**MEJO 356.02 Syllabus**

**Feature Reporting & Writing**

**Spring 2021**

**11 a.m.-12:15 p.m. MW**

**Live on Zoom: Register in advance for our meetings**

**https://unc.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJcqc-yhrT0vGNdfIpsTsr8ywScj9QYkL0ne**

**Sakai site:** <https://sakai.unc.edu/portal/site/features>

**Instructor: Angelia Herrin**

**Office Hours: By appointment, phone or Zoom**

**Best way to find me:** [**angelial@email.unc.edu**](mailto:angelial@email.unc.edu)

**Not the best way to find me: 857 752 6766**

***“Thank God for stories – for those who have them, for those who tell them, for those who devour them as the soul sustenance that they are. Stories give shape to experience and allow us to go through life unblind. Without them, everything that happens would float around, undifferentiated. None of it would mean anything. Once you have a version of what happened, all the other good stuff about being human comes into play. You can laugh, feel awe, commit a passionate act, get pissed, want to change things.” - Alex Tizon***

In this class, we are going to tell stories. The kind of stories that readers are eager to read because they connect the dots, illuminate the world, and make us stop and think and feel how we are connected.

When you read a feature story that ticks all these boxes, you can’t help asking “HOW did the writer do this?” As a journalism student, you already know the answer: Hard work.

This class will demand hard work, as you study the tools and techniques of feature writing and build your skills. Much reading, research and interviewing is involved. *Hint: If you don’t like talking to people, this class is probably not for you!* There are weekly writing and editing and rewriting assignments. Class meetings are discussions that demand full participation, as we explore generating original story ideas, developing interview and reporting skills, experimenting with themes and structures and dissecting each of your stories to make them better

So, the work will be challenging, but as Pulitzer Prize-winning author Katherine Boo, says it won’t be boring: “You can’t help but know this kind of work is mind-stretching, life-enhancing, slap-up fun. Go out and find some of it.”

What You Can Learn From This Class:

* How to identify good feature story ideas
* How to research, report and interview for impact
* How to refine writing techniques such as tension, action, detail and character
* How to “show” more and “tell” less.
* How to structure a long-form story, organize it and engage readers
* How to connect the dots and explain what a story *really* means
* How to become a better writer and reporter

Textbooks and Resources

Required texts are:

**"Writing Tools: 55 Essential Strategies for Every Writer"** by Roy Peter Clark. (Available through Amazon)

The **AP Stylebook** and **JOMC Stylebook**.

All other resources will be found in Sakai: Assigned readings and discussion board will be used for each class.

Subscribe to Chip Scanlan’s weekly newsletter. We will discuss it each week. <https://www.chipswritinglessons.com/newsletter/>

Assignments

A story will be due once every three or four weeks**. Start thinking about and planning for ALL assignments at the beginning of the semester. You will send a writing memo to the instructor for each story. Your upfront work in exploring topics, identifying issues and interviews is crucial.** Writers who challenge themselves with meaty stories or stories that are hard to get will be rewarded. Mundane, simplistic stories will be graded accordingly.

**A sure way to fail: Leave it to last-minute scrambling for a topic and interviews.** The best stories are filled with detail, anecdote and description. Seeing people, places and events with your own eyes, hearing sounds and voices, feeling the air, smelling the atmosphere all contribute to excellent stories. The easiest way to get those details is to be where they are happening. If you are uncomfortable going out to interview in person, you will need to be able to get this in-depth information another way.

There are four major stories in this class and a final narrative story. The first story is a 700-word short profile and only two sources are required.

The three other feature stories are **1,000 to 1,200 word each**.

A properly formatted memo pitching your story is **due two weeks** before these stories are turned in to Sakai. Failure to submit this on time will be reflected in your grade because it means that you haven't planned well, don't take the deadline seriously and/or have no idea what you're going to write about. Each is a recipe for failure.

Each of the three feature stories will be 1,000-1,200 words long and must have **at least four human sources** listed at the end of the story with contact information. Students may NOT write a first-person story for one of these three stories. There will be a short first person in-class assignment that will be graded.

You may **not** submit stories written for another class or a publication, including the Daily Tar Heel. Instead we will write original stories you expect to get published. Each student should strive to have their story selected to be a recommended entree for the Hearst Awards. The categories are Feature Writing, Sports Writing and Personality Profiles. This is a description of each category and expectations: http://www.hearstawards.org/guidelines/entry-guidelines/writing/

**Final story:**

The final story will be a narrative non-fiction feature in which you will shadow a source or sources for some time and write the story from a narrative perspective. This feature, like the other stories you write for this class, must be written in third person. Reporting for this story is crucial. Writers must set up their follow/shadowing reporting early to have enough time to gain experience with the source to be able to tell the story from inside.

The format is the same as a regular feature except the word length is 1,800-2,000. **At least five human sources are required**.

