75 for revision(s)

Longer feature (1,500-4,000 words): 300 points; 100 for first draft, 200 for revision(s)

Four miscellaneous assignments: 50 points each

Final story (“longer feature”) pitch: 50 points

Participation: 150 points

Assignments in-depth

Assignment	Due Date(s)	Description	Points	% of Course Grade
Profile	Idea via email by Sept. 7; first draft Sept. 28; Revision Oct. 12	1500 words; write about a person	150 points - 50 for first draft - 100 for revisions	15%

Short Feature	Ideas via email by Oct. 12; first draft Oct. 26; revision Nov. 2	300-500 words; write about a person, event or place to practice short-form storytelling	150 points - 75 for first draft - 75 for revisions	15%
Final Story Pitch	Nov. 2	A formal pitch for your final project	50 points	5%
Longer Feature	Nov. 30 for first draft; Dec. 14 (or earlier) for revisions.	1500-4000 words; feature that can be about anything, in any form (pending approval)	300 points - 100 for first draft - 200 for revisions	30%
Misc Assignment 1	Sept. 23 at 11:59 p.m.	<p>“Two Writers Slinging Yang” assignment</p> <p>You’ll listen to one episode of Jeff Pearlman’s writing podcast, “Two Writers Slinging Yang,” and write a two-page double-spaced (minimum) essay about what you learned/found most helpful and/or interesting. You can pick any episode in the extensive history of the show, although if you’d like recommendations, I’m happy to provide them.</p>	50 points	5%
Misc Assignment 2	Must have watched episode before class on Oct. 20	<p>“Forensic Files” assignment</p> <p>“Forensic Files” is a true-crime TV show that used to air on HLN. I will send out an episode to the class, and we will discuss it in the context of story shape and the idea of journalistic writing as a craft. I know this sounds extremely random on its face, but I think this show could be a valuable</p>	50 points	5%

		teaching tool. We'll figure that out together. To get full credit, just contribute to the in-class conversation.		
Misc Assignment 3	Nov. 18 at 11:59 p.m.	<p>Fact checking assignment</p> <p>After you've all submitted your shortform feature revisions, I will randomly assign each of you one of your classmates' stories. You will have one week to fact-check that story — a process we will discuss in class.</p>	50 points	5%
Misc Assignment 4	Sept. 1 at 11:59 p.m.	<p>Song analysis assignment</p> <p>A two-page, double-spaced write-up that explores the narrative/storytelling... of a song. Any song — you pick. The idea here is to get you thinking about how stories and narratives are everywhere if you learn to look for them. If you'd rather I assign a song, I'm happy to do that, but I'd prefer you pick one that you like. From there, just tell me what you think the song is trying to say/what you find interesting about it from a storytelling perspective.</p>	50 points	5%
Participation	All the time	<p>This grade will be based on two factors: your engagement during in-class discussions, and the results of three pop-reading quizzes. If you want to make it easy on yourself, I suggest you raise your hand early and often. Those who don't will also get a chance</p>	150 points	15%

		<p>to impact this grade when I randomly call on them. As for the quizzes, they'll be open ended — just two or three prompts asking you to analyze the readings. I'll use a combination of your quiz results and your class engagement to determine your participation grade. If that sounds somewhat subjective, that's by design — I want you to have a chance to make up for poor quiz scores with excellent in-class engagement, and vice versa.</p>		
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Class policies of note

On plagiarism and professionalism: Like in every other class at the J-School, plagiarism will not be tolerated. There are, in fact, very few things that I will not tolerate to some degree, but this is one of them, so let me be perfectly clear: If you are caught plagiarizing (stealing someone's work or ideas, verbatim or not, without attribution), fabricating (making up people, quotes, anecdotes, etc.), or engaging in conflicts of interest (using as sources your parents/roommates/people to whom you have some personal connection in a non-personal story), then **you will receive an automatic failing grade**, no question about it. I know the pressures of college/young adulthood may tempt you to take an easy way out; I saw it plenty during my time as a student. But it simply is not worth it. If you're struggling, just talk to me and we'll work something out. No amount of pressure is worth engaging in these practices; especially not when I'm offering you an alternative escape hatch.

Additionally, you are expected to be accurate, and your prose should be in accordance with the most up-to-date AP Stylebook. I will not be rigorously fact-checking every story you submit, but you will lose points for obvious errors. And I am not going to deduct a specified number of points for spelling/grammar errors (though I will point them out), but an accumulation that suggests carelessness will affect your grade. I will hand out rubrics with each assignment that offer specifics on what qualifies as "an accumulation," how many points you'll lose for fact errors, etc.

On deadlines: This industry doesn't tolerate lateness, and I won't tolerate patterns of tardiness in this class. Submit your assignments on time, and we won't have any problems. If you need an extension for whatever reason, I'm happy to consider it if you come talk to me; I've often found that as important as deadlines are in our industry, learning to negotiate them is also a valuable skill. However, if you turn in an assignment late without consulting me at least 24 hours before it's due, you will lose one letter grade for each day it's late.

