

MCOM 2243 – Media Writing and Reporting I

Fall 2024 – 3 credits

Hybrid

Tuesday, Thursday – 9:30 a.m. -10:50 a.m.

Prof. Lindsey Medenwaldt

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Office Hours: By Appointment, Zoom or telephone

Prerequisites and Conditions

- There are no formal prerequisites for this course, although it is strongly suggested that you take this course after you have had the freshman composition courses.
- Cannot be enrolled concurrently with MCOM 3313.

Course Objectives/Description

Course Catalogue Description: A workshop course focusing on news reporting and writing techniques used in both traditional print media and internet publishing. Students will be introduced to the basics of accuracy, clarity, word choice, journalistic style, story structure, and deadlines. Coverage of on-campus news events is supplemented by deadline writing exercises in a classroom laboratory.

Learning Objectives

To introduce you to journalistic writing and principles of good journalism. Upon successful completion of this hybrid class you should be able to:

1. Use an online educational environment (D2L) to accent learning in a classroom environment;
2. Apply a news sense to finding stories and sources;
3. Have the ability to write a news/feature story, whether for a public relations entity, a marketing entity, or a news media outlet for both print and online;
4. Apply social media skills to media writing;
5. Evaluate a news/feature story based on criteria established in class, including, but not limited to, news value, readability, grammar, spelling, and punctuation;
6. Know and apply AP style to ensure consistency;
7. Possess the ability to conduct an interview and gather information;
8. Make decisions based on ethical, legal, technical, and journalistic criteria;
9. Understand basics of covering general news, spot news, meetings, and speeches; and
10. Work successfully under deadline pressure.

Course materials

Required:

- The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law (do NOT purchase the digital-only version – you need the actual book)
- Any paperback dictionary
- Any thesaurus

Grading

Final grades will be based on in-class and outside assignments as well as end-of-unit quizzes. There will not be any mid-term or final exams. **Do not submit late work.** Keep track of due dates.

60%: Article/Story Assignments. There will be eight throughout the semester, each worth 7.5% of your grade. Stories will be due at the end of class on the date noted in this syllabus.

40%: Other in-class assignments (including attendance, participation, and other writing/editing activities) to practice what we're learning in class. You will also be given numerous assignments that will count toward this component. Please note that most assignments will be due by the end of class on the date noted in this syllabus (to be submitted online). The number of these assignments is not set in stone. This means that it is impossible at the outset of the semester to determine how much each individual assignment will be worth.

There is no final exam or final project for this class.

Grading scale:

90+	A	Excellent
80-89	B	Good
70-79	C	Satisfactory
60-69	D	Passing
<60	F	Failing

Attendance

Please come to class. We have a limited number of Zoom sessions and a lot of ground to cover. Attendance is part of your grade. If you have to miss a class or a deadline for any reason, please contact me IN ADVANCE to let me know. Contacting me in advance does not automatically excuse an absence, but it is a lot better than calling after the fact. If you fail to contact me before the next class period to explain an absence, it will be very difficult for me to excuse the absence. Not all excuses given by students will be considered excused absences (including work, other classwork, or car troubles [our class meets via Zoom]). See also the Missed Assignments Policy.

If you need to miss class due to a religious holiday, please let me know as far in advance as possible.

If you need to miss class due to university-sponsored events such as field trips and sports, please let me know as far in advance as possible. You will be required to complete the assigned work on or before the due date, and you will be required to submit an official form from the university before your absence.

A related note: You are required to be on time, dressed, with camera on. Tardiness will be noted and could lower your final grade. **Don't be late, and please wear clothing.**

Missed Assignments Policy

Late assignments will not be accepted without a valid reason for the late submission. I reserve the right to determine whether an absence will be excused. In-class assignments may be excused at my discretion; however, all outside assignments must be completed within a reasonable time frame after your absence — no exceptions. In addition, I reserve the right to determine what, exactly, is a “reasonable time frame.” In sum: This is a zero-tolerance policy.

A related note: You will be required to work on assignments outside of class time. If your other commitments will make it impossible for you to do so, please drop this course now.

