

MCOM 1603 – Writing for the Communication Professional

Fall 2025 – 3 credits

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

Prof. Lindsey Medenwaldt, JD

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Office Hours: by appointment via D2L Zoom

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.

Course Objectives/Description

Learning Objectives:

This course is designed to give students the skills needed to write for the print and broadcast media, public relations, advertising and digital media.

- Emphasis will be placed on accuracy, technical ability, fairness, ethics, coherence and speed in writing.
- Students will gain an appreciation for, and a better ability with, the “nuts and bolts” of good writing: spelling, grammar, sentence structure, style, punctuation and clarity.
- Students will learn the basics of proper formatting for various media.
- Students will be prepared to move on to other classes in the major, such as Media Writing and Reporting (MCOM 2243), Public Relations Principles (MCOM 4683) and Foundations of Media Production (MCOM 3313).

Students should note that this is strictly a writing class and will involve substantial writing but no outside news reporting. The goal of the course is for students to understand and perform the basic techniques needed to succeed in a mass communication career, which always starts with solid writing ability. As this is a survey course, emphasis will be placed on gaining a broad, general understanding, and it will be difficult to study specific topics in depth. However, I encourage students to approach me about suggestions for more in-depth readings and/or projects on various topics.

Reading

Required:

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law
Any paperback dictionary

Recommended (strongly):

Strunk and White – The Elements Of Style

Brooks, Pinson and Wilson – Working with Words: A Handbook for Media Writers and Editors

Any thesaurus

An excellent resource on the Internet:

The Grammar Lady Online – www.grammarlady.com

These materials will be supplemented by **numerous** handouts distributed through D2L over the course of the semester.

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.

Because mass communication is a discipline that lives and dies by the clock, missed deadlines will be severely penalized. Details on all assignments will be given as the semester progresses.

In-Class and Outside Assignments – 65%: Assignments will be completed in class almost every day. You will also be given numerous assignments to take home, and these assignments will count toward this component. Worksheets and lab exercises will also be part of this component. Please note that most assignments will be due at the beginning of the next class period. All outside work must be typed.

Please note that the number of 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.

Editing/Style Quizzes – 35%: There will be three announced quizzes at the end of each unit. In addition, if I sense that you are not keeping up with the assignments or attendance is poor, unannounced quizzes will be given and they will count toward your final grade. All unannounced quizzes will be given at the beginning of class, and late students will receive scores of zero unless the late arrival is excused.

Attendance: Attendance does not constitute a specific part of your grade, but perfect attendance is required. In the absence of a required textbook, attendance is critical, and I will go to great lengths to attain full attendance.

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

If you need to miss class due to university-sponsored events such as field trips and sports, please see me 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.

Please note that there is no provision for late work. If you have a legitimate excuse for missing deadline, please contact me. I reserve the right to determine whether a late assignment or project will be accepted and if so, whether it will be given full or partial credit.

Grade Calculations: Almost all assignments will be graded on a 0-100 scale unless otherwise announced. Final grades will be determined on the traditional 90/80/70/60 (A/B/C/D/F) scale.

Attitude: I realize this course requires a lot for the three credits you earn, but every assignment is designed so you will move that much further with your writing skills. This is not the type of course in which you can read a chapter, attend few class sessions, take a test . . . and end up with an A for the semester despite very little effort. Skills courses require your time, attention and effort. Students who come in with a bad attitude tend to do poorly. Although there is no set percentage for this component, it will play a big role if you are on the "borderline" at the end of the semester.

In addition, you need to understand that this course serves as a building-block to many other courses in the mass communication major. It has weeded out many of your predecessors who could not handle the demands placed upon them. This course allows mass communication majors to look at their writing skills in order to make an informed decision about continuing in this major.

A related note: Please refrain from surfing the web while we're in class. I know you're on the computer, and well, it's tempting, but please don't do it. We can tell when you're not paying attention. Although this class is taught online, I encourage you to take notes in a notebook. Your brain learns better that way.

Another related note: This class is taught through D2L Zoom. Please have your camera on and your microphone muted for each class. If I can't see you, you will be counted as absent.

Sending and receiving text messages during class will not be tolerated.

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 online classroom and take other disciplinary actions as necessary. In addition, students are expressly prohibited from attending class or class-related activities, while under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs. Please see information under Alcohol and Drugs below.

