

JI MC 202
Intermediate Reporting and Writing
Course Syllabus
Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication
Iowa State University
Spring 2008
Debra Gibson, Lecturer

Class Time: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 a.m. to 11:50 a.m.

Class Site: Room 10B, Hamilton Hall

Office/Phone: 120 Hamilton Hall; (515) 294-0488

E-mail address: dsgibson@iastate.edu

Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 1:30 p.m. to 3 p.m.

Course description:

Remember the last time you picked up, say, the Science section of the New York Times and were held spellbound by a feature on how South Korean scientists cloned a dog. Or you happened across Time's recent analysis of how American voters are defying prediction and supporting a gamut of presidential candidates.

The key here is that you remembered. The best-written newspaper and magazine articles stay with you, often managing to inform, educate and entertain you in one package. That happens because good reporters and writers took the time to research the topic, ferret out myriad sources to bring the piece to life, and most of all, worked successfully at answering the readers' age-old question: Why should this matter to me?

That's what this course is all about. By coming to class, listening, engaging in class discussions and committing to a respectable work ethic, you will grow as a reporter and a writer. You've already learned the basics in JI MC 201; now it's time to expand and polish those skills that ultimately will prepare you for a career in newspapers and/or magazine.

Here's what 202 will teach you:

- how to define what's news
- how to work successfully on deadline
- how to report and write in a fair, accurate, thorough and factual manner
- how to deliver clean copy to your instructor and your editor
- how to effectively collect and utilize detail
- how to write proficiently for both hard- and soft-news formats
- how to write a story that both flows well and exhibits cohesion
- how to push yourself to find the more original, less predictable sources
- how to develop these sources and build relationships
- how to conduct more effective and useful interviews
- how to sharpen the focus of your stories
- how to successfully incorporate AP style into your writing
- how to understand and apply news values to your stories
- how to discover and communicate the NEW angle
- how to be present in your own stories without getting in the way
- how to conduct yourself in a professional and ethical manner

Successful students who complete JI MC 202 will experience the following learning outcomes:

- Understand news judgment and begin to develop it
- Identify appropriate sources of information and gather information from those sources
- Translate data from various formats, including interviews, observation and research, into written stories that meet professional standards
- Report and write ethically while pursuing truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for news audiences, both print and online
- Critically evaluate work for accuracy, fairness, clarity, style and grammar

Required reading:

- *AP Stylebook*
- Other readings as distributed throughout the course

Encouraged reading:

Des Moines Register, Ames Tribune, Iowa State Daily, The New York Times, Chicago Tribune, Wall Street Journal, Washington Post, Time, Newsweek, U.S. News and World Report and other national newspapers and news magazines of your choice

Course requirements:

To enroll in this course, you must have completed JI MC 201 with a grade of “C+” or better.

Assignments:

Throughout the course of the semester, you are required to produce the following:

- a 400-word autobiography – **due at 9:30 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 17**
- coverage of an Ames High basketball game. We will attend the **Jan. 29 evening game** as a class, then return to 10B Hamilton Hall to write an online and a print story on deadline.
- coverage of a speech. We will attend the **Feb. 4** “The Lost History of the Civil Rights Movement” **evening lecture** as a class; then return to 10B Hamilton Hall to write an online and a print story on deadline.
- coverage of an Ames City Council meeting. We will attend the **Feb. 12 evening meeting** as a class; then return to 10B Hamilton Hall to write an online and a print story on deadline.
- review of a current release film. We will attend the **Feb. 17 evening film showing** as a class (time and location to be announced); then return to 10B Hamilton Hall to write an online and a print story on deadline.
- coverage of a magazine editors’ panel: online story and print story **due at noon Thursday, Feb. 21.**

(more)

Assignments (cont.)

