

JMC 3023, Section 1 Kathryn Jenson White
Feature Writing GYLD 3023
Spring 2006 325-9102/2453
TR 10:30-12:20/GYLD 1030
kjlw@ou.edu
Office Hours: TR 2-3:30/by appointment

COURSE INFORMATION

Catalog Description

Feature Writing. Prerequisite: JMC 1013 and JMC 2033. Recognition and development of ideas for feature stories for various media. Instruction in background research and interviewing methods, writing and rewriting to develop an individual writing style. Students research, write and rewrite a minimum of eight feature stories.

Course Objectives and Ways to Meet Them

At the conclusion of this course, students will

- understand the basic steps in the process of feature writing
- be more familiar with the basic elements of publishable feature stories for magazines and newspapers
- improve interviewing and other information gathering techniques
- learn how to generate and develop ideas for feature stories
- grasp the business of freelance feature writing, from drafting query letters to completing manuscripts
- develop an ability to analyze feature stories from the writer's point of view rather than from that of the media consumer
- become familiar with a variety of feature formats and areas of specialization
- discover the variety of storytelling techniques appropriate for different feature types and markets

To meet the objectives, students will

- work with me to produce publishable work. That will involve participating in coaching sessions and revising each story to publishable standards.
- make efforts to have their work published. The "Sooner" yearbook is an excellent outlet for OU community features. You will send some of your work to local and state newspapers as well as national outlets. **All stories must be submitted for publication to receive a grade.**
- read the texts, The New York Times, handouts and assigned magazine and newspaper articles online and in print.

Required Texts/Materials

Writing for Story, Jon Franklin, Plume, 1994.

Professional Feature Writing (Fourth Edition), Bruce Garrison. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004.

Pulitzer Prize Feature Stories (Second Edition), edited by David Garlock. Iowa

State University Press. 2003.

Best American Magazine Writing 2005, American Society of Magazine Editors.

The New York Times, print edition

AP Stylebook and Libel Manual

Flash drive

We'll also look at magazines outside the world of consumer magazines: business-to-business, association and corporate communication publications among others. I'll direct you to these when we deal with that unit.

Web sites

Many major newspaper and magazine web sites include valuable materials for you: writer's guidelines, feature story archives, etc. Some good ones to visit include Pulitzer.org, poynter.org and slate.msn.com. We'll explore the world of online magazines as well as printed publications.

Course Policies

- Attendance is mandatory. Three absences without official written excuses will reduce a student's final grade by one letter. Four absences will reduce it by two grades. Five absences, whether excused or unexcused, will result in an F in the class. Don't squander your absences early only to have an emergency later that puts you in the danger zone. If you are going to miss class for a good reason, please notify me by e-mail before your absence.
- Repeated tardiness will also reduce a student's grade. I will count as absent anyone coming into class more than 10 minutes late.
- Late work will be penalized as described in the **Analyses** and **Features** sections of this syllabus.
- Any evidence of academic misconduct will result in an F in the course. Please familiarize yourself with the OU Student Code's information on academic dishonesty. Whether intentional or unintentional, plagiarism is a major ethical lapse, as is falsifying sources or suggesting you have gathered information in a manner you have not.
- Professional behavior requires limiting or curtailing certain activities during official time, whether in class or an office. These include, but are not limited to, coming in late or leaving early, reading newspapers or other items during lecture, using the Internet unless assigned as an activity, disrupting lecture or discussion, interrupting others while they are speaking, speaking in a destructive rather than constructive way about an individual's work or comments and engaging in any other behavior generally deemed uncivil.
- Any student who has a disability that may prevent him or her from fully demonstrating his or her abilities should contact the instructor to discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and facilitate his or her educational opportunities.

Course Grading

Two feature story analyses (3-5 pages)..... 20%

Four long-form feature stories, one with a marketing plan, and two short-form features.....	45%
Midterm and Final Exams.....	20%
Reading Journal.....	5%
Feature Idea List.....	5%
Various short homework assignments.....	5%

Exam/Assignment Information

The midterm and final will be two-part: Part I will be an in-class short answer and essay exam. Part II will be a take-home analysis of a feature story not discussed in class. It will be due at the beginning of the exam period.