By accepting this syllabus and remaining enrolled in this course, you are indicating that you understand the Missed Assignments Policy (and the rest of the requirements for this course).

Being “Present”

I understand that a bulk of this course is on Zoom, but besides using the computer for Zoom and relevant coursework, technology is not permitted. This means that I expect to see your face on the screen, engaged with what we are talking about. Do not have your cell phone out. Do not “game” on another screen. Do not private chat your classmates. Being present means that you are an active participant, ready to be called on at any time. This is part of your participation grade. You have paid for this class, and it helps lay the foundation for other classes in the mass communication major. Please don't waste your time or mine.

A related note: Please refrain from eating during our class, even though you're on a computer. It's distracting to watch people eat.

Also Related: Recording any part of the class is prohibited, unless it is part of a reasonable accommodation under ADA or the student obtains proper written consent from the instructor. As noted below, if you do have an accommodation under ADA, I must be informed as soon during the semester as possible. If I do grant permission, please note:

- I will inform the entire class, as a courtesy, that our discussions are being recorded. The person recording will not be identified.
- Any personal information offered by another student, any guests or the professor are not to be used for purposes outside the normal realm of the education process. The person recording is not allowed to share such information with outsiders.

- I reserve the right to revoke permission if the process becomes too disruptive.

Appropriate Conduct

In the classroom, with the instructor and in any other class-related situations – is required at all times. The instructor has the right to remove disruptive, disrespectful students (or students creating any other kinds of problems) from the classroom and take other disciplinary actions as necessary. In addition, students are expressly prohibited from attending class or class-related activities, including visits to the professor's office, while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs. **Yes, even if we are meeting via Zoom.**

Proper Communication with Me

I've given you my cell phone number. **Please don't misuse it.** I prefer text. You may also email me. Make sure you tell me who you are if you text me. I teach four classes this semester in two different states. I want to make sure I know who you are.

My normal response time on text will be quick, BUT not after 6 p.m. and not before 8 a.m. I have a family and other responsibilities. I want to be available to you, but I cannot be 24/7. I may not immediately answer on the weekends, but I will do my best.

Effective Jan. 1, 2024, university policy mandates that faculty and staff conduct all official business using their MSU e-mails. It further requires that we e-mail with students only via their official MSU e-mail. Please be advised that if you contact me using your personal e-mail address, I will respond by asking you to switch to your MSU e-mail. I realize this may require some of you to check an e-mail you normally do not check, but in order to comply with policy, I am requiring you to do so. This e-mail address is provided to you as part of your enrollment at the university.

I reserve the right to drop any student with an F if he/she has excessive absences or missed assignments, engages in disruptive behavior, has a poor attitude, or in any other way is clearly not taking the class seriously.

In order to help students keep track of their progress toward course objectives, as well as to comply with university policy, I will provide a Midterm Progress Report through each student's Navigate account. Any student who is in danger of earning a D or F in this course will receive notification. Students who are not complying with the attendance policy or are missing assignments will also receive notification that they are in danger of failing the course. Midterm grades will not be reported on the student's transcript, nor will they be calculated in the cumulative GPA. They do, however, give students an idea of where they stand at the midpoint of the semester. Students earning below a C at the midway point should contact me as soon as possible to discuss future actions.

Related: If you are unsure of where you stand in this course, you are welcome to – encouraged to – contact me. I am more than willing to go over your grades with you.

Also related: MSU faculty also have the option of filing an Academic Referral and/or a Conduct Referral with appropriate offices, both of which will follow-up with students. I reserve the right to file such referrals when needed. I will always try to contact the student first to request a meeting, but if the student does not respond appropriately, I will file the relevant referral(s).

Statements Related to the Current Health Situation: During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, I developed several paragraphs of information concerning what could happen if the disease were to once again disrupt the world. I have retained a copy and will provide this information to any student who requests it.

Ethics

Don't cheat.

“Not everyone cheats. Not everyone cuts corners. There isn't a diploma in the world that's more valuable than your integrity. And you can't buy your integrity back.”

– Jason Gay, commenting in *The Wall Street Journal* on the recent admissions scandals involving celebrities and the wealthy, March 14, 2019, p. A16.

