

# ***Magazine and Feature Writing***

JOU 4308  
Summer A 2010

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**Office Hours**  
**Tuesday: 2 – 4 p.m.**  
**Wednesday: 9:30 a.m.- noon**  
**Other times by appointment**

**COURSE OBJECTIVES:** The purpose of this course is to introduce you to the art and craft of writing feature stories. Feature-style writing is commonly found in magazines, newspapers, newsletters, and various genres of Web sites. Whereas news articles provide a reader with a straight-to-the-point account of the facts, a feature story takes the reader on a narrative non-fiction journey. In this class, you will learn how to develop and focus story ideas, blend background research with source interviews and observations, and utilize the key components of feature writing to tell a vivid and compelling story.

**READINGS:** There is no required text for this course. However, I will give you selected readings - mostly feature stories written and published by others – throughout the term. You will be expected to read all of these articles and be prepared to discuss them in class. I believe that the best way to learn how to write well is to read good writing. You should bring copies of the assigned readings with you to class.

**MECHANICS, ETC.:** This is a journalism class. More specifically, this is a writing class. That means you will be expected to write with a command of spelling, grammar and style, just as you would as a working journalist. It also means that you will be expected to conduct yourself with professionalism, integrity and courtesy both in and outside the classroom. Let's go over some basics.

- **Spelling and grammar:** You may have been the citywide 8<sup>th</sup>-grade spelling bee champion when you were younger. Or, you may be one of those people that seems to trip over every word you type. Regardless of which category you fall into, your readers expect your work to be done well – no spelling errors, no grammar mistakes. Therefore, I also expect you to turn in clean work. Because you are not writing under tremendous deadline pressure, you are expected to take **as much time with your stories as you must to make sure that they are free** of all spelling errors, including typographical errors, and grammar errors.
- **Style:** In general, we will use the style rules listed in the *Associated Press Stylebook*. If you don't have the AP stylebook already, shame on you (he teased) and get one immediately (no, seriously, get a stylebook). If you plan to submit your story to a specific publication that uses a different style, talk to me about it first. I'll expect you to know and point out specifically where your article deviates from AP style in favor of the style used by your target publication.

- Accuracy: While the literary nature of feature writing provides you with a certain degree of freedom to tell a story with perspective and point of view, it is still non-fiction. It is still journalism and it is still expected to be accurate. Get your facts right. Minor factual errors (of which I am the judge) will drop your grade for that story at least half a letter. Major factual errors will result in automatic failure for that feature. If you are unclear on any of this, come see me.
- Deadlines: Your stories are due at the beginning of class on the day that they are due. You must turn in a hard copy of your article. No e-mail submissions will be accepted. Again, you are not writing under heavy deadline pressure, so you should have plenty of time to write your story and print it out. If you wait until an hour before class to print out your story and your printer breaks, and you don't have time to go to the computer lab to print it out, then I'm very sorry, you're out of luck. If you think you are going to miss a deadline, no matter what the reason, discuss it with me at least 24 hours before the day it is due. When you come by, call or email about missing a deadline, you should know when you expect to be able to turn the story in. In some cases (and these are the exception, not the rule), I may agree to let you turn in a story late. If I have not agreed to an extension **before the original deadline**, your grade will drop **five percentage points per class period** until the story is turned in. Unless I have agreed to a later deadline, stories that are more than two weeks late will receive an automatic E. Generally speaking, you should not expect me to extend your deadline more than one week, and only then under legitimately exceptional circumstances. If you turn in a story after the agreed-upon extended deadline, it will be graded as late.
- Plagiarism and Academic Honesty: **IF YOU PLAGIARIZE ANY ASSIGNMENT IN THIS CLASS, YOU WILL FAIL THE CLASS.** Journalists make their living on credibility. They fulfill a special role in society to provide the public with information about the world around them. There is no greater offense for a journalist than STEALING someone else's work and lying to his readers. You wouldn't want someone to take credit for all the hard work you did, so don't do it to someone else. Again, if you plagiarize you will fail the class – not the assignment, but the entire class. For more information about what constitutes plagiarism, you can go to this Web site created by Prof. Mindy McAdams: <http://www.macloo.com/cheat/general.htm>. I should note here that plagiarism also includes **self-plagiarism. Do not turn any work that you have previously turned in for another class, or that has already been published elsewhere.** You are expected to do original work for this course. If you are interested in doing an assignment on a topic that you have covered before, it is possible that this will be acceptable if you speak with me beforehand and get permission in advance. I will report any incidents of plagiarism to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs as academic dishonesty.

