

J280 • Introductory Magazine Writing

Fall Semester 2008 • Monday and Wednesday • 2:00-3:15 p.m.

Dr. David E. Sumner • AJ391 Tel. 285-8210 (office) and 643-0947 (home) •

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Professor's Web site: www.davidesumner.com

Magazine Sequence Web site: www.bsu.edu/magazine

Office hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 12:00 to 2:00

Tuesdays and Thursday 1:30-3:30

"Walk-in" questions always welcome

Course goals: By the end of this course, you will know

- various types of magazines and diverse audiences among the 19,000 American magazines
- how to develop original ideas for the specific, niche audiences served by magazines
- how to propose and sell articles using query letters to magazines
- how to research and report the types of articles that magazines frequently publish
- how to follow the highest standard of ethical practices in magazine publishing

Resources for learning:

Feature and Magazine Writing: Action, Angle and Anecdotes, 1st ed. by David E. Sumner and Holly G. Miller (Blackwell, 2005)

2009 Writer's Market. Available in print or online for about \$30.

2008-2009 Magazine Handbook from Magazine Publishers of America. Free online.

Please read this syllabus:

Students who make A's this course follow my instructions carefully. This syllabus contains detailed policies and requirements for completing assignments, and I don't make exceptions. Please save an electronic and hard copy of the syllabus and refer to it frequently when completing the assignments to make sure you do everything right.

How you will be evaluated:

A. 4 magazine articles that meet the deadline and minimum length	400 points
B. 4 first drafts that meet the deadline and minimum length	100 points
C. 2 magazine research reports and two query letters	100 points
E. Midterm and final exam	100 points
F. Classroom assignments and homework	200 points
G. Class participation, attendance (includes reading assignment journal)	100 points
TOTAL	1,000 points

Four Article Assignments (400 points)

Each article has a unique purpose that teaches different reporting and writing skills:

1. Calendar-content related story – Chap. 15
2. Trend or issue story with a statistical component – Chap. 16
3. Real-life drama about someone with interesting experience – Chap. 13
4. Story for an online magazine on any topic – Chap. 19

Two Market Research Reports and Two Query Letters (100 points)

The purpose of a market research report is to help you locate the magazine most likely to publish your article. It's like shooting an arrow at the bull's eye. The purpose of a query letter is to "pitch" your idea to an editor and convince the editor to give you the assignment. It's like writing a sales letter to convince the editor to buy your product. The query letters must be submitted to me in a ready-to-mail (but unsealed) envelope with a self-addressed, stamped envelope on the inside. If your query letter contains any major deficiencies, I will return them to you for revision before mailing. Then I will mail them for you. If your target magazine accepts e-mail queries, I will give you special instructions on how to submit them.

Minimum sources required

- **Each article requires a minimum of one face-to-face interview and three telephone (or face-to-face interviews).** Lack of the required number results in a 5-point deduction from the final grade. Quotes obtained by e-mail add to the quality and depth of your research, but can't be included among the minimum number of interviews.

- **Each article requires a minimum of five print or online sources for background research.** 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 of sources might look like this.

Interviews:

1. Dr. John McCord, Ft. Wayne, face-to-face interview, 8/6/08 (260) 495-2914
2. Adam Bornstein, Emmaus, PA., 8/13/08, (317) 285-2910.
3. John King, Muncie, telephone interview, 8/9/08, (765) 214-1024

Print sources:

1. Josh Kinsey-Jones, "Seven tips for finding fat-free fast food," *Oregon Health Center Newsletter*, March 2007 (accessed at www.oregonhealthcenter.com, 1/11/06)
2. Michele McNeil, "Local fast food restaurants re-shaping their menus," *Indianapolis Star*, 12/15/06; (accessed at www.indystar.com, 1/11/07)
3. Robert Balch, M.D. *Prescription for Nutritional Healing* (New York: Doubleday Books, 2006), p. 4-6.
4. Sylvester Monroe, "Afraid to Hope," *Ebony* (May 2008), p. 80-81.
5. Karen Grimaldos, "Living With Breast Cancer," *Latina*, (Oct. 2004), p. 115.

Please note: I have caught students making up fictitious quotes or plagiarizing material from Web sites without giving credit. If I suspect plagiarism, I will check verify your sources with telephone calls or web searches.

