

## **Feature and Opinion Writing (COMM 262)**

**Fall 2018**

**Wednesdays 7-9:30 p.m.**

**School of Communication - Room 013**

*(Note: Proper attribution is of the utmost importance in journalism. In keeping with that, I'd like to note that this syllabus was created with great help from past syllabi by Prof. Dodie Hofstetter and Acting Dean John Slania.)*

### **Class Description:**

Students will learn about writing feature stories, from idea generation to detail-oriented reporting to crafting engaging stories for both print and online readers. They will then focus on opinion writing in formats ranging from tweets to full-length columns and learn the reporting skills needed to communicate impactful opinions.

### **Instructor contact information:**

Rex Huppke

Email: [rhuppke@luc.edu](mailto:rhuppke@luc.edu) (preferred) or [rhuppke@gmail.com](mailto:rhuppke@gmail.com).

Cell: 312-203-8064

Office hours: By appointment.

### **Required texts and materials:**

“The Art and Craft of Feature Writing: Based on the Wall Street Journal Guide” by William E. Blundell

“Writing Opinion For Impact” by Conrad C. Fink,

AP Stylebook

Local daily and Sunday newspapers (print or online)

### **Class objectives:**

Simply put, I want students to become better writers. I want each individual to begin the process of finding an authentic writing voice. That's not easy, but this will be a start. We'll hone in on the reporting skills necessary for powerful feature and opinion writing and examine the craft that is behind any good feature story or opinion piece.

### **What students should expect each week:**

- A news quiz. Along with basic questions about notable local and national news, students will sometimes be asked to give a short opinion or analysis of one major news story or suggest a feature story idea off the news.
- A reading assignment from one of the two textbooks.
- A class discussion of the week's reading assignment.
- An in-class writing drill. This could range anywhere from crafting a lede to writing a short feature or opinion piece (on deadline) to simply writing a cogent tweet in response to a news event.
- Discussion and review of work produced during in-class writing drill.

### **What I expect from students each week:**

- Honesty and accuracy. Those are the two most important qualities any journalist can possess. If you make a mistake, say so. Own it and make it right. But try REALLY HARD to not make any mistakes.
- Engagement. This class will work best if we are talking and exchanging points of view. I expect you to ask questions and share opinions and not be afraid of any idea that might bubble up in your head. Everyone's voice is valuable, and I expect to hear all your voices each week.
- Professional, ethical behavior and respectful dialogue.
- Hard work. The point of this class is to learn and get better. That takes work, and I can assure you that effort will be weighed heavily in grading. The best students will not necessarily be the ones who are the most naturally gifted writers.

### **Breaking up our long class sessions:**

Each class is two-and-a-half hours long. That seems a bit daunting (I certainly wouldn't want to hang out with me for that long), so we'll try

breaking the class into segments that will keep things moving. Here's a plan to start with, one that can be modified as we figure out what works best.

**7 to 7:15** — Ask me anything. This will be a quick settling-in period that allows students to ask me anything they want, from thoughts on the news to why I wrote such a terrible column on Tuesday to questions about stories you've read. You could even bring in a few great sentences from a story you liked and share them, or just take some time to detail the many ways I'm failing you as instructor. Skies the limit.

**7:15 to 8** — Discuss the week's reading. Here we'll go over the subjects you read about for homework, and I'll mix in some other thoughts and pointers on reporting or writing. We'll also look at some examples of good feature or opinion pieces and consider the reporting that went into them and the decisions each writer made regarding style and word choice. This won't be a lecture. I'd like it to be a conversation.

**8 - 8:10** — Explanation of in-class writing drill.

**8:10 - 8:20** — Quick break to catch our collective breath.

**8:20 - 8:50** — Writing drill.

**8:50 - 9:10** — Review and discussion of in-class writing drill.

**9:10 - 9:30** — Wrap up. Here we'll tie up loose ends from class and I'll make sure everyone is clear on what comes next.

