

English 312: News and Feature Writing
Spring 2006

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Zinzendorf 304
Hours: M-F 10:30-noon
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Course description and objectives

English 312 will provide guided practice in writing informative, interesting, or entertaining “stories” for newspaper audiences. You will be expected to develop writerly or journalistic habits and attitudes toward your writing; to practice giving and receiving constructive criticism on writing; and to be active and critical readers of newspapers. You will also have an opportunity to hear from professional writers as guest speakers and to “cover” news for course assignments. Specific learning goals for the course are as follows:

- **regular, scheduled writing** (exercises, major assignments, reflective analyses of your own writing and writing process, responses to classmates’ writing and to published pieces, notes on reading, notes toward writing)
- **knowledge of the work of professional news/feature writers**
- **improved critical and editing skills**
- **awareness of news values, audiences, publications’ *personae* and the preparation of at least one piece of news/feature writing for submission to an editor**

Assignments and evaluation

Grades are important, but more so from student and institutional perspectives. While you will receive grades in this course, I encourage you to consider your work more as “writers” than as “students.” To that end, much of this course will be about practice, habits and discipline. Action produces motivation or “inspiration” more often than the other way around.

As suggested above, you will do frequent writing of various kinds: note-taking and –making, planning stories, drafting them, exercises of several kinds, critiques of your own and others’ writing. **Major assignments** will consist of **three** news/feature stories to be developed from planning through editor-ready copy. Of these, you will revise **one** to submit for publication. There will also be **one** major fact-finding exercise that is to become the basis for a story. All this work may also contribute toward the program portfolio that English-Writing majors must compile, so if you have yet to submit your portfolio, save all your major assignments—preliminary as well as final drafts. Specifically, these assignments and their percentages of your course grade will be:

- **a fact-finding exercise**, leading to a story idea or plan = 10%
- **an on-campus news story** = 15%
- **an on-campus feature story** = 15%
- **a off-campus news or feature story** = 20%

Other graded work in EN312 will consist of:

- **“weekly” quizzes on grammar, punctuation, usage, spelling, style** = 15% (altogether)
- **other exercises** = 10% (altogether)
- **style test** = 15%

Most written work is to be done using a word processing application on the campus network. This work should be submitted electronically via the course Blackboard site. **Late work will not be accepted without prior approval; any work handed in late without prior approval will be assigned a grade of zero.**

Attendance

This is a workshop-based course, which means that your attendance and active participation are crucial. Please arrive on time and prepared for every class meeting. You may be excused from up to three class meetings for legitimate academic, medical, or emergency reasons only; more than three unexcused absences will result in a lowering of your grade by 1/3. Missing more than two workshops, excused or unexcused, will result in a lowering of your grade by 1/3. Repeated lateness to class or failure to be prepared when class starts may also negatively affect your grade.¹

Books and materials

Goldstein, Norm, ed. *The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*. New York: Basic-Perseus, 2004.

The New York Times (Monday-Friday)²
The Morning Call (Monday-Friday)³ and/or
the Express-Times (Monday-Friday)⁴
the Comenian (Wednesdays)⁵

a reporter's notebook
pens, pencils, eraser

Academic honesty

The academic honesty policy of the College will apply in this course. Please see the *Student Handbook*, pp. 54-59 for a discussion of this policy and consequences of its violation.

¹ "Prepared" in this context means you are in class and your work is readily accessible via the course Blackboard site or the campus network.

² Required reading -- to be purchased, at 40 cents per copy, through the college bookstore.

³ Required reading -- available free on campus

⁴ Required reading -- available free on campus

⁵ Required reading -- available free of charge on campus.

Tentative schedule

Week I 1/16 – 20	Course introduction. What is news? What are some of the important factors of audience, newspapers, writers' stances? Leads and story structures - I
Week II 1/23 - 27	<i>All the President's Men</i> (film on video) Leads and story structures - II
Week III 1/30 –2/3	Writing the news story; interviewing Class visit: a news interview subject Fact-finding exercise due
Week IV 2/6 – 10	Handling quotes and attribution; working with sources; on- and off-the-record etc.
Week V 2/13 -17	Draft of on-campus news story
Week VI 2/20 - 24 (midterm)	On-campus news story due Class trip: a news event
Week VII 2/27 – 3/3	Feature leads and story structure
Spring Break 3/4 - 12	
Week VIII 3/13 - 17	Draft of on-campus feature story

Week IX
3/20 - 24

Developing the feature story
Class visit: a feature writer

Week X
3/27 - 31

Refining news writing: some writing tricks and pitfalls
On-campus feature story due

Week XI
4/3 - 7

Conferences; ideas for off-campus stories

Week XII
4/10 - 13

Draft of off-campus story

Week XIII
4/18 - 21

Off-campus story due

Week XIV
4/22 - 28

Style test
Story revised for submission due

Final exams
5/1 - 6