



## MCOM 1603-201 Writing for the Communication Professions

Spring 2024 | TR 5:00PM-6:20PM | D202

### Instructor Contact Information

Instructor: Christy Johnson

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### Course Description & Objectives

- This course is designed to give students the skills needed to write for 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 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.

### Recommended Textbook & Materials

We will utilize D2L for assignments, handouts, etc.

You will need the following books for this class:

- *The Basics of Media Writing: A Strategic Approach* (ISBN-13 978-1506308104)
- *The Associated Press Stylebook: 2022-2024* (ISBN 978-1541601659)
- Any paperback dictionary

## **Recommended, but not required:**

- *The Elements Of Style* (Strunk and White)
- *Working with Words: A Handbook for Media Writers and Editors* (Brooks, Pinson and Wilson)
- Any thesaurus

## **Course Requirements**

### **Grading:**

Final grades will be based on in-class and outside assignments as well as end-of-unit quizzes. There will not be a midterm or a final exam.

**IMPORTANT:** It is YOUR job to turn in assignments; it is NOT my job to make sure you do them.

**In-Class and Outside Assignments** – 60%: 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. Details on all assignments will be given as the semester progresses.

**Section Quizzes** – 30%: There will be four scheduled quizzes at the end of each section. Unannounced quizzes are always a possibility, and they will count toward your final grade.

### **QQC:**

You will be responsible for Questions, Quotations, and Comments for each chapter. This will be a running document that you will turn in at the end of the semester. More importantly, it is how we will begin class each time a chapter is assigned. More information will be provided during the first week of class.

### **Participation** – 10%

- This class includes various class activities. The activities are designed to be interesting and to help you learn. Thus, your active participation will affect how much you learn and how well you do in the course.
- If emergencies arise or your circumstances change, please communicate with me. This will help us work together to try to find a solution for your situation.
- In class, please:
  - behave professionally
  - arrive on time
  - be prepared
  - pay attention

- actively participate
- treat others with courtesy and respect
- use language thoughtfully
- If you miss class, you miss the chance to participate in your education and the education of others in class. Your peers are counting on you to be in class and to participate.

### Attendance

- Attendance will be taken at each class, and you will be allowed a total of **three** absences without penalty or question (i.e., unexcused absences). This does not apply to section quiz days (see Tentative Class Schedule). After your third unexcused absence, however, you will lose points from your participation grade and credit for class activities for each additional class missed.
- In case of excused absences, appropriate documentation (e.g., doctor's notes, obituaries) must be handed in to me within a week.
- Finally, if you miss class, it is **your responsibility** to find out what you missed and arrange with the instructor to make it up. As for missed assignments, if you have a legitimate explanation, alternate arrangements can be made at my discretion.

### Grading

- Section Quizzes = 30%
- Assignments (in and out of class) = 60%
- Participation = 10%
- Total = 100 %

### Grading Criteria

The following scale will be used to determine the final grade:

- A = 90-100%
- B = 80-89%
- C = 70-79%
- D = 60-69%
- F: Less than 60%

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

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.

