

## SYLLABUS

Conrad C. Fink  
Room 234, Journalism

Journalism 5530/7530  
Editorial Writing and Issues

Wrap yourself around this reality:

As an opinion writer in the media today you can do more good than a battalion of Red Cross volunteers. You also can do more harm than a bomb-throwing terrorist on a crowded street corner.

Welcome to Editorial Writing and Issues, which offers blood, sweat and tears--plus three hours credit (for the successful), along with good fun, corny jokes and (I am required to say) a “learning experience.”

Here’s what we--read that, you--are going to do:

--Read more newspapers and magazines than is healthy, listen to and watch newscasts and become thoroughly, intimately, 110 percent aware of the compellingly important social, economic and political issues of the day. If World War III breaks out at dawn and you’re not aware of it by class-time, you indeed shall suffer mightily at my hand.

--We’re going to discuss these issues in detail, and you will focus your thinking on them, then take, hold and defend (to death) a position.

--You will write for me brief outlines of ideas for institutional editorials, and personal columns for op-ed pages.

--Then, with my approval you will write for publication. To receive a high grade it is essential that you get published during this course.

We will not pontificate from afar. We will move onto our local battlefield of ideas, objectively examining the issues important to our campus readers, then writing subjectively our interpretation, our analysis, our opinion of those issues.

That is, this is a course in which you must write not with the objective Five Ws and How, but, rather, write with the “SEA factor”: Stimulate, Explain, Advocate.

Warning: Thunder, lightning and the wrath of the gods (multiple) will descend on those rascals who merely rush to the keyboard, shouting, “I believe... I believe...” Your position must be based on strong reporting, faithful examination of issues, their details, their complexities. You must do added-value reporting. Then, only then, will you be free to express your (by then) enlightened opinion.

And do remember this: An opinion writer who simply outlines a problem without pointing to solutions is part of the problem.

Before each class, you must read the Red & Black. We will read other newspapers and magazines during the course.

Read my Writing Opinion for Impact (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1999.)

Your grade will be based on your writing, plus the occasional quiz on current events (and my book, which I know you must be “encouraged” to read, although it is vastly entertaining.)

Starting with our fourth meeting, you will give me a writing proposal each time we meet until I have approved 10. Of these ideas, five will be for institutional editorials, five for personal columns.

Write each idea in 50-70 words--typed, of course, and double spaced. List on each the publication to which you will submit your finished product (each idea must be conceived and written for a specific publication and, importantly, its audience.)

In a one-on-one conference, each student and I will agree on the breakdown in the 10 writing assignments between political, economic, sports and other subjects. I want to tailor the course--as much as possible--to each student’s career interests.

Your 10 pieces must be submitted on this schedule:

September

- First week, one institutional.
- Second week, one personal column.
- Third week, one personal column.
- Fourth week, one personal column

October

- First week, one institutional.
- Second week, one personal column.
- Third week, one personal column.

November

- First week, one personal column.
- Second week, one personal column
- Third week, one personal column

ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY.

For weeping, moaning and complaining see me in Room 234. The door is always open, the traps always set.

Addendum—Syllabus

Grady College students have been remarkably successful in publishing personal columns and commentary in the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Athens Banner-Herald* and *Red & Black*.

Anxious to maintain the momentum, I am offering substantial extra credit for any student in this course who publishes during the semester a column or commentary on a matter of newspaper ethics, media strategy or a critique of newspaper/media performance.

We will encounter, in our reading and discussions, many controversies and issues affecting the media and their relationship with the public and other societal institutions, such as government, big business, the church, and so forth.

If you are interested, see me for a discussion of an idea for a column and how to proceed.

CF

Addendum to Syllabus

I am informed University regulation requires the following statements must be added to all syllabi:

All academic work must meet the standards contained in “A Culture of Honesty.” Each student is responsible to inform themselves (sic) about those standards before performing any academic work.

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The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Conrad Fink