

COM 285: News Writing & Reporting

Spring 2011/MWF 9–9:50 a.m./Rowland 206

Prof. Stephanie A. Witmer

Office Hours: MWF noon–2 p.m. or by appt. / Office: Rowland Hall 126

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REQUIRED MATERIALS:

- *Reporting for the Media*, 9th edition, John R. Bender, et al.
- *Associated Press (AP) Stylebook* (latest edition)
- *Webster's New World Dictionary* (pocket-sized, latest edition)
- Reliable Internet access
- Portable flash drive
- Students will occasionally be required to purchase a newspaper.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: COM 285 is a course that focuses on the journalistic style of writing and is intended for students who plan to become professional writers. It teaches the basic journalistic formats and strategies used in print media such as the summary lead, delayed lead and conventional news-story format. COM 285 teaches students to write with economy and clarity.

COURSE OBJECTIVES: COM 285 explores the fundamentals of journalism. During the semester, students will learn to:

- develop news judgment;
- understand and apply AP style;
- recognize the essential elements of news and develop story ideas;
- develop the central point of a story and organize information;
- write news leads that encompass major elements of the story and emphasize the strongest angle of the news;
- understand story structure and how to write the body of the story clearly and concisely;
- develop accuracy in their writing by verifying information;
- develop strong interviewing skills and note-taking techniques;
- know how and when to use attribution and quotation;
- cover speeches;
- write obits;
- edit and rewrite stories effectively;
- write effectively under deadline pressure.

PROFESSIONAL VALUES & COMPETENCIES FOR C/J MAJORS AND MINORS:

The Communication/Journalism Department faculty sets the goal of developing within each student the following core professional values and competencies as defined by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC): *[competencies addressed in this course are in bold]*

- 1. Understand and apply First Amendment principles and the law appropriate to professional practice.**
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- 3. Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of groups in a global society in relationship to communications.**
- 4. Work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.**
- 5. Think critically, creatively and independently.**
- 6. Conduct research and gather information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.**
- 7. Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.**
- 8. Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for grammatical correctness,**

appropriate style, clarity, accuracy and fairness.

9. Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information.

10. Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts.

11. Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

CLASS FORMAT: Most class periods will begin with a brief lecture or class discussion. Since the focus of this class is writing, however, students should be prepared to spend most of their time practicing their craft. Stories will be assigned, written and/or critiqued during class periods.

ATTENDANCE & OTHER COURSE POLICIES: Treat this class as you would a job—be on time every day, and be prepared to work and participate. Students are expected to attend class and to be on time. Tardiness will not be tolerated. Once the classroom door closes, it stays closed; if you're late, you're out of luck and will be marked absent for the day. Students are permitted only **TWO** unexcused absences for the semester. Twenty (20) points will be deducted from the student's overall course grade for **each** additional absence after two.

Contact the Dean's Office immediately if you must miss class because of a family emergency or an extended illness. Absences will only be excused with notification from the Dean's Office, a doctor's note, a note from an athletic coach, or other official documentation.

Students must attend each class with all necessary materials in hand and all homework and reading assignments completed. (Please bring your textbook, AP stylebook, dictionary and flash drive to class with you each day.) In-class quizzes or assignments cannot be made up and will receive zero points if your absence is unexcused. Late work will not be accepted for unexcused absences. When you miss class, it is your responsibility to turn your work in on time and to find out what you missed. If a student is going to miss class for any reason, assignments should be posted to the dropbox on D2L.

Texting and other cell-phone use is strictly prohibited in the classroom. Turn your phone OFF upon entering the classroom and store it in your backpack or bag for the duration of the class period. Food and drinks are not permitted in the computer labs. Computer use is permitted in the minutes before class begins, but you should log off the computer once class starts, unless instructed otherwise. Students should not be checking e-mail, Facebook or other websites during class. Likewise, all homework assignments must be printed before class begins. All of this is common courtesy and professionalism, and students who cannot abide by these rules will be asked to leave the classroom and will be marked absent for the day.

