

JOU4308: Magazine and Feature Writing Course Syllabus, Fall 2025

**Instructor:** Nila Do Simon

**Email:** ndosimon@ufl.edu

**Office Hours:** Video conference, Thursdays (except on 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 do not meet the minimum requirement of sources, you will lose a separate 5% of points. 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](mailto:ndosimon@ufl.edu) as an editable Microsoft Word document.

**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 (300 words):

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

Reported feature (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. Separately, if you do not meet the minimum number of required sources, you will lose 5% of points.

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 Microsoft Word 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, August 21

**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, August 26, including specifics on what stuck with you about the story and how it made you feel after finishing it

Tuesday, August 26

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

**Homework:** Read Kelefa Sanneh's [profile Morgan Wallen](#) + Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Sanneh's profile on Wallen

Thursday, August 28

**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, September 2

**Lecture topics:** Your profile ideas + interview tips

**What's due before class begins on September 2:** Two bullet-pointed topics that you'd like to discuss about Quittner's piece

**Homework:** Student-selected reading

Thursday, September 4

**Lecture topics:** Finding a focused angle

**What's due before class begins on September 4:** Ideas for your profile piece

**Homework:** Student-selected reading

Tuesday, September 9

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

**Homework:** Student-selected reading

Thursday, September 11

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

**Homework:** Student-selected reading

Tuesday, September 16

**Lecture topics:** Take the Lede

**Homework:** Read [Matt Ortile's](#) pieces

Thursday, September 18

**Lecture topics:** Guest speaker Matt Ortile, editor at *Conde Nast Traveler*

**What's due before class begins on September 18:** Profile first draft

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

Tuesday, September 23

NO CLASS in observance of Rosh Hashanah

Thursday, September 25

**Lecture topics:** Review of reported feature story ideas + Art of the rewrite

**What's due before class begins on September 25:** Ideas for your reported feature

**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

Tuesday, September 30

**Lecture topics:** Action-packed storytelling

**What's due before class begins on September 30:** Topics you want to discuss about Colloff's feature story

**Homework:** Student-selected reading

Thursday, October 2

NO CLASS in observance of Yom Kippur

Tuesday, October 7

**Lecture topics:** Using voice and style to your advantage

**Homework:** Student-selected reading

**What's due by 10am on October 7:** Profile second draft

Thursday, October 9

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

**What's due before class begins on October 9:** Reported feature first draft

**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

Tuesday, October 14

**Lecture topics:** The art of the pitch

**What's due before class begins on October 14:** Topics you want to discuss about Chris Jones' feature story

**Homework:** Student-selected reading

Thursday, October 16

**Lecture topics:** Guest speaker Jamie Rich, editor/publisher of *Flamingo magazine*

**Homework:** Ideas for your longer feature story

Tuesday, October 21

NO CLASS in observance of Diwali

Thursday, October 23

**Lecture topic:** Pitching exercise

**What's due before class begins on October 23:** Ideas for your longer feature story

Tuesday, October 28

**Lecture topics:** Action-filled writing

**What's due before class begins on October 28:** Reported feature second draft

Thursday, October 30

**Lecture topic:** Narrative structure + Headlines and subheads

**What's due before class begins on October 30:** Story pitch for longer feature

Tuesday, November 4

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

Thursday, November 6

**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?

**What's due before class begins on November 6:** First draft of your longer feature story

Tuesday, November 11

NO CLASS in observance of Veterans Day

Thursday, November 13

**Lecture topics:** Tips for your second draft

**Homework:** Read Christiana Lilly's stories

Tuesday, November 18

**Lecture topics:** Guest speaker Christiana Lilly, group editor of JES (*Boca Raton* magazine, etc)

**Homework:** Student-selected reading

Thursday, November 20

**Lecture topics:** The art of the interview, part IV

**Homework:** Student-selected reading

Fall Break: NO CLASS November 25 and November 27

Tuesday, December 2

**Lecture topics:** Feature writing careers

**What's due on December 2:** Longer feature story second draft

**Diversity Statement**

Journalists are responsible for telling the stories of individuals who make up any given community. We serve, help and inform everyone. In order to best carry out these ideals, we must exhibit respect, inclusiveness and an understanding for all people. These expectations during field work will also be carried into this classroom. Our differences will serve as a strength that we embrace as we discuss relevant story ideas, developing contacts within a community or even storytelling techniques. Exposure to different perspectives, values, ideals and experiences will make us all better, more compassionate and understanding journalists — and people. We all learn best and maximize our outcomes when we feel comfortable. Please let me know what I can do to make sure you feel respected and welcomed in this space.