The marketing plan will accompany feature story three, four, five or six. Both the story and the plan will earn a grade.

You must submit your six stories for publication to a newspaper or magazine. In the case of magazines, you will need to write a query letter even though you have already written the article. Most editors don't want completed manuscripts.

You may offer some of your stories to The Oklahoma Daily, "Sooner" yearbook, or Pulse, but most should go to off-campus outlets like The Transcript, Oklahoma Today, the Oklahoma Gazette, TulsaPeople Magazine, or other newspapers and magazines. Prepare for this early. When you come up with your idea, you should have one or two markets in mind.

You must type all work and submit it in correct format. This includes even short homework assignments. Do not turn in handwritten work.

Analyses

- The first of these two analytical papers will look in-depth at a magazine feature story I assign. We will all do the same story. For the second assignment, you will evaluate the feature content of a Sunday New York Times. In each analysis, you will use concepts, terms, and ideas from lecture and the texts to identify, explain and evaluate the various feature-writing elements at work in the story or stories within the publication.
- For the second, you will look for patterns of these elements and the similarities and differences among the stories. You will also discuss the paper's use of features as part of its package for readers. I'll hand out an analysis guide sheet for each assignment.
- **I will reduce the analyses' grades by a letter grade each day past the deadline date.**

Features

- You must submit all feature stories on deadline. **I will reduce the story's grade by a letter grade each day past the deadline day.** After a coaching session with me and/or a written critique from me, you must revise each story to publishable quality. That may take more than one revision. **You must also meet the revision deadlines. I will also dock revisions one letter grade for each day they are past deadline.**
- Those stories for on-campus publications must meet their requirements

for length, format and deadlines. Students will work with editors to ensure stories meet requirements. Stories intended for submission to other outlets must meet the requirements of that publication.

- We will work to give you experience in a variety of feature types and formats. If you have an area of special interest, let's mine that for ideas. I want each student to write a variety of feature types: one first-person feature, one personality profile and one issue or trend piece are required. The other story types we can negotiate on an individual basis. They might include travel, historical, event, or duplicates of one of the required types.

Story Idea List

- Story ideas are the stock in trade of the feature writer. You must develop an idea list to which you add two ideas each week during class. By the end of the semester, you should have 30 good feature ideas on your list.
- Your idea list should follow the following format. Each week, turn in new sheet with sequential numbers. Week 1: 1-3, Week 2: 4-6, etc.

Name

Date/Week 1

Idea List

1. TOPIC AREA:

ANGLE/FOCUS:

SOURCES (3-5): Name/title/contact/reason as source

MARKETS:

WHY IS THIS WORTHY OF A FEATURE?

2. Repeat

3. Repeat

I will collect a copy of your three list additions each Thursday. This is a graded assignment due each Thursday. You should keep the list on your disk and print out a new page each week. I'll keep the hard copies in your class folder. With some slack built in for you, I require of you 40 story ideas by semester

In-Class Pitch Meetings

Most weeks we'll have a staff-like story pitch meeting to discuss ideas for your assigned features. The idea you choose to develop to pitch as one of your assignments may be from your ongoing idea list, but you should type it out as a separate page to use in our class discussion and to turn in. We will brainstorm with you to help hone and focus your idea as much as possible. I'll keep your story pitch sheets in your class folder. You'll keep a copy on your class digital storage device.

Marketing Plan

You must prepare a marketing plan for media placement for either feature three,

four or five. It will include a market survey of potential publications and, for three of them, an audience analysis and query letter or cover letter. I'll explain this in class and provide written guidelines.