The MSU Student Honor Creed, written and adopted by the 2002-2003 Student Senate, covers expectations related to cheating and other forms of academic dishonesty. The main statement from this document is:

“As an MSU student, I pledge not to lie, cheat, steal, or help anyone else to do so.”

All students in my courses are expected to abide by this student-produced document, as well as all other related university policies. I will provide copies of the MSU Student Honor Creed to any student who requests one. It is also available online at [MSU Honor Creed](#).

In addition, students are required to be familiar with the MSU Code of Student Conduct as outlined in the MSU Student Handbook.

The university also requires faculty to provide this statement to all students:

By enrolling in this course, the student expressly grants MSU a “limited right” in all intellectual property created by the student for the purpose of this course. The “limited right” shall include but shall not be limited to the right to reproduce the student's work product in order to verify originality and authenticity, and educational purposes.

By accepting this syllabus and remaining enrolled in this course, you are indicating that

you understand the statement provided above and agree to comply with it.

I require complete honesty in producing your work. Working professionals are often encouraged to confer with their colleagues on strategies and wordings, but there is a difference between advice and blatant plagiarism. **Do not use AI.**

I also realize it will be very easy to confer with colleagues on take-home assignments, but you should realize that instructors can usually identify when students have worked together. I also realize the Internet provides a convenient source of information, but students need to be aware that proper citation will be required.

The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as, but not limited to, ChatGPT, Google Bard and Bing, is not permitted in this course; therefore, any use of AI tools for work in this class may be considered a violation of MSU and/or course policy as the work is not your own. You are required to produce your own work, using your own brain. The use of unauthorized AI tools is considered academic dishonesty and will result in referral to the Office of Student Conduct. Exceptions may be made for specific assignments/projects, but in general, students are required to proceed as if AI does not exist. **Do not use AI.**

I reserve the right to drop any student with an F if he/she engages in any form of academic dishonesty. I further reserve the right to recommend other sanctions as may be appropriate. Students are also encouraged to consult the following sources for additional discussion of students' rights and responsibilities regarding cheating, attendance and general conduct:

- The MSU Student Honor Creed, available online at [MSU Honor Creed](#).
- The 2024-2025 MSU Undergraduate Catalog, available online at [MSU Undergraduate Catalog](#).
- The 2024-2025 MSU Student Handbook (the handbook is also available online at [MSU Student Handbook](#)).

By accepting this syllabus and remaining enrolled in this course, you are indicating that you understand the seriousness of academic dishonesty and realize I will impose the harshest sanctions possible if I can prove you have engaged in academic dishonesty. You are also indicating that you understand what constitutes academic dishonesty; I will not tolerate the excuse that the student did not know he/she was engaging in academic dishonesty. You are also indicating that you have read and understand the MSU Student Honor Creed and the MSU Code of Student Conduct, and that you agree to abide by both.

Privacy

Federal privacy law prohibits me from releasing information about students to certain parties outside of the university without the signed consent of the student. Thus, in almost all cases I will not discuss your academic progress or other matters with your parents. Please do not have them call me. Regardless of these important legal considerations, it is my general policy to communicate with the students, not their parents, even when a student has signed a consent form. College students are adults and are expected to behave accordingly.

One possible exception is information for parents or emergency contacts that is determined on a need-to-know basis.

Related: Due to security and confidentiality concerns, I generally do not discuss grades and other sensitive information over e-mail.

Campus Carry

Senate Bill 11 passed by the 84th Texas Legislature allows licensed handgun holders to carry concealed handguns on campus, effective Aug. 1, 2016.

Areas excluded from concealed carry are appropriately marked, in accordance with state law. For more information regarding campus carry, please refer to the University's webpage at <https://mwsu.edu/campus-carry/rules-policies>.

Please be advised that any violations of the law will be reported immediately.

Active Shooter

The safety and security of our campus is the responsibility of everyone in our community. Each of us has an obligation to be prepared to appropriately respond to threats to our campus, such as an active aggressor. Please review the information provided by MSU Police Department regarding the options and strategies we can all use to stay safe during difficult situations. For more information, visit [Safety / Emergency Procedures](#). Students are encouraged to watch the video "Run. Hide. Fight." which may be accessed via the MSU Police Department's webpage at "[Run. Hide. Fight.](#)"

Please be advised that I make it a point to review safety procedures during the first week of class, to include active shooter and weather-related situations.