Class participation is also required of each student. Students will regularly be asked to share your work in class and should be prepared to do so. Students are expected to have completed all reading and all other assignments by class time and be prepared to discuss them.

AMERICAN DISABILITIES ACT (ADA) STATEMENT: Students with disabilities are not required by law to identify themselves to Shippensburg University and the Office of Disability Services. However, if a student desires accommodations, the student is obligated to complete the necessary forms and provide disability documentation at the time other requests are made. It is the policy of Shippensburg University to accommodate students with disabilities, pursuant to federal law, state law, and the University's commitment to equal education opportunities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services, which is located in 120 Horton Hall, or via phone at 717.477.1329.

LEARNING CENTER RESOURCES: If you feel you need extra help to improve your academic performance in this course or any of your other courses, please consider making an appointment with a tutor or learning specialist in the Learning Center (LC). The LC is located on the lower level of Lehman Library, right below Starbucks, and can also be reached at 717.477.1420. *If you're struggling with any portion of the course, please let me know ASAP so that we can work together to improve your*

understanding and performance.

EVALUATION: As COM 285 is a writing course, students should be prepared to write — a lot. There will be approximately 20–30 in-class assignments and approximately 20–25 out-of-class assignments. Most assignments will come from the textbook. In addition, there will be quizzes on text material and lectures, as well as a final exam. Students will earn a certain number of points for each assignment and quiz, and ***final grades will be based on the total number of points accumulated for the semester.***

In order to give credit to students' improvement over the course of the semester, students will be permitted to revise some of their assignments to be re-evaluated for a possible higher grade — though it should be noted that revision is an important component of all writing. Students should edit their work carefully and ask others, such as classmates, roommates or friends, to read their copy before it is turned in.

Mechanical errors, including spelling, grammar, AP style, typos, and biased language will result in a deduction of points on an assignment. A deduction of **0.25** will be deducted for each grammar or spelling error. Students are permitted three AP style errors, but after that, **0.25** will be deducted for each additional error. Accuracy is a key element of journalism because people rely on the media to provide them with complete and accurate information to help them with their decision-making. A major fact error in a story, such as flawed or incorrect information, including misspelling someone's name, giving a source a wrong title, or misquoting a source, will result in a grade of zero (0) for the assignment.

Explanation of Assignment Grades:

A/A- — This is work that is publishable or usable as is. It has no errors. It shows a superior command of facts, news judgment, organization, and writing. News judgment includes an engaging lead and selection of newsworthy facts and quotes. Organization includes items such as transitions, readability and following the inverted-pyramid style when appropriate.

B+/B/B- — Could be published with some revision. The assignment reflects good news judgment, organization and writing but contains some minor errors.

C+/C — An average job. Not a story or press release that someone would stop and read unless he or she really needs the information. The piece has some basic organizational or writing problems.

D — A poor piece. It lacks fundamental judgmental and or writing skills. May have a fact error or major spelling or grammatical errors. Omission of two or more important facts or elements (story is not complete). Contains major problems in organization and language usage. Fails to meet basic writing standards. Needs substantial editing, rewriting and reorganization.

F — Unacceptable work. The piece has too many fundamental writing problems to be readable, is incomplete, does not follow directions, or fails to meet the deadline. It may also include a major fact error, such as the misspelling of a person's name, a misquote or unattributed material or quotes.

ETHICS: Journalists must produce work that is factual and accurate — their credibility and their livelihoods depend on it. One way to ensure accuracy is by taking careful and thorough notes during and/or recording interviews. Another is to fact-check your stories to verify information. All work students produce in this class must be original, factual and accurate. Students will turn in source lists for writing assignments. *Any work that is plagiarized, fabricated, embellished, either through deceit or sloppiness, will result in a failing grade (F) for the course.* Cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the department and to the Dean of Student Affairs. Please consult the student handbook for more information about the University's academic-dishonesty policy.