- a service-oriented feature story with photos – **due at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, March 4**
- a personality profile with video clip– **due at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, March 25**
- a story covering the April 5 SPJ conference – due at 8 a.m. Monday, April 7
- an issues story with audio clip – **due at 9:30 a.m. Thursday, April 10**
- a business trend story with slideshow – **due at 9:30 a.m. Thursday, May 1**

Most days in class, we'll be conducting a brief "Style Watch," an exercise designed to help you further master Associated Press style. I'll throw in a good dose of grammar at the same time, and on a few occasions throughout the semester, you'll be quizzed on these two areas. You'll also participate in current events quizzes throughout the next 15 weeks and occasional in-class exercises to strengthen reporting and writing techniques.

Welcome to 202.

Grading:

Your grade will depend on the quality of the work you turn in and whether you meet the stated deadlines. Stories must be accurate, fair and thorough. A major factual error or misspelling will be heavily penalized.

The writing assignments outlined on page 2, as well as in-class assignments, **will make up 75 percent of your final grade. Articles will not be accepted late.**

The **remaining 25 percent of the grade** will come from the previously mentioned quizzes and the final exam.

Periodic current events quizzes will provide you with extra-credit points (maximum 10 points per quiz). These extra-credit points will be factored into the 75 percent section of your grade. **There are no other extra-credit options for this course. Therefore, please make sure you turn in your best work at all times to earn optimum points.**

Midterm and final exams:

There is no midterm. A final exam will be given covering lecture material and guest presentations.

Attendance

I'm in favor of it.

This course is designed to prepare students for careers in the media. So professional standards will be enforced. You are expected to be in class, and on time. Absences must be explained in advance, either by calling or e-mailing me at my office. Only illness or family emergencies will be excused. Routine medical appointments, job interviews or part-time or fulltime jobs do not constitute valid reasons for missing class. No make-up privileges will be extended for any absence not approved in advance. And if you miss quizzes or other in-class assignments on those days when you haven't talked to me in advance, you'll get zeroes for that work.

Classroom environment:

Professionalism extends to how we communicate with one another in and out of the classroom. The prospects for learning from each other are endless. I want to see cooperation among you, as you absorb knowledge from your fellow classmates and learn how collaboration can produce effective communications.

Nothing stimulates creativity in a newsroom or a magazine conference room like story meetings. We'll experience our own version of that when you pitch your ideas for several of the story assignments listed on page 2. Here's a chance for all of us to help flesh out a story idea or angle, or drum up a source or two that hasn't yet been identified.

Occasionally, we will discuss, as a class, your completed stories. We'll brainstorm regarding what works, what needs some more attention, other angles to pursue, etc. I expect all students to address each other (and their works) with thoughtfulness, respect and professionalism. All comments will be presented in the spirit of fostering improvement and strengthening your work.

Likewise, I want that atmosphere of cooperation to prevail every day of this course. If, at any time, you have an issue with me or with a fellow student in the class, please speak with me as soon as possible so we can work things out. Throughout the semester, I plan to conduct one-on-one meetings to discuss your reporting and writing progress, but please know that I want you to communicate with me whenever you have questions or concerns.

Finally, during the times we're together in class, I don't expect to share your attention with your cell phone messages, your text messages, your pagers, your Dailys, your iPods, Facebook or your buddy the next seat over. Thanks in advance for being considerate.

What else do you need to know?

- The use of anonymous sources is strongly discouraged. Don't use them unless we discuss it beforehand.
- Plagiarism: Students engaging in acts of academic dishonesty will be referred to the Dean of Students and to the All-University Judiciary Committee for prosecution. They also will receive a grade of "F" for this course.
- If you feel you have a disability that requires accommodation, you need to obtain a Student Academic Accommodation Request (SAAR) form from the Disability Resource Office (294-6624), located on the main floor of the Student Services Building, Room 1076.

COURSE OUTLINE

(subject to change)

Tuesday, Jan. 15: Course introduction, interviewing exercise. Assignment: **Complete a 400-word autobiography to turn in at 9:30 a.m. Thursday, Jan. 17.**

Thursday, Jan. 17: *Style Watch:* Letter A and grammar; discuss news judgment. **Autobiography due at 9:30 a.m.**

Tuesday, Jan. 22: *Style Watch:* Letter B and grammar; discuss online reporting and writing.

