

Southwest Minnesota State University Fall 2013 English 204: Introduction to Journalism (4 credits)

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Classroom: IL 210 (10:30-11:30) and CH 102 (11:30-12:20)

Course Objective:

This course is an introduction to writing and reporting news, with a unit on public relations writing. In this course, you will acquire:

- Preparation for careers in the media that require knowledge of print, broadcast and online journalism skills.
- Skills in developing stories, finding sources and doing online research.
- Reporting and interviewing techniques, writing and revision strategies.
- An understanding of the Associated Press guidelines and media ethics.
- The ability to consider the best use of graphics (photo, chart, graph, diagram) to accompany your stories.
- The ability to collaborate on revision work to produce the best work possible by deadline.
- The ability to develop a portfolio of stories, a cover letter, and resume.
- The ability to publish at least one story and begin a clip file as part of your professional portfolio.
- Exposure to journalism professionals who will be guest speakers in class.

Required Texts:

Rich, Carole. *Writing and Reporting News: A Coaching Method*. 7th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2013.

AP Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law (recent edition)

Other Required Reading and Materials:

You will read other newspapers and magazines such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Marshall Independent*, *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader*, *Time*, *Newsweek* as well as online news sources, BBC and Al Jazeera, from around the globe.

Notebook for class notes and for reporting notes

A good college dictionary

Two (2) jump/flash drives (one for backup)

Class Attendance and Participation:

- I require and take attendance at all class meetings. Attendance will be taken at the start of the class; if you are late, you will be counted absent. Tardiness is disruptive, so please be on time.
- All absences are considered unexcused unless you receive approval from me to have your absence excused. Please schedule routine doctor's appointments, daycare, and other non-emergency appointments around this class.
- Each student is allowed to miss two (2) class meetings with no penalty. After a student's second unexcused absence, I reserve the right to adjust your final course grade accordingly. If you are absent more than six (6) times, you will receive an F in the course—no exceptions.
- You are expected to participate in class discussions, ask questions and share ideas. Come to class having done the reading and prepared to write the type of story covered in the assigned chapter. Bring your textbook, AP Stylebook, reporter's notebook every day as well as your flash drive on the two days when we are in the computer lab.
- You are responsible for all work missed and all material covered, even when you are absent, either excused or unexcused.

Deadlines:

You would be reprimanded – or even fired – for missing a deadline if you worked at a newspaper. This class will teach you not only about journalism but also the workplace skill of meeting deadlines. Out-of-class assignments are due at the start of the class on the date they are due. If you must be absent when work is due, have a classmate or friend deliver it for you before the start of the class on the due date. I do not accept late work. You will receive a zero for work submitted late.

Preparation of Written Work:

Your written work should be typed on a computer, double-spaced, in 12 point Times Roman font. Put your name, the date and the title of the assignment at the top. **Include a headline for all stories.** Start each paragraph with an indent. Use spell-check and grammar-check. **Pages must be numbered and stapled. Save work on your computer, in your D2L Locker and on a flash drive.**

Assignments and Grading:

Grading will follow a portfolio method, explained below. We will cancel designated class sessions for your research and writing use and for portfolio conferences.

Portfolios:

I will edit and comment on your work, giving it either a check (passable work), check plus (above average work) or check minus (substandard work). I will not grade it initially. After stories have been returned, you will rewrite and place all your articles into a portfolio. This portfolio will be handed in mid-term (Stories #1,2,3, and a Media Kit) and at the end of the semester (Stories #5,6,7,8). I will grade portfolios and meet with students individually to discuss their progress.

Web Exercises:

You will take Web exercises on the textbook chapters and self-guided style quizzes on Associated Press style. You will also complete in-class writing and reporting exercises which you will include in your midterm and final portfolios.

Current Events Report:

Each day at the start of class, one student will present a two-minute report on a current event in the news (local, national or international) and critique the coverage. We'll do this in alphabetical order through the semester until you've each presented twice. If you're absent, you'll present at the next class you attend along with the person who is presenting that day. This oral report will receive a check, check plus or check minus and will be considered as part of your class participation. Please bring in a print copy of your story as well.

Idea Budgets:

You will write 10 Idea Budgets as practice in generating story ideas. These must include three story ideas you could actually follow through and write. You will include a slug (a one-word title) followed by a few sentences describing the story. Include possibilities for photos or graphics, at least two possible sources to interview and possible links/survey question, etc. These will be graded with a check, check plus or check minus.

Coaching Groups:

We will form coaching groups to discuss topics from the text, work on exercises and assignments, and critique and edit assigned work in and outside of class. I may ask you to work with different teams for each assignment so that the entire class gets to know one another and has the experience of working with a variety of people and writing styles. On group assignments, I will ask each group member to submit a private evaluation of the teamwork experience to me along with their initial assignment. These evaluations are confidential and will assist me in grading for the course.

Grading Schedule:

Introduction to Journalism is a writing course. Portfolios count for 70 percent of your grade. Web exercises and Idea Budgets count for 15 percent. Participation in the class, including your efforts to help peers improve their writing, your work as the recipient of peer-coaching, your Current Events Reports, and your completion of group and individual exercises, counts for 15 percent.

Reading Assignments:

I will assume you have done your assigned reading and will not go over every point made in the textbook. If you want to do well in the course, read the book, use its resources, and ask questions in class, during office hours and computer lab time.

Ethics and Accuracy:

The reputation of a journalist and their publication rests on factual research and accurate, truthful presentation. It is essential to double-check quotes, spelling of names, and accuracy of dates, locations, and titles. Students who plagiarize and fabricate material, including sources or quotations, will receive a failing grade on that assignment and be referred to the Director of Student Life as stated in the Code of Conduct in the SMSU Student Handbook.

Publication:

You are encouraged and required to submit your stories for consideration to local media, particularly *The Spur*, *The Marshall Independent*, and your hometown newspaper. Stories selected for publication with minor editing will automatically receive an A grade. If substantial editing must take place between writing and publication, the grade will reflect that fact. One of the course objectives is to have students publish at least one article and begin building a clip file by the end of the semester. Students who become staff writers for *The Spur* during the course will receive 10 extra credit points.

Classroom Decorum and Behavior:

Here are a few “rules of the road” regarding the behavior I expect during class:

- Use computers for class work and not for reading e-mail, surfing the Web, playing computer games or writing personal letters.
- Turn off mobile phones before class begins. No text-messaging.
- No side conversations during class that do not pertain to journalism.
- Arrive on time and stay for the entire class period.
- Be polite. Respect your classmates and your instructor.

Class Web Site:

We will be using the Desire 2 Learn (D2L) course management system. After you log in, you will be able to read class announcements and online materials, download resources, and send e-mail to your classmates and me. Some materials will be available to you only through the site. You will want to check the D2L site regularly.

Final note: When grading portfolios, my philosophy is that a student cannot fail a paper if he or she does the work. The student can always make it better by revising it. However, there are a few grounds for failure: plagiarism, a misspelled name or a factual error. The other errors can be corrected on the revised versions.

Major Stories/Assignments:

Story 1: Profile

Story 2: Campus/Regional Event

Story 3: SMSU Building/Facility

Story 4: Sports or Health/Wellness

Portfolio 1 (mid-term): Stories 1-4 revised

Story 5: Beyond the Comfort Zone

Story 6: Government

Story 7: Feature Obituary

Final Project: Resume and cover letter

Portfolio 2 (final): Stories 5-7 and Final Project revised

