

JOU4308: Magazine and Feature Writing Course Syllabus, Fall 2024

Instructor: Nila Do Simon

Email: ndosimon@ufl.edu

Office Hours: Video conference, Thursdays (except holidays) from 11:30a-1:30p; and by appointment through email request

Class Time: Tuesdays, 10:40a-12:35p; Thursdays, 10:40a-11:30a

Class Location: Zoom via Canvas

Please let me know if you have a name or preferred pronouns that differ from the class roll information.

WELCOME!

Everyone has a good story to tell. Let's find it and write it. Together.

This course will build upon your reporting foundation and give you the tools to create narratives with soul and authenticity.

You will learn the types of features exist in the expanding media world in print, online, on social media and more. You'll learn the basics of pitching to editors and how to craft profiles, reported personal essays and longer features. You will meet visiting professionals who have experience pitching, writing, reporting, editing and fielding pitches. Most importantly, your love of feature writing and reading will expand.

Some basics we'll cover:

- Developing feature ideas and where to find ideas
- Researching and reporting a feature
- Getting sources and making use of the time you have with them
- Understanding your voice and style, and how that applies to what you write and for where
- How to use anecdotes, color and imagination in your writing
- How to get published

Reading: This is a reading-intensive course. I've never met one good writer who isn't also a good reader. We will have routine and required reading assignments, often on a weekly basis. Sometimes these recommendations may even come from you.

In addition, your participation grade will largely reflect the quality of your engagement level in these discussions. Thankfully, the reads are going to be so thought-provoking that you'll want to share your personal take to the class. And we'll want to hear from you.

Student-generated reading selections: Each week, a different class member will be selected to suggest a feature article that the entire class will read and discuss. That class member will lead the discussion and field feedback and thoughts from fellow peers with the goal of having engaged conversations on what makes that specific article unique and a good read (and conversely, what you think could have been better about it).

Pro tip #1: Select articles from credible, established news sources.

Pro tip #2: Articles must be no less than 1,000 words.

Attendance: Attendance is required for the success of this class. You are expected to be on time for class and to attend each class. That said, if you absolutely must miss class for a valid, excusable reason, it's your responsibility to advise me via email of the circumstance before class begins.

Cameras On: Please have your camera on during class to keep our communication and engagement strong. Everyone will get more out of the class if we're more connected. In addition, a portion of your participation grade will reflect your consistent ability to keep your camera on.

If you have privacy concerns, poor Wifi, anxiety about being spotlighted or other concerns, please message me directly so we can figure a comfortable solution.

Attention and Participation: Your participation grade will be based on how much you engage with our class discussion and the quality of the engagement, as well as during peer workshops and assignments.

Assignments and Deadlines: Assignments are expected to be completed and turned in by deadlines discussed in class. You will lose 5% of total points for each assignment for each day it's late. If you're having trouble with a source or an assignment, communicate with me at least 24 hours before the deadline so we can problem-solve.

Accuracy and Honesty: You are expected to report and write original, factual work. You are expected to gather information from diverse sources. Please try to conduct interviews in person or on the phone. If a source is only willing to conduct an interview via email, communicate with me before agreeing to this.

Plagiarism, fabrication and conflicts of interest: They will not be tolerated. If you do choose to take this path, your grade will be reflective of this decision. You are expected to abide by the UF Honor Code.

AI-Generated Content: Please see above response for "Plagiarism, fabrication and conflicts of interest." One more time for emphasis: Don't do it. Your grade will reflect this decision.

Email Response Policy: Please allow at minimum 48 hours for a response to emails. Emails or messages sent on Saturdays and Sundays will be answered at the earliest on Monday.

Submission Guidelines: Unless noted otherwise, all assignments should be EMAILED to me at ndosimon@ufl.edu as an editable Google doc.

Grading:

You'll be graded out of a 1,000-point scale. Each assignment will be graded on the quality of your work, reporting, story structure, incorporation of feedback on final drafts, style, creativity and sometimes more.

