

Soc Sci 184 GW
Media Writing
Course Syllabus
Summer Session One, 2020

Instructor: Ricardo Chavira



Teaching Assistants: James Michael Nguyen and Vahid Niayesh

Course Description and Objectives:

This course, in addition to fulfilling the upper-division writing requirement, will provide you with the skills needed to write succinctly, clearly, and quickly in any professional environment. More precisely, you will become adept at writing effectively for online readers. You will learn how to gather and organize information, research facts, and write on deadline. Lectures will cover in detail the writing for the media process.

Other Important Information:

Proficient writing for most of us is a skill acquired and refined by frequent and guided practice.

Consequently, expect to write at least once a week, sometimes more. We will analyze your work in detail, making you a progressively better writer. Most of what you write will be more concise compared to many writing courses.

The assignments and exams are challenging. All course work will involve writing. This is a distance learning class, **which makes it crucial that you focus on and meet assigned deadlines.**

***Assignments you submit later than the deadline time will be subject to a ten-point deduction.**

***No assignments will be accepted after the posted date. These are necessarily inflexible rules.**

Conditions or circumstances that make it impossible for you to submit your work as scheduled are acceptable excuses. However, you will need to offer documentation to substantiate your excuse.

There are common excuses offered that are not acceptable. If your excuse falls into one of these categories, we will not honor your request.

* Scheduling conflicts

*Work

*Travel

*No Internet connection, unless you experience an electrical blackout and have no battery power.

*Computer crashes are a common excuse offered over the years. It is acceptable if you produce documentation of the crash and attest that you had no way of using another computer.

*A Canvas Pilot glitch that lacks documentation. In earlier classes, some students have insisted that they submitted work as required only to have it disappear. So far, what system techs have found is that the assignment was improperly turned in, and so it never landed in the submission window. Please be sure you confirm that the submission is in fact in place. We can only grade work that is in our possession.

*Forgetting or becoming confused about a deadline

*Colds, the flu, headaches, hangovers, and other minor illnesses are similarly invalid excuses. After all, you can work in your pajamas and on the sofa, should it be required to complete an assignment on time.

The best course, if you want the best grade possible, is to plan on completing all assignments as required. Betting that you will be excused is usually a losing proposition.

Similarly, it's best if you do not ask for a deadline extension unless you have an extreme emergency. Altering deadlines for one student requires re-setting the assignment.

*All assignments must be submitted on the class site. If you send work by e-mail, it will not be accepted.

****The authoritative written sources for deadline information are the syllabus and assignments and exams.** There is a tab for assignments. Ignore it. A reoccurring glitch causes old assignments to reappear.

Similarly, don't rely exclusively on the calendar tab. There, too, assignments appear that will not be completed for this course. If you go by the syllabus and the work listed on the course site, you ought not to get confused. Of course, don't be shy about asking when in doubt. You will find weekly modules with the deadlines listed.

There are no class texts. Thus, you must read posted material and listen to audio and video lectures. Should you fail to do that, it is almost certain you will do poorly with assignments and exams.

Missed Deadline Penalties:

As noted above, assignments or exams submitted later than the deadline time are subject to a ten-point deduction. No work will be accepted past the deadline day.

Timed Assignments:

Timed assignments are subject to strict deadlines. **Once the submission window closes, no assignments can be accepted.**

Timed assignments are intended to teach you how to write quickly and concisely and in a brief period.

Should you be confused about deadlines, it is your responsibility to contact us in a timely fashion. That means not at the last minute.

This is an upper-division writing course, and as such, it is expected that you have a firm grasp of grammar, punctuation, and syntax.

What You Should Expect to Learn:

Through a variety of assignments, you will sharpen your writing skills

and expand your knowledge of the news and information-gathering process. Your final exam will require you to interview several people and conduct independent research. You will be allotted adequate time to complete this work and write your final exam.

By the end of the course, you should understand mass media and how to report and write media stories and press releases appropriate for publication in print or online. More generally, you will be able to write effectively in any professional environment. While this class fulfills your upper-division writing requirement, it is important for other reasons as well. You should see a marked improvement in your writing and you should have a much better appreciation for what it takes to become even better in the future.

Course Requirements:

Since a key course goal is to help you improve your writing, there will be a variety of writing assignments.

Students who complete this course should be able to:

- Produce press releases and stories that are accurate, concise, objective, and in a media writing style.
- *Show effective use of attribution in media writing.
- Demonstrate skill in analyzing facts from interviews, fact sheets and other sources to produce effective news leads and show the proper organization of facts in the body of news stories and press releases.

Participation:

You will find class forums for each assignment and exam. They serve to post questions, concerns, or comments. Personal matters should be handled in e-mails to your instructor or teaching associate.

Writing Format:

*The first paragraph of every assignment is called **the lead**. We will review the lead in upcoming lectures. The lead must be **no longer than 35 words**. Subsequent paragraphs should not exceed 40 words. We can allow you to exceed these limits by a word or two but think of them as generally firm rules. You may find this an odd rule. However, it is based on a solid foundation, which we will explain in the first lecture.*

Grading:

Seven assignments, 30 points each: 210 points

Midterm Exam, 50 points

Final, 100 points

MAXIMUM COURSE POINTS POSSIBLE: 360

Your grade will be decided by your point total. We follow UCI grade criteria. There is no curve, and there are no extra credit assignments. If you believe you have been graded unfairly, you are welcome to appeal.

However, keep in mind that strict writing criteria determine assignment grades. In this sense, our grades are less subjective than traditional writing classes.

For instance, if you do not properly attribute information or incorrectly punctuate a sentence, points will be deducted. Similarly, if the story is poorly organized, your grade will suffer. Those sorts of flaws do not lend themselves to successful appeals.

Final Words: This is an exceptionally challenging class, in large part because it requires you to write in a fashion that almost certainly is

new to most of you. You will also need to write much more quickly than is typical in other classes.

Pay careful attention to the lectures and the critiques offered. Take the critiques in the constructive spirit in which they are offered. We want you to earn the best possible grade. That requires us to be frank and precise when giving feedback.

Do whatever it takes to complete all assignments. A single missed assignment will significantly affect your point total, and thus your final grade.

Once the session has ended, there will be no opportunities to turn in extra assignment work or complete missed assignments. Again, this underscores the vital importance of staying current.

SCHEDULE

Orientation Week: June 15-June 21

Week One: June 22-June 28

Lecture Course Overview: The Media Writing Process
Lecture: The lead and inverted pyramid

Writing Assignment: Dog Story, Due: Thursday, 9 a.m.

Week Two: June 29-July 5

Lecture: Leads, Paragraphs, Attribution, Quotes, and Story Basics
Lecture: Writing about Controversies

Writing Assignment: Leads: Due: Tuesday, 12 pm

Writing Assignment: Coffee Story: Due: Wednesday, 12 pm

Week Three: July 5-July 12

Lecture: Information Sources, the Internet and Online Writing

Lecture: Ethics: Why They Matter

Writing Assignment: School Board Story: Due: Wednesday, 12 pm

Midterm Exam: Due Friday, at 9 am.

Week Four: July 13-July 19

Lecture: How to Conduct Effective Interviews Lecture: Public Relations and Press Releases

Writing Assignment: Interview Story: Due: Wednesday, 2 pm

Writing Assignment: Press Release: Due: Friday, 12 pm

Week Five: July 20-July 26

Lecture: The Feature Story: Writing with Detail and Flair

Writing Assignment Feature Story: Due Wednesday, 12 pm

****Final Exam: Due Wednesday, July 29, 12 pm***

