

JOU4304(18308) Science Journalism/MMC6936 (18426) Science Writing

Spring 2025 Syllabus* • Instructor: Dr. Czerne M. Reid

Credits: JOU4304 (18308): 3 credits, MMC6936 (18426): 1-3 credits

Instructor: Dr. Czerne M. Reid, Instructional Associate Professor, Department of Psychiatry and
Affiliate Associate Professor, Department of Journalism, University of Florida (czerne@ufl.edu)

Class Time and Place: Mondays, Periods 9 to 11 (4:05 to 7:05 p.m. – two 15-min breaks), WEIL 0279

Learning Management System: Canvas (Log in at <http://elearning.ufl.edu/> with Gatorlink credentials.

Click the “Courses” icon on the left and select this course from the list.)

*Students will be notified of any changes to the syllabus or stated class schedule.

Course Description, Goals, Readings, Policies

Course Description:

This course introduces the art and craft of science storytelling. Students will learn how to produce well-written, engaging science stories for general audiences. The course covers writing news and feature articles such as might appear in a magazine, newspaper, online news publication or other science news outlet. We will learn about and practice finding story ideas and news angles in published research, interviewing scientists, simplifying complex scientific topics, writing explanatory prose and key story elements creatively, responding to editing, pitching to an editor, fact-checking science stories, exploring careers in science communication, and other topics. We'll also discuss science writing as a career. Science writers work in a variety of settings, including as freelance journalists and at magazines, online news sites, newspapers, broadcast outlets, podcasts, university news offices, research labs, federal agencies and museums.

Please note that this class is not specifically about learning how to describe your own research clearly, simply and in an engaging way or on writing dissertations, manuscripts or grant proposals — although the skills gained in the class would certainly assist with that.

Guest speakers in our class regularly include writers and editors from a variety of science writing outlets, including Science, Nature, The New York Times, Scientific American, and Science News; as well as freelance writers and editors. Guest lectures provide opportunities for students to hear from noted science writers, and begin building their professional network within the field. Course experiences may also include lab or field visits with scientists, and attendance at in-person or virtual science talks or scientific conferences.

Students will hone their science writing skills through several assignments and in-class exercises. For the major course assignment, students will propose an idea for, and write a 2,000-word feature story about a research project or findings. Students will have the option of pitching their stories to a science writing outlet for publication. The story development process will include story selection, pitch writing, interviewing and other reporting and research, and structuring and crafting the story. As part of the revision process, students will peer-edit the work of classmates.

Students are expected to complete assigned readings before class and come to class prepared to contribute by sharing comments on those assigned readings, participating in in-class activities, and discussing their own work and the work of their peers. Students are expected to submit assignments by the stated deadlines.

Course Goals:

On successfully completing this course, students will be able to:

- Discuss the basics of writing about science for general audiences
- Apply key skills needed for writing good science stories:
 - Writing explanatory prose
 - Finding news in published research
 - Interviewing scientists
 - Writing creatively
 - Self-editing and peer-editing
- Respond constructively to editing
- Write publishable science news, feature and opinion/essay pieces for general audiences
- Fact-check science stories before submission
- Craft, tailor and submit pitches to science writing publications of interest
- Explore training opportunities such as science writing fellowships and internships
- Explore career options for science writers
 - Discuss science writing as a career, including employment options
 - Discuss various settings in which science writers work
- Develop professional contacts and begin building a science writing professional network
 - Join and learn about the benefits of science writing professional organizations
 - Contact guest speakers for follow up conversations
 - Propose science writing conference presentations/workshops

Variable credit for graduate students in MMC6936 Science Writing – based on assignments

1 credit: Attend class, complete and receive instructor feedback on one out-of-class assignment (feature analysis).

2 credits: Attend class, complete and receive instructor feedback on all written and presentation assignments *except* the feature story and related work, i.e., pitch, class presentation and story draft

3 credits: Attend class, complete and receive instructor feedback on all assignments.