Alcohol and Drugs

Midwestern State University has developed a drug and alcohol prevention program in accordance with the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989. As stated above, students are expressly prohibited from attending class or class-related activities, including visits to the professor's office, while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs.

Please be advised that any violations of the law, of MSU policy or class policy will be reported immediately.

Further information is available through the following links:

<https://public.powerdms.com/MidwesternState/tree/documents/2223833>

https://msutexas.edu/student-life/_assets/files/handbook.pdf

Computer Lab

Students are expected to follow all rules posted in the computer lab. All food and beverages must be kept away from the equipment, preferably on the shelves near the door. Any abuse or misuse of equipment will result in expulsion from the lab for the semester and/or assessment of replacement/repair costs. In short, if you break it, you buy it.

Special Accommodations/Emergencies/Outside Difficulties

Students with disabilities or who are in need of special arrangements should see me as early as possible in the semester. I cannot help you if you come to me at the last minute. I will do what I can within reason to accommodate your needs, but federal law requires me to remain fair to all students. Please note that in order to qualify for consideration of special accommodations, you must be registered with the MSU Office of Disability Support Services, and I must have a memo on file from that office, along with the Special Accommodations Request form.

If you have specific medical information that needs sharing or you need specific accommodations in case of emergencies or emergency evacuations, please see me as soon as possible.

If you have outside circumstances that may affect your performance in this class – including but not limited to food insecurity, inadequate housing, family issues – please contact me if you are comfortable in doing so. I may be able to refer you to on-campus resources that will help you address the situation.

Please note that all information provided to me remains confidential.

Course Organization and Schedule

We will meet on Zoom every Tuesday this semester unless otherwise noted on this syllabus or arranged during the semester. Thursdays will generally be reserved for individual meetings with me and individual work. You are expected to do work for this class during Thursday class time, even though we will generally not meet via Zoom. You will note that most assignments are due at the end of class period on Thursdays.

With regard to our Zoom meetings, please be dressed appropriately and in a location where you are ready to learn and are not distracted by others. **Your video must be turned on, or you will be counted absent for that day. You must also stay present the entire class period, or you will be counted absent for that day. I expect active participation, so if a question is asked, please be prepared to contribute to the conversation.** A portion of your grade is based on your participation.

This is the **TENTATIVE** course schedule. Due to storms, last-minute changes, extended class discussions and my frequent inability to stick to the agenda I set at the beginning of the course – on top of the uncertainty with the current state of the world – this schedule is likely to change. I reserve the right to change the class schedule if circumstances make it

necessary. If deadlines, reading assignments or quiz dates change, I will tell you well in advance.

Please note also that campus closures due to bad weather and other situations can cause schedule changes. If campus is closed on a class day, I will do my best to e-mail the class early in the day with instructions regarding next steps.

Date(s)	Topic(s)
8/27-29	Introduction; what is journalism?; let's talk about the news We will meet on Zoom both Tuesday and Thursday this week!
9/3-5	Fundamentals of reporting; short articles; organizing articles intro
9/10-12	Story ideas; Story process; Lead writing
9/17-19	Interviewing skills; quote integration; AP Stylebook intro
9/19	Story 1 due
9/24-26	More on the AP Stylebook; social media
10/1-3	Features and reviews; sports; photo captions
10/8-10	Police/Fire; obituaries; weather
10/10	Story 2 due
10/15-17	Editing and Revision
10/17	Story 3 due
10/22-24	Common language problems
10/29-31	Speeches and press conferences; public affairs reporting; press releases
10/31	Story 4 due
11/5-7	Introduction to media law and ethics
11/7	Story 5 due
11/12-14	Alternative story forms; math for journalists; studies
11/14	Story 6 due

11/19-21	Life in Journalism - Looking ahead
11/21	Story 7 due
11/25, 4 p.m.	Last Day to Drop with a W
11/26	AP Stylebook review and practice
11/27-29	Thanksgiving Break – No classes
12/3	Course Wrap-Up; Last Day of Class; Story 8 Due

Good luck with your finals. There is no final exam for this course.