PUBLICATION REQUIREMENT: Students are required to publish a **minimum of three (3) articles** during the semester. Articles may be published in The Slate (the student newspaper), in a local newspaper (The Sentinel, The Public Opinion, The News-Chronicle), or on a legitimate news website (as the instructor deems appropriate). Journalists get jobs based on their “clips” — their published work — and their experience, and this course aims to help you in both of those departments. Likewise, students in the major need pieces for their portfolios in order to graduate. *Students who do not meet the minimum publication requirement will have their final grades lowered by one half grade.*

ASSIGNMENT REQUIREMENTS: All work must be **typed** in **10-point type** and printed on standard white paper in black ink. Handwritten work will not be accepted and will earn zero (0) points. All work should be **double spaced** to allow for ease of reading and editing. Do not indent paragraphs. Homework is due at the start of class or by the end of the period for an in-class assignment. Late work will not be accepted and will receive a zero (0).

Please include the following **heading** on each assignment, typed in the top left corner of the first page (no separate title pages, please):

Student's Name Student's E-mail Address Date Slug Word Count Headline (if required)
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SEMESTER SCHEDULE (*subject to — and most likely will — change; more detailed explanation of assignments on weekly schedules in Content on D2L*).

IMPORTANT REMINDER: Bring textbooks to class every day!

WEEK/DATE	TOPIC/IN CLASS	HOMEWORK DUE
Week 1 Wed 1/19	Introduction to the course; introduction to journalism; writing exercise	
Fri 1/21	AP Style quiz; writing exercise (from textbook)	Read Chap. 1: Journalism Today

Week 2 Mon 1/24	Chap. 3; Quiz: AP Style + Chap. 3;	Read Chap. 3: Grammar & Spelling
Wed 1/26	Chap. 3	Continue Chap. 3
Fri 1/28	Chap. 4; Quiz: AP Style + Chap. 4	Read Chap. 4: Newswriting Style
Week 3 Mon 1/31	Chap. 4	Continue Chap. 4
Wed 2/2	Chap. 5; Quiz: AP Style + Chap. 5	Read Chap. 5: The Language of News
Fri 2/4	Chap. 5	Continue Chap. 5
Week 4 Mon 2/7	Chap. 6; Chap. 5 & 6 Quiz	Read Chap. 6: Selecting & Reporting the News

Wed 2/9	Chap. 6; Quiz: Chap. 6	Continue Chap. 6
Fri 2/11	Chap. 7	Read Chap. 7: Basic News Leads
Week 5 Mon 2/14	Chap. 7; Quiz: Chap. 7	Continue Chap. 7
Wed 2/16	Chap. 7	Continue Chap. 7
Fri 2/18	Chap. 8	ONLINE CLASS: Read Chap. 8: Alternative Leads; assignment TBA
Week 6 Mon 2/21	Chap. 8	Continue Chap. 8
Wed 2/23	Chap. 9; Quiz: Chap. 9	Read Chap. 9: The Body of a News Story
Fri 2/25	Chap. 9	Continue Chap. 9
Week 7 Mon 2/28	Chap. 10; Quiz: Chap. 10	Read Chap. 10: Quotations & Attribution
Wed 3/2	Chap. 10	Continue Chap. 10
Fri 3/4	Chap. 10	ONLINE CLASS: <i>assignment TBA</i>
Week 8 Mon 3/7	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK
Wed 3/9	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK
Fri 3/11	SPRING BREAK	SPRING BREAK
Week 9 Mon 3/14	Chap. 11; Quiz: Chap. 11	Read. Chap. 11: Interviews
Wed 3/16	Chap. 11	Continue Chap. 11
Fri 3/18	Chap. 12	Read Chap. 12: Writing Obituaries
Week 10 Mon 3/21	Chap. 12; Quiz: Chap. 12	Continue Chap 12
Wed 3/23	Chap. 13	Read Chap. 13: Speeches & Meetings
Fri 3/25	Chap. 13	Continue Chap. 13
Week 11 Mon 3/28	Chap. 14; Quiz: Chap. 13 + 14	Read Chap. 14: Specialized Types of Stories
Wed 3/30	Chap. 14	Continue Chap. 14
Fri 4/1	Chap. 16	ONLINE CLASS: Read Chap. 16: Public Affairs Reporting; <i>assignment TBA</i>
Week 12	Chap. 16	Continue Chap. 16
Week 12 Mon 4/4	Chap. 16	Continue Chap. 16