Short profile (about 300 words):

- 150 points
 - 75 points (first draft)
 - 75 points (second draft)

Reported feature (up to 1,000 words)

- 250 points
 - 125 points (first draft)
 - 125 points (second draft)

Feature story pitch

- 100 points

Longer feature story (minimum 1,500 words)

- 350 points
 - 175 points (first draft)
 - 175 points (second draft)

Participation

- 150 points

Extra credit: Periodically, and often without preamble, there will be short quizzes throughout the semester for extra credit and the opportunity to boost your point total.

1,000-point grading scale

A: 925-1,000	C: 725-774
A-: 900-924	C-: 700-724
B+: 875-899	D+: 675-699
B: 825-874	D: 625-674
B-: 800-824	D-: 600-624
C+: 775-799	E: 0-599

Each will require a first draft and final draft that will be weighed equally on your grade. We'll discuss grading rubrics for each assignment as each is assigned.

How to lose points: An easy way to obtain point deduction is by submitting assignments after the due date. Deadlines in journalism are important. You will lose 5% of total points for each assignment for each day it's late.

How to lose substantial points: See section on "Plagiarism, fabrication and conflicts of interest." Once again: Don't do it.

How to earn points: Participate. You'll also be graded on participation, which includes attendance, keeping your camera on, and quality input during class discussions about, and not limited to, weekly readings and weekly lectures.

Writers learn from one another. Because your contribution is important, class participation makes up 150 points of your final grade. You will lose 5% of total points for every unexcused absence. Excused absences may include serious illness, family emergencies and other urgent matters 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 only be given in class, so it's in your best interest to make it to class each week.

Extra credit: Once in a while, there will be surprise quizzes and assignments throughout the semester where you can try to boost your grade.

You are welcome to schedule private meetings with me to discuss grades.

Comments on your work will be delivered either via comments in Google Docs and/or during class.

On plagiarism and professionalism: Like in every other class at the J-School, plagiarism is not be tolerated. There are, in fact, very few things that I will not tolerate, and plagiarizing or any form of cheating 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, sources, quotes, anecdotes, etc.), using AI-generated content via Chat GPT or other AI programs, 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 on the assignment. No questions about it.

Additionally, you are expected to be accurate, and your prose should be in accordance with the most up-to-date AP Stylebook. You will lose points for obvious errors. I won't 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 discuss rubrics with each assignment that offer specifics on what qualifies as "an accumulation," how many points you'll lose for fact errors, etc.

CLASS SCHEDULE

The schedule below is fluid and may change

Thursday, Aug. 22

Lecture topics: Introductions, syllabus review + What is a feature? An overview of different types of features

Homework: Read [He Ran Marathons in Prison. Boston's Was Easier](#) by Patricia Leigh Brown, then be prepared to discuss the article on Tuesday, Aug. 27, including specifics on what stuck with you about the story and how it made you feel after finishing it

Tuesday, Aug. 27

Lecture topics: Deep dive into different types of features, part I: The personal essay, how-to, news features, investigative, opinions, etc.

Homework: Read Sean Gregory's [profile on Snoop Dogg](#) + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Gregory's profile on Snoop Dogg

Thursday, Aug. 29:

Lecture topics: What's a profile, and what makes the best ones so enjoyable

Homework: Read [The Celebrity Photographer Who Put Down His Camera To Bake For His Community](#) by Ella Quittner + specifics on what stuck with you about the story and how it made you feel after finishing it + Ideas for your profile piece

Tuesday, Sept. 3:

Lecture topics: Deep dive into different types of features, part II: Trend pieces, opinions, etc.