A stern word on deadlines: Stories submitted after the deadline will be accepted but will be considered late. Late stories are docked one letter grade for each day they are tardy.

**Classwork**

**Stories:** In most classes we will discuss several stories. We will use the Sakai Weekly folder to post feature stories of interest for in-class discussion. Each student will lead a discussion based on the feature story he or she selected. Students will be expected to have read the stories and make comments on them on the Sakai Discussion page prior to the discussion. **This counts as part of your class participation grade**.

Your selected story must be posted on SAKAI four days prior to your presentation.

**Readings**: I will assign readings about writing for most classes from the text or other sources. The purpose is to teach you skills about the craft and to encourage you to think about your style.

**Writing:** You will write from a prompt I give you on many days. The purpose is to allow you time to practice specific challenges in your writing craft. I will read, comment and return these promptly. These writing exercises will not be graded. They are designed for you to experiment with your writing.

**Quiz**

Writing skills are important. That's why we use the Clark text. Two-thirds of the way through the semester you will be quizzed on the writing tools in the text.

**Grading:**

All grading on stories is to a great extent subjective, as are opinions of editors and readers. An editor will be judging your style, mechanics, reporting, precision, enterprise, how you write, how you capture a reader’s interest and maintain it, tone and whether the story is interesting. I will evaluate your stories the same way. Turn in a story to a publication that’s boring to the editor and it won’t be published. Make silly style or grammar mistakes and no one will assign you a story. Be professional.

Grade breakdown:

Classwork 15%

Profile 10%

Story 2 10%

Story 3 15%

Story 4 15%

Class Story 5%

Final 30%

Stories 1,, 3 and 4 will be graded twice. Each grade will have the same weight. I will read, comment on and grade your first version story. My comments will address reporting, writing and form. You may then rework your story to improve it and **resubmit it within three days.**

I will read, comment on and grade your story on its rewrite. This grade will be based on the story's final form AND how much you've improved it. WARNING: If that first version does not have all the sources, and a sound structure – you are in very low-grade territory.

Rewritten stories can NOT get a higher grade than a 91.

Grading throughout the semester is conducted on a numerical scale. Each student begins each assignment with a raw score of 100. Points are added or subtracted from that according to the standards listed below. You may determine your approximate grade standing in the course by converting your numerical grades to letter grades on your assignments according to this scale:

**90 and above = A**

**80 - 89 = B**

**70 - 79 = C**

**60 - 69 = D**

**below 60 = F**

Grades will be assigned plusses and minuses using this scale: A numerical grade of 80-82.9 is a B-; 83-87.9 is a B; and 88-89.9 is a B+. The same applies to all letter grades except there is no A+ or D-.

Under the definitions established by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, students who receive the following letter grades are considered to have reached the level of attainment defining that letter. Thus, letter grades received for reporting and writing courses may be interpreted this way:

Generally speaking, for stories: **A** = publishable story with no factual or style errors and written well. **B** = near-publishable story with minor errors of style or logic; no fact errors; needs revision. **C** = unpublishable story with serious errors of style, logic, reporting or readability. **D** = sub-par, unpublishable work with major errors of style, logic, approach; reporting gaps; low level of engagement with the story **F** = unacceptable work, including factual errors, many style errors, major logical errors, minimal reporting; generally embarrassing to the writer. Don’t go here.

**Seeking Help:**

If you need individual assistance, it’s your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

**Diversity:**

The University’s policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined on the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office’s webpage (https://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm/). UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran’s status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

**Special Accommodations:**

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Department of Disability Services website at [*ars.unc.edu/*](https://outlook.unc.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=_PwXhu5wkEKfdEIVTpil9KJAr6RORM8IBwmgW7JyZPUuO4or7Dri_9D4gXEkBO0Z0IIreRKEjIQ.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fdisabilityservices.unc.edu%2f)

**ACCREDITATION:**

The Hussman School of Journalism and Media’s accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program. Learn more about them here: http://hussman.unc.edu/accreditation. No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. The values and competencies associated with this course include being able to:

· Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientations and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;

· Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;

· Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;

· Think critically, creatively and independently;

· Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications, professions in which they work;

· Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;

· Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;

· Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions.