Copies of web pages, 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. I use this information to determine the quality of your research and reporting. "Real life" editors and fact-checkers often ask for them, too, so it's good to get in the habit of keeping careful records of your research.

Minimum length requirements

A 5-point deduction will be taken for each 50 words short of the minimum 1,000 word length. Minimum length requirements are important in magazine writing because editors assign articles to writers with a specific length to fill specific pages or blocks of space. A two-page spread in most magazines with a two or three photos will consist of about 1,000 words. That's the reason for the assigned length.

First Drafts (100 points)

First drafts will be submitted electronically and critiqued by the professor using Word's "track changes" component. 25 points each if it meets deadline and minimum length. These drafts will sometimes be read by others and discussed in class. If you do not want your draft publicly critiqued because of a sensitive topic, please let me know in writing.

No extensions: plan for more interviews than you need. No deadline extensions will be given for canceled interviews, computer crashes, re-scheduled interviews, or sources who don't return e-mail or phone messages. This frustrating experience is an everyday part of working for a magazine, where you still have to meet the deadline. Professional writers always have contingency plans.

Viewpoint: Please write all articles in the objective 3rd person viewpoint. Avoid the use of "I" and "we" pronouns. Many fine articles are written in first-person, but rarely by beginning writers.

Avoid "backyard sources": Too many beginning writers rely on parents and siblings as primary sources for interviews and story ideas. I do not allow stories written about a parent or a sibling because it's easy to lose the objectivity necessary for successful reporting. You can use them for support interviews or secondary sources. That's because you don't see their experiences through the same lens that everyone else does.

Writing Center: Please use the department's Writing Center in AJ382 for help with your articles—especially the structural details. 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.

Articles from other classes: You are not permitted to 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. You may, however, use an article that you are *currently* writing for *Expo* or *Daily News* this semester.

Grading scale:

You must earn the following percentage on all assignments to earn the following letter grade.

Grade	Percentage	Points on GPA scale
A	96-100	4.0
A-	94-95	3.667
B+	92-93	3.333
B	89-91	3.000
B-	86-88	2.667
C+	84-85	2.333
C	78-83	2.000
C-	76-77	1.667
D+	74-75	1.333
D	72-73	1.000
D-	70-71	0.667
F	BELOW 70	0.000

Attendance policy

The J280 course will meet twice a week for an hour and 15 minutes each time. I use a variety of lectures, audio-visual and Internet presentations, class discussions, small group discussions, classroom writing assignments and homework assignments. Attendance is essential and you can't fully "make up" or "find out what you missed" any time you are absent. Absences will significantly affect your grade. For each unexcused absence, 20 points will be deducted from your final point total. An unexcused absence occurs when you do not contact me in advance of the class you miss with an legitimate reason.

Punctuality:

Lack of punctuality is rude and disrupts the teacher's comments and other students' attention. It has sometimes been a serious problem. I pass around an attendance sheet at the beginning of every class. If you are not here on time to initial it, then you will receive an unexcused absence if you do not have an acceptable reason for being late. If lack of punctuality becomes a serious problem with one or more students, I reserve the right to lock the door and prohibit entry after class starts.

Backups: Keep a backup of every article and assignment on a jump drive or external hard drive and make a backup copy every time you revise it.

Extra Credit:

- Anyone who gets an article accepted by a regional or national magazine and gets paid for it (other than Expo) will get an automatic A. You must complete all other assignments with at least a “C” grade and not miss more than two classes. To qualify for the A, you must provide proof of acceptance and payment before the end of the semester although the article may be published later.
- If you get a personally addressed and encouraging response to a query letter from an editor, you will you will get 10 extra credit points.
- If you get a C or a D on a final draft, then go to The Writing Center and review it with one of the writing tutors and have it signed by the tutor. Rewrite the article and resubmit and you can raise your grade up to one letter grade.

Honesty

I always tell the truth. I trust students to always tell me the truth. If you are sick, late or have any reason that affects your attendance or performance, then I will trust what you tell me as true unless I have reason to suspect otherwise. Please do not disappoint me. If anyone abuses my trust, I may ask for proof or documentation of illness, family emergencies, etc.

