

Media Writing

CMA 201

Fall 2019

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Office 208 Rosenstock

Class: Monday & Wednesday, 11:30 a.m.-12:45 p.m.

This syllabus is subject to change. Students will be responsible for keeping up with the adjustments made during class.

Office Hours: 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday, and by appointment

Course information: CMA 201 is an introduction to writing for various publics using a variety of formats within the contexts of informing, persuading and entertaining. Applications will include print news media, online publications, broadcast news media and public relations.

Student Learning Objectives:

This course aligns with the following CMA program goals in teaching students to:

- Communicate appropriately and clearly in forms specific to the audiences and purposes they serve.
- Use multimedia tools effectively and create communications specific for the audience and purposes they serve.
- Identify legal principles applicable to communicators.
- Develop strategies to confront moral and ethical dilemmas facing communicators.
- Research critically, evaluate the results and present them in a cogent manner.
- Apply business fundamentals to the creation and distribution of mass media.
- Evaluate the influence of media on society.

The skills we will practice here are consistent throughout all forms and purposes of mass communication. CMA 201 will examine how to write information that audiences want and need to know. This type of writing is different from the forms you've undertaken elsewhere in academia, such as creative essays or research papers. You will think critically about your writing and consider both content and structure of each composition – from a 140-character tweet to a 600-word story – as well as the challenges of writing for many people, as opposed to one person.

In CMA 201, we write what we know, not what we think. To that end, you will develop critical-thinking skills with respect to assessing information and crafting clear, concise writing. This course is rigorous and demanding, and requires patience and attention to detail.

Two of the most critical skills we'll develop in this class:

- Being able to identify the most important and relevant information for your audience
- Presenting that information accurately, clearly and concisely

Furthermore, we will examine some of writing's fundamental concepts, including grammar, punctuation and syntax. For some, this will be a review; for others, it will be challenging and perhaps frustrating; for everyone, it will improve your writing.

Required textbooks:

- *Writing and Reporting for the Media* by John R. Bender, Lucinda D. Davenport, Michael W. Drager and Fred Fedler, 12th edition and accompanying workbook (Bring to each class)
- *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual* (Bring to each class)

Required social media

- Twitter
- Facebook

Course format: This course will be split about evenly between lectures and discussions and time spent learning to write articles for various formats. Complete the reading assignments before the class day for which they are assigned. The best way to learn media writing is to practice and so you will have lots of practice exercises. One-quarter of your grade will come from class work and homework assignments.

Attendance

Because a significant portion of your grade will be based on in-class work, attendance is required. However, I know life happens. For that reason, I will allow you 2 absences—excused or unexcused without penalty. Any work missed due to absence must be made up within one week of returning to class. Missing three or more class periods may result in your dismissal from the class.

If any personal or health problems occur during the semester, see me about arranging extra help before getting behind on assignments.

Inclement Weather

Snow happens. In the event that our class must be canceled because of school closing or a delayed opening, you will still be responsible for the assigned readings. Be sure to check Blackboard because I may present alternative lectures or assignments.

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Classroom courtesy

- Be on time. You will lose attendance points for habitual tardiness.
- I do not permit cell phones use in my class except in certain lessons. Turn them off and put them away.
- You may use tablets and laptops for taking notes or writing assignments, however, if their use becomes disruptive, you will not be permitted to use them.

The Basics: To be successful in this class, you must have a solid foundation in spelling and grammar. If you need extra help, I encourage you to contact the Center for Academic Achievement and Retention on the third floor of Rosenstock.

Blackboard: Class work, homework and outside writing assignments must be submitted to Blackboard for grading. Students also will be expected to check Blackboard regularly for announcements and assignments. Copies of lectures will also be posted to Blackboard the day they are given. **I will not** accept work that is emailed or handed to me on paper.