**DAY BY DAY SCHEDULE**

**Important note: This syllabus is subject to change, so stay alert and read the CLASS NOTE that is sent out a least once a week.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Topic** | | **Readings and assignments** | |  |
| **Week 1**  **Jan.20** | **Opening Day!**  **Syllabus Review And all Big Questions!** | | **Interview assignment due Friday 8 a.m.** | |  |
| **Week 2**  **Jan. 25** | **What Makes That Great Story Great?**  **Learning to Look for Stories** | | * READ story assignments in Week Two Folder and Comment on Sakai * WATCH : What’s The Most Important Element of a Good Story: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=geG8E_ocYDY> | |  |
|  |  | |  | |
| **Jan. 27** | **The Not Well-Kept Secrets of the Dead** | | * READ story package in Week Two Folder and Comment on Sakai * READ Tools 1-5 * Post writing in assignments 8 a.m. Thursday | |
| **Week 3**  **Feb. 1** | **Consider the Profile Easy Reading is Damn Hard Writing** | | * READ profile package in Week Three Folder and Comment on Sakai * READ Tools 5-10 * Submit your Profile Memo in Assignments 8 a.m. Tuesday | |
| **Feb 3** | **Why Do You Ask? Interviewing for Impact** | | * READ stories and package in Week Three Folder and comment on Sakai | |
| **Week 4**  **Feb. 8** | **Mark it on your Calendar: Event stories**  **In class exercise** | | * READ story package in Week Four Folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * Submit in class writing in Assignments 8 a.m. Tuesday * **NOTE: Your Profile is Due 8 a.m. WEDNESDAY in Assignments** | |
| **Feb. 10** | **WORKSHOP PROFILE** | | * READ and COMMENT on student story   **Note: Your Rewrite is Due Saturday – Why not get it in early and enjoy the long weekend?** | |
| **Week 5**  **Feb. 15** | **NO CLASS** | | **NOTE: Your SECOND STORY MEMO is due 8 a.m. TUESDAY** | |
| **Feb. 17** | **More Trouble with the Obvious**  **Observation and Description** | | * READ article assignments in Week Five Folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ Tools 11-16. Plus, bonus chapter 22 | |
| **Week 6**  **Feb. 22** | **Exploring Narrative** | | * READ Assignments in Week Six Folder * READ Tools 23-26 * READ and COMMENT on student story | |
| **Feb. 24** | **TBD GUEST SPEAKER:** | | * READ Guest Speaker Bio and Stories: Post Questions on Sakai Board * READ and COMMENT on student story | |
| **Week 7**  **March 1** | **WORKSHOP SECOND STORY** | | * NOTE: YOUR STORY IS DUE IN ASSIGNMENTS ON SUNDAY FEB. 28 AT NOON * READ and COMMENT on student story | |
| **March 3** | **Always Looking for an Angle** | | * READ story package in Week Seven Folder * READ and COMMENT on student story | |
| **Week 8**  **March 8** | **Leads and Rewards** | | * READ story package in Week Eight Folder * READ and Comment on student story * READ Tools 32 -33 | |
| **March 10** | **The Inciting Incident**  **In class writing** | | * READ and COMMENT on student story | |
| **Week 9**  **March**  **15** | **The VOICE** | | * READ story package in Week Nine Folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ Tools 17-21 * **NOTE: YOUR THIRD STORY MEMO IS DUE TODAY** | |
| **March**  **17** | **The Sweetest Thing** | | * READ story package in Week Nine Folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * Post Assignment in Sakai Friday * **YOUR FINAL PROJECT DUE FRIDAY** | |
| **Week 10**  **March 22** | **Metaphor and poetry** | | * READ Story Package in Week 10 Folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ Tools 34-38 | |
| **March 24** | **A Sense of An Ending** | | * READ package in Week 10 Folder * READ and COMMENT on student story   READ Tool 39 | |
| **Week 11**  **March**  **29** | | **Workshop Third Story** | | * READ and COMMENT on student story | |
| **March**  **31** | | **NO FORMAL CLASS**  **Midterm consultations** | | * YOUR THIRD STORY REWRITE IS DUE FRIDAY April 2 * NOTE: Your FOURTH STORY MEMO IS DUE TODAY | | |
| **Week 12**  **April 5** | | **NO CLASS WELLNESS DAY** | |  | | |
| **April 7** | | **Structural Issues** | | * READ stories in Week 13 Folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * Read Tool 27-30 | | |
| **Week 13**  **April 12** | | **Organize the Long Story** | | * READ stories in Week 13 Folder * READ Tools 40-45 * READ and COMMENT on student story | | |
| **April 14** | | **FOURTH STORY WORKSHOP** | | * READ and COMMENT on student story | | |
| **Week 14**  **April 19** | | **TBD Speaker** | | * READ and COMMENT on student story | | |
| **April 21** | | **Murder Your Darlings**  **Edit Yourself** | | * READ package in Week 14 Folder * READ and COMMENT on student story * READ Tools 46-50 | | |
| **Week 15**  **April 26** | | **No formal class**  **Mandatory Final Project Check ins** | |  | | |
| **April 28** | | **The Ethics of the Truth and other Issues** | | * READ package in Week 15 Folder * READ and COMMENT on student story | | |
| **Week 16**  **May 3** | | **One on One in Class FINAL Workshop Event** | | * Prereading required * READ and COMMENT on student story | | |
| **May 5** | | **FINAL CLASS**  **YOUR PROJECT IS DUE** | |  | | |
|  | | **FINALS WEEK**  **Our final is at noon May 14: There WILL be a final meeting! There WILL be celebration!!** | |  | | |