### **Grading:**

A. Each week, instructor will return graded quizzes and writing assignments.

B. A midterm evaluation will be presented to student by instructor one-on-one.

C. Written assignments with a grade of C+ or lower may be redone and re-evaluated once if they are handed in the next week after receiving grade. If the second draft of the written assignment shows sufficient improvement, the

student's grade for that assignment will be raised a maximum of half a letter grade. (C+ would go up to a B-, a C- would go up to a C etc...)

D. Students will be graded on class participation, written assignments, quizzes, attitude and attendance.

E. Late work/missed assignments will be accepted and will be graded down by one full grade. All assignments must be completed, but no credit will be given later than one week after original due date. If assignments are not completed, student will not pass the course.

F. In the case of an absence, it is a student's responsibility to contact instructor to report absence and to receive homework assignments AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Do NOT wait until the next week or you will be behind. All assignments build on the last one. Assignments that were due on day of absence will be accepted one week late with a possible grade penalty.

G. Spelling, grammar and style mistakes will be subtracted from an assignment's grade.

H. Students will NOT be graded based on instructor's agreement or disagreement with the point of view/position taken by student in an opinion piece.

Total possible points for the semester: 1,000

Breakdown of points:

- News quizzes: 100
- Columnist/editorial page summaries: 100
- Class participation: 100
- Feature story 1: 100
- Feature story 2: 200
- Editorial 1: 100
- Column 1: 100
- Column 2: 200

Full-semester grade scale:

A: 1,000 - 940  
A-: 930 - 900  
B+: 890 - 880  
B: 870 - 830  
B-: 820 - 800  
C+: 790 - 780  
C: 770 - 730  
C-: 720 - 700  
D+: 690 - 680  
D: 670 - 630  
D-: 620 - 600  
F: 590 - 0

### **Academic Dishonesty Policy:**

Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, such acts as:

- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled examination without the consent of the teacher.
- Providing information to another student during an examination.
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an examination.
- Using any material or equipment during an examination without consent of the instructor, or in a manner which is not authorized by the instructor.
- Attempting to change answers after the examination has been submitted.
- Unauthorized collaboration, or the use in whole or part of another student's work, on homework, lab reports, programming assignments, and any other course work which is completed outside of the classroom.
- Falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines.
- Any other action that, by omission or commission, compromises the integrity of the academic evaluation process.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, language, work, or intellectual property of another, either by intent or by negligence, without sufficient

public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express all thoughts. Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of specific words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources, and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Submitting as one's own material copied from a published source, such as Internet, print, CD-ROM, audio, video, etc...
- Submitting as one's own another person's unpublished work or examination material.
- Allowing another or paying another to write or research a paper for one's own benefit.
- Purchasing, acquiring, and using for course credit a pre-written paper.

The above list is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is both an act of personal, professional courtesy and of intellectual honesty. Any failure to do so, whether by intent or by neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism. A more detailed description of this issue can be found at <http://luc.edu/english/writing.shtml#source>.

In addition, a student may not submit the same paper or other work for credit in two or more classes. This applies even if the student is enrolled in the classes during different semesters. If a student plans to submit work with similar or overlapping content for credit in two or more classes, the student should consult with all instructors prior to submission of the work to make certain that such submission will not violate this standard.

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor's assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. The instructor may impose a more severe sanction, including a grade of "F" in the course. All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the appropriate area head and to the office of the Dean of the School of Communication.

A complete description of the School of Communication Academic Integrity Policy can be found at: <https://www.luc.edu/soc/resources/>

### **Students with Disabilities:**

Students who need special accommodations for exams or class meetings because of a learning disability will provide instructor with a letter documenting the type of accommodations needed. If they claim to have a physical or psychological condition that hinders their ability to perform in class, medical documentation must be provided to the Office for Students with Disabilities and that office will assess whether or not your collaboration is required. These matters are confidential.

