

The University of Mississippi
Meek School of Journalism and New Media

Journalism 350: Writing With Voice

Spring 2014

Assistant Professor Vanessa Gregory

Jour 350 Section 3

Time & Place: 9 a.m. in Farley 124

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Office: 223 Farley Hall

Office Phone: 662-915-7127

Office Hours: Monday and Wednesday, 2:30 to 3:30 p.m. or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course focuses on nonfiction writing with a distinct point of view. We'll explore the work of some of the most established and promising voices in contemporary journalism. We'll write in a variety of advanced journalistic styles, exploring everything from the short and punchy blog post to the long magazine feature. Along the way, we'll examine the ways authors establish authority, handle the first-person, and deploy the traditional tools of fiction while still remaining faithful to the truth. Students will leave class with a greater ability to recognize and match the tone and style of different publications and different story forms.

IMPORTANT NOTE: The reading, reporting, and writing demands in this class are significant. This class also involves peer editing. Students should be comfortable sharing their work with classmates and participating in respectful critiques. Likewise, this class requires a working mastery of basic grammar, reporting ethics, and journalistic best practices.

REQUIRED TEXTS AND MATERIALS

- "On Writing Well: The Classic Guide to Writing Nonfiction," William Zinsser
- Multiple readings, as posted on Blackboard or in handout form
- Notebooks and pens

Recommended Resources & Inspiration

- "The New New Journalism: Conversations with America's Best Nonfiction Writers on their Craft," Robert Boynton. (book)
- "Essays on Craft," Nieman Storyboard (website)
<http://www.niemanstoryboard.org/category/essays-on-craft/>
- Magazines: The New Yorker, Harper's, The Atlantic Monthly, The New York Times Magazine, also any of the "Best American" annual collections

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of the course the students will:

- demonstrate the knowledge, writing and reporting skills needed to work in the journalism profession as a reporter
- write multiple-platform analytical stories
- demonstrate expertise to write deeper, more penetrating, more meaningful stories
- explore writing stories in formats other than inverted pyramid
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity

GRADING

Course Grading Scale: This course uses the +/- system.

A+	97
A	93
A-	90
B+	87
B	83
B-	80
C+	77
C	73
C-	70
D	60
F	0

IMPORTANT: Please keep your returned assignments and keep track of your own grades. Students are responsible for remaining aware of individual grades and doing the math to figure out how they're faring in class at any given time.

- I do not offer individualized extra credit. Do not ask for it.

ASSIGNMENT WEIGHTS FOR FINAL GRADES:

Quizzes & discussion questions	15 percent
Peer Editing/Workshop	20 percent
Blog Entries	15 percent
Memoir/Reported Essay	20 percent
Pitch for Feature Story	10 percent
Feature Story	20 percent
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TOTAL	100 percent

Quizzes: Quizzes on assigned readings and discussion questions related to guest speakers.

Peer Editing: Students will read their classmates' first drafts and provide written and verbal feedback. Students will address reporting, logic, structure, grammar, news value, AP Style, etc. Peer editing feedback is based on a simple grading scale:

- High Pass (100): Student provides detailed and insightful type written commentary on her classmate's work, offering acknowledgement of what is strong in the piece and specific suggestions for improvement. Student addresses major issues, such as reporting deficiencies and structure, as well as flagging any particularly distracting grammatical issues.
- Pass (75) Student provides cursory typed comments that show only minimal engagement with the work of her classmates. Student is in class, but contributes little to discussion.
- Fail (0): Student is not in class and has no excuse for her absence. Or student comes to class, but does not have typed comments.

DESCRIPTION OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS:

Blog Entries: A blog with at least three entries of 300 to 500 words each.

Memoir/Reported Essay: A memoir or a first-person reported essay of at least 1,000 words.

Feature Story: A magazine feature of at least 2,000 words.

Each written assignment will be subject to intensive revisions based on peer and instructor feedback. Ideas—or story “pitches” are mandatory for each story. First drafts and revisions are also mandatory.

- Do not think of your first draft as a “rough draft.” Instead, your first draft should represent your best reporting and writing. Drafts that lack adequate sourcing or that demonstrate an obvious lack of proofreading and/or due diligence will receive a “fail.”
- Part of your grade for written assignments will be based on evidence that you have put forth your best effort by participating in required steps to produce your final stories. As such, the blog and the memoir/reported essay will be graded as follows:

Ideas	5 percent (pass/fail; 100 percent or 0)
Rough Draft	10 percent (pass/fail; 100 percent or 0)
<u>Final Draft</u>	<u>85 percent (normal numerical grading)</u>

100 percent

- The feature story rough draft will account for 10 percent of the final story grade. The final draft will account for 90 percent. The written pitch for this story is graded as a separate writing assignment.

