



**Course Syllabus: Media Writing and Reporting**  
**Lamar D. Fain College of Fine Arts**  
**MCOM 2243 Section 101**  
**Fall 2026**

**Contact Information**

Instructor: Dr. Sarah Fisher

Office: #D203 Fain Fine Arts Center

Office hours: Tues & Thurs 12:30-2:00; Wed 10:00-12:00

Office phone: (940) 397-4375

E-mail: [sarah.fisher@msutexas.edu](mailto:sarah.fisher@msutexas.edu)

Email is the best way to contact me, I typically answer emails in around 48 hours, excluding weekends, unless circumstances prohibit. Please read the syllabus before emailing me with questions, in case your question is already answered in the syllabus.

**Course Description**

MCOM 2243 is designed to further students' skills in writing and reporting for the mass media. Emphasis will be placed on key characteristics of good writing: spelling, grammar, sentence structure, style, punctuation and clarity. Students will gain additional experience in essential writing and reporting skills for print and broadcast media. Students will gain a better understanding of some of the legal and ethical issues they may encounter during their mass communication careers.

**Course Objectives**

In this course, students will learn how to:

1. Properly use the key characteristics of good writing: spelling, grammar, sentence structure, style, punctuation and clarity.
2. Identify newsworthy topics. "What is news?"
3. Understand the importance of objectivity in newswriting to distinguish news from other forms of writing, such as public relations and advertising.
4. Research a topic for a news story.

5. Conduct, record and transcribe an interview. Talk to strangers, learn how to approach people who are potential interview subjects.
6. Evaluate an interview to choose the best content and quotations for the topic.
7. Follow the Journalism Code of Ethics and legal principles for journalism.
8. Understand the history of the journalism field.
9. Use AP Style (and know what to avoid). Write a strong "lede" utilizing the "Five Ws and H" of journalism: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.
10. Write in an inverted pyramid style with a strong "nut graph" according to AP Style.

### **Textbook & Instructional Materials**

1. Required Textbook:  
The Associated Press Stylebook 57th Edition (required)  
Any paperback dictionary (required)  
Any Thesaurus (recommended)
2. Required Equipment:
  - (1) Audio recorder, to record your interviews.
  - (2) SD card (128 GB or larger), to hold your interview recordings.
  - (3) SD card reader with USB-C cable, to transfer your audio data.
  - (4) External hard drive with USB-C cable, to store your audio data.

### **Student Handbook**

Refer to: [Student Handbook](#)

### **Academic Misconduct Policy & Procedures**

Academic Dishonesty will not be tolerated. This includes: Cheating, collusion, and plagiarism (the act of using source material of other persons or AI, either published or unpublished, without following the accepted techniques of crediting, or the submission for credit of work, not the individual to whom credit is given). The term "collusion" means collaboration with another person (or AI) in preparing work offered for credit if that collaboration is not authorized by the faculty member in charge.

Students are expected to uphold academic integrity. Additional guidelines on procedures in these matters may be found in the Office of Student Conduct. [Office of Student Conduct](#)

### **AI Policy**

No use of AI is permitted in any aspect of this course. Any AI use will be considered Academic Dishonesty (see previous section).

## **Moffett Library**

Moffett Library provides resources and services to support student's studies and assignments, including books, peer-reviewed journals, databases, and multimedia materials accessible both on campus and remotely. The library offers media equipment checkout, reservable study rooms, and research assistance from librarians to help students effectively find, evaluate, and use information. Get started on this [Moffett Library webpage](#) to explore these resources and learn how to best utilize the library.

## **Grading**

*Table 1: Points allocated to each assignment*

| Assignments                                 | Points |
|---------------------------------------------|--------|
| 10 Weekly Assignments (20 pts each)         | 200    |
| Final Project                               | 200    |
| Attendance, Participation & Professionalism | 100    |
| Total Points                                | 500    |

*Table 2: Total points for final grade.*

| Grade | Points        |
|-------|---------------|
| A     | 450 to 500    |
| B     | 400 to 449    |
| C     | 350 to 399    |
| D     | 300 to 349    |
| F     | Less than 300 |

## **Weekly Assignments**

There will be 10 weekly assignments given throughout the semester, each worth 20 points. The type of assignment will vary each week, such as conducting and transcribing interviews or writing news stories.

## **Final Project**

The Final Project will be a full news story with at least two interviews, worth 200 points of your grade, due before Thanksgiving break. You can also turn it in earlier if you so choose. You will turn in an original, complete news story in AP Style on a newsworthy topic of your choosing, by approval.

## **Extra Credit**

Extra credit assignments may be offered to the entire class at the discretion of the instructor.

## **Late Work**

Points will be reduced for late assignments. In journalism and mass media, deadlines are crucial. Thus, work is expected to be turned in on time. All assignments have a 2-hour grace period in which you do not need to request an extension; however, weekly assignments and assessments that are more than 2 hours late will have the grade reduced by 5 points per day. The Final Project will be reduced by 20 points per day if it is more than 2 hours late.

