

Loyola University Chicago

Fall 2015

COMM 206-20W: Writing for the Web

**Tuesdays 7-9:30
SOC 51 East Pearson
Room 002**

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Office Hours:

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Tuesdays 6-7

Wednesdays 5-6

or by appointment

Course description

We now have the tools do almost anything online.

Ten years ago, it was hard to use these tools. Only “techy” people could do it.

Today, these tools are fairly easy to use. They don’t require a degree in computer science. You don’t even need to know a lick of HTML.

But what good are these tools if we don’t do anything cool and smart with them?

This course is designed to teach you how to tell captivating and informative stories online using words, data, video, sound, images and interactivity.

Objectives:

In this course, students will:

- Develop skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals working in online communication.
- Develop creative capacities (writing, treating photos, using various software programs, etc.)
- Develop skills in expressing ideas through writing and visual storytelling.

- Understand how to research a story—who to interview and where to find information.
- Understand the demands of the online platforms.
- Learn the specific reporting, writing and editing skills necessary in online journalism.
- Produce informative and compelling stories using various platforms.
- Learn to how use at least two content management systems (CMS).
- Learn basic HTML.
- Learn how to write for slideshows.
- Learn how to promote content through social media and measure analytics.
- Create a professional web site displaying work produced in this class, resumes, a blog, etc.

Course Materials

Required:

- The readings are all online (and free) for this class. I've gone through the trouble of finding them because I think they're more important than what you can find in a textbook. Make sure you read them.
- AP Stylebook – consult and read throughout the semester at your own pace. You will be graded on punctuation, grammar, etc. for each assignment. THIS BOOK IS REQUIRED, AND SHOULD HAVE BEEN PURCHASED FOR REPORTING AND WRITING. IF YOU DIDN'T PURCHASE IT THEN, PURCHASE IT NOW. A used copy cost one penny through amazon.com.
- You should read news websites, especially ones that don't have a print companion, regularly in your spare time. Suggestions include abcnews.com, cnn.com, etc.

Strongly Recommended Reading:

I strongly suggest you subscribe to a newspaper for this course, even though it's about online journalism. Why?

1. You need to read the work of established writers in order to become a good writer. We often stop reading online after the second or third graf, so it's harder to learn about the craft of writing if you *only* read online articles.
2. Online, we only click and read articles that are already of interest to us. The mere act of turning the pages of a newspaper, and reading the first few paragraphs, exposes you to stories you'd otherwise ignore when looking at a homepage or on social media feeds. Journalists and all media professionals must know a lot about the world around them. Newspapers make this easier.
3. Subscribing to a paper is less expensive than buying one every day. It's also at your door every morning. It's easy.

Any newspaper is fine, but I'm a huge proponent of the New York Times. It is arguably the best newspaper in America and required daily reading for serious professional journalists. The paper always contains a mix of hard news stories, feature stories and opinion pieces. They even have a Chicago section. The least

expensive option is \$2.50 per week (\$40 for the semester) but that doesn't include the Sunday edition. Visit this link for details:

<http://homedelivery.nytimes.com/HDS/StudentSubscriptionLanding.do?mode=bac&ToStudofSubscripLndngPg>

If you don't want to subscribe to the New York Times, you can subscribe to another newspaper. I will help you track down the best deal – most have special offers for students.

Course Policies – IMPORTANT! READ THIS!

I'm not your mom. I'm a facilitator of your education.

Let's avoid having me parent you by agreeing to the following ground rules:

Absences and Tardiness:

In order to learn, it is imperative that you attend class and arrive on time.

I'll do my best to make this class engaging. Your end of the bargain is to show up at every class (unless you're really sick or otherwise unable to attend), prepared and alert. If you fail to show up or show up late regularly, I will notice and react accordingly.

That said, stuff happens. If you need to miss a class due to an illness or emergency, and you don't want to be penalized for missing a class, you need to:

1. Notify me beforehand and explain your absence
2. Provide documentation that explains your absence

Acceptable documentation depends on the circumstance. If someone has passed away, I'll accept an obituary and/or memorial from the ceremony. If you were sick enough to visit a doctor, he/she will give you a note. If you weren't sick enough to visit a doctor, but were still ill, bring me receipt from a store for any medicine, soup or liquids you bought to treat your illness. Notes from parents are generally not acceptable, nor are notes from your friends/roommates.