NEWS/FEATURE STORIES

I strongly suggest you work with each other to avoid duplication of topics. Don't turn in a first draft of anything. Until the deadline, almost anyone can edit your story and offer you suggestions at any point, including the course instructor, anyone who has previously taken MCOM 1243 and, especially, anyone else in the class. Help each other out!

Once you have committed to a story idea, write it on the story idea list (accessible on D2L). If someone has already written that story idea down, you may not choose that topic without communicating with that person and the instructor. If you write a story on the same topic as another person in the class, any student that has not written his or her story on the story idea list may receive a grade deduction.

GRADING:

- Your stories will be graded based on news value (timeliness), readability, evidence of reporting, grammar, spelling, punctuation, style as well as ethical and legal criteria.
- **Each of the eight stories is worth about 7.5% of your final grade.**
- Any story submitted with a name misspelled (including my name) in a final draft receives a grade of zero.
- Some stories should revolve around the investigation around some issue, not just a routine event. Such feature stories will be well-developed, use multiple (more than three) authoritative sources (not just random students), show evidence of significant background research, and contain in-depth interviews. They will flow well and be free of editing errors. Challenge yourself!
- Neither plagiarism nor copyright violation will be tolerated whether intentional or not. **Do not use AI. I cannot emphasize this enough.** You must develop your own story idea/angle, do your own background research, conduct your own interviews (at least three), write your own stories and edit your own stories. Any other student in this class or the instructor may provide feedback at any level of the story development, but the story must be the sole work of the person completing it.
- You may not submit a story that has been (or will be) submitted for a grade in any other

class unless you obtain my explicit written permission.

- ANY story you write for this class should be considered publishable material and may be submitted to local news media for publication.

FORM:

- Your stories should be 500-1,000 words in length and should take the form of a third-person news or feature story.
- It should include no fewer than three primary and authoritative sources.
- Your target audience is the students of Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas.
- In addition to the final story, you must write a headline (at the top) and an alternative story form sidebar (at the bottom).

WRITING PROCESS:

1. Story idea
2. Background research
3. Develop story angle
4. Reporting / interviewing
5. Draft — just get words on paper
6. Editing including fact checking, more reporting
7. Rewrite
8. Edit, Edit, Edit, Edit, Edit (check spelling!!)
9. Submit

STORY IDEAS: Look at msutexas.edu. Follow @wichitanonline and @midwesternstate on Twitter. Look on other local news media. Read flyers posted around campus. Talk to your friends and classmates. Read the *Times Record News*. Watch KFDX and KAUZ.

BACKGROUND RESEARCH: Always review stories written on similar topics on thewichitan.com and other local media. Check other local media outlets.

NUMBER OF SOURCES: All stories should include at least three authoritative sources, avoiding random sources.

SPEECH or MEETING STORY: You may cover any speech on campus or involving a campus faculty or staff member. No more than one person can write on the same speech, so communication with your classmates is critical. Take a feature approach to the coverage.

SPORTS STORY: A sports story may NOT be a game recap. It might be a story that focus on one player or one aspect of a sport.

FUN IN WICHITA FALLS STORY: You may consider a story about activities for students around town. Your job is to detail something fun for students to do in Wichita Falls rather than just campus events.

COLUMN/REVIEW/EDITORIAL: AFTER one-on-one consultation with the instructor, some students may be allowed to write one subjective piece during the semester. Only one subjective piece will count as a brief, NOT a major story. If you would like to do this, please schedule a time with me on a Thursday during our regularly scheduled class period to discuss.

DEADLINES: All stories are due at the end of class on date noted, submitted in D2L/Brightspace. Late stories will NOT be accepted unless previously arranged with instructor.

Sept. 19.....story 1 due
Oct. 10.....story 2 due
Oct. 17.....story 3 due
Oct. 31.....story 4 due
Nov.7story 5 due
Nov. 14.....story 6 due
Nov. 21.....story 7 due
Dec. 3.....story 8 due