## Course Policies

1. **Academic Dishonesty:** Plagiarism is: (1) using someone else's source material (published or unpublished, including content from the Internet) without following accepted citation guidelines; or (2) submitting work that is not your own. The instructor will take appropriate disciplinary action for students if a student is caught cheating, plagiarizing or fabricating information. The MSU Student Honor Creed in your student handbook and the university catalog reinforces this policy: "As an MSU student, I pledge not to lie, cheat, steal, or help anyone else to do so." By remaining enrolled in this class, you acknowledge that you have learned the meaning of the term *academic dishonesty*. Students cannot use the excuse that they do not understand the concept of academic dishonesty.
2. **Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI):** You are permitted to use ChatGPT and other artificial intelligence (AI) tools to assist you in gathering information and brainstorming ideas but you may not copy and paste information directly from the AI tool and present it as your own without citation. You are responsible for the information you submit based on an AI query and for assuring that it does not contain misinformation or unethical content and that it does not violate intellectual property laws. You are expected to include a disclosure statement at the end of your assignment describing which AI tool you used and how you used it. For example, "ChatGPT was used to draft approximately 50 percent of this assignment and to provide revision assistance. AI-produced content was edited for accuracy and style." Your use of AI tools must be properly documented and cited for academic integrity. For this course, we will use APA (<https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>).
3. **Disruptive Behavior:** Any student's classroom behavior that interferes with either the instructor's ability to conduct the class or other students' ability to benefit from the instruction – or violates any other Standard of Conduct applicable to the classroom environment – will result in his/her removal from the class. (See MSU Student Handbook, "Standards of Student Conduct.").
4. **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.
5. **Special Accommodations:** Any student with a disability who is registered with the MSU Office of Disability Support Services (940-397-4140, CSC Room 168) and needs specific accommodations, or requires other considerations because of a disability, should notify the instructor at the beginning of the semester to ensure that these accommodations are provided. Please note that all information provided to me remains confidential.
6. **Cell Phones and Other Recording Devices:** The use of cell phones and other recording or electronic devices is strictly prohibited during class. The instructor may permit, from

time to time, the use of cell phones for legitimate class reasons. Recording the class is prohibited, unless it is part of a reasonable accommodation under ADA, or unless students have special permission from the instructor. Computers/devices may be used for the purpose of taking notes during class; however, their use must be limited to course-related activities.

7. **Limited Right:** The university 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.
8. **FERPA:** As a result of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, federal law bars the instructor from releasing information about students to parties outside the university – including parents/guardian - without the student’s signed consent. Thus, in almost all cases the instructor will not discuss your academic progress or other matters with your parents. The instructor will only discuss grades with students. If there are any grade issues, the instructor will discuss grades during office hours.
9. **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.
10. **Social justice:** Social justice is one of Midwestern State University’s core values, and I consider the classroom to be a place where students will be treated with respect as human beings, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, political beliefs, age, or ability. Moreover, diversity of thought is appreciated and encouraged. It is my expectation that ALL students be able to consider the classroom a safe environment.
11. **Sickness:** Safety and health of all are our top considerations. If you feel sick, do not come to class. If you need to miss class, contact me as outlined under class procedures, and I will work with you.

**By accepting this syllabus and remaining enrolled in this course, you are indicating that you understand the Missed Assignments Policy.**

## Tentative Class Schedule

NOTE: The instructor reserves the right to change and or move around scheduled lectures in order to facilitate potential unplanned events (cancellations or guest speakers). You will be notified ahead of time of any changes to the schedule.

Week Of	Topic
Jan. 15: Week 1	Intro. to Writing for the Communication Professions/Ch. 1 (no reading required)
Jan. 22: Week 2	Ch. 2: Media Writing Professions and Strategies
Jan. 29: Week 3	Ch. 3: Media Writing Style and Language Conventions
Feb. 5: Week 4	Continue AP Style <b>Feb. 8: Section 1 Quiz</b>
Feb. 12: Week 5	Ch. 4: Reporting and Interviewing
Feb. 19: Week 6	Ch. 5: Hard News and Features
Feb. 26: Week 7	Ch. 6: Electronic News: Radio and TV
March 4: Week 8	Continue Broadcast News Writing
March 11: Week 9	SPRING BREAK
March 18: Week 10	Ch. 8: Media Law and Ethics <b>March 21: Section II Quiz</b>
March 25: Week 11	Ch. 9: Writing for Social Media March 28: MSU HOLIDAY/NO CLASS
April 1: Week 12	Ch. 10: Web Copy <b>April 4: Section III Quiz</b>
April 8: Week 13	Ch. 11: Basic Persuasive Writing
April 15: Week 14	Ch. 12: Public Relations
April 22: Week 15	Ch. 13: Advertising
April 29: Week 16	Ch. 14: Business Communications <b>May 2: Section IV Quiz</b>

\*\*\*Each week a chapter is listed, you will need to have your QQC done prior to coming to class Tuesday. More details will be provided in class during Week 1.