Reading Journal

- You will read many, many stories this semester. **YOU MUST READ AND RESPOND TO YOUR READING TO DO WELL IN THIS CLASS.** In addition to the features in *The New York Times*, you will read features in various other newspapers, magazines, online sites and in our two collections of award-winning stories. You must keep a typed reading journal. You must read a minimum of four feature stories each week and write a one paragraph response to each. These are due with your idea list each Tuesday.
- Readings may come from "The Best of American Magazine Writing 2005," "Pulitzer Prize Winning Feature Stories: America's Best Writing 1979-2003," *The New York Times* and other newspapers and magazines with my approval. I expect you to read and respond to four stories a week for the semester. I'll give you some slack, so you need to end the semester with a total of 50 story responses.
- If I find any good features in other areas, I'll bring them in. You may read more stories for extra credit. We'll talk about how to read and respond appropriately in the first class session. Don't fall behind. Read, read, read. Respond, respond, respond.

Class Time

Our time in the classroom will be a combination of lab, lecture and discussion. Bring work, reading and necessary materials to class each meeting. That includes texts, note-taking materials and handouts for lecture/discussion periods as well as a flash/thumb drive, story notes, AP Stylebook and other necessary items for lab writing. In addition, some classes will involve analysis and critiquing of student stories. You must have copies of stories with you on those days. If we are going to analyze a published story in class, you are responsible for bringing your copy to class. Coming to class unprepared will result in a lower grade in the course.

Workshop/Coaching Sessions

- We have a lot of material to cover in lecture and discussion, but we'll have lab time as well. Come prepared to work on something each day. **YOU MUST BEGIN YOUR GATHERING PROCESS EARLY FOR ALL YOUR STORIES SO YOU HAVE MATERIAL WITH WHICH TO WORK WHEN WE HAVE WORKSHOPS. LOOK AT THE ENTIRE SEMESTER. START WORKING ON ALL STORIES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. YOU WILL HAVE SEVERAL STORIES WORKING AT VARIOUS STAGES ALL SEMESTER.**
- Student/instructor conferences are an important part of the course. Some of them will take place during lab periods when the other students are

working. Others will take place in my office at scheduled times. I will be both coach and editor to you at various times during your composing process.

COURSE SCHEDULE

- Week 1: January 17/19
Course introduction/syllabus
Reading Journal discussion
Idea List discussion
How to read features for class
The Feature Story: Process
Read Garrison, 1-2
- Week 2: January 24/26
The Feature Story: Process
Read Garrison 3-5
- Week 3: January 31/February 2:
The Feature Story: Product
Read Garrison, 6-8 and Franklin, I & II
Analysis Guidelines/ Analysis
Assignment #1 handed out. All students will analyze the same feature story.
- Week 4: February 7/9
Feature Types
Analysis #1 due Thursday
Read Garrison, 9-12
Analysis #2 assignment handed out Thursday. Each student must analyze the Sunday New York Times for its feature content. I'll order the Sunday, Feb. 12, paper for each of you. It will be available in my office Monday, Feb. 13.
FEATURE 1 STORY PITCH MEETING
TUESDAY AT BEGINNING OF CLASS
- Week 5: February 14/16
Feature Types
Read Garrison, 13-16 and Franklin, III
Read Franklin, IV-VI
FEATURE 2 STORY PITCH MEETING
TUESDAY AT BEGINNING OF CLASS
- Week 6: February 21/23
Draft 1, feature #1 due Thursday
Read Franklin, VII-X
Minority/ethnic/online outlets
Online resources, read Garrison
Appendix A
ANALYSIS #2 DUE TUESDAY AT BEGINNING OF CLASS
BRING FOUR COPIES OF DRAFT TO

FEATURE 5 FINAL DUE TUESDAY
FEATURE 6, DRAFT 1, DUE THURSDAY

Week 16: May 2/4

Public relations and other non-consumer
magazine feature outlets

Wrap-up/Review for Final

FINAL IDEA LIST DUE THURSDAY

FINAL READING JOURNAL DUE THURSDAY

FEATURE 6 FINAL DUE MONDAY BY NOON

FINAL EXAM DATE: Friday, May 12, 8 a.m.-10 a.m.

**NO EARLY FINALS POSSIBLE. PLEASE DO NOT SCHEDULE YOUR
DEPARTURE FOR SUMMER BREAK UNTIL AFTER THE EXAM PERIOD.**

Changes/Additions/Notes