

J427 • Advanced Magazine Writing

Spring Semester 2007 • Monday & Wednesday 4:00-5:15 p.m.

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Office hours: 1:00 – 3:30 Monday through Thursday
and other hours by appointment

COURSE GOALS: This course will focus on the craft of story-telling. You will learn to find, write and tell in-depth stories about people. This genre goes by several names: literary journalism, literary nonfiction. The course uses a workshop format with frequent group meetings, discussions, critiques and teacher conferences.

BOOKS:

1. ***Writing for Story*** (Jon Franklin) This book emphasizes techniques you will use in writing your stories.
2. ***Best American Magazine Writing 2006***. This book contains a collection of stories that won American Magazine Awards from the American Society of Magazine Editors.
3. **A nonfiction book of your choice based on a true-life story:**
Examples: *Seabiscuit, A Beautiful Mind, The Perfect Storm, etc.*

ASSIGNMENTS: Each story must be based on a minimum of **five interviews** although you may do more than one interview with the same person.

A. First story. (20 percent) Write a “people story” that relies heavily on several face-to-face interviews with a person who has had an interesting or dramatic experience as well as support interviews with at least **two people** who know that person and observed what he or she went through. This story should have a definite beginning, middle and ending at particular points in time. Example: “The Recruit.”

B. Second story. (20 percent) Guidelines are more flexible, but the story must still rely heavily on personal visits, observation, and face-to-face interviews (as opposed to telephone interviews or Internet research). You can write about a person or a interesting place (Example: “Love and Death in the Cape Fear Serpentarium”) and you can also use first-person point of view (Example: “A Matter of Life and Death.”) Topics will be approved on a case-by-case basis.

C. Written and oral report on nonfiction book. (10 percent) Choose a book that tells a true story. All choices must be approved. Do not choose autobiographies, fiction, or books about current events or social issues. The story should focus on a person with a story that has a beginning, middle and end. Your oral report must be given without notes because I want you to learn how to tell an interesting story. Your written report should focus on discussing certain aspects of structure, point of view, voice, tone, and interviewing techniques. More details later.

D. Tests on class activities and assigned textbooks. (30 percent) You will have a test on lectures, handouts, homework and *Writing for Story* in February and on lectures and *Best American Magazine Writing* in April. You are responsible for taking notes on every lecture or asking for handouts you missed. If you are not here, the professor can't be responsible for making sure you get missed handouts or Powerpoint material.

E. Homework assignments, in-class assignments (10 percent) and attendance. (10 percent)
This portion of the grade will be based on percentage of assignments completed and percentage of classes attended. If we have 15 homework or class assignments and you complete 13 of them, then you will get an 86 percent on homework. You can miss two classes and still get 100 percent for attendance. But every absence after two will result in a 10 percent deduction on attendance.

NEW: “Writing Tip of the Day” and “Career Tip of the Day”

I will begin every class with a two-to-five minute “Writing Tip of the Day.” These tips will explain practical writing techniques that you can take home and apply immediately. These tips will be included on tests. I will end every class with a two to five minute “Career Tip of the Day.” These tips will focus on finding or succeeding at a job. They will not be covered on tests.

GRADING POLICIES AND CRITERIA:

A. One 2,000-2,300 word true-life story (20 percent) – 100 points	20%
B. One 2,000-2,300 word true-life story (20 percent) – 100 points	20%
C. Oral presentation and written report on nonfiction book – 50 points	10%
D. Pass-fail homework, in-class assignments (10%) and attendance (10%) – 100 points	20%
E. Two tests – 75 points each	30%
Total: 500 points	100%

• Grading scale:

A	96-100%	C	79-82.9%
A-	94-95.9%	C-	76-78.9%
B+	92-93.9%	D+	73-75.9%
B	88-91.9%	D	70-72.9%
B-	85-87.8%	F	69.9-below
C+	83-84.9%		

• Grading criteria for final drafts (100 points): Articles will be graded on the following criteria:

1. Quality of writing: 30 points
2. Quality of content, organization, and story narrative: 30 points
3. Documentation of interviews and observations: 20 points
4. Grammar, punctuation, capitalization, spelling: 20 points

• Length penalty: Any article less than 1,950 words will not receive a grade higher than a “B.” Any article less than 1,850 words will not receive a grade higher than a “C.”

• Late penalty: Plan ahead. No late assignments (homework or articles) will be accepted. A canceled or re-scheduled interview is not a valid excuse; always have a back-up plan. I may make exceptions for cases of family deaths or sickness which you discuss with me before the deadline, but please call or see me (don’t e-mail these requests).

First drafts: The first drafts are counted as homework assignment for each of the stories. They will be submitted via Blackboard for class review and discussion. You will have two class periods for each story to work on them in class (attendance required) while I read and discuss them with you. I will make specific suggestions to each student as well as general comments to the whole class about the quality of the first drafts.

Professionals-in-Residence: You are required to attend the two PIR speeches I designate (if possible) which will count as homework assignments. If the schedule prevents you from attending the one I designate, then you will be allowed to attend another one as make-up. No written report required—just documented attendance.

Other article requirements:

1. Double-spaced with page numbers on each page and word count on page one

The top of page one for each first and final draft should look something like this:

J427 Article #1
 Word count: 2,011 words
 David Sumner
 Sumner@bsu.edu • tel 285-8210

2. Final page list of sources

Please keep careful records of your research. For interviews, include telephone, date interviewed and telephone number for sources interviewed. For the print sources, include author, title of article, name of publication or web page and web address; date published and date accessed. A sample list might look like this. The department has encountered an increasing number of cases of plagiarism or fabricated quotes. If I have any reason for suspicion, I reserve the right to call your sources to verify your interviews.