What's due before class begins on Sept. 3: Ideas for your profile piece + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Quittner's piece

Homework: Student-selected reading

Thursday, Sept. 5:

Lecture topics: Elements of compelling features: Descriptive writing that's created by using your senses, and details, details, details

Homework: Student-selected reading

Tuesday, Sept. 10

Lecture topics: Organizing a feature: Adding science to the art of writing

Homework: Student-selected reading

Thursday, Sept. 12

Lecture topics: Action-packed storytelling

Homework: Read Caroline Clements' [Five Reasons Cameron Indoor Stadium Is the South's Most Iconic Basketball Venue](#)

Tuesday, Sept. 17

Lecture topics: Guest speaker Caroline Clements, associate editor of *Garden & Gun*

What's due before class begins on Sept. 17: Profile first draft

Homework: Ideas for your reported feature + Student-selected reading

Thursday, Sept. 19

Lecture topics: Art of the rewrite + Using voice and style to your advantage

What's due before class begins on Sept. 19: Ideas for your reported feature

Homework: Student-selected reading

Tuesday, Sept. 24

Lecture topics: Review of reported feature story ideas + finding the soul in stories

Homework: Read Pamela Colloff's [The Innocent Man Part I](#) + One to two bullet-pointed topics you want to discuss about Colloff's feature story

Thursday, Sept. 26

Lecture topics: The art of the interview, part I: Old-school vibes combine with modern journalism

What's due before class begins on Sept. 26: Topics you want to discuss about Colloff's feature story

Homework: Student-selected reading

Tuesday, Oct. 1

Lecture topics: The art of the interview, part II: Listening and observing

What's due before class begins on Oct. 1: Profile second draft

Homework: Student-selected reading

Thursday, Oct. 3

NO CLASS in observance of Rosh Hashanah

Tuesday, Oct. 8

Lecture topics: The art of the interview, part III: Advanced feature interviewing; asking good questions

Homework: Read Chris Jones' [Animals: The Horrific True Story of the Zanesville Zoo Massacre](#) + One to two bullet-pointed topics you want to discuss about Jones' feature story

Thursday, Oct. 10

Lecture topics: The art of the pitch

What's due before class begins on Oct. 10: Reported feature first draft + Topics you want to discuss about Chris Jones' feature story

Homework: Read Emilee Perdue's articles [The Science of Sipping](#) + [Southern Charm and Sausages](#)

Tuesday, Oct. 15

Lecture topics: Guest speaker Emilee Perdue, assistant editor of *Flamingo Magazine*

Homework: Ideas for your longer feature story

Thursday, Oct. 17

Lecture topic: Pitching exercise

What's due before class begins on Oct. 17:

Tuesday, Oct. 22:

Lecture topics: Action-filled writing

Thursday, Oct. 24:

NO CLASS

What's due by 10 a.m. EST: Reported feature second draft

Tuesday, Oct. 29

Lecture topic: Narrative structure + Headlines and subheads

What's due before class begins on Oct. 29: Longer feature story pitch

Thursday, Oct. 31

Lecture topics: The case for the present tense/historic present tense

Tuesday, Nov. 5

NO CLASS

Thursday, Nov. 7

Lecture topics: Writing for specific audiences + Feature ethics, covering diverse communities + Open class discussion: What problems are you running into with editing your feature? What questions do you have about features? Pitching? Revising?

Homework: Read David Amsden's [The Visceral Appeal of Late Winter in America's Wild, Frozen North](#) + soak in his editing of [Secret Menu Magazine](#)

Tuesday, Nov. 12:

Guest speaker David Amsden, editor at large at *Travel + Leisure*, editor of *Secret Menu* and freelance writer

Thursday, Nov. 14:

Lecture topics: Tips for your second draft

What's due before class begins on Nov. 14: First draft of your longer feature story

Tuesday, Nov. 19:

The art of the interview, part IV

Thursday, Nov. 21

NO CLASS

Tuesday, Nov. 26 and Thursday, Nov. 28:

NO CLASS

Tuesday, Dec. 3

Lecture topics: Feature writing careers

What's due on Dec. 3: Longer feature story second draft