It is up to my discretion to accept this documentation or not. If your excuse is valid and verified, you may make up whatever you missed.

If you don't explain your absence, or provide documentation, your absence will not be excused and you cannot make up the work.

Missing class without advanced notification and documentation will result in lower scores in the areas of participation, professionalism, quizzes and in – class exercises. Your grades in these areas start at **zero** (not 100), and you earn points as the semester progresses and you complete the assignments, all of which are in-class. **I do not calculate these grades until the end of the semester.**

This absence policy does not apply on days that a project is due.

Deadlines:

I will be treating you like communication professionals, which means deadlines **MUST** be met. You cannot negotiate or fib your way out of meeting a deadline.

Unfortunately, because of numerous problems in the past dealing with the issue of late assignments, this class has a very rigid late policy with harsh penalties. An assignment is considered late if you do not turn it in at the beginning of class (or email it to me per assignment) on the day it is due. In other words, don't come into class 20 minutes late the day an assignment is due and think you can still turn it in without penalty.

Stories not submitted by the given deadline will lose one letter grade every day (not class period) they are late. On the sixth day after the due date, your grade becomes an automatic zero.

If you are not attending class on the day an assignment is due, you must notify me beforehand via email. **You must have a legitimate, documented excuse to miss a deadline. You must provide me with advanced notice. Otherwise, you must accept the one-letter-grade-per-day penalty.**

Style & Spelling Policy:

To be a successful communication professional (or simply write a good cover letter), you must know proper grammar, punctuation and spelling.

If you make grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors, in a cover letter, your saying to a potential employer "hire me even though I can't pay attention to details, a skill most entry level jobs require".

Hopefully, you caught the errors in the above sentence. If you didn't, here is the correct version:

If you make grammar, punctuation and spelling errors in a cover letter, you're saying to a potential employer, "Hire me, even though I can't pay attention to details, a skill most entry level jobs require."

Read your AP Stylebook throughout the semester to master these skills. A used copy costs one cent on Amazon.

As an incentive, and because a clear writing is essential when writing for screens, I deduct points for all grammar, spelling and punctuation errors.

Participation and Professionalism:

You will never be penalized for voicing your opinions, whatever they may be.

You will, however, be penalized for disrupting the class. Talking on cell phones, texting, interfering with classmates, e-mailing, arriving late/leaving early, sleeping, closing your eyes and hoping I don't notice, doing Sudoku, instant messaging and using computer programs other than the ones we are working on in class will lead to a lowering of the participation/professionalism portion of your grade. The golden rules? While we are talking, don't touch anything electronic. While we are using the computer, only use software we are working with.

Remember that the number of classes you miss impacts your professionalism and participation grades. You can't participate if you're not in class. Not coming to class is also not very professional.

You will also be penalized for not speaking at all. To be a successful journalist (or successful in any field), you must learn how to voice your opinions and contribute to conversations. Your participation and professionalism grades start at 0. It's up to you to work your way up the grade scale.

The grading scale for participation is as follows:

A: Frequent and meaningful contributions to class discussion that show insight and understanding of material.

B: Frequent and meaningful contribution to class discussion.

C: Occasional participation to class discussion.

D: Only participates when called upon.

F : No class participation

Academic Dishonesty Policy:

Plagiarism of any form, of any kind and of any length will be reported to the Dean of Students and the student will automatically receive a failing grade for the course.

Cheating on in-class assignments or any other work associated with this class will receive a similar punishment. As you know, plagiarism constitutes using another's words or ideas without acknowledgment.

In journalism, it is also considered equally dishonest to invent quotes, facts, scenarios and so on. I will occasionally check to verify that you have indeed interviewed the people you claim to have interviewed.

I also consider it an act of plagiarism to turn in work for an assignment in this class that you wrote for another class (any semester, any year). You must turn in original work for all class assignments.

Email policy:

I will respond to all emails within 24 hours, except for weekends.

Keep in mind that I may not check my email right before an assignment is due. Ask questions early and re-read the assignment sheet. Often, the answer is there.

Laptop and cell phone policy:

Although technology is an integral part of communication, it doesn't always help you learn. The more you multitask, the less you learn. Multitasking is also disruptive to me and the students around you.

