

JOURNALISM 3410 (Lab Sections)

News Reporting and Writing

Fall Semester 2009

Tom Hudson, Senior Lecturer in News Writing

Journalism Building, Room 231

Office Hours: Monday: 1:30–2:30 p.m.; Tuesday: 2:30-3:30 p.m.

I will also meet with you if you make an appointment in advance.

Phone: 706-542-5028 (office) and 706-543-9100 (home)

E-mail: calltom@uga.edu

Notice of Changes: This course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Academic Honesty: All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” All students are responsible to inform themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.

Texts: Writing and Reporting News: A Coaching Method, 6th ed. Carole Rich.
Associated Press Stylebook

UGA Undergraduate Bulletin Course Description: Techniques of basic news reporting and writing and an introduction to advanced practices, with practical assignments in the media.

Objectives of the Lab Course: The weekly lab is to teach students Associated Press rules and to give practice in writing journalism.

Requirements of the Lab Course: Students are required to attend 90 percent of the lab meetings (13 of 15), successfully complete tests of journalism usage and/or journalism writing and to submit all assignments on deadline. Students are also required to send assignments to a class Blog. Students must attend the LAST lab meeting.

Tests and Quizzes: Tests will cover Lead Writing, Associated Press style rules and Story Writing.

Leads Test: Week 5

Story Writing Tests will be in weeks 8, 10 and 13.

AP Style Tests will be in weeks 8, 10, 12 and 14.

Bonus Points for Publishing: I will give you 15 points if you get published this term in any newspaper, newsletter or magazine, either in hardcopy or online. You will get the points if you are accepted for publication, even if later your story is not used/published.

Writing Assignments: This is a writing lab, so you will write in class and out of class using Associated Press style. Assignments will come from the Rich text, Rich online workbook and other exercises.

Deadlines and Grades: I will not read copy that misses its deadline. If the copy is to be graded, it will receive a failing grade.

Fact Error(s) and Grades: Any graded story assignment written in Associated Press style that contains a fact error or errors will lose 5 points per error. Common fact errors are found in names, addresses, ages, quotes and narration. Be certain to proofread your copy carefully before you turn it in to me.

Grading Criteria for Journalism Writing: Grades for story assignments using Associated Press style will be awarded according to these standards:

- A Copy is publishable as is. No fact error.
- B Copy needs minor editing. No fact error.
- C Copy needs close editing.
- D Copy needs heavy editing.
- F Copy has too many problems to be accepted.

Computing Your Grade: The lab grade counts as 2/3 of the final grade for Jour. 3410. Your lab grade will depend on whether you have met all of the Requirements for the Course. If you fail to meet all of the requirements, the highest grade I would give you is a "C" (75 percent). Otherwise, here are the components of your lab grade:

Style and writing tests: 150 points
(Leads: 50 points; AP style: 50 points; stories: 50 points)

CLASS BLOG: I will create a class Blog site and you will post in-class and other assignments to the Blog. There is NO EXTRA CREDIT for participating in the class Blog, however your FAILURE to post exercises to the Blog in a timely manner may cost you points from your final grade.

NOTE: I do NOT give you a LETTER GRADE. Rather, I give a number grade which is based on a scale of 100 percent of the possible points (150) you can earn in the lab.

COURSE EVALUATION: During the last week of the term, you will complete an online course evaluation at the following site: eval.franklin.uga.edu
Please complete the evaluation before our last weekly meeting. They are valuable to me.

GRADING SCALE FOR NEWS WRITING

To help you understand how I arrive at the grades I give on news writing assignments, here is a list of my concerns:

LEADS: Problems arise when you focus on the wrong information in the lead, or the lead is boring, flat or inaccurate. Likewise, I usually want a one-sentence lead, so a lead graph with two or three sentences or longer is a problem. A delayed identification lead instead of an immediate identification lead is normally preferable.

WORDS: Journalism relies on simple and plain vocabulary, so words that are too big, as you might find in a research paper, are a problem. Keep the words short, easy to understand. Inappropriate words may surface, such as curse words or personal opinions or judgments. Don't use these in news stories. Also, be sure to use the correct word or you open yourself to usage problems. Watch out for homonyms, words that sound the same but have different meanings.

SENTENCES: First, sentences must make sense. Be certain you are saying what you intend to say in simple words. Avoid nominalizations. Next, sentences in journalism should be short, say between 15 and 25 words. They may even be shorter, but seldom much longer. Watch for comma splices and sentence fragments, common errors due to hasty writing. Also, we normally will use active voice in story writing. Passive voice is not wrong to use and sometimes is desirable to use. But usually, write in active voice.

GRAPHS: Like sentences, paragraphs in news writing should also be short. Normally one or two sentences will fill up one inch of column space in a newspaper, so graphs that are longer will strain the reader's eye and may result in the reader leaving your story for another one easier to read. Don't let that happen to your reader.

If you have quoted material in your paragraph, it may go beyond two sentences, but consider three sentences, even in quoted material, long enough for one graph. If there is more to the quote, start a new graph and follow the guidelines for punctuation of attributions given by AP and/or Carole Rich's text book.

For class assignments, paragraphs must always be indented from the left margin, and you should not have extra spaces between one graph and the next. Just double space all copy.

FACT ERRORS: Journalism writing must be accurate. A fact error damages your credibility as a news writer. Double proofread your copy for fact errors.

ATTRIBUTION: All information comes from someone or somewhere. Cite the sources for all of your writing. Follow the ample guidelines in Rich and the AP stylebook.

GRAMMAR: Clear writing is clear when it follows accepted and standard writing protocol. Know where to find answers to grammar problems. Practice writing will help you get better at grammar, but always have an up to date grammar book available. Problems in subject and verb agreement or errors in pronoun and antecedent agreement mark your writing as amateurish. Aim for professionalism.

AP STYLE: Following are items addressed in the Associated Press Stylebook:

Knowing the proper ways and places to use abbreviations, acronyms, capitalization, numerals and punctuation is essential to clear writing. There are guidelines for these things in the AP stylebook and you should be familiar with where to find the answers to your questions about these various conventions of use. Rich has put online very useful guidelines and practice quizzes to increase your understanding of style. Use them.

Points Removed from Papers.

I remove points based on the following scale of infractions:

Missed deadline: Some editors will work with you on this. I'm one. 5 points.

Fact Error: The most grievous offense after missing a deadline. 5 points.

Leads: Bad leads cost you readers. 3 points.

Graphs: Graphs that are too long are unreadable in newsprint. 2 points.

Sentences: Use simple sentences when you can and keep them short. 2 points.

Words: Words that can be made simpler should be. 1 point.

Attribution: Sourcing has rules; follow them. 1 point.

Grammar: Some faults are more noticeable than others. 1 to 3 points.

Other style considerations: Abbreviations, acronyms, capitalizations, numerals, punctuation and spelling errors alone, not as part of a fact error. 1 point.

2009 Fall Brief Weekly Calendar

- Week #1. Introduction to the Lab (Diagnostic Writing Exercise)
2. Lead Writing
 3. Lead Writing
 4. AP Style and Story Editing
 5. Lead Writing Test (50 points)
 6. Writing Stories
 7. Writing Stories
 8. Tests: AP Style Test #1 (10 points) and Story Writing Test #1 (10 points)
 9. AP Style and Story Editing
 10. Tests: AP Style Test #2 (10 points) and Story Writing #2 (15 points)
 11. Review of Materials
 12. Test: AP Style #3 (10 points)
 13. Test: Story Writing Test #3 (25 points)
 14. Test: AP Style #4 (20 points)
 15. Online Course Evaluations Due