Course Readings and Course Reserves

Click on Course Reserves in Canvas to view electronic copies of all required and most recommended texts. If you are off campus, log into vpn first. If prompted, set up an account in the course reserves software called Ares. Next, search for this course by name, course code or instructor name, then click “Add Course.” Click on the title of the item you want to view. Once you’ve set up your Ares account, just clicking on Course Reserves in Canvas should take you to the list of course texts. View additional Course Reserves information at <https://ares.uflib.ufl.edu/>

Required readings

- *The Science Writers Handbook: Everything You Need to Know to Pitch, Publish, and Prosper in the Digital Age* (2013), Eds: Thomas Hayden and Michelle Nijhuis
- *Ideas into Words: Mastering the Craft of Science Writing*, (2003), By Elise Hancock
- *The Science Writers' Essay Handbook: How to Craft Compelling True Stories in Any Medium* (2016 paperback), By Michelle Nijhuis
- *AP Stylebook* Online

Recommended readings

- *The Craft of Science Writing: Selections from The Open Notebook* (2020), Ed: Siri Carpenter
- *The Chicago Guide to Fact-Checking* (2016), By Brooke Borel
- *Science Blogging: The Essential Guide* (2016), By Christie Wilcox, Bethany Brookshire & Jason Goldman
- *The Best American Science and Nature Writing* annual series, Eds: varies each year
- *For old times' sake: A Field Guide for Science Writers*, 2nd Ed (2005), Eds: Deborah Blum, Mary Knudson, Robin Marantz Henig

Course Policies

AI Statement:

You may not turn in work produced by others or generated by Chat GPT or other AI programs as your own work.

Grades

In this course, each assignment builds on the ones before it, thus providing opportunities to apply new skills as they are acquired. When you receive your graded assignments, please carefully review the instructor comments about what you are doing well and what revisions and improvements are needed. Be sure to view the returned assignment as a Microsoft Word document on a computer, not on a mobile device or in Google docs, and make sure “Track Changes” is turned on and “All Markup” is selected in the “Review” tab, so that you can see all instructor comments and editing marks. If you open the returned assignment on a mobile device or program other than Microsoft Word you might not see all the instructor edits or comments. For second drafts, work in and submit the same Word document as the first draft, and retain the editing markup and comments throughout the whole process. Do not delete editing marks or select “Accept” or “Reject” to make them go away. Do give each draft a unique filename using the format indicated below.

When revising your stories, bear in mind that good revisions go beyond the specific comments made by your editor. Take the opportunity to rethink the entire piece; look for areas to strengthen, cuts to make, phrases to add and paragraphs to reorganize or move. Use the instructor's edits and comments as a guide to improve and tighten each piece as well as you can. Read the work of other science writers to get ideas for how to structure your stories.

To see the specific criteria used to grade assignments, click on the Assignments tool within Canvas, select the assignment in question, and select "Show Rubric" from the dropdown menu near the top right of the page.

The following general criteria will factor into your final grade:

Quality of assignments, and level of effort

Completion of written assignments and readings

Participation in class discussions, in-class activities and peer editing

Grading scale (%):

A \geq 95	A- 90-94.99	B+ 87-89.99	B 83-86.99	B- 80-82.99	C+ 77-79.99
C 73-76.99	C- 70-72.99	D+ 67-69.99	D 63-66.99%	D- 60-62.99	E \leq 59.99

View the current UF Grading Policy: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

Earning an A in this course requires diligence and excellent performance in all areas: attendance, participation, attentiveness, meeting deadlines and spending time to research and complete each assignment. The instructor also will assess the journalistic quality of your written work in terms of accuracy, structure, style, grammar and your use of interviews and details from your own observations and research. Plagiarism detection software will be used to evaluate assignments submitted. Any documented instance of plagiarism will result in a failing grade. You may not turn in work produced by others or generated by Chat GPT or other AI programs as your own work. You may not submit work you completed for a different class, as an assignment in this class.

Attendance

In-class attendance is expected, and accounts for part of your grade in this course. The course includes graded in-class assignments, and attendance is taken at each session. Requirements for class attendance are consistent with university policies, which can be found at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>. The Dean of Students office provides assistance with submitting documentation and notifying instructors of absence due to extenuating circumstances, and you may use this optional service if you would like. See more at <https://care.dso.ufl.edu/instructor-notifications/>.

Late/make-up policy

If you believe you have a legitimate reason for missing work, you may request an extension from the course instructor before the assignment deadline. Requirements for medical excuses, make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies, which can be found at <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/attendance-policies/>.

