

Magazine and Feature Writing

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JOU 4308
Course Syllabus

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Spring 2015
Periods 7-9
Mondays 1:55 – 4:55 p.m.
Weimer Hall, Room 1092

Professor Erica Newport, Ph.D. Student (Note: Just call me Erica.)

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Office hours:

Mondays, time slots TBD based on student vote

Other times can be arranged by appointment via e-mail. Skype and cell phone appointments are always available. My previous students will tell you, I am always available to talk through stories, etc.

Additionally, I will be available before and after class for quick questions or to set up an appointment.

What you need to know is that I am here for you. Don't ever feel lost, discouraged, or overwhelmed. We can work through all obstacles, by way of great communication. Also, I love hearing about success stories. Feel free to reach out about successes, as well!

Office location: G044 Weimer Hall

Instructor:

Ms. Erica Newport (Osvath, pronounced osh-vat)

E-mail: ericanewport@ufl.edu

<http://thegiftofchoice.yolasite.com/>

Course Description:

Magazine and Feature Writing is a course that teaches students how to write long-form feature articles, which (should) lure readers in page-by-page, unfolding the magic of strong storytelling and skilled writing. For this course, students will be introduced to the “elevator” pitch (or a one-to-two sentence headline for a story idea), the feature story pitch, including its placement into a formatted query letter, and the draft and rewrite of a feature story. Under the instructor's guidance, students examine how to properly research for a particular feature story, conduct interviews, and review exemplary feature stories. Upon completion of this course, students should have honed the skills and collected relevant writing resources to write accurate, thrilling, entertaining, and informative feature stories. The course relies heavily on discussions and in-class practice activities, which means that attendance and punctuality are of utmost importance.

Course Objectives:

I want you all to enjoy this journey. To find passion in learning the art and craft of feature writing. (You will!) And, to collaborate with one another and embrace the wonderful adventure traveled as writers.

This course aims to:

- // Differentiate feature writing from other writing types
- // Follow the basic rules of news feature writing (e.g. AP style, attribution, writing in the third-person)
- // How to pitch a story (over the phone, in person and via e-mail/online)
- // Develop a compelling lede, write a convincing nut graph, thoughtfully organize a story, effectively use anecdotes, produce satisfying endings
- // Pace a story (e.g. create a rhythm, use effective transitions)
- // Conduct comprehensive research
- // Distinguish between good and bad sources
- // Understand how to extend a feature article from a print edition to an online edition

Required Textbooks: Tentative (will, likely, change)

Blundell, W. E. (1988). *The art and craft of feature writing: based on the Wall Street Journal guide*. New American Library.

Zinsser, W. (2006). *On writing well: The classic guide to writing nonfiction*. HarperCollins.

A Typical Class:

Inspiration
Open discussion
Collaboration
Education
Application

Deadlines:

Deadlines for all assignments are firm. As a class, we will decide on a pre-deadline, which will offer each of you an opportunity to show me a draft of the assigned project, receive my feedback/suggestions (not to edit your work), allowing for a few days to tweak and submit by the set deadline.

Assignments:

Quizzes/free writes: 10% of class grade

Quizzes will be administered during class starting week two. Students are expected to arrive on-time and will be unable to make-up the quizzes, unless the absence is excused.

Note: Quizzes will be open-book and open-note based on the first part of each class (or prior classes), prior to class break.

Feature article I (1000-1200 words): 30% of class grade

Know someone really cool?

A profile piece, which includes an elevator pitch (What's the story in a sentence or two?), written and verbal pitch, query letter to editor, and draft/re-write of final.

Note: A grading rubric will be provided for above assignment.

Feature article II (1000-1200 words): 30% of class grade

What do you care about?

An in-depth piece, which includes an elevator pitch (What's the story in a sentence or two?), written and verbal pitch, query letter to editor, and draft/re-write of final.

Note: A grading rubric will be provided for above assignment.

Feature article III (1000-1200 words): 30% of class grade

What's trending?

An informative piece, which includes an elevator pitch (What's the story in a sentence or two?), written and verbal pitch, query letter to editor, and draft/re-write of final.

Note: A grading rubric will be provided for above assignment.

Tentative schedule:

Please note that the final agreed upon schedule is subject to change at any time. The professor will notify you via the e-mail and in class. This schedule will change. Thus, the following is tentative.