Studies have shown the following:

- According to Winona State University researchers, 68% of students who use laptops in the classroom aren't using them just to take notes – they're also surfing the web, checking Facebook and email, etc.
- Former Stanford researcher Clifford Nass found that multitaskers perform worse than non-multitaskers in nearly every category, including critical thinking skills and memory tests.
- Researchers in China found that the more time you spend online, the less grey matter you have in your brain. Grey matter is the section of your mind that controls thinking.

If you multitask in class, you will be asked to leave. The professionalism portion of your grade will also be lowered.

Grading:

Of course, this is a graded class. The system is the system.

Grading is a complex issue.

At best, grades motivate you to learn as much as you can.

At their worst, grades make you feel bad about yourself, question your life goals and detest learning.

When thinking about grades, keep a few things in mind.

Grades don't always indicate how much you're getting out of this class, or school in general.

When you were in elementary school and high school, teachers and parents used grades to help keep you on task and unearth your talents.

But you are now an adult. It is your responsibility to learn as much as you can, keep yourself on task and uncover your passions. Grades may help you do this, but grades aren't your only guide on this road.

As an adult, you need to push yourself to learn – without the reward or punishment of a grade.

Getting As on assignments shouldn't be a reason to tell yourself, "I am a master at this. I don't need to try anymore." You're not a master yet. An A means you're exceptional for storytellers at this stage of their careers. You're likely not ready to win a Pulitzer yet. Keep working hard until you do.

Likewise, getting Cs shouldn't be a reason to give up. In fact, a C makes sense. That's an average grade, and you just started doing this. Telling stories through words and images takes practice. After all, there are no child prodigies when it comes to writing.

That said, I take a lot of time to make my grading policy transparent. You will receive a rubric for each assignment, along with an explanation of potential point deductions.

I will always evaluate your work and provide you with an explanation of why you've earned your grade.

Your first assignment is worth less than latter ones. After all, as you learn, you should get better.

The in-class writing assignments are purely for practice. I will look at them. But you either earn an A for putting some degree of effort into it and an F if you don't.

Please remember that I do not grade based on effort alone. I will not give you an A on one of the outside assignments simply because you tried your best.

A C is average, and average doesn't mean bad.

Quizzes on the readings will occur nearly every week. You are expected to read your assignments before class begins.

News quizzes will also occur throughout the semester. Sometimes, you will be able to find the answers online for these quizzes. Other times, I will expect you to know the answers because you should be consuming news regularly in your spare time.

Grade disputes:

You may not agree with a grade I give you. If you think you deserve a better grade, you must write one to two paragraphs explaining why and visit me in my office to discuss the matter.

Again, you must visit me **in person**. Do not email me the explanation and expect me to respond. Do not argue your point after class on the day I return an assignment. You have a one-week window after I return an assignment to dispute a grade. After that, I will not change a grade for any reason.

Rewrite Policy:

The best way to become a better writer is to rewrite based on feedback. You have until

the last day of class to rewrite any piece of content you produce for this class. However, the rewrite must include significantly new information. Acceptable information is a new interview in which you quote someone directly, a new study explained in full detail, new statistics, and other forms of new research.

You may only rewrite a piece once. Your final grade on the piece will be an average of the two grades.

If you want to rewrite a piece on the Hub Bub, and it's already been published, you must notify Professor Jessica Brown and ask her to unpublish it so that you can make changes. Her email is jbrown7@luc.edu. Try not to wait until the last day of class to ask her to do this, as she may be busy.

If you rewrite a piece, you must give me a copy of the old version, and the new version. Please print out both versions and give them to me in class.

Final grade breakdown:

In-class writing and editing exercises: 100 points

News/pop quizzes: 100 points

Professionalism/Professionalism: 100 points

Article one: 100 points

Article two: 200 points

Photo slideshow: 100 points

Interactive piece: 100 points

Final project (different options will exist): 200 points

Grading Criteria:

A: Publishable work with a **maximum of one spelling, grammatical, or punctuation error** and the proper information and sources written in a lively, well-organized manner. Articles are written in proper web format. Significant difference between print should be apparent.

B: Minimal spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors. Minimal missing information and sources; minimal problems with the lead and organization. Some missing web formatting.