Deadlines: CMA 201 carries rigorous expectations. You will need to learn to perform consistently under inflexible deadlines. If you don't, you won't be prepared to work as a professional communicator. You must have all assignments ready no later than the beginning of the class period for which they are due. A late assignment is a missed deadline. **I will deduct one letter grade per day for late major assignments. If an assignment is four days late, you can earn no higher than 50 percent (F). Missed assignments will be scored at 0. Homework and class work assignments more than one week late will receive a 0.**

Exceptions can be made for documented serious illnesses that require trips to the emergency room or hospitalizations, and notifications from the Dean of Students' office regarding deaths in a family or other family crises. In such cases, students must meet with me to develop a plan for making up missed assignments.

Athletes who will be missing class because of games are still required to submit assignments on time.

Outside News Writing Projects

In order to acquire real and meaningful reporting experience, you will be required to write two articles that could be published in the student newspaper; a press release that would be suitable to publicize a person, organization or event on campus; and a broadcast story that could be aired on the student radio station.

Story No. 1: 100 points. You must write an article of between 350 and 400 words about a newsworthy topic. In order to complete this assignment, you must interview and quote at least **one** authoritative person with knowledge of the topic. The interview must be conducted in person

or over the phone. You must submit a story proposal and the subject must be approved in advance.

Story No. 2: 150 points. You will cover a speech/lecture/presentation or a meeting in person. In addition to quoting the speaker or officials, you must quote reaction from at least **two audience members** and write an article of 500-600 words using a summary news lead. The story must include **one** hyperlink and one social media enhancement. You must submit a story proposal and the event must be approved in advance.

Story No. 3: 100 points. Press release. You will write a press release of 250-350 words to promote a person or organization on campus. The press release must reflect news values designed to garner media attention. You must include at least **one quote from your client**. The subject must be approved in advance.

Story No. 4: 50 points. Broadcast story. You will write a 30-second script based upon the news you gathered in Story No. 2.

Story of the Week

To help you develop your sense of news judgment you will be required most weeks to identify a story of the week and be ready to explain why the story is newsworthy. You must post your Story of the Week in Blackboard before class on Wednesdays. Late postings will not be accepted. To know what news is, you must keep up with the news. A great resource is the Associated Press' [10 Things You Need to Know for Today](#).

Grading:

Outside projects: 400 points

In-class work and homework: 230 points

Story of the Week: 50 points (5 point per)

Quizzes: 50 points

Midterm Exam: 120 points

Final Exam: 150

Extra Credit: You may receive up to 50 points for writing additional stories published in the *Blue and Grey* or other publications (25 point per story).

About my grading system:

My system is simple: Your grade is based on 1,000 points (possibly more if you do extra credit). Grades for all assignments will be posted in Blackboard. You start with 0 points and earn points as you complete assignments. Ten points on a homework assignment or quiz might not seem like much, but it is 1 percent of your grade. If you fail to turn in five homework assignments and five class assignments, you've lost a letter grade. You should always know what your grade is in my class because all assignments and all grades are in Blackboard. Divide the points received by points possible and you have your grade.

I try to grade papers within a week of your submitting them. If you do not see a grade for an assignment you believe you have submitted, ask. **It is your responsibility to keep track of your assignments.**

Grading criteria on writing assignments:

("A" & "A-") Publishable work. It is a story that is clear, interesting, and well-written. It has good organization, effective quotes, smooth transitions and no spelling, grammar, or accuracy errors.

("B+", "B", & "B-") Publishable with some editing. It may have some minor spelling or grammatical errors. The lead is effective. The body is cohesive and well-organized.

("C+" & "C") Requires extensive editing to publish. Several sections must be rewritten. The lead may be buried or fail to focus on the most important aspects of the story. The body of the story is disorganized and contains many minor errors. Significant information is missing.

("D") Needs a complete rewrite to be published. The facts are presented ineffectively. The story contains an unacceptable number of spelling, grammar, or accuracy errors.

("F") Contains major factual error(s). Names are misspelled. The facts are so distorted that they could not be rewritten and published.

