

Writing for Mass Communication (MMC 2100)
Lab Syllabus – Spring Semester 2009

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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, which is posted online. 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.

Textbooks and Required Reading – See lecture syllabus for the list of textbooks. Please keep up with reading assignments in the lecture syllabus, as they have direct application to writing assignments in lab. You are being tested every week in lab on those assigned readings. Please bring “When Words Collide” and the “Associated Press Stylebook” to every lab for reference while you work on assignments.

Course Web Site – <http://grove.ufl.edu/~mmc2100>. Be sure to bookmark this site and check it regularly for updates on lectures and for materials you need to print for lecture and lab activities. You will need the user name and password to access the What’s Happening section of the site.

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.

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.

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 will miss lab because of a religious observance or a university-scheduled exam (for a course like economics), you must notify me **at least one week in advance** to make arrangements to make up the lab. Do NOT contact other lab instructors yourself or go to another lab without prior arrangements being made.

Be on time - Ten points will be deducted from your lab assignment if you are late to lab.

Technology 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 printed copy of your rough draft or a final assignment.
- USB key (flash memory) for bringing digital files to lab.
- Access to a camera for photography assignments. For the photography assignments, you are to take the photos with a camera and not a cell phone. Photos must be digital for use in lab. If you are using a film camera, you will need to have photos scanned as digital files.
- E-mail use:
UF requires you to use your GatorLink e-mail for all class activities and blocks the forwarding of UF e-mail to other servers. 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 GatorLink e-mail daily.** I will be sending announcements to the lab listserv, which uses your UF e-mail address.
 - (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, you will need to provide your own headphones. The course podcasts are posted on iTunes. You can listen to them on your computer or mp3 player for free.

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.
- Bring the course textbooks with you to lab. Be sure you have completed before lab any reading assignments listed in the lecture syllabus.
- In your daily writing (including e-mails you send), practice your writing and editing skills.
- Become familiar with using online editing resources. For spelling and word use, we recommend Merriam Webster Dictionary -- <http://www.m-w.com/>

Grading for the Course

Your grade for the course is the combination of your lecture grade (25 percent) and **your lab grade (75 percent)**. Each of the graded 14 labs counts equally toward your final lab grade. **There is no final exam in lab.**

Grading Scale (for writing assignments and the course overall)

A	90-100	C+	77-79	D	60-66
B+	87-89	C	70-76	E	59 and below
B	80-86	D+	67-69		

Formula for calculating your overall grade in the course

- + Lecture grade
- + Lab grade multiplied by 3

Total divided by 4 = overall grade

Scores of .5 or higher are rounded to the next whole number. For example, 86.5 becomes 87.

Lab grades – You 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.

If you would like to discuss a grading issue for a lab assignment:

- (1) The discussion must be held during office hours and not during lab.
- (2) The discussion must be no longer than two weeks after receiving the graded assignment.
- (3) You should bring to our meeting the appropriate documentation to support your position.

Lecture grades (25 percent of overall grade) – See lecture syllabus.

Don't wait too late to develop a plan for improving your performance in the course – Every semester, some students become concerned about their grade in the course too late in the semester to make the kind of improvement necessary to improve their performance in lab and, hence, their grade in the course. You should carefully review every graded lab assignment and use “When Words Collide” and the “AP Stylebook” to complete the Mechanics Inventory Form, which is posted on the What’s Happening link. Please see me during office hours to discuss your assignments – both those assignments that have been graded and homework you are to complete prior to lab.

Extra-Credit Opportunities

You will have several extra-credit opportunities during the semester. These points are added to your total number of points for all 14 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 story published by the end of the semester in a publication approved by me.
- 20 points (maximum) – Schedule and then attend a portfolio review and interview with me during the weeks of Labs 13 and 14.
- 15 points (maximum) – Write three practice assignments (5 points each) that are assigned and collected in lecture – news story, news release and ad copy.
- 10 points – Complete “Cleaning Your Copy,” a free online module at <http://newsu.org>. Set up an account and complete the module (except for the Style section). E-mail a course report to your lab instructor prior to Lab 3. (Directions about this assignment will be provided in lecture and lab.)

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. General criteria for all assignments include writing style, organization, clarity, and appropriateness for topic and audience. For those labs when a rubric is not provided, you will have the writing experience in that writing format to develop a rubric yourself. Be aware that being able to determine criteria to evaluate your own performance is an important part of media internships and jobs.

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 give you the opportunity 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 Writing Coaching Center in 1088 Weimer.