In accordance with UF policy, I'm also including in this syllabus the definitions of the types of academic dishonesty that seem most likely to be potential problems for students in this class. If you are unclear on any of these definitions or uncertain if something you are doing or plan to do falls under one of these categories, ASK ME.

*From the Office of Student Judicial Affairs website:  
<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/Academichonestyfaculty.html>*

**Plagiarism.** The attempt to represent the work of another as the product of one's own thought, whether the other's work is published or unpublished, or simply the work of a fellow student. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, quoting oral or written materials without citation on an exam, term paper, homework, or other written

materials or oral presentations for an academic requirement; submitting a paper which was purchased from a term paper service as your own work; submitting anyone else's paper as your own work.

**Misrepresentation.** Any act or omission with intent to deceive a teacher for academic advantage. Misrepresentation includes using computer programs generated by another and handing it in as your own work unless expressly allowed by the teacher; lying to a teacher to increase your grade; lying or misrepresenting facts when confronted with an allegation of academic honesty.

**Fabrication.** The use of invented or fabricated information, or the falsification of research or other findings with the intent to deceive for academic or professional advantage.

- Accommodations for students with disabilities: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who then must provide this documentation to the instructor when requesting accommodation.

## **GRADING:**

### Feature Story 1

- <i>Outline</i>	5%
- <i>First draft</i>	10%
- <i>Final draft</i>	15%
<b>Total:</b>	<b>30%</b>

### Feature Story 2

- <i>Outline</i>	5%
- <i>First draft</i>	10%
- <i>Final draft</i>	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>35%</b>

First-person story	<b>9%</b>
Peer critiques (2)	<b>8%</b>
Other in-class exercises	<b>8%</b>
Class participation	<b>10%</b>

## **Overall Grade Scale** (It is unlikely that the grades will be curved.)

A = 90% +	
B=80-87%	B+=87.1%-89.9%
C= 70-77%	C+=77.1%-79.9%
D-= 60-67%	D+=67.1%-69.9%
E = 59.9% or lower.	

**Extra Credit:** Bring in examples of great work you've read. If it's available in electronic form and you can email it to me, even better. Make sure you include a brief statement (roughly a page double-spaced) as to what element of great feature writing your example

represents and why you think it's a good story. This helps me to build a file of examples to use for this class and future classes. Depending on how good the example is, I'll add one percentage point to your overall grade for up to 5%.

**Peer Critiques and Other Exercises:** As you will note on the schedule below, you will be reviewing your classmates feature stories twice during the semester. You are required to be in class on the day of these critiques. You will also have an evaluation form to complete as part of these exercises in which you will indicate what you, the writer, gained from the peer critique. You will be required to turn in these forms at the end of the class period. Except in extreme and unforeseeable circumstances, if you are not in class on the days we do the peer critiques, you will receive a **zero** for this portion of your grade. Likewise, we will be doing in class exercises at various points in the course. Again, except in extreme and unforeseeable circumstances, if you are not in class on the days we do these exercises, you will receive a **zero** for this portion of your grade.