You will be graded based on professional standards. That might seem a high expectation of undergraduates in an introductory course, but any lower standard would be unrealistic and unfair. You should rightfully expect to be prepared to enter the professional world with ease and to perform with competence. Employers will expect you to contribute to the mass media organization from day one. You are capable of doing that. Success in this course means you are prepared to do that.

The most common problem students have in CMA 201 is lack of attention to deadlines and details. You must learn to be precise in your work. Careless errors, including writing before thinking and continuing to make the same errors after they have been brought to your attention, are the most common. Those errors are usually committed by students who haven't yet developed a sense of responsibility for their efforts. When you learn to care about and take pride in your work, those errors nearly always disappear.

You will lose one letter grade for each factual mistake, including misspelled names.

Proofread your work.

As you might suspect, deciding what is “publishable work” is not an exact science, but is based upon my judgment with more than 30 years of experience as a reporter and editor. For a number of reasons, it's often easier to identify what doesn't work than what does. That means you'll get far more negative than positive feedback at times. A thick skin is considered a tool of the trade.

You must learn to benefit from your mistakes, make a serious effort to build on your strengths and work on your weaknesses.

Developing the skills, self-awareness and grace-under-pressure of a pro begins in this course. This is important if you wish to pursue careers in mass communications. For many students fewer than two years separate your time in CMA 201 and a career in which you will be writing for large and diverse audiences. You must be prepared to handle yourself with competence and well-placed self-confidence when you deal with the major decision makers in the community. They must also show sensitivity to and understanding of the lives and problems of people who might be quite unlike them. It is none too soon, therefore, to develop a sense of professionalism, responsibility and your role as a moral actor.

Although I will provide rubrics for the outside writing assignments, in general this is what I expect in the order of importance:

1. Accuracy. Your audience demands that the information you provide is correct, including the spellings of names.
2. Reporting. Your readers expect you to answer their questions as thoroughly as possible.
3. Objectivity. You must keep your opinion out of the news stories.
4. Meeting deadlines. Writing the best story in the world won't matter if you blow your deadline. The presses do not stop to wait for you. Get your work in on time.
5. The lead. You will learn and practice writing news leads, which are the first sentence of the story. The lead must capture the reader's attention.
6. The inverted pyramid story structure. Most stories you write in this class will be organized from most important to least important information.
7. Grammar.
8. Associated Press Style.

Guidelines for Written Work in Media Writing:

- Do not plagiarize, fabricate, or submit work you have done for another class.
- You may not use family members or close friends for your sources.
- You may not write about an organization in which you are involved.
- You may not use quotes or other information published in other news sources. You must do original reporting.
- Stories must be submitted to Blackboard in correct form and style and should contain your name and story slug in the upper left-hand corner.
- Proofread and correctly edit your copy! All spelling, punctuation, grammar, AP style, and factual errors will cause you to lose grade points.

Drafts

No one writes perfectly the first time and for that reason you are required to submit drafts of the outside writing assignments to receive feedback from your classmates and me. The drafts must be submitted to Blackboard and printed out before class begins on their due date. Your draft

should demonstrate how well you gathered your information. The revision will demonstrate how well you wrote about the information you gathered. **The draft accounts for 25 percent of the story grade. Failure to submit a draft will result in a 25 percent deduction on the final story.**

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

I **DO NOT** tolerate plagiarism or fabrication of any kind. This includes failing to attribute quotations and information gathered from sources you interview. Also, you may not gather quotations published in other sources, including press releases, and pass them off as your own. You may attend events together, but you must write your own stories based upon your own notes, research and understanding. Journalists value their integrity and strive to present the truth to their audiences to the best of their ability. You will be asked to live up to these standards as well. Instances of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade on the assignment and no chance for a re-do. I check student work through SafeAssign.