Step Two: Mechanics

After determining the content grade, 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 and errors or 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.**
- Zero = You will receive a zero for using your friends, family members, employers or work colleagues as sources for stories that require your own reporting. You will receive a zero for using a photograph that you did not take for assignments that require you to take your own photographs.**

Academic Honesty

See the lecture syllabus for a discussion of academic honesty issues in the course. A helpful explanation of academic honesty and plagiarism is hosted on the College's Web site --

<http://www.jou.ufl.edu/academic/jou/honesty/>

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. **Be aware that making up quotes or information or taking the work of others without appropriate attribution will result in receiving a zero for the assignment.**

Office Hours

I will hold office hours every week. If my times don't work with your schedule, we can try to find a time that will work for both of us. 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.

Guidelines on discussing your grades with me

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 received the graded assignment. Prior to our meeting, be sure you have checked the item in question – checking the grammar or AP style issue and/or reviewed the grading rubric – and have completed the Mechanics Inventory Form.

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 across campus from a previous class, 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. You will be able to take a break during the lab and can eat a snack at that time – outside of 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. Using copyediting symbols is good practice for those students who will be going on to Reporting, as those instructors expect you to know and use copyediting symbols when editing your printed stories.

Lab Schedule

Additional homework assignments and quizzes for lab will be announced in lab. Several labs will include an additional online assignment that will be announced during lab.

Lab 1 Tuesday, Jan. 6 – Monday, Jan. 12

Introduction to MMC 2100 lab – policies, classmates and computer use.

Assignment: On deadline writing assignment based on a writing prompt. This will be a graded assignment with points deducted for spelling and grammatical errors.

Lab 2 Tuesday, Jan. 13 – Monday, Jan. 19

Homework: Completed resume (100 points)

Assignment: On deadline, write a cover letter (100 points) to accompany your resume.

Monday, Jan. 19 – Martin Luther King, Jr. Day – UF closed

The lab rotation will change so that each new lab will begin on Tuesday and end on Monday.

Lab 3 Tuesday, Jan. 20 – Monday, Jan. 26

Homework to be completed prior to lab:

- Complete the “Cleaning Your Copy” module at <http://newsu.org> and send a course report to your lab instructor. (Optional 10-point extra-credit opportunity)
- **Write the practice news story based on** the assignment posted on What’s Happening.

Assignment: On deadline, writing news stories.

Lab 4 Tuesday, Jan. 27 – Monday, Feb. 2

Assignment: On deadline, writing news for Web and print delivery.

Lab 5 Tuesday, Feb. 3 – Monday, Feb. 9

Assignment: On deadline, write a news story with a feature lead from information provided and online reporting. [Multiple sources and direct quotes]

Lab 6 Tuesday, Feb. 10 – Monday, Feb. 16

Homework: Based on the interview on the CD-ROM, write the draft of a personality profile of Donna Green-Townsend. Bring to class your draft (printout and digital file) and your notes to lab.

Assignment: On deadline, preparing feature package of Green-Townsend profile.

Lab 7 Tuesday, Feb. 17 – Monday, Feb. 23

Assignment: On deadline, conduct the interview and write a personality profile about a classmate.

Lab 8 Tuesday, Feb. 24 – Monday, March 2

Homework: Using an in-lecture interview as a starting point, conduct your own research and three additional interviews and write a story suitable for publication. Take a photograph and write a caption to accompany your story. (See page 4 for penalties for using friends as sources or not using your own photo.)

Assignment: In lab you will revise the **story and create a story package.**

Lab 9 Tuesday, March 3 – Monday, March 16

Homework: At least 48 hours before lab, e-mail me pitching **two possible story ideas for the environmental, health or science assignment**. (See the memo on the EHS assignment for the requirements for the story proposal e-mail.)

Assignment: You will begin a blog during lab and will make additional posts after lab.

Monday, March 9 – Friday, March 13 – UF spring break/UF closed

Lab 10 Tuesday, March 17 – Monday, March 23

Homework: Independent reporting on an environmental, health or science topic that I've approved.

Assignment: You will turn in your typed **environmental/health/science story**. In lab, you will create a story package and post the online version of your story. (See the memo on the EHS assignment for more complete directions for this assignment. See page 4 of this syllabus for penalties for using friends as sources or not using your own photo.)

Lab 11 Tuesday, March 24 – Monday, March 30

Assignment: On deadline, write a news release.

Lab 12 Tuesday, March 31 – Monday, April 6

Assignment: Write a **news release** based on information you collected during in-lecture interview with a client.

Lab 13 Tuesday, April 7 – Monday, April 13

Assignment: Create a **Soundslides presentation using your own photos**.

Lab 14 Tuesday, April 14 – Monday, April 20

Homework: Write and design a print advertisement based on information you collect in lecture and your own research.

Assignment: In lab, you will turn in the **completed ad package**.

No final exam for the lab portion of the course.