COURSE POLICIES

Deadlines: Journalists must learn to produce quality work on deadline. For this reason, I do not accept late work. If it's late, it's a zero.

You will learn, if you have not learned already, that it can sometimes be hard to contact busy sources. Plan accordingly.

Turning in Assignments: These policies are designed to prevent grading errors and to use class time effectively:

1. Drafts will be posted on Blackboard, per the instructor's directions, so that they are accessible by the instructor and your classmates. Final stories must be submitted on Blackboard and in-class on the day they are due. Do not email an assignment unless I have told you to do so.
2. Please staple multi-page assignments. Failing to do this will result in a 5-point penalty. The printers are for in-class writing and editing exercises only. Do not use them during lecture or class discussion. "The printer is out of paper/not working/etc." is not an excuse for late work.
3. You may turn any assignment in early. If you need to do this, please place the assignment in my box in the front office of Farley Hall and send me an email telling me it's there.

Sources:

- Originally reported stories need a minimum of three sources and, in most cases, many more. At least two of those sources must be people. Your blog posts will likely be the only exception to this rule.
- All reporting assignments must be turned in with a source list that includes names, phone numbers and e-mail addresses. If you rely on a lawsuit, a police report, or any other document for facts, I expect you to be able to produce that document (or a copy) if I ask.
- Friends, family members, classmates, boyfriends/girlfriends and sorority sisters/fraternity brothers, and journalism faculty and administrators are not acceptable sources unless you have discussed your reasons for interviewing them with me first. If I find out you quoted someone with whom you have a close personal relationship, you will receive a zero on the assignment.

Attendance: Class attendance is mandatory.

If you have an anticipated and excusable absence, such as jury duty, military service, certain university-related events, religious observations or scheduled medical procedures, please contact me in advance about meeting deadlines and making up work.

If you have an unanticipated absence, such as an illness, your child's illness, a death of a friend or family member or an accident, please notify me as soon as reasonably possible about making up any missed work.

You must provide documentation for both anticipated and unanticipated absences.

If you have other obligations that you choose to prioritize over class—such as a wedding or a family reunion or a job interview—then plan accordingly by turning in assignments early and checking on Blackboard and with classmates about missed work. Since these absences are not excused and merit no special accommodations, please do not tell me about them.

A final note on attendance: The fastest way to fail this course—or pretty much any class—is by missing multiple sessions. Come to class.

E-mail: Check your university e-mail. I will communicate important information about the course through e-mail, including additional readings.

Blackboard: I post extensively on Blackboard. Make a habit of checking the site on a regular basis.

Cell phones, BlackBerries, etc: These should be off unless they're being used for reporting or other class purposes. If I see you texting, I may ask you to leave.

Ethics: The relationship between news consumers and reporters is based on trust. This classroom is also based on trust. I assume that every student will behave with integrity and honesty. What does this mean? It means that every assignment you turn in is 100 percent original work produced by you.

Fabrication and plagiarism are unacceptable for any student, but particularly egregious for journalists. **I reserve the right to give students who plagiarize or fabricate on any assignment an "F" for the entire course. Ignorance of plagiarism is not an excuse.** If you are uncertain about correct attribution, please contact me via email, phone or in-person during class.

All incidents of plagiarism will also be reported to the university's Academic Discipline Committee. Plagiarism is defined on Page 7 of the current University of "Mississippi Handbook of Standards" (the M Book), here:

www.dosolemiss.com/page.php?parent_id=&page_id=106769.

Plagiarism includes copying articles, text or quotations from websites without citation. Fabrication includes making up facts, details or sources. Changing quotations is another form of fabrication. If you put words in between quotation marks ("") and attribute them to a given individual, you are pledging that you spoke to that person (or emailed) and that the person said those exact words.

“Recycling” papers, or turning in the same paper you wrote for another class or for an outside publication is also an act of academic dishonesty. **These papers also receive zeros** and are reported to the Academic Discipline Committee.

- In addition, **DO NOT tell the people you interview that their comments are “just for a class.” Identify yourself as a student reporter and explain that you may pursue publication of your article.**

Professional Comportment: Your behavior while you’re in the field reflects not only on you, but also on your classmates and the Meek School of Journalism and New Media. Please be polite and respectful while you’re reporting. Keep appointed meeting times, dress appropriately, represent yourself honestly, quote people accurately and fairly, etc.

Diversity Statement: The Department of Journalism is committed to diversity in the classroom, in its publication and in its various organizations and components. Faculty and staff recognize that the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of their colleagues and students are best served through respect toward gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, culture and other personal characteristics. In addition, the department is committed to taking a leadership position that calls for promoting a commitment to diversity in and out of the classroom and in the practice of journalism.