3. Separate envelope with interview notes, articles, brochures and any collected research information. Turn this information in with the article in a BSU mail envelope that I will give you. "Real life" editors and fact-checkers ask for them, too, so it's good to get in the habit of keeping careful records of your research.

4. Final drafts may not be submitted as e-mail attachments. Please make sure final drafts are double-spaced and include page numbers on each page.

OTHER POLICIES AND REMINDERS:

1. Attendance and class participation: Please initial the attendance roster each day you come to class. Required class attendance is a university policy (Undergraduate Catalog, pp. 17-18). Basically you get two excused or unexcused absences. Missing more than two classes will result in a 10 percent penalty for each absence for that part of your grade.

2. You are responsible for anything I say in class or include on this syllabus. Regardless of whether you were absent or not, "*I didn't know you wanted this....*" is not an acceptable excuse for not doing an assignment properly or turning it in on time. *Do not need to ask for permission to miss a class.* You are an adult and you can decide what you must do and how to manage your time and your responsibilities.

3. E-mail or talk to the professor? If your question requires a lengthy answer, I prefer to discuss it with you on the telephone or in person. If your question requires a short answer, e-mail is fine. Please call 285-8210. If you don't reach me, the answering machine message gives my cellphone number and you have my permission to call it. I always return phone calls and e-mail within 24 hours except on Saturdays and Sundays.

4. E-mail interviews with sources: E-mail interviews are discouraged for this class, but are better than none at all. If you quote a person from an e-mail message, please indicate it came from e-mail within the attribution. (".....," she said in an e-mail message.")

5. Course calendar: My course calendar is different than the syllabus. It lists class topic, reading assignments, test dates, and deadlines for all article assignments. I reserve the right to change the calendar to accommodate unexpected delays or opportunities for guest speakers. If I do, you will still have at least two weeks notice for all deadlines. The calendar will be posted on the course website and distributed in class.

6. Backyard sources: Too many beginning writers rely on parents and siblings as primary sources for interviews and story ideas. These stories frequently aren't as fascinating to others as they are to you. I discourage the use of backyard sources because it's easy to lose the objectivity and detachment necessary for successful reporting. Please get my permission to use any "backyard sources" during the proposal and first-draft stages for each story.

7. Writing Center: Please use the department's Writing Center in AJ382 for help with your articles—especially in developing structure, focus and organization. Never turn in a final draft without having someone else (at least a friend) read it first. The department pays writing coaches to help you with any aspect of your writing assignments. The coaches prefer appointments (285-7412) but students may also just drop in to talk with one of the writing coaches.

8. Articles from other classes: You may not rewrite or revise articles written for other classes or previously for student publications. Magazine writing has a specific style and tone, so don't try to turn

research papers for other courses into magazine articles. Known or discovered violations will result in a failing grade for that assignment.

9. Exit interviews: An exit interview is required to graduate. You should start now arranging and developing the portfolio you will bring to your exit interview. I will give all May graduates a chance to schedule exit interviews after spring break. Generally I schedule exit interviews for May graduates during April. If you are graduating in August, I will schedule an interview during July.

10. AP Stylebook: The *AP Stylebook* has certain requirements for capitalization, titles and word usage. You are responsible for following the *AP Stylebook* if you do not already have one.

11. Diversity statement: The Department of Journalism is committed to creating an awareness of diversity issues as they relate to the society, workplace and classroom. You are encouraged to explore diversity issues in your articles as they relate to the type of content required for each specific assignment. You may write about groups or issues that are often poorly reported in the mainstream media. You may also explore controversial issues without fear of personal viewpoints affecting your grade. I always grade solely on specified journalistic and editorial criteria.

12. Special needs: If you have any issue in your life that prevents regular, punctual attendance, please speak with me confidentially and I will try to help you. If personal problems prevent class attendance, I encourage you to talk with me about them. It can only help your grade. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please see me.

13. Writing policy: The Department of Journalism regards writing performance and language usage proficiency as essential to the satisfactory completion of all courses. Therefore, department instructors must monitor writing performance and language usage in all courses. Student grades on all course assignments reflect both criteria. That means you are also graded on the quality of writing in the market research reports and the query letter.

14. Letters of recommendation policy:

Because of the number of requests for letters of recommendation, I have established the following policies. If you make a request for me to write a letter, please provide:

(a) A written request giving me the name and address of a specific person (if possible) to whom to address the letter. Indicate whether the letter may be snail-mailed, e-mailed or returned to you in a sealed envelope.

(b) Please give a specific date by which you need it and allow me at least two weeks to write it. When I have several letters to write, I write them in order of date they are due or expected.

(c) A current hard copy of your resume or vita. Be sure to include all of your media and writing experience and, if available, photocopies of any published articles.

(d) A brochure or written description of the job, internship, scholarship, etc. for which you are applying so that I can know the criteria the recipient is looking for.

(e) Please don't request general "to whom it may concern" letters for student portfolios because I don't think they are very effective or useful. The best letters are tailored for a specific purpose to a specific person or organization.

(f) If you are afraid my recommendation may not be 100 percent positive, please feel free to ask me what I might say. I will be honest in telling you of any weaknesses I might mention.

(g) If you use my name as a reference, use "Dr. David E. Sumner" and the title "Professor of Journalism" and/or "Magazine Sequence Coordinator." The mailing address is: Dept. of Journalism AJ391, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306. Tel: (765) 285-8210 or e-mail: sumner@bsu.edu.