Monday, Jan. 12, 2015
Class begins.
Explanation of syllabus

Feature writing assignment
Introduction of instructor/students

Monday, Jan. 26, 2015

Surprise class day. Be inspired. Don't dare miss.
This day will set the tone and pace for subsequent classes.
Coffee-house theme

Monday, Feb. 2, 2015

Review: What is a feature story?
How do I come up with an idea?
Examining ledes and strong openings
Open-note/book quiz

Monday, Feb. 9, 2015

Skillful, intentional, empathic interviewing
What's newsworthy?
Middle heart of story – organizing and writing the story – what to include, and what to cut
Descriptive/narrative writing
Open-note/book quiz

Monday, Feb. 16, 2015

Pitches: How do I pitch a feature story?
Planning and outlining a story
Descriptive/narrative writing
Open-note/book quiz

Monday, Feb. 23, 2015

Query letters: How do I write a query letter?
Sourcing and researching
Identifying good quotes
Descriptive/narrative writing
Open-note/book quiz
Note: Feature story I draft may be submitted for review on Friday by midnight.

Monday, Mar. 2, 2015

Note: Feature story I full packet due by midnight. Packets will be returned to students a week later.
Extra help will be offered in class for feature story I
Writing mechanics – simple no clutter
Open-note/book quiz

Monday, Mar. 9, 2015

Review: How do I come up with an idea?
Review: Examining ledes and strong openings
Review: Pitches: How do I pitch a feature story?

Review: Descriptive/narrative writing
Open-note/book quiz

Monday, Mar. 16, 2015

Review: Skillful, intentional, empathic interviewing

Review: What's newsworthy?

Review: Middle heart of story – organizing and writing the story – what to include, and what to cut

Review: Descriptive/narrative writing

Open-note/book quiz

Monday, Mar. 23, 2015

Review: Planning and outlining a story

Review: Query letters: How do I write a query letter?

Review: Sourcing and researching

Review: Descriptive/narrative writing

Open-note/book quiz

Note: Feature story II draft may be submitted for review on Friday by midnight.

Monday, Mar. 30, 2015

Who do you authorize as your journalism role model?

Expanding from print to online

Review: Identifying good quotes

Open-note/book quiz

Monday, April 6, 2015

Note: Feature story II full packet due by midnight.

Extra help will be offered in class for feature story II

Group edit

Monday, April 13, 2015

Feature story III launch + taking the story to Web 2.0

Stay tuned!

Monday, April 20, 2015

Taking your stories to Web 2.0

Stay tuned! Feature writing is about to get really exciting and techy!

What's next: Do my stories make the cut, and what are some possible publication(s) for me to pitch/query my features?

Last day of class party

Monday, April 27, 2015

No class

Note: Feature story III due at midnight.

Evaluation:

Quizzes	10%
Feature Story I	30%
Feature Story II	30%
Feature Story II	30%

Grading:

A	100.00-93.00
A-	92.99-90.00
B+	89.99-87.00
B	86.00-83.00
B-	82.99-80.00
C+	79.99-77.00
C	76.99- 73.00
C-	72.99-70.00
D+	69.99-67.00
D	66.99-63.00
D-	62.99-60.00
F	59.99-0

Important Resources:**Absence Policy:**

Course attendance is mandatory and attendance will be taken. Students are expected to show-up on-time for class meetings as outlined in this syllabus. Students are responsible for making up any material missed due to absences. If you are absence for any acceptable reasons, a note from the Dean of Students Office will be requested. (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/supportservices/>)

According to the Registrar's Office at the University of Florida, an acceptable reason for an absence is outlined below:

“In general, acceptable reasons for absence from class include illness, serious family emergencies, special curricular requirements (e.g., judging trips, field trips, and professional conferences), military obligation, severe weather conditions, religious holidays and participation in official university activities such as music performances, athletic competition or debate. Absences from class for court-imposed legal obligations (e.g., jury duty or subpoena) must be excused. Other reasons also may be approved.”

Source: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx#absences>

Additionally, it is important to note that four absences will result in lowering your grade by an entire letter grade. Six absences will result in lowering your grade by two entire letter grades, and you will fail if you are absent eight times.

Class attendance, make-up exams, and other class assignments:

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:

<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>.

Academic Integrity:

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 honor 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.

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 which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester. Please feel free to approach me should you have any special needs.

Counseling and Wellness:

The center provides scheduled drop-in and appointments with counselors to discuss a range of personal issues (352-392-1575, <http://www.counseling.ufl.edu/cwc/Default.aspx>, Department: 392-1111 or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

Class Demeanor:

I expect you to be on time to class, to please turn off and to put away your cell phones, and to only use your laptop or tablet when I give directions to do so. Guests may come to class, only after I give you permission to bring them. While food is not permitted, drinks may be brought to class in a closed container. Three tardies is equal to an absence, unless you have given notice to me beforehand.

UF grading policies:

For assigning for assigning grade points, this link will take you to the UF grading policies web page: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>.

Online course evaluation process:

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu>. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>.