On diversity and inclusivity: At its best, our industry thrives when diverse viewpoints, backgrounds and experiences are represented consistently and thoroughly across publications. Conversely, one of our industry's greatest threats to credibility is presented by being clueless, misguided or out of touch with the people we write about. For that reason, prioritizing diversity is vital both in terms of your reporting, and in terms of the parameters of this class.

The key word here is empathy, meaning, at its most basic, "understanding another." This sounds simple on its face, but it often means delving into contexts and communities you've never encountered. We'll discuss how to do that effectively over the course of the semester, but for now, just keep in mind that you'll be expected to incorporate diverse, relevant sourcing into your reporting. Our job as reporters is somewhat unique in that we're not only a reflection of society, but we *present* that reflection back to society, and it ought to be as thorough and as accurate as possible. This becomes impossible if we ignore important cultural context and relevant voices. In order to be fair, we must be empathetic, and we must be thorough. That's the way it should be — and also the way that makes the work most fun and rewarding. As retired sportswriter Gary Smith once said, "Judgment just closes off so many possibilities and doors and windows. So, the more you open to what created the human in any given moment, the richer the terrain you as a writer have to explore. It's in the ambiguities, the paradoxes of human beings, where truth lies."

As far as this class goes, I fervently believe that our differences — be they race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, age, religion, nationality, disability, or culture — make us better reporters and better human beings. Our differences make us who we are, and by embracing our own unique backgrounds while also recognizing and trying to understand the unique experiences of others, as reporters, we're able to better serve the communities we cover. The same applies to our relationships in this class. We're all better off when we work hard to understand each others' viewpoints, and I expect that you will do so throughout our time together. I, in turn, will strive to do the same. I've tried to incorporate a range of voices and experiences into our reading selections, and by giving each of you the chance to choose one story for us to read, I've empowered you to do so as well. That said, my selections/inclination

toward this end will likely be imperfect, which is why I've chosen to borrow the following guidelines from the syllabus of my former professor, Dr. Norm Lewis:

- 1) Please let me know if you find any material in the course violates the College's (and my own) expectation of fostering understanding of diverse peoples and cultures, and how our role as reporters impacts that understanding in others.
- 2) Please alert me if you have a name or preferred pronouns that differ from the class roll information, which is my only source of information about you.
- 3) If you have any concerns involving diversity in this course that you feel uncomfortable discussing with me, I encourage you to contact Professor Joanna Hernandez, CJC director of inclusion and diversity, at jhernandez@jou.ufl.edu.

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/publicresults/>.

About me

I'm 26 years old. I'm originally from Miami, Florida, and these days I'm living in scenic Provo, Utah, with my wife, our border collie and a pair of temperamental cats. I graduated from UF in 2018. I worked at the Alligator starting in the second semester of freshman year, first as a copy editor, then covering cross country, women's basketball, football, baseball, football again and baseball again, along with a few men's basketball games and columns thrown in. I was the assistant sports editor for three semesters and the main sports editor for one, back when the paper was still a five-days-a-week operation. I have the Alligator 'a' tattooed on my arm, as you've perhaps already noticed. During my time in Gainesville, I also freelanced for the Associated Press and was a Gators correspondent for the Tampa Bay Times. I interned at the Miami Herald after junior year and at the Los Angeles Times after senior year, before acquiring a 10-month Master's from the Columbia Journalism School in Manhattan. I came to Deseret as an intern in June 2019 and have been here since, working mostly on the in-house magazine we launched in January 2021.

My focus at every place I've been, on every beat, has been feature storytelling — through narratives. Through profiles. Through 300-word slices of life. I'm far from an expert, but I'm really, really excited

to pass on what little I have learned to y'all. In that vein, I pride myself on being available, because I've found that the best teachers/editors I've had have done that for me. So if you ever need help with anything class-related, career-related or, really, with anything at all, my digital door is always open.

Two other quick personal things worth noting: First, my parents will be moving to Gainesville this fall, so I'll likely be in town a few times, and I'll likely try to host class in person when that's the case. Given that this is a fully online class, you will still have the option to attend via Zoom, but I think it'll be helpful to interact face-to-face a few times, if possible.

Also, please, *please* do not call me "Professor Bauer," "Mr. Bauer," or any other courtesy title thereof. I'm already elbow-deep in a quarter-life crisis, and I don't think I can handle such an adult title. So please, just call me "Ethan." If that feels weird, then I will begrudgingly allow "Professor" or "Prof."