C: Notable number of spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors.
Noticeable missing information and sources; problems with the lead and organization.

D: Significant number of spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors.
Significant missing information and sources; Significant problems with the lead and organization.

F: Misspelling of proper names. Other major spelling, grammatical, punctuation and/or AP Style errors. Almost total lack of information and sources; Severe problems with the lead and organization.

Here are some deductions (there are others) I use to calculate grades for articles:

- 1 point spelling error
- 1 point grammar error
- 1 point punctuation error
- 5 points for weak nut graf
- 2 points per run on sentence
- 3 points per weak lead
- 10 points for not meeting direct quotes requirement on assignment sheet
- up to 10 points for not meeting technical requirements
- up to 10 points for research lapses or errors
- up to 10 points for organizational errors
- up to 10 points for formatting errors (how it looks on the web site)
- 5 if there's no photo with article

Individual Assignment Grade Scale:

A: 100-94

A-: 93-90

B+: 89-88

B: 87-83

B-: 82-80

C+ 79-78

C: 77-73

C-: 72-70

D+: 69-68

D: 67-63

D-: 62-60

F: 59-0

Total Semester Grade Point Scale:

Grades are absolutely not rounded up at semester's end

A: 1000-940
A-: 939-900
B+: 899-880
B: 879-830
B-: 829-800
C+ 799-780
C: 779-730
C-: 729-700
D+: 699-680
D: 679-630
D-: 629-600
F: 599-0

Schedule

Subject to Change

Readings listed under Homework should be completed by the following week.

Week One – August 25

Lecture: Introductions; Digital journalism examples

Homework Due next week:

1. Read “Print is down, and now out”
http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/11/business/media/media-companies-spin-off-newspapers-to-uncertain-futures.html?_r=0
2. Read “People aren’t reading news: they’re news snacking”
http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/news-consumption_b20432
3. Read “Writing a lead”
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/735/05/>
4. Read “Structuring a news story”
<http://journalism.about.com/od/writing/a/storystructure.htm>

Week Two – September 1

Lecture: The power of online journalism; journalism review (leads, nut grafs, body, etc.); online article structure vs. print article structure; how to pitch ideas in writing and in person

Homework:

1. Read “Writing Style for Print Vs. the Web”
<http://www.nngroup.com/articles/writing-style-for-print-vs-web/>
2. “F Shaped Pattern for reading web content”
<http://www.nngroup.com/articles/f-shaped-pattern-reading-web-content/>
3. Read “Writing for the web” <http://www.usability.gov/how-to-and-tools/methods/writing-for-the-web.html>
4. Read “5 Ways to Find Sources Online”
<http://ijnet.org/stories/5-ways-find-sources-online>

Week Three – September 8

ARTICLE IDEA NUMBER 1 DUE

Lecture: How people read online; finding experts

Homework:

1. Read “How to get people to read online”
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jayson-demers/how-to-get-people-to-read_b_3132942.html
2. Read “Write Interesting Facts”
<http://www.nngroup.com/articles/write-interesting-facts/>
3. Read “Write Chunky Paragraphs”
<http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/CGuide4Chunky.htm>. Be sure to read everything linked to from the left hand side of the page (4a-4d)

Week Four – September 15

ARTICLE NUMBER ONE DUE

Lecture: CMS; Best practices for web writing

Homework:

1. Read “Make Text Scannable”
<http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/CGuide2Scan.htm>. Be sure to read all of the pages linked to from the left hand side of the page (2a-2d)
2. Read “Has Scannability Made us Stupid?”
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/jul/15/slow-reading>
3. “Trim that Text” <http://www.webwritingthatworks.com/CGuide1Trim.htm>
Be sure to read the main page and all of the pages that are hyperlinked to from the left hand side of the web page (1a – 1h)
4. Writing for Mobile Users
<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/mobile-content.html>

Week Five – September 22

IDEA ARTICLE 2 DUE

Lecture: Concise writing; scannability

Homework:

1. Read “Taylor Momson Did Not Write This Headline”
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/05/17/business/media/17carr.html?partner=rss&emc=rss>
2. Read “World’s Best Headlines” <http://www.nngroup.com/articles/worlds-best-headlines-bbc-news/>
3. Read “Writing Web Headlines that Work”
<http://www.mediabistro.com/articles/cache/a11327.asp>

Week Six – September 29

Lecture: Headline writing; more on concise writing

1. Read “Grammar Rules to Break when Writing for the Web”
<http://www.nngroup.com/articles/break-grammar-rules/>
2. Read “H is for Hypertext”
<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=52&aid=127952>
3. Read “How, where and when to link in a news story”
<http://www.ojr.org/ojr/stories/080215niles/>

Week Seven – October 6 No Class Fall Break

Week Eight – October 13

ARTICLE 2 DUE

Lecture: Linking; grammar and the web; what's interactivity and why is it important online?