Accommodations

If you have a disability or a personal circumstance that will affect your learning in this course, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can discuss the best ways to meet your needs. (Any student who needs accommodation for disabilities is strongly encouraged to contact the Office of Accessibility Services at accessibilityservices@hood.edu or 301-696-3421 to obtain an official letter of accommodation for all their courses.)

The Office of Accessibility Services provides academic support for students with disabilities. Examples of disabilities include, but are not limited to, mobility impairments, blindness/low vision, psychiatric conditions, recurring medical conditions, ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders, and others. The following are examples of academic accommodations:

- Extended time on exams
- Note-taking support
- Textbooks in alternative formats (electronic, audio, etc.)
- ASL interpreting services

If you have a documented disability and are interested in finding out more about academic accommodations, please contact the disability services coordinator at CAAR.

Center for Academic Achievement and Retention (CAAR):

The CAAR office is located on the third floor of Rosenstock Hall. It provides a wide range of academic supports for all students. Services range from math and writing tutoring to individualized one-on-one meetings to discuss any barriers that might prevent you from reaching

your full academic potential. If you ever need help, feel free to stop by and they will try to get the help you need.

CLASS SCHEDULE

(All readings assigned below are from Bender. They should be done before the class meeting.)

Aug. 26: Introduction

Chapter 1

Due: Introductions

Aug. 28: Writing for an Audience

Chapter 2

Due: Story of the Week

Sept. 2—NO CLASS. LABOR DAY.

Sept. 4: Media Writing Style

Chapter 3

Due: Story of the Week

Sept. 9: Grammar

Chapter 4

Due: Active Voice Assignment

Sept. 11: AP Style

Due: Story of the Week

Sept. 16: Grammar/Active Voice Quiz

Due: AP Style Exercise.

Sept. 18: Basic News Leads

Chapter 7

Due: Story of the Week

Sept. 23: AP Style Quiz

Due: Exercise 2, Section 1-4, page 151.

Sept. 25: More on Basic News Leads

Due: Story 1 Proposal—what is it and why it's newsworthy

Due: Story of the Week

Sept. 30: The Body of a News Story

Chapter 9

Due: Exercise 2, Section V, No. 2 page 153.

Oct. 2: Finding and approaching sources

Interviews—Chapter 11

Due: Story of the Week

Oct. 7: Quotations and Attributions – Chapter 10

Due: Exercise 2, No. 1, page 231

Oct. 9: MIDTERM EXAM

Oct. 14: NO CLASS. FALL BREAK.

Oct. 16: Communications Law Chapter 5

Oct. 21: Communications Ethics, Chapter 6

Due: Mandatory draft Story 1.

Oct. 23: Speeches and Meetings, Chapter 15

Due: Story of the Week

Due: Story 2 Proposal—meeting or speech you will cover and why it's newsworthy

Oct. 28: Speeches and Meetings continued

Due: College Athletics Speech, 327-329

Due: Revised story 1

Oct. 30: Public Affairs Reporting – Chapter 18

Due: Story of the Week

Nov. 4: Alternative Leads—Chapter 8

Due: Exercise 4, page 384.

Nov. 6: Specialized Types of Stories—Chapter 16

Due: Exercise 2, Nos. 2- 6, pages 177-179

Due: Story of the Week

Nov. 11: Working with Numbers

Due: Story 2 mandatory draft.

Nov. 13: Writing for Digital Media

Due: Poll Story

Nov. 18: News Media & PR Practitioners —Chapter 19

Due: Revised Story 2

Due: Story 3 Proposal --Your client and the purpose of the press release

Nov. 20: More on News Media & PR Practitioners

Due: Story of the Week

Nov. 25: Social Media

Due: Story 3 Draft

Nov. 27: NO CLASS. THANKSGIVING BREAK

Dec. 2: Broadcast writing—Chapter 13

Due: Story 3

Dec. 4: More on Broadcasting

Story of the Week

Due: Story 4 Draft

Dec. 9: More on Broadcasting

Due: Story 4

FINAL EXAM: Noon Friday, Dec. 13