Assignment submission instructions

- Submit assignments in Canvas via the Assignments tool, not by email.
- Submit assignments as Microsoft Word documents (.doc or .docx), not .pdf or other formats.
- Name document drafts of all assignments using the following format:
FirstInitial_LastInitial#_GeneralTitleofAssignment_headline/topic keyword(s) (where # is the draft version. No number is needed for the first draft. Add “2” for second draft, “3” for third draft, etc.). So, for example, the filename for Jane Smith’s first draft of the Explainer assignment with the headline or topic of how robots work, would be in the format: “js_Explainer_how robots work.” For the second draft of an assignment, insert “2” right after your first and last initials. For example, for Jane Smith’s feature story, draft 2, about an Artemis mission rocket launch, the filename could be “js2_Feature story_Artemis moon mission,” etc.
- Include the following information at the top of every assignment submitted:
 - Course code, section, title and semester.
 - Undergrads use: JOU 4304, Class # 18308 Science Journalism, Spring 2025
 - Grad students use: MMC 6936 Class # 18426 Science Writing, Spring 2025
 - Student’s first name, last name and UFID
 - Instructor name: Dr. Czerne Reid
 - Submission date
 - Assignment title, including draft # (e.g. Explainer, or Feature Draft 1)
 - Headline – Craft a brief, snappy headline that captures the essence of the piece

Office hours:

Office hours will be held Fridays from 11:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. in the Harrell Medical Education Building, Room 322. Please sign up in advance using the link provided, so the instructor can devote time to each student. During office hours we can discuss individual assignments, your progress in the course, career paths and other science writing related issues you may wish to raise.

Accommodations for students with disabilities:

Students requesting accommodations must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide a letter of accommodation to the student, who must then pass it on to the course instructor. Contact the Disability Resources Center, <http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>, for information about available resources for students with disabilities.

End-of-semester course evaluation:

Near the end of the semester, students will be asked to provide constructive feedback on the quality of instruction and content of this course, via GatorEvals. This process is anonymous; Neither your name nor your ID is associated with evaluations submitted. What you write in your evaluation will not affect your grade. The instructor cannot see your evaluation until after your final grades have been submitted at the end of the semester. Your feedback is reviewed carefully and used to improve future offerings of the course. Submit your evaluation using the GatorEvals tool in Canvas. You may also submit online at <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. The evaluation period for Spring generally opens in early April and closes in late April. Look out for related in-course announcements. If at least 90 percent of the class submits an evaluation by the close of the evaluation period, all students will be awarded 2 extra credit points. If

that threshold is not met, extra credit points will not be awarded to anyone. Extra credit awards are based solely on the response rate of the class. Points are not given to individual students in return for submitting an evaluation, and are not dependent on the content of any evaluation submitted. Summary results of the evaluations are available after the semester ends, at <https://gatorevals.ua.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

Table 1: Course modules and dates

COURSE MODULES	
Wk. 1: Jan 13	Course introduction • What is science writing? • Explanatory writing
Wk. 2: Jan 20	No class - Martin Luther King Jr. Day
Wk. 3: Jan 27	Finding story ideas • Science writers & news outlets • Anatomy of a science news story • Scholarly paper to news story
Wk. 4: Feb 3	Pitching stories and professional development workshop proposals
Wk. 5: Feb 10	Covering a science talk • Reporting and interviewing • Evaluating sources
Wk. 6: Feb 17	Reporting your story • Choosing sources: Local, national & global perspectives
Wk. 7: Feb 24	Fact-checking • AI & other topical issues
Wk. 8: Mar 3	Features workshop
Wk. 9: Mar 10	Working effectively with editors
Wk. 10: Mar 17	No class – Spring break
Wk. 11: Mar 24	Narrative structure • Story sections
Wk. 12: Mar 31	Science essay and opinion writing
Wk. 13: Apr 7	Self-editing • Peer-editing workshop Course evals open Sat Apr 12 and close Fri April 25
Wk. 14: Apr 14	Science writing for audio: podcasting & other multimedia
Wk. 15: Apr 21	Science writing: The Big Picture • Careers in science journalism & SciCom
Wk. 16: Apr 28	No class – Exam week. No final exam

Table 2: Assignments and due dates

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE	WORD COUNT
Pre-class self-assessment	Sunday Jan 12	400
Science writer review	Friday Jan 24	200
Explainer	Friday Jan 31	250
News story pitch	Friday Feb 7	300
News story	Friday Feb 14	800
ScienceWriters2025 proposal	Friday Feb 21	200
Fact-checking assignment - in class	Monday Feb 24	
Science talk story pitch	Friday Feb 28	300
Feature story pitch & presentation in class	Monday Mar 3	500
Science talk story	Friday Mar 14	750
Feature story first draft	Friday Mar 28	2000
Peer review - feature story	Monday Mar 31	100
Opinion piece pitch	Friday Apr 4	350
Opinion piece	Friday Apr 11	800
Feature story second draft	Friday Apr 18	2000
Self-reflection	Wednesday Apr 23	400
Feature Analysis (grad students only)	Saturday Apr 26	750

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