## **Make Up Work**

Missed assignments will receive a zero unless it is an approved absence or a legitimate documented emergency (see the Late Work section above). Your professor reserves the right to decide what absences will be approved.

## **Important Dates**

- Last day for term schedule changes: Check date on [Academic Calendar](#).
- Deadline to file for graduation: September 21, 2026. Check date on [Academic Calendar](#).
- Last Day to drop with a grade of "W": November 23, 2026. Check date on [Academic Calendar](#).
- Refer to: [Drops, Withdrawals & Void](#)

## **Desire-to-Learn (D2L)**

Extensive use of the MSU D2L program is a part of this course. Each student is expected to be familiar with this program as it provides a primary source of communication regarding assignments, examination materials, and general course information. You can log into [D2L](#) through the MSU Homepage. If you experience difficulties, please contact the technicians listed for the program at [D2lhelp@msutexas.edu](mailto:D2lhelp@msutexas.edu) or contact your instructor. Note that your instructor cannot troubleshoot D2L or your computer for you.

## **Attendance Policy**

Students are expected to have on-time attendance to all in-person meetings of the classes in which they are enrolled. Since part of your course grade is based on attendance, participation and professionalism, more than two absences will lower the student's grade. Class attendance and class participation are deemed essential by the faculty member.

A student with excessive absences may be dropped from a course by the instructor. Three tardies count as one absence. Attendance is very important to your success in this course. Beyond two absences, each additional absence will decrease your grade by 15 points. If you miss class for any reason, it is your responsibility to acquire notes from a classmate to keep up with the material covered in the course.

If you miss class for an officially recognized reason, it may be excused with approval from your professor. If you know ahead of time that you will need to miss class for an official reason, please let your professor know in advance.

#### Class Participation and Professionalism:

In addition to attendance, your participation grade in this course will include the grades from additional class assessments (quizzes, etc.), logins to the course site, time spent on projects and the website, as well as your professionalism in interactions with the professor and other students.

### Computer Requirements

Taking this class requires you to have access to a computer (with Internet access) to complete and upload your assignments. It is your responsibility to have (or have access to) a working computer in this class. ***\*Assignments and tests are due by the due date, and personal computer technical difficulties will not be considered reason for the instructor to allow students extra time to submit assignments, tests, or discussion postings.*** Computers are available on campus in various areas of the buildings as well as the Academic Success Center. ***\*Your computer being down is not an excuse for missing a deadline!!*** There are many places to access your class! Our classes can be accessed from any computer in the world which is connected to the internet. Contact your instructor immediately upon having computer trouble. If you have technical difficulties in the course, there is also a student helpdesk available to you. The college cannot work directly on student computers due to both liability and resource limitations. However, they are able to help you get connected to our online services. For help, log into [D2L](#).

### Recording Classes

***\*Recording classes is generally prohibited without the professor's explicit permission.*** Such recordings, when permitted, are for personal use only and may not be uploaded to the internet or otherwise shared, transmitted, or published without the professor's prior consent. The professor does not permit recordings of this class. When it is feasible and appropriate, students may record classes to accommodate disabilities under the Americans With Disabilities Act, with prior approval of Disability Support Services and your professor. Such recordings may not be uploaded to the internet or otherwise shared, transmitted, or published.

### Instructor Class Policies

- 1) Please be respectful of your professor and considerate in your interactions in this course, including emails and assignments.
- 2) Be professional: no profanity or inappropriate comments, since these have no place in the university environment. Listen the way you would want someone to listen to you and do to others what you would want others to do to you.

- 3) Thoroughly read the materials and assignments. Be prepared to participate.
- 4) No audio recording, photographing or videotaping allowed of any aspect of the course or course materials without receiving permission first. Unauthorized recording and unauthorized sharing of course materials are strictly prohibited.
- 5) In case of inclement weather, the course will shift to fully online during the harsh weather. If course assessment deadlines coincide with the closure dates, the deadlines will be delayed until after the campus reopens.
- 6) For all assignments: All work in this course must follow the journalism code of ethics. Any work turned in that does not fully adhere to it will result in a zero for the assignment and possibly the course.

All material turned in for this course must be completely your own work (no use of AI or help from others) and created during the assignment period. Turning in previously gathered material, materials used for another course, or someone else's work in part or whole (including AI), will receive a zero for the assignment and possibly the course, along with any university-determined consequences. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and presenting any materials as your own that were produced by another person (or machine) is plagiarism.

### **Change of Schedule**

A student dropping a course (but not withdrawing from the University) within the first 12 class days of a regular semester, or the first four class days of a summer semester, is eligible for a 100% refund of applicable tuition and fees. Dates are published in the Schedule of Classes each semester.

### **Refund and Repayment Policy**

A student who withdraws or is administratively withdrawn from Midwestern State University (MSU) may be eligible to receive a refund for all or a portion of the tuition, fees and room/board charges that were paid to MSU for the semester. HOWEVER, if the student received financial aid (federal/state/institutional grants, loans and/or scholarships), all or a portion of the refund may be returned to the financial aid programs. As described below, two formulas (federal and state) exist in determining the amount of the refund. (Examples of each refund calculation will be made available upon request).