**ATTENDANCE:** Attendance is mandatory. This is a small and highly interactive class and we are working within a shortened and condensed semester. Therefore, it is essential that everyone is in class on the days that we meet. Additionally, you'll note on the schedule below that I have canceled a number of dates for our collective class meetings in favor of individual conferences and to give you extra time to work on your stories. That means the days that we do all meet together for class are that much more important. If for some reason there is an emergency that requires you to miss class, notify me ahead of time. If you are sick and cannot come to class, I will expect a doctor's note (on letterhead) when you return to class, verifying your illness.

Acceptable reasons for missing class include illness (yours), a death in your immediate family, and other serious emergencies. Unacceptable reasons for missing class include hangovers, sporting events, concert attendance, family reunions, family vacations, etc. You have chosen to enroll in this course for this semester and you knew the dates for the beginning and end of the term when you registered. Therefore, sad stories about how your family has planned a cruise, or family reunion, or trip to the Grand Canyon, or your best friend's wedding, etc. will not be accepted as reasonable excuses. If you wouldn't offer this excuse to your first newspaper or magazine boss, don't offer it to me.

**BEHAVIOR:** I expect you to be courteous and attentive to classmates and to me. Turn off your cell phone before class starts, and put your laptop away unless I've asked you to get it out for something we're working on.

**STORY FORMAT, ETC.:** All assignments, except those completed during class time, are to be typed and printed on a reasonably dark printer. Make certain your printer produces copy dark enough to be read easily. Use only white paper. If I can't read it, I won't accept it. Use 1.5-inch margins on all four sides. Do not widen the margins or triple-space the lines to make your stories appear longer. All assignments should be double-spaced and in an appropriate font for body text (e.g. Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, Helvetica, etc.).

In the top left corner of the first page of your story, include your name, the email address you check most often, phone number and the date the story was due. Skip three lines, then center the story title.

**FIRST DRAFTS: ALWAYS BRING TWO COPIES OF THE FIRST DRAFTS OF YOUR STORIES ON THE DAY THEY ARE DUE. YOU WILL HAND IN ONE COPY TO ME, AND ONE COPY WILL BE USED FOR YOUR PEER CRITIQUE.**

**FINAL DRAFTS: WHEN YOU TURN IN THE FINAL DRAFTS OF YOUR STORIES, YOU MUST STAPLE YOUR OUTLINE AND YOUR FIRST DRAFT TO THE FINAL COPY YOU HAND IN. IF YOU DO NOT TURN IN YOUR GRADED FIRST DRAFT, YOUR OUTLINE, AND YOUR FINAL DRAFT AT THE SAME TIME, I WILL NOT GRADE YOUR ASSIGNMENT.**

**SCHEDULE:** The schedule below is subject to change based on things like possible guest speakers and the unique needs of the course this semester.

<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics, etc.</b>	<b>Assignments due</b>
5/11	Syllabus, introductions, and what makes a good story	
5/12	Individual conferences about story ideas for feature story 1	
5/13	Individual conferences about story ideas for feature story 1	First-person story 800-1000 words – due to my office by 5 p.m.
5/18	Finding a focus; Justifiers; Discussion of first-person story. Discussion of readings	Outline: Feature story 1
5/19	Researching and interviewing for features;	
5/20	The process approach to writing; Rewriting your story.	
5/25	Individual conferences about story ideas for feature story 2	
5/26	Individual conferences about story ideas for feature story 2	
5/27	Peer critique of feature story 1	First draft: Feature story 1 1000-1200 words
6/1	Feature leads, organization and transitions; Discussion of readings	Outline: Feature story 2
6/2	Anecdotes; Dialogue; Discussion of readings	
6/3	Using your senses – descriptive writing	Final draft: Feature story 1 1000-1200 words
6/8	Endings; tone & voice	
6/9	NO CLASS – Work on your stories	
6/10	Peer critique of feature story 2	First draft: Feature story 2 1200-1500 words
6/15	Freelancing for a living, writing query letters	
6/16	Writing profiles	
6/17	Course wrap-up	Final draft: Feature story 2 1200-1500 words