Thursday, Jan. 24: *Style Watch:* Letter C and grammar; reporting techniques.

Tuesday, Jan. 29: *Style Watch:* Letter D and grammar; lecture on sports writing. **7:45 p.m.: Attend and cover Ames High School boys' basketball game. Return to 10B Hamilton Hall to write stories on deadline.**

Thursday, Jan. 31: *Style Watch:* Letter E and grammar; lecture on speech coverage; write speech advance.

Monday, Feb. 4: 8 p.m.: Attend and cover speech, "The Lost History of the Civil Rights Movement," presented by ISU alumna Modupe Labode, Sun Room, Memorial Union. Return to 10B Hamilton Hall to write stories on deadline.

Tuesday, Feb. 5: NO CLASS (compensation for evening assignments)

Thursday, Feb. 7: *Style Watch* F and grammar; how to cover meetings; discuss Ames City Council issues.

Tuesday, Feb. 12: Quiz: AP style letters A through F and grammar covered to date; write council meeting advance story. 7 p.m., Attend and cover Ames City Council meeting, council chambers, Ames City Hall, 515 Main Street. Return to 10B Hamilton Hall to write stories on deadline.

Thursday, Feb. 14: AP quiz review; lecture on writing reviews.

Sunday, Feb. 17: 7 p.m.: Attend screening of current release film (site to be determined). Return to 10B Hamilton Hall to write reviews on deadline.

Tuesday, Feb. 19: *Style Watch:* Letter G and grammar; lecture on magazine writing and service features.

Thursday, Feb. 21: *Style Watch:* Letter H and grammar; guest panel: Meredith magazine editors; **write panel coverage story on deadline.**

Tuesday, Feb. 26: *Style Watch:* Letter I and grammar; story meeting on service features.

Thursday, Feb. 28: *Style Watch:* Letter J and grammar; producing online video clips.

Tuesday, Mar. 4: Service feature package due 9:30 a.m.; *Style Watch* letter K and grammar; producing online audio clips.

Thursday, Mar. 6: *Style Watch*: Letter L and grammar; discuss writing techniques/how to write personality profiles.

Tuesday, Mar. 11: *Style Watch*: Letter M and grammar; story meeting on personality profiles.

Thursday, Mar. 13: Quiz: AP style letters G through M and grammar covered since last quiz.

Tuesday, Mar. 18: NO CLASS: Spring Break

Thursday, Mar. 20: NO CLASS: Spring Break

Tuesday, Mar. 25: Personality profile package due 9:30 a.m.; review AP quiz; discuss writing issues articles.

Thursday, Mar. 27: *Style Watch*: Letter N-O and grammar; interviewing tips.

Tuesday, April 1: *Style Watch*: Letter P and grammar; story meeting on issues package.

Thursday, April 3: NO CLASS: Work on issues package.

Saturday, April 5: Attend and cover SPJ conference, ISU campus. Times/locations to be announced. Package to be e-mailed to Deb Gibson no later than 8 a.m.
Monday, April 7.

Tuesday, April 8: *Style Watch*: Letters Q-R and grammar; work on issues package.

Thursday, April 10: Issues package due 9:30 a.m.; *Style Watch*: Letter S and grammar; guest speaker Mark Goodman, director, Singer Press Law Center, “Student Press and Media Law”

Tuesday, April 15: Quiz: AP style letters N through S and grammar covered since last quiz; lecture on writing trend stories.

Thursday, April 17: Review AP quiz; reporting techniques.

Tuesday, April 22: *Style Watch*: Letter T and grammar; story meeting on business trend package.

Thursday, April 24: *Style Watch*: Letters U-Z and grammar; work on trends package.

Tuesday, April 29: NO CLASS: Work on trends package.

Thursday, May 1: Business trends package due 9:30 a.m.; **Quiz: AP style letters T through Z and grammar covered since last quiz;** finals review.

Week of May 5-9: Final; time and date to be announced