### **Class meeting schedule:**

*Disclaimer: This syllabus may change as the semester progresses. You will be notified ahead of time of any substantive changes. The homework assignments listed here are also subject to change. Students will be given clear homework instructions at the end of each class.*

### **CLASS 1 (Aug. 29):**

- Introductions and explanation of class goals
- What is a feature story?
- Feature story idea brainstorming session

Assignment for the following week: Read Chapters 1 and 2 of “The Art and Craft of Feature Writing”; pick a columnist or editorial page you will follow throughout the semester; come up with an idea for a feature story and be prepared to discuss it in class.

### **CLASS 2 (Sept. 5):**

- News quiz
- Discuss reading and feature story ideas
- Writing drill — Crafting a lede

Assignment for the following week: Read Chapters 3 and 4 of the “The Art and Craft of Feature Writing”; decide on subject for Feature Story 1 and begin reporting; prepare a “doping” (a one-paragraph summary) for your story; write first evaluation of your chosen columnist or editorial page.

**CLASS 3 (Sept. 12):**

- News quiz
- Discuss reading and progress on Feature Story 1
- Guest speaker TBA

Assignment for the following week: Read Chapters 5 and 6 of “The Art and Craft of Feature Writing”; write first draft of Feature Story 1; submit doping for Feature Story 2.

**CLASS 4 (Sept 19):**

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- In-class drill - polishing interviewing and observational skills

Assignment for the following week: Read Chapters 7, 8 and 9 of “The Art and Craft of Feature Writing”; continue work on Feature Story 2.

**CLASS 5 (Sept. 26):**

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- Receive feedback on first draft of Feature Story 1
- Guest speaker TBA

Assignment for the following week: Final draft of Feature Story 1; continue work on Feature Story 2 and prepare one-page update on story progress; read selected feature stories assigned in class; write second evaluation of your chosen columnist or editorial page.

**CLASS 6 (Oct. 3):**



- News quiz
- Discuss feature stories
- Writing drill — spot-news feature story

Assignment for the following week: Prepare first draft of Feature Story 2; read selected feature stories assigned in class.

### **CLASS 7 (Oct. 10):**

- News quiz.
- Discuss feature stories.
- Guest speaker TBA

Assignment for the following week: Read selected feature stories assigned in class; write third evaluation of your chosen columnist or editorial page.

### **CLASS 8 (Oct. 17):**

- News quiz
- Discuss feature stories
- Receive feedback on Feature Story 2 draft
- Pivoting to opinion writing

Assignment for the following week: Prepare final draft of Feature Story 2; Read Chapter 1 of “Writing Opinion for Impact.”

### **CLASS 9 (Oct. 24):**

- No news quiz!
- Discuss reading
- Having an opinion: Who cares what you think?

Assignment for the following week: Reader Chapters 2 and 3 of “Writing Opinion for Impact”; write fourth evaluation of your chosen columnist or editorial page.

### **CLASS 10 (Oct. 31):**

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- Guest speaker TBA

Assignment for the following week: Read Chapter 4 of “Writing Opinion for Impact”; write Column 1.

**CLASS 11 (Nov. 7):**

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- In-class writing drill — opinion on deadline

Assignment for the following week: Read Chapters 6 and 7 of “Writing Opinion for Impact”; prepare “doping” for Column 2; write fifth evaluation of your chosen columnist or editorial page.

**CLASS 12 (Nov. 14):**

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- Guest speaker TBA

Assignment for the following week: Read chapters 10, 11 and 13 of “Writing Opinion for Impact”; write Editorial 1; continue work on Column 2.

**NO CLASS - THANKSGIVING BREAK (Nov. 21)**

**CLASS 13 (Nov. 28):**

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- In-class writing drill — tweeting an opinion; seeing both sides of an issue

Assignment for the following week: Prepare draft of Column 2; read selected opinion pieces assigned in class.

**CLASS 14 (Dec. 5):**

- Optional news quiz (Grade can sub-out your lowest previous grade)
- Discuss reading
- Receive feedback on draft of Column 2
- Go on to long and prosperous careers!

***For the final exam, you will submit a final draft of Column 2.***