The Department of Journalism takes academic dishonesty very seriously. You will be asked to sign the journalism department's "Student Academic Ethics Policy." If you violate the department's "Student Academic Ethics Policy," you risk receiving a failing grade on an assignment or for the class overall. You also might jeopardize your good standing with the university, which could include expulsion from the university. As of fall 2007, the Department of Journalism will keep a list of names of students who are caught plagiarizing or fabricating information. For more information, go to Ball State's "Student Academic Ethics Policy" at: www.bsu.edu/sa/article/0,1375,207457-14207-34919,00.html

Professionals-in-Residence attendance

The department chair invites several professional journalists to speak each semester. They offer you a great chance to learn from people who are out there doing what we teach you how to do. They also offer you a great chance to make contacts that can lead to future internships and jobs. That's why I require all students to attend two of these addresses. Failure to attend two will result in a 20-point (each) reduction from your final grade. Attendances are recorded and reported to me by the department. I will ask for oral class reports the next day for students who attend a PIR talk.

- Oct. 9, Tom Traynor, 7:30 pm, AJ175
- Oct. 20, Peggy Stark Adams, 7:30 pm, AJ175
- Oct. 29, Young Alumni Career Panel, 7:30 pm, AJ175s
- Nov. 4, Lesley Tomlin, 7:30 pm, AJ175
- Nov. 17, Hazel Reinhardt, 7:30 pm, AJ175

Questions

I prefer a telephone conversation to an e-mail exchange especially for questions that require a longer answer. Call me first at 285-8210 and leave a message if I am not there. You have permission to call my cellphone at 617-3890 if you need a quick answer. However, please don't use the cellphone number at nights or on weekends. I answer all e-mail and telephone calls from students within 24 hours except on weekends or when out of town.

Original Ideas: The Most Important Criteria

It's hard to earn an “A” on an article if it isn't original enough to get published in a magazine--even if it's perfectly written without any grammatical or punctuation errors.

Here are my five best suggestions for finding original ideas:

1. Read and read newspapers, magazines and books that aren't required class assignments. It's okay to borrow an idea from another publication and develop your own angle and do original research.
2. Read the *Muncie Star-Press* every day and look for short local stories you can develop further into a magazine feature.
3. Read every bulletin board on campus and look for ideas you can develop into a magazine feature.
4. Watch for e-mail and Daily News announcements about guest speakers and special campus events that you can develop into a magazine feature.

Assessment test: As part of its assessment procedures to improve curriculum, the department requires all students to take sequence competency exams. Students are required to take both the department and sequence exams. Failure to complete exams will result in an incomplete. Date and time of the exam will be announced later.

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.

Special needs: Please make an appointment with the professor immediately if you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share or if you need special arrangements in case of a building evacuation. If personal problems ever prevent punctual class attendance, I encourage you to talk with me about them. It can only help your grade.

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.

Journalism style statement

The *AP Stylebook* will be followed for all course assignments. You are responsible for owning an AP Stylebook and using correct style, spelling, punctuation and grammar throughout the semester.

Professional portfolio

Students are encouraged to keep both digital files and copies of all of their classroom projects and assignments and published work for their professional portfolio. Your professional portfolio is a collection of your best work and will be used to help you find internships and to begin your career after college graduation. Always back up your work. Use a separate flash drive and/or CD-R. Computer failures and crashes will not be an acceptable excuse for late or missed assignments.

Use of technology in the classroom:

If you need to use a recording device or laptop computer during class because of special needs, please make arrangements with the instructor. These devices can be disruptive to students around you and cannot be used during class without permission. It's also important for you to learn to take notes and participate in discussions without the use of electronics. Cell phones also should be disabled during class and stored away.

Internship Informational Meetings

You must attend one of the Internship Informational Meetings to learn about your work experience requirement. Graduate students also are welcome to attend these meeting. The meetings are as follows:

- 5:15 p.m. Monday, Sept. 15, AJ 384
- 11 a.m. Tuesday, Sept. 16, AJ 384
- 11 a.m. Wednesday, Sept. 17, AJ 384
- 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 18, AJ 384
- 1 p.m. Friday, Sept. 19, AJ 384
- Noon Monday, Oct. 13, AJ 384
- Noon Tuesday, Oct. 14, AJ 384
- 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 15, AJ 384
- 10 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 16, AJ 384
- 2 p.m. Friday, Oct. 17, AJ 384