Wed 4/6	Chap. 15; Quiz: Chap. 15	Read Chap. 15: Feature Stories
Fri 4/8	Chap. 15	Continue Chap. 15
Week 13 Mon 4/11	Chap. 20	Read Chap. 20: Libel, Privacy & Newsgathering Issues
Wed 4/13	Chap. 20	Continue Chap. 20
Fri 4/15	Chap. 21; Quiz: Chap. 20 + 21	Read Chap. 21: Ethics
Week 14 Mon 4/18	Chap. 21	Continue Chap. 21
Wed 4/20	Chap. 19	Read Chap. 19: The News Media & PR Practitioners
Fri 4/22	Chap. 19	ONLINE CLASS: assignment TBA
Week 15 Mon 4/25	Chap. 22	Read Chap. 22: Becoming a Professional
Wed 4/27	Chap. 22	Continue Chap. 22
Fri 4/29	Last day of classes; review for final exam	
FINAL EXAM Fri 5/6 8–10 a.m.		

Professional Emphasis Writing — PM Rubric: COM 285 — News Story Assignment

Student: _____ **Section:** _____ **Date:** _____

Project Title: _____

Objectives	Exemplary (4)	Accomplished (3)	Developing (2)	Beginning (1)	Score
Effective & Appropriate Lead	Lead is original and catchy; fits well with the rest of the story; invites readers into the piece; contains a strong nut graph if lead is not a summary lead	Lead is appropriate to story and fairly effective at getting attention; shows some signs of originality; contains an effective nut graph, if necessary	Lead is adequate but not extremely catchy or original; or there is no nut graph, even though it is necessary	Lead is neither original nor catchy; is boring, overused or trite, or is inappropriate to story; no nut graph	

Adequate Use of Primary Sources, Mainly Interviews	Evidence of reporter trying to get as many sources as necessary to adequately present all sides in the story; all are identified; info is properly attributed; all info is accurate, thorough; uses best sources	A minimum of three sources are used and clearly identified in story; most information is attributed to sources; information is accurate	Two or fewer sources are used; some sources are improperly identified or some info or opinion is given without attribution; most info is accurate but may not be as thorough; missing key sources; may use too general info	One or fewer sources used in story; or sources are improperly identified; much info is given without attribution; inaccurate or vague info	
Quotes Show Evidence of Careful Reporting	Strong evidence of good research and interviewing by the use of effective, story-telling quotes that cover a broad range of the topic; good use of quote-transition formula	Most quotes show evidence of effective interviewing and use of good follow-up questions; quotes are interesting and story-telling	One or two of the quotes show evidence of good interviewing, but most do not help propel the story	Quotes are short, weak or ineffective; no evidence of follow-up questions being asked	
Effective Organization and Flow (deals with structure)	Story is in inverted pyramid <u>or</u> specified alternate form; strongly organized with clear transitions and logical connections that create a sense of being tightly woven together	Story is organized and most transitions and connections are clear, but either organization is somewhat lacking or the sense of flow is somewhat abrupt	Story lacks strong organization, jumps around too much or lacks effective transitions; not in inverted pyramid or proper alternate form	Story is choppy; organization is unclear; few effective transitions; not in inverted pyramid or proper alternate form	
Clear Focus and Unity (deals with content)	Focus of story is clear; nothing detracts from primary focus; everything contributes to overall angle	Focus is fairly clear but on or two areas detract from the primary angle	Story lacks strong sense of unity and focus; several areas seem to detract from angle	No clear angle; story is rambling and awkward	
Interesting & Effective Writing	Writing is strong and effective with a clear voice and a variety of sentence structures; piece	Writing is adequate but not extremely compelling or original; may be wordy or voice	Writing is rather bland; lacks a clear voice and/or sense of originality; is wordy or	Writing lacks a clear voice and original style	