### **Services for Students with Disabilities**

In accordance with Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, Midwestern State University endeavors to make reasonable accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for qualified

persons with disabilities to participate in all educational, social, and recreational programs and activities.

After notification of acceptance, students requiring accommodations should make application for such assistance through Disability Support Services, located in the Student Wellness Center, (940) 397-4140. Current documentation of a disability will be required in order to provide appropriate services, and each request will be individually reviewed. For more details, please go to [Disability Support Services](#).

### **Emergency Aid Resources for Basic Needs**

Unexpected life circumstances can affect anyone. If you are experiencing challenges meeting basic needs—such as housing, utilities, food, transportation, healthcare, technology, textbooks or other life necessities, resources may be available to help. Visit the [Student Emergency Support and Resources webpage](#) to learn more, and explore emergency support opportunities through MSU and how to access them. For additional information, please contact the Office of Student Affairs: Clark Student Center #108, (940) 397-7500, [student.affairs@mstuexas.edu](mailto:student.affairs@mstuexas.edu).

### **College Policies**

#### *Campus Carry Rules/Policies*

Refer to: [Campus Carry Rules and Policies](#)

#### *Smoking/Tobacco Policy*

College policy strictly prohibits the use of tobacco products in any building owned or operated by WATC. Adult students may smoke only in the outside designated-smoking areas at each location.

#### *Alcohol and Drug Policy*

To comply with the Drug Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989 and subsequent amendments, students and employees of Midwestern State are informed that strictly enforced policies are in place which prohibits the unlawful possession, use or distribution of any illicit drugs, including alcohol, on university property or as part of any university-sponsored activity. Students and employees are also subject to all applicable legal sanctions under local, state and federal law for any offenses involving illicit drugs on University property or at University-sponsored activities.

#### *Campus Carry*

Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes has prohibited. The new

Constitutional Carry law does not change this process. Concealed carry still requires a License to Carry permit, and openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit [Campus Carry](#).

### 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 [MSUReady – Active Shooter](#). Students are encouraged to watch the video entitled “Run. Hide. Fight.” which may be electronically accessed via the University police department’s webpage: [“Run. Hide. Fight.”](#)

### **Grade Appeal Process**

Students who wish to appeal a grade should consult the Midwestern State University [MSU Catalog](#)

### **Course Schedule:**

The following is a tentative schedule of the topics we will cover in class weekly. Assignments are due on the scheduled date.

| Week                     | Course Topic                                                                                                                                                   | Due Date                            |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Week 1<br>8/24 to 8/28   | What is news?<br>History of journalism<br>SPJ Code of Ethics                                                                                                   |                                     |
| Week 2<br>8/31 to 9/4    | Types of news: print, broadcast, hard news, soft news, speeches, press conference, sports and more. AP Style. The “inverted pyramid” style and the “nut graph” | 1. Assignment Due Thursday in class |
| Week 3<br>9/7 to 9/11    | Good writing skills: spelling, grammar, sentence structure, style, punctuation and clarity                                                                     | 2. Assignment Due Thursday in class |
| Week 4<br>9/14 to 9/18   | Using AP Style.<br>Writing a strong “lede”                                                                                                                     | 3. Assignment Due Thursday in class |
| Week 5<br>9/21 to 9/25   | Identifying and researching a topic                                                                                                                            | 4. Assignment Due Thursday in class |
| Week 6<br>9/28 to 10/2   | Sources: Talking to strangers, how to set up and conduct an interview                                                                                          | 5. Assignment Due Thursday in class |
| Week 7<br>10/5 to 10/9   | Journalism legal considerations                                                                                                                                |                                     |
| Week 8<br>10/12 to 10/16 | Interviewing: record and transcribe                                                                                                                            | 6. Assignment Due Thursday in class |



| Week                      | Course Topic                                                      | Due Date                              |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Week 9<br>10/19 to 10/23  | Evaluating an interview: choosing the best content and quotations | 7. Assignment Due Thursday in class   |
| Week 10<br>10/26 to 10/30 | Putting it all together in a clear and cohesive storyline         | 8. Assignment Due Thursday in class   |
| Week 11<br>11/2 to 11/6   | Copy editing, fine tune your writing                              | 9. Assignment Due Thursday in class   |
| Week 12<br>11/9 to 11/13  | Business: Pitching & selling your work                            | 10. Assignment Due Thursday in class  |
| Week 13<br>11/16 to 11/20 | Technological innovation and its repercussions                    | Final Project Due Thursday at 4:00 PM |
| Week 14<br>11/23 to 11/27 | NO CLASS Thanksgiving (11/26,27)                                  |                                       |
| Week 15<br>11/30 to 12/4  | Last week of classes                                              |                                       |
| Week 16<br>12/7 to 12/10  | Exam week                                                         |                                       |

**\*Notice:** Changes in the course syllabus, procedure, assignments, and schedule may be made at the discretion of the professor.