Tentative class calendar

Note that the following topics and readings are subject to change at the instructor's discretion. I'll send emails with reading information every Thursday, and if it doesn't match the readings on the syllabus, go with the ones in the email; I'd like to keep the readings flexible enough to pepper in the occasional timely piece, as well as potentially lighten the load if these prove to be too much. Plus sometimes I'll assign only one section of a listed story, or make a story optional, etc. Similarly, I might need to rearrange discussion topics to accommodate guest speakers. This calendar is meant to provide a **rough idea** of how the class will proceed, and I reserve the right to change it up as needed.

Week	Date(s)	Topic/Assignments	Readings
1	Aug. 25	Syllabus day	" Someone to Lean On ," by Gary Smith; " The LaMelo Show ," by Mirin Fader
2	Aug. 30; Sept. 2	What is a feature?; An overview of feature types; why features are valuable; Magazines vs. newspapers. Song assignment due Wednesday	" A place of their own ," by Benoit Morenne; " Baseball, barbecue, and losing freedom this Fourth of July ," by Howard Bryant; " Book bans are the new front in the culture wars. What's really going on? " by Laurenz Busch; " The second coming of the 'hipster grifter ," by Bindu Bansinath

3	Sept. 6 & 8	The common elements of memorable features; developing your voice. Profile ideas due Wednesday	“The Falling Man,” by Tom Junod; “Telling II,” by John Woodrow Cox
4	Sept. 13 & 15	An intro to the classics of feature writing; Intro to profile writing.	“The Kentucky Derby is decadent and depraved,” by Hunter S. Thompson; “Frank Sinatra has a cold,” by Gay Talese; “A good judge of character,” by Ethan Bauer
5	Sept. 20 & 22	Ledes and nut grafs; Intro to pitching. “Two Writers Slings Yang” assignment due Friday	“Snowfall,” by John Branch; “A most American terrorist: The making of Dylann Roof,” by Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah
6	Sept. 27 & 29	Finding untold stories; finding feature ideas on a beat — or not on a beat. Profile due Wednesday	“Lightning players entrust ‘The Heart Hatter’ with their stories, style,” By Mari Faiello; “Sixers’ Throwback Anthem Becomes the Soundtrack of a Comeback,” by Scott Cacciola; Demario Davis profile, by Amie Just
7	Oct. 4 & 6	Intro to ultra-shortform features	“After the sky fell,” by Brady Dennis; “Burn survivor’s words are the balms that soothe,” by John Woodrow Cox; “A long goodbye,” by Ethan Bauer; Sampling of “Cheeseburgers in Western Paradise,” by Deseret Magazine staff
8	Oct. 11 & 13	Opinions & advocacy in magazine stories; When to insert yourself into a story; Intro to the “thinkpiece.” Profile revisions and shortform feature pitches due Wednesday	“You can’t quit cold turkey,” by Tommy Tomlinson; “The cruelty is the point,” by Adam Serwer; “The importance of Black History Month,” by Jelani Cobb; “It’s not biased to gasp,” by Chuck Culpepper
9	Oct. 18 & 20	Intro to the “trend piece”; art vs. craft; fairness vs.	“Fatal Distraction,” by Gene Weingarten; “This rancher has her boots on the

		balance; how to be “neurotic.” “Forensic Files” assignment due Thursday	ground ,” by Mary McIntyre
10	Oct. 25 & 27	Advanced feature interviewing; asking good questions; feature ethics Shortform feature due Wednesday	“ Prince Vinegar’s last stand ,” by Lane DeGregory; “ The tragic story of Willie Williams ,” by Jeff Pearlman
11	Nov. 1 & 3	Covering diverse communities; immersive reporting and gaining trust. Final project pitches due Wednesday	“ The low of highs ,” by Briana Erickson; “ The white flight of Derek Black ,” by Eli Saslow
12	Nov. 8 & 10	Writing for a specific audience; the fact-checking process Shortform feature revisions due Wednesday	“ Standing in the Shadow of Zion ,” by Ethan Bauer; Javonte Harding profile , by Mia Berry; “ The Return of Morehouse football ,” by Alanis Thames
13	Nov. 15 & 17	Advanced first-person features; how to handle criticism. Fact-checking assignment due Friday	John Rocker , by Jeff Pearlman; “ The Boys on the Bus ,” by Gary Smith
14	Nov. 22	Using social media and creative mediums to your feature-writing advantage	“ What is code? ” by Paul Ford; Chris Jones’ Twitter thread about scuba diving
15	Nov. 29; Dec. 1	Answering questions about final project; potpuri. Final project first draft due Wednesday	“ The case of Jane Doe Ponytail ,” by Dan Barry; “ Are Cuban beers being sold in Miami? ” by Carlos Frias
16	Dec. 6	A last smattering of different feature types	“ Latina mothers, daughters and the pursuit of higher education — together ,” by Melissa Gomez; “ Blindsided by

			history ,” by Gary Smith
17	Finals week	Final project revisions due Dec. 14	