Style	is tightly written; utilizes active verbs and vivid word choice; original writing	may be unclear; diction and s/s may not be as vivid or sophisticated	redundant; or diction &/or sentence structure may be repetitive		
Journalistic Style	NO errors in journalistic style (quotes, dates, scores, numbers, money, percents, time, commas, etc.); short paragraphs; quotes stand alone	Has few (one or two) errors in journalistic style; or may have non-journalistic paragraph structure	Has several errors in journalistic style or non-journalistic paragraph structure	Has many errors in journalistic style and/or non-journalistic paragraph structure	
Grammar and Spelling	Story is well edited and virtually flawless; NO spelling errors; includes the proper spelling of all names	Story is spell checked and all names are correct; contains few grammatical errors	Story is spell checked and all names are correct; contains several grammatical errors	Names are misspelled; or spell check was not run; or contains many grammatical errors	
Format	No tabs at the beginning of graphs; attached all signed & dated flow sheets; TNR, 10 pt, double spaced w/name and slug	Missed one criteria	Missed two criteria	Missed three or more criteria	
				Total Points	

Comments:

PM Rubric: COM 285 — News Story Assignment

Student: _____ **Section:** _____ **Date:** _____

Project Title: _____

	Exemplary (4)	Accomplished (3)	Developing (2)	Beginning (1)	Score
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Content	Covers topic in-depth with details and examples. Subject knowledge is excellent.	Includes essential knowledge about the topic. Subject knowledge appears to be good.	Includes essential information about the topic but there are 1-2 factual errors.	Content is minimal OR there are several factual errors.	
Organization	Content is well organized using headings or bulleted lists to group related material.	Uses headings or bulleted lists to organize, but the overall organization of topics appears flawed.	Content is logically organized for the most part.	There was no clear or logical organizational structure, just lots of facts.	
Originality	Product shows a large amount of original thought. Ideas are creative and inventive.	Product shows some original thought. Work shows new ideas and insights.	Uses other people's ideas (giving them credit), but there is little evidence of original thinking.	Uses other people's ideas, but does not give them credit.	
Attractiveness	Makes excellent use of font, color, graphics, effects, etc. to enhance the presentation.	Makes good use of font, color, graphics, effects, etc. to enhance to presentation.	Makes use of font, color, graphics, effects, etc. but occasionally these detract from the presentation content.	Use of font, color, graphics, effects etc. but these often distract from the presentation content.	
Mechanics	No misspellings or grammatical errors.	Three or fewer misspellings and/or mechanical errors.	Four misspellings and/or grammatical errors.	More than 4 errors in spelling or grammar.	
Presentation	Well-rehearsed with smooth delivery that holds audience attention.	Rehearsed with fairly smooth delivery that holds audience attention most of the time.	Delivery not smooth, but able to maintain interest of the audience most of the time.	Delivery not smooth and audience attention often lost.	
Sources	Source information collected for all graphics, facts and quotes. All documented in	Source information collected for all graphics, facts and quotes.	Source information collected for graphics, facts and quotes, but	Very little or no source information was collected.	

	desired format.	Most documented in desired format.	not documented in desired format.		
Requirements	All requirements are met and exceeded.	All requirements are met.	One requirement was not completely met.	More than one requirement was not completely met.	
TOTAL POINTS					

Comments: