Writing for Mass Communication (MMC 2100)
Lab Syllabus – Fall Semester 2006

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The MMC 2100 writing lab, in conjunction with the lecture portion of the course, is designed to give you a practical introduction to the basics of media writing. A complete explanation of all course policies is contained in the lecture syllabus. Please refer to the lecture syllabus for information on required textbooks and materials, computer expectations, lecture attendance, resources for help and directions for calculating your course grade.

Texts and Materials – “Writing and Reporting News” is the text that provides guidance for media writing. Be sure to keep up with the reading assignments listed in the lecture syllabus, as they have direct application to writing assignments in lab. “When Words Collide” and the “Associated Press Stylebook” are reference books as you edit your work. Please bring those two books to lab each week. The “Developing Media Skills” CD-ROM provides samples of previous students’ writing and also includes an interview that is the basis of one lab’s writing assignment.

Course Web Site – http://grove.ufl.edu/~mmc2100. Visit the Web site prior to every lab, as you may need to print the lab assignment or grading rubric prior to lab. To access some parts of the Web site, you will need a user name and password. User name = mmc2100 / Password = proofread

Attendance in Lab
You must attend every lab. If you are absent and that absence has not been approved by me in advance, you will receive a zero for all assignments for that week’s lab. No lab grades will be dropped. The following are the situations that will be accepted as excused absences:

• Medical excuses are accepted only if you contact me before lab and you then provide a letter from a physician documenting the dates of the illness. A slip from the infirmary that states you were seen is not adequate.
• Other situations, such as military service and family emergencies, are considered on a case-by-case basis as long as you contact me before lab.
• If you are taking a course, such as calculus, that has university-approved night exams during the same time period as this lab, see me immediately so you can attend another lab section or so arrangements can be made for make-up work.
• If you will miss lab because of a religious observance, you must notify me at least one week in advance to make arrangements to make up the lab.

You must contact me prior to lab to discuss your situation and for us to discuss how you will make up the assignment. Leaving me a phone message or sending me an e-mail without actually talking with me does not mean that your absence will be excused.

To make up work you will miss for an excused absence, it may be possible for you to attend a lab section at another time. Here’s what to do BEFORE you talk to me about missing lab:

1. See the list of labs posted on the MMC 2100 Web site.
2. Select three or four that would fit your schedule.
3. Provide me a list of those sections and their instructors so I can check on a possible alternative lab for you to attend.

Be on time - Ten points will be deducted from your lab assignment if you are late to lab.
Computer Expectations (also see lecture syllabus)

- Computer use in lab – You will be expected to use Word to write, save and print. For several labs, you may bring a rough draft of the assignment to lab. In addition to having a hard copy of your draft, you may bring a memory stick or a diskette with your draft saved as a text only file (*.txt). Be sure to use a high density, IBM-formatted diskette. Be aware that if your memory stick or disk has a virus or other problems, you won’t be able to retrieve or open your document. Another option is to e-mail the file to yourself.

- E-mail use:
  UF requires you to use your GatorLink e-mail for class activities and now blocks the forwarding of UF e-mail to other servers, such as AOL. Please use your GatorLink e-mail account for all communication with me.
  1. Use standard English, including correct capitalization, grammar and spelling.
  2. Sign your e-mail with your first and last name.
  3. Include MMC 2100 in your subject line.
  4. Check your e-mail daily.
  5. Allow at least a 48-hour response time for an e-mail message to me – and be aware I may not check messages during weekends or University holidays.
  6. Be sure you have an e-mail account with a name appropriate for business use.
  7. When you want to have a record of an important e-mail, print it.

- Computer applications – You should be able to download and print PDF files, view and hear instructional materials on the course CD-ROM. If you are unable to perform these applications on your own computer, you may use computers in a CIRCA lab. If you use a CIRCA lab for the CD-ROM or the online video, you will need to provide your own headphones.

Preparing for Lab

Your success on lab assignments will be greatly influenced by what you’ve done prior to lab to prepare.

- Attend all lectures. A major goal in almost every lecture is preparing you for a specific lab writing assignment. Some lectures provide the information (from guest speakers or clients) for the lab writing assignment. You need to be in those lectures to take your own notes.
- Keep up to date on all the assigned readings listed in the lecture syllabus. Those readings provide information and writing samples that will be tied to the lab writing assignments.
- Read and analyze media writing (newspaper articles, Web sites, public relations news releases and advertising copy).
- For the majority of the labs, you will be expected to do some preparation for lab in advance, such as conducting an interview and/or writing a draft of an article.
- Be ready for lab – You won’t do your best work (which includes careful proofreading) if you are tired, hungry or distracted. Be focused and energized for the three hours.

Your Grade

Your grade for the course is the combination of your lecture grade (25 percent) and your lab grade (75 percent). Each of the graded 13 labs counts equally toward your final lab grade, regardless of the total number of assignments given each week in lab. There is no final exam in lab.

You are responsible for maintaining a folder of your work during the semester. You also should record your score for each week’s lab, so you can keep track of your running average. Be aware of the importance of your performance for each week’s lab. One or two low grades won’t keep you from successfully completing the course. But one or two high grades won’t greatly raise a number of low lab grades. No lab grades will be dropped, and lab scores are not curved.

Every semester, some students become concerned about their grade in the course too late in the semester to make the kinds of improvement necessary to improve their performance in lab and, hence, their grade in the course. Beginning with Lab 2, you should carefully review every graded lab assignment and use “When Words Collide” and the “AP Stylebook” to complete the Mechanics Inventory Chart, which is posted on the What’s Happening link. Please see me during office hours to discuss your assignments – both your graded assignments and
homework you are to complete prior to lab. Another helpful resource is the Communications Coaching Center (1088 Weimer), staffed by upper division students who provide coaching on writing assignments.

**Extra-Credit Opportunities**
You will the opportunity to earn a maximum of 75 points of extra credit during the semester. These points are added to your total number of points for all 13 graded labs **not** to your overall lab average. Each extra-credit option will be discussed in lecture and lab.
- 25 points – Get your environmental/health/science article (the Lab 11 assignment) published no later than Lab 14 in a publication approved by me.
- 20 points (maximum) – Schedule and then attend a portfolio review and interview with me during the weeks of Lab 12-14.
- 30 points (maximum) – Write three practice assignments (10 points each) that are assigned and collected in lecture – news story, news release and ad copy.

**How Lab Assignments are graded**
Your grade on each writing assignment consists of the points earned for content minus the points deducted for errors and mechanics. To ensure consistency among labs, all instructors use the same grading standards.

**Step One: Content**
The content grade is based on criteria for each specific writing assignment. A rubric (a listing of grading criteria) will be provided for most assignments. The criteria vary depending on the particular lab assignment — news stories, news releases or advertising copy. To be “A” work, a news or feature story, news release or ad should be publishable, with minor editing, in The Alligator. General criteria for all assignments include writing style, organization, clarity and appropriateness for topic and audience.

Especially if media writing is a new writing style for you, you may want to complete practice writing assignments at the end of chapters in “Writing and Reporting News” to try the writing style before you are writing in a timed setting in lab. These practice assignments will not be graded and completing them will not earn you extra credit. However, practicing will help you be better prepared for those assignments that will be graded. You may receive feedback on these practice stories from me during office hours or from students in the Communications Coaching Center in 1088 Weimer.

**Step Two: Mechanics**
After determining the content grade, the points will be deducted for grammatical errors, spelling errors, factual errors and AP style errors. The points are deducted as follows:
- 5 points = Grammar and punctuation errors.
- 5 points = AP style errors.
- 5 points = Improper copyreading symbols or sloppily marked copy.
- 5 points = Failure to prepare copy correctly.
- 15 points = Spelling error. Deducted both for misspelled words and typos. If the same word is misspelled more than once in a story, 15 points will be subtracted only once.
- 10 points = Failure to make a deadline, which means turning in anything late. Additional points will be deducted for assignments turned in more than one day late.
- 50 points = Factual error. This includes inaccurate information as well as errors and typos in proper nouns, numbers, addresses, dates and quotes. In Lab 2, a fact error = -15. In Labs 3-4, a fact error = -25. Beginning in Lab 5, a fact error = -50.

See the lecture syllabus for the grading scale as well as an explanation of how to calculate your overall grade.

**Academic Honesty**
See the lecture syllabus for a discussion of academic honesty issues in the course. Using a classmate’s lab assignment as your own, copying a story or a portion of a story from a publication, making up information or quotes are academic honesty violations. **If you are guilty of academic dishonesty in a writing assignment,**
you will receive a zero for the assignment. If you have any question regarding an academic honesty issue (such as appropriately incorporating a source into a story), please talk with me before you turn in an assignment.

Office Hours
I will be in my office during the hours listed in this syllabus, and I can be available at other hours if you make arrangements with me in advance. During office hours we can discuss how you can improve your writing, how I graded an assignment, or how you can prepare for your career goals. Please take advantage of office hours to speak with me one-on-one.

To help us get to know each other and provide you with the opportunity to discuss your career goals and performance in your lab work, please schedule an appointment to meet with me during office hours prior to Lab 7.

I will not discuss individual lab grades in lab. If you have a question about how I’ve evaluated your writing, please come in to see me during office hours or at another time we work out. If you do have a question about a specific grading issue in a lab assignment, you must talk to me within two weeks of the lab when you wrote the assignment.

Please Note
• I will start class on time and expect you to be on time. If you have an on-going situation that could affect your prompt arrival to class, such as having to walk to Weimer from a class the previous class period in Norman Hall, talk with me. I will deduct 10 points from your lab grade if you are tardy.
• I will end lab on time. Even if you don’t have a class following the end of lab, I won’t allow extra time to finish an assignment. If you do not turn in your assignment on time, I will deduct 10 points for failure to meet a deadline.
• No food or drink is allowed in the computer lab.
• Be sure to turn off and store cell phones, pagers and handheld computer before class starts.
• Please use the computers only for our lab activities. Do not check your e-mail, visit non-class-related Web sites, play computer games, or do instant messaging or text messaging during lab.
• No guests are allowed in class.
• After the initial assignment of copyediting symbols and AP style, you are responsible for using correct AP style and copyediting symbols on all assignments for the rest of the semester.
• For students attending night lab — You are encouraged to walk on campus with a buddy or use the university’s SNAP escort service (392-SNAP).

Lab Schedule
Homework assignments and quizzes for lab will be announced in lab.

Lab 1       Wednesday, Aug. 23 – Tuesday, Aug. 29
Orientation to MMC 2100 lab and computer training.
Assignment: Practice writing assignment. No grade for this lab.

Lab 2       Wednesday, Aug. 30 – Tuesday, Sept. 5
Homework due at beginning of lab: Completed resume.
Assignment: Write cover letter based on directions provided in lecture and the textbook.

Lab 3       Wednesday, Sept. 6 – Tuesday, Sept. 12
Homework due at beginning of lab: Completed news story that is posted on What’s Happening
Assignment: Write news story based on information provided on deadline (due at end of lab).

Lab 4       Wednesday, Sept. 13 – Tuesday, Sept. 19
Assignment: Write one longer news story from information provided in lab. [More than one source of info]
Lab 5  Wednesday, Sept. 20 – Tuesday, Sept. 26
Homework due at the beginning of lab: Write a memo – using the correct format – about yourself to be used as background information for a personality profile.
Assignment: Write a news story with a feature lead from information provided. [Multiple sources and direct quotes]

Lab 6  Wednesday, Sept. 27 – Tuesday, Oct. 3
Homework due at beginning of lab:
• A typed draft of a personality profile about Donna Green Townsend and her raising squirrels. The interview that is the basis of this assignment is on the CD-ROM. Bring to lab the notes you took during the interview.
Assignment: Revise the profile.
In lab, you will be matched with a classmate for the personality profile assignment (due Lab 7).

Lab 7  Wednesday, Oct. 4 – Tuesday, Oct. 10
Homework:
(1) At least 48 hours before lab, send me an e-mail, explaining your environmental/health/science topic, the focus, target publication, two background sources, and listing five questions you need to answer in order to write the article. I will provide feedback on your e-mail in Lab 7. [The first draft of the environmental/health/science article is due in Lab 9.]
(2) Bring a typed draft of personality profile based on interview you conducted with a classmate at least 24 hours before lab. Also bring interview notes to lab.
Assignment: Revise personality profile in lab.

Lab 8  Wednesday, Oct. 11 – Tuesday, Oct. 17
Homework: (1) At least 48 hours before lab, send me an e-mail on environmental/health/science article. Update me on your progress, provide the names of at least two people you are interviewing, and list five interview questions you will ask each person. I will provide feedback on your e-mail in Lab 8. (2) Bring notes on information you collected in lecture. (You will need to take notes in lecture, so check lecture syllabus for date of lecture.) Also bring interview notes to lab.
Assignment: In lab, write and revise news-feature story on in-lecture interview.

Lab 9  Wednesday, Oct. 18 – Tuesday, Oct. 24
Homework and Assignment: Bring two typed and carefully edited copies of completed environmental/health/science draft to one-on-one meeting with lab instructor. Meetings will be held during lab time. You will receive a zero if you do not keep your scheduled appointment and do not have two typed rough drafts. We will edit one copy of the story, and you will have that copy to use as you continue work on the story. I will keep the other copy of the story to grade. This is to be a polished draft, as points will be deducted for grammar, spelling, AP style and factual errors.

Lab 10  Wednesday, Oct. 25 – Tuesday, Oct. 31
Assignment: Write a news release based on information provided in fact sheet distributed in lab. Environmental/health/science article draft returned to you.

Lab 11  Wednesday, Nov. 1 – Tuesday, Nov. 7
Assignment: Environmental/health/science article due at beginning of lab. Turn in notes on background research, interview questions and notes, drafts and source list (names and phone numbers of people you interviewed, citations for articles and URLs for Web sites you used).

Lab 12  Wednesday, Nov. 8 – Tuesday, Nov. 14
Assignment: Write a news release based on information you collected during in-lecture interview with a client. You will bring your notes and a plan for the news release to lab.
Lab 13    Wednesday, Nov. 15 – Tuesday, Nov. 21
Assignment: Print ad. You will do research on an assigned product prior to lab and bring with you to lab your research notes and drafts of some portions of the ad package (memo, list of 10 headlines, and headline and ad copy).

Lab 14    Wednesday, Nov. 29 – Tuesday, Dec. 5
Homework: Write and design a print advertisement based on information you collect in lecture and your own research. This assignment is to be completed outside of lab. In lab you will turn in the **headlines, a sales-pitch memo to me, and the finished ad. Note**: Deadline for turning in published environmental/health/science articles for extra credit.

**No final exam for the lab portion of the course**