SYLLABUS: JAMS 306/Feature and Magazine Article Writing
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, College of Letters and Sciences
Department of Journalism, Advertising, and Media Studies
Instructor: Erik Gunn

My name is Erik Gunn. I’ve worked as a freelance writer and editor since 1995, publishing in more than a dozen national and regional magazines and newspapers. Previously I worked for 15 years as a daily newspaper reporter.

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JAMS 306 – Feature and Magazine Article Writing is taught as a journalism class, employing the standards and perspectives of professional journalism; students will be expected to produce work that is grounded in journalistic style, practices, and principles.

Course Objectives

1. To provide experience in writing feature stories suitable for publication in print or online.
2. To expose students to examples of published feature articles from which they can profitably learn the craft.
3. To provide opportunities for students to further develop the elements of the journalist’s craft, including:
   
   • news judgment and critical thinking;
   • fact-gathering through primary and secondary sources of information, including documents, interviews, and personal direct observation;
   • story-telling that is accurate, concise, and compelling;
   • mastery of the standard rules of mechanics for contemporary professional writing;
   • an appreciation for the continuing role of journalists in a time of immense change in society and culture as well as in media technology;
   • a commitment to the ethical practice of journalism.

Workload Statement

This class meets the standards set forth by the university for expected in-class and out-of-class workloads. Reading for this class requires less time than many classes; the bulk of out-of-class time is spent on reporting and writing for assignments. The estimated total workload over the 15 weeks of the semester is just under 140 hours, divided as follows:

   • Lecture: (twice a week, 75 minutes a lecture): 37.5 hours
   • Reading: 20 hours
   • Short assignments: 30 hours
   • Projects: 50 hours

Course Components

1. Class Meetings (Lecture). The class meets according to the established schedule. Exceptions will be made clear in both in-class and D2L communications. Attendance will be taken. Class meetings will consist of lectures, discussions, and a variety of in-class activities.

2. Reading. There are two required reference texts. You will be expected to consult them regularly as you write and edit your work. They are:
   - *The AP Stylebook.*

Additional required reading will be provided in class, posted on the class D2L site, or both, and will include sample feature articles, excerpts from books and other sources on writing and journalistic practice, and additional material from various sources relevant to the course.

There are a number of excellent books on journalism and on strong, narrative-based feature writing in particular. They have been included in the Recommended Course Text list. Source materials for assigned readings include:

   - William Reuhlmann, *Stalking the Feature Story* (out of print)
   - James B. Stewart, *Follow the Story* (Simon & Schuster/Touchstone)
   - David Fryxell, *How to Write Fast (While Writing Well)* (Writer’s Digest)
   - Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird* (Anchor)

3. Written Assignments fall into two categories:

   **Short Assignments** include free-standing reporting/writing assignments and building blocks for major projects. Other short assignments may reflect on reading for the class or be tied to events such as class guest speakers. Short assignments also include the First Drafts of the three major projects.

   **Major Projects.** Three major projects constitute the bulk of the work, and the grade, in this course. The projects are based on your original reporting and writing. They are:

   A. A **Profile** of an individual – a living person of interest or relevance, whom you must interview; 800-1,000 words.

   B. A **Place** story rooted in a physical place or institution that you must visit as part of your reporting for this project; 1,000-1,200 words.

   C. A **Magazine Story** on a subject of compelling reader interest; 1,500-2,000 words.

Grades

Your grade includes:

1. **Attendance and Participation -- 10% (combined)**

   **Attendance:** Every class session is important. Unexcused absences will be deducted from your overall attendance great. Absences will be counted as unexcused unless you provide medical documentation or you have notified the instructor in advance of a compelling reason.
for your absence, and I have approved the reason for your absence. Being late or leaving class early without prior approval counts as ½ an absence.

Participation and Effort: Participation demonstrates your willingness to engage with the course material and with the assignments. For the most productive experience, be prepared to respond to questions and engage in dialogue as well as to discuss in depth progress on your projects. Along with participation, this portion of your grade reflects the degree of effort you have displayed throughout the semester in applying yourself to assignments large and small.

2. In-class Activities – 10%

The class includes individual and small-group work tied to out-of-class assignments as well as in-class lecture material. They are graded Pass/Fail and cannot be made up due to absence.

3. Short Assignments – 20%

Some short assignments are graded Pass/Fail; others are graded using a scale that reflects the degree to which an assignment was fulfilled.

4. The Three Major Projects – 60%, divided accordingly:

- **Profile** – 10%
- **Place Feature** – 20%
- **Magazine Story** – 30%

Procedures, Expectations, and Standards

1. Assignment Memos. Follow the instructions in the D2L note describing the assignment.

2. Submission and Deadlines. Submit all written assignments electronically to the designated D2L Dropbox by the assigned deadline. The assignment memo will indicate if a particular assignment also must be submitted on paper.

   **Penalties will be imposed for late work** – up to 25% for Short Assignments, and up to 2% for every day late for Projects. An assignment deadline calendar will be provided early in the semester.

3. Rubrics. Detailed rubrics will be posted in connection with each assignment. Review them for a clear understanding of the standards against which assignments will be assessed.

4. Reporting and Writing Expectations. The three Major Projects and most Short Assignments are based on your original reporting, written in a journalistic style and format.

   This class pays equal attention to Reporting – gathering, verifying, and selecting information – and Writing. You cannot write well without strong, accurate, and thorough reporting. You cannot serve your reporting – your story – adequately without strong, accurate, and compelling writing. Student journalists enrolled in this class will be expected to

   - interview people;
   - read and understand reliable document sources for background information;
   - employ your own personal observation.

   Major Projects and Reporting/Writing Exercises are assessed against standards that include:

   - **Accuracy, depth, detail, perspective, and completeness** in reporting;

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• Coherence, conciseness, color and description, narrative flow, and other elements of powerful writing; and
• Command of writing mechanics, including grammar, usage, punctuation and other elements; also, adherence to style rules from either the AP Stylebook or Strunk & White’s The Elements of Style, and adherence to standard journalism conventions described in separate documents found on the course D2L site.

In addition:

• All assignments must adhere to a prescribed set of formatting requirements, described in a separate syllabus supplement you can find on the course D2L site.
• The formatting instructions also describe the Source List that is required to accompany every written assignment that grows out of your reporting. Read and follow the Source List instructions.

5. Original Work, Source Conflicts, and Plagiarism

• Work for this class must be original to this class. Work previously written for another class, any publication, or your employer will not be accepted.

• Avoid source conflicts of interest. People you interview for stories cannot be family members or close friends. Exceptions to this principle are possible, if we discuss your plans in advance and if, in my judgment, you have compelling and sound reasons for including an individual with whom you have this sort of personal relationship.

• Do not plagiarize. Plagiarism – presenting another person’s words and ideas as your own – is equally unacceptable in academia and journalism. Intent is irrelevant. Plagiarism can be grounds for failing an assignment or the course.

Notes on Publication

If I find your assignment publishable or close to publishable, I may submit it for publication on Media Milwaukee. I will notify you first. If I think a final, graded project of yours is not yet publishable but could be improved for publication, I'll encourage you to do that additional work.

Photos

You are free to submit photos with your work, but they are not required. Photos are handy if your work is later submitted to Media Milwaukee. Including them, or failing to include them, will not affect your grade. If you do include them, however, please do not embed photos in your text. Instead, attach them at the end of your story, after the source list, and include caption information.