Civility & Respect: The classroom should be a lively place in which students feel free to exchange ideas and challenge the logic of their classmates and their professor. Please do so in a civil manner. Refrain from name calling, ridicule, or personal attacks.

Policies Related to Students With Disabilities: It is the responsibility of any student with a disability, who requests a reasonable accommodation, to contact the Office of Student Disability Services (915-7128). Contact will be made by that office, through the candidate to the instructor of this class. The instructor will then be happy to work with the candidate so that a reasonable accommodation can be made.

Flexibility Clause: I may alter class assignments, policies or other elements of the syllabus depending on student experience and needs.

COURSE OUTLINE:

Week 1: What is voice?

Reading: Chapter 21 (Enjoyment, Fear and Confidence) and Chapter 22 (The Tyranny of the Final Product) from "On Writing Well," William Zinsser; "Chris Christie's Problem is That He's Really, Truly A Bully," Ezra Klein (politics); "Yeah, Alec Baldwin is A Bigot," Ta-Nehesi Coates (Culture & Social Commentary)

Week 2: Writing with a point of view: blogs

Reading: Chapters 1 (The Transaction) through 7 (Usage) from "On Writing Well," William Zinsser; "The World is Changing," Willa Paskin (Television Criticism); "College Football Will Miss Johnny Football," Edward Aschoff, ESPN; "What If the Tsarnaevs had been the Boston Shooters?" John Cassidy, The New Yorker blog

Due on Wednesday, January 29: Blog pitches

Due on Friday, January 31: Source lists for blogs

Week 3: Writing in the first-person: memoirs & reported essays

Reading: Chapter 14 (Writing About Yourself) from "On Writing Well," William Zinsser; "Homecoming at Howard," Ta-Nehesi Coates; "Luxury Shopping from the Other Side of the Register," Carmen Maria Machado; "My Desperate, Stupid, Emotional Hunt for the Perfect Pants," Marc Maron; "Finding My Marathon Legs," Rob Hoerburger; "How to Write a Lives Essay," Hugo Lindgren; "This is How You Write a Memoir," Katie Roiphe; "First Person Singular: It's Not Just About You," Adam Hochschild, "The Sea of Information," Andrea Barrett

Week 4: Memoirs & reported essays

Reading: "A Scary Abundance of Water," Barry Lopez; "The Only Way to Hold On," Kyle Clayton; "My Worms," Catherine Price

Due on Thursday, February 13 by 5 p.m.: Blogs

Week 5: Peer editing workshops

Week 6: Memoir & reported essays

Due on Wednesday, February 26: Pitches (story ideas) for memoirs or reported essays

Week 7: Writing with authority: features

Reading: Chapter 8, 9 & 10 and Chapter 12 (Writing About People: The Interview) in "On Writing Well," William Zinsser; "Three Rs of Narrative Nonfiction," Lee Gutkind; "Can Emotional Intelligence Be Taught?" Jenn Kahn; "Life in the Cellar," Suketu Mehta; "The American Male at Age 10," Susan Orlean; "Harlem Chic," Kelefa Sanneh

Week 8: SPRING BREAK

Week 9: How to write a pitch & peer editing

Due on Monday, March 17: Memoirs/reported essays

Week 10: Peer editing & features

Reading: Chapter 19 (Humor) in "On Writing Well," William Zinsser, "The Art of Humor No. 3: Calvin Trillin," Paris Review; "Pepper Chase," Calvin Trillin; "The King of the Ferret Leggers," Donald Katz

Week 11: Features, literary nonfiction

Reading: Chapter 11 (Nonfiction as Literature) in "On Writing Well," William Zinsser; "Swamp Nurse," Katherine Boo; "Katherine the Great," Kira Goldenberg, Columbia Journalism Review;

Due on Monday, March 31: Pitches for features

Due on Friday, April 4: Final memoirs/reported essays

Week 12: Features, structure

Reading: "Jump Juan Crow," Duncan Murrell; "Power Steer," Michael Pollan; "Natural Narratives," Michael Pollan; "Travels in Georgia," John McPhee; "Structure," John McPhee; "Hockey Nights," Guy Lawson

Week 13: Features w/ a sense of place & peer editing

Reading: "Where I Was From," Chapter 6, Joan Didion; "Detroit Arcadia," Rebecca Solnit; "Joyas Voladoras," Brian Doyle

Due on Thursday, April 17: Feature stories

Week 14: Peer editing

Week 15: Round two feature draft revisions

Exam Week:

Due on May 6: Final Feature Stories