Proper Communication with Me: Please reach out to me primarily through email (lindsey.medenwaldt@msutexas.edu). You may text me at 303-253-5227, but you'll need to tell me your name and what class you're in. I will not respond to emails or text messages before 7 a.m. or after 6 p.m. I may look at email during the weekends, but I may not respond immediately.

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.

By accepting this syllabus and remaining enrolled in this course, you

are indicating that you understand my expectations for students concerning attendance, attitude and work ethic.

Class Participation: You are expected to speak in class at least once per week with something meaningful (e.g., comment about the topic or question about the assignment). If you have a question, it's likely someone else does, too, so ask!

In order to help students keep track of their progress toward course objectives, as well as to comply with university policy, the instructor will provide a Midterm Progress Report through each student's WebWorld 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).

Please remember that attending every class and completing every assignment do not constitute outstanding quality or guarantee an A for the course. Attending every class and completing every assignment are only prerequisites for achieving a desired grade in the class. Too many students have argued that these are the reasons they deserved an A in the class, and I do not buy into this way of thinking.

By accepting this syllabus and remaining enrolled in this course, you are indicating that you understand the grading policies for the course. If you have questions, you should see me as soon as possible.

Ethics

The MSU Student Honor Creed, written and adopted by the 2002-2003 MSU 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 on page on page 10 of the 2024-2025 MSU Student Handbook (the handbook is also available online at [MSU Student Handbook](#)), as well as on the homepage of the MSU Office of Student Rights and Responsibilities ([Student Rights and Responsibilities Homepage](#)).

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.

I also realize it will be very easy to confer with colleagues, 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.

Please note that submitting the same work for two courses is considered academic dishonesty. Even if another professor agrees to accept the work, I will treat it as academic dishonesty and take subsequent action.

Generative AI use is not allowed in this class.

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.

The learning outcomes for this course, listed above, make it clear that the goals revolve around you, the student, in partnership with me, the professor, taking the initiative to learn. Technology can't do that for you.

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.

Safety

You are urged to download the MSU Safety App and to join the MSU Emergency Alert system. Information about these services can be found at [Safety / Emergency Procedures](#).

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."](#)

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>

Materials

Each day you should bring the following to class: the AP Stylebook, your pocket dictionary, your thesaurus, pens and an extra supply of sanity for the days you leave feeling as if you have none left.

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.

Further information is available through the following links:

[Student Emergency Support and Resources](#)

[Canan Food Security Program](#)

[Counseling Services](#)

Please note that all information provided to me remains confidential.

A Reminder Regarding The Portfolio Requirement

Please note that all mass communication majors are required to submit a portfolio during their Internship course (please note that Internship is a prerequisite to Senior Production). This requirement is a part of MSU's reaccreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and is

non-negotiable. Students are required to demonstrate communication competence through the written word and visual communication; two examples of each competency are required for the portfolio.

As you go through this and other classes, you are responsible for saving course work that could be included in your portfolio.

Please see your adviser or any mass communication faculty member for handouts with more information (“Mass Communication Portfolio Competencies” and “Mass Communication Portfolio FAQ”).

Course Organization and Schedule

We will meet via D2L Zoom, and you should expect to write something nearly every day. I will introduce each new topic with straight lecture, then you will have one or several assignments relating to that topic. Please note that there will be numerous take-home assignments, most of which will be due the next class period.

This course will be run as a seminar, with the expectations that students will arrive for class prepared and that the course will proceed with far more discussion than lecture. The success of this format depends on your willingness to actively participate in class discussions and other activities.

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. Chances are good that you will receive at least one revised schedule before the semester is over. If deadlines, reading assignments or quiz dates change, I will tell you well in advance. Please note that the reading and general workloads vary considerably from week to week.

Date (s)

Topic (s)

1/21

Introduction

1/23- 2/27

Unit 1: Basics of good writing; AP Style

2/27

Quiz #1

3/4-4/3

Unit 2: Writing for Print/Web

3/10-3/14

Spring Break – No Classes

3/24

Last Day to drop for “W”

4/3

Quiz #2

4/8-5/8

Unit 3: Writing for broadcast; broadcast style

4/17

Holiday Break – No Classes

5/8

Quiz #3/Last Day of Class