Homework:

1. Read "10 Rules of Photo Composition and Why They Work"
<http://www.digitalcameraworld.com/2012/04/12/10-rules-of-photo-composition-and-why-they-work/>
2. Read "Caption Writing for Photo Slideshows"
<http://www.digitalnewsjournalist.com/2008/09/22/caption-writing-for-web-photo-slideshows/>
3. Read "Photos as Web Content" <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/photo-content.html>

Week Nine – October 20

Lecture: Photos, interactivity

Guest Speaker: Matt Black, creator of "The Geography of Poverty." You can visit the work here: <http://pulitzercenter.org/blog/geography-poverty-united-states-policy>

Homework:

1. Read and closely study all of the maps linked to from this article "15 Awesome Interactive Maps from the New York Times"
NOTE: GOOGLE THE HEADLINES OF THE MAPS IF YOU HIT THE NY TIMES PAY WALL
http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/15-interactive-maps-from-new-york-times_b407

1. Read/Watch/Interact with “Coal: A Love Story”
<http://www.poweringnation.org/coal/#>
2. Read “Writers and Sleep”
http://www.brainpickings.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/sleepproductivitywriters_1500_1.jpg

Week Ten – October 27

SLIDESHOW DUE

Lecture: Putting a slideshow online; interactivity 101

Homework:

1. Read “What is Data Journalism?”
 - a. http://datajournalismhandbook.org/1.0/en/introduction_0.html
2. Read “Why is Data Journalism important?”
http://datajournalismhandbook.org/1.0/en/introduction_2.html

Week 11- November 3

Lecture: Interactivity and Data Journalism

Homework:

- [Read “Gawker Retracts an Article After Criticism and Gets more Brickbats from Its Staff”](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/18/business/media/gawker-retracts-an-article-after-criticism-and-gets-more-brickbats-from-its-staff.html?_r=0)

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/07/18/business/media/gawker-retracts-an-article-after-criticism-and-gets-more-brickbats-from-its-staff.html?_r=0

- [“Statistics—Measuring the Impact of Your Story”](#) on Medium
- [“The Six Things That Make Stories Go Viral Will Amaze and Maybe Infuriate You”](#) by Maria Konikova for The New Yorker

- Read “The Journalist’s Guide to Analytics”

http://www.mediabistro.com/10000words/the-journalists-guide-to-analytics_b875

- Read “Why Can’t We Agree on Web Traffic”

<http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-we-still-cant-agree-on-web-metrics/>

Week 12 – November 10

Lecture: The business side of journalism; analytics

Homework:

1. Read “The Basics of Video Storytelling”

<http://www.socialmediatoday.com/content/basics-video-storytelling>

2. Read “9 Key Elements in Video Storytelling”

<http://www.poynter.org/news/media-innovation/163352/9-key-elements-that-can-help-journalists-be-better-video-storytellers/>

Week 13 – November 17

Interactive story

Lecture: Video in journalism; simple video editing; video scripts

Homework:

1. Read “Create a Top Notch Web Site”

<http://tech.journalism.cuny.edu/2011/01/11/create-a-top-notch-journalist-portfolio-website/>

2. Read “Your Resume For All to See”

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/jobs/27search.html>

3. Read “Top Ten Mistakes in Web Design”

<http://www.useit.com/alertbox/9605.html>

4. Read “How to pitch an editor” <http://www.xojane.com/diy/how-to-pitch-an-editor>

Week 14 – November 24

Lecture: Online portfolios; resume writing; cover letter writing; pitching

Homework:

1. Work on final project

Week 15 – December 1

Lecture: Final work

Homework: Work on final project

Final project due by email start of finals time