



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

MPJO-700-40: FEATURE WRITING

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY: MPS-JOURNALISM

Wednesdays, 6 p.m. to 9:20 p.m. | Summer 2015

Instructor: Ryan Lizza

Downtown campus, room C126

- Office hours: by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

In this course you will learn the basics of feature writing, a genre of journalism that goes by many names and includes numerous sub-genres, but which we will define simply as nonfiction storytelling.

While straight news reporting emphasizes new factual information and is often presented in the inverted-pyramid style, feature writing aspires to explain people, ideas and institutions through deep reporting and the use of writing techniques borrowed from fiction and cinema, including the use of scene, dialogue and character development. This course will place a particular emphasis on profile writing.

Class assignments include one short feature, one long feature and regular journal entries. Top editors and reporters will visit class to share their insights on the craft of writing.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the semester, students will:

- Understand the difference between news reporting and feature writing
- Learn how to conceive, report, outline, write, and revise a major feature article
- Learn how to apply the traditional elements of storytelling to nonfiction writing
- Understand the role of feature writing in today's media landscape

REQUIRED READING

There are two texts for this course, but I will assign other readings each week that you should be prepared to discuss.

1. Title: Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer

Author: Roy Peter Clark

ISBN: 0316014990

Publisher: Little, Brown & Company

Year: 2008

Price: \$13 (Amazon)

2. Title: Writing for Story: Craft Secrets of Dramatic Nonfiction

Author: Jonathan Franklin



ISBN: 0452272955

Publisher: Plume

Year: 1994

Price: \$12.83 (Amazon)

SUGGESTED READING:

These books are not required, but they are highly recommended:

Title: Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University

Authors: Mark Kramer and Wendy Call

ISBN: 0452287553

Publisher: Plume

Year: 2007

Price: \$14.15 (Amazon)

Title: On Writing Well, 30th Anniversary Edition

Author: William Zinsser

ISBN: 0060891548

Publisher: Harper Perennial

Year: 2006

Price: \$9.03 (Amazon)

ATTENDANCE, PARTICIPATION AND CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Class attendance is critical. If you miss two classes, your final grade will be reduced by one level (e.g., an A to an A-). Further absences will result in further grade reductions. If you are absent for more than four classes, you will fail this course.

If you have an emergency and need to miss class, please let me know as soon as possible.

I strongly encourage you to talk, debate, argue and engage with the material, the guest speakers, and me every week. Please be respectful and considerate of others' views and opinions. Please turn off your cell phone while in class.

ASSIGNMENTS

Specific guidelines will be provided for each assignment, but the assignments in brief are as follows:

- Journal: Weekly assignments analyzing feature writing (Deadline for final entry: July 29)
- Short feature: 1,000-word story on assigned topic (Deadline: June 24)
- Short feature revision (Deadline: July 1)
- Profile outline (Deadline: July 8)

- First draft of profile: 2,500- to 3,000-word profile (Deadline: July 15)
- Profile revisions (Group 1 deadline: July 29; Group 2 deadline: Aug. 5)

Additionally, students will edit a classmate's profile. This assignment is ungraded, but students' performance on it will be factored into their journal grade.

Please submit all assignments to me via email by 5 p.m. on the due date. Late assignments will be reduced by one grade level (e.g., an A to an A-) per day.

GRADING

Your course grade will be based on the following:

Journal entries:	15%
Short feature:	10%
Short feature revision:	15%
Profile outline:	10%
First draft of profile:	15%
Profile revision:	20%
Attendance and class participation:	15%
Total:	100%

Graduate course grades include A, A-, B+, B, B-, C and F. **There are no grades of C+, C- or D.**

A	100-93	B-	82.99-80
A-	92.99-90	C	79.99-70
B+	89.99-88	F	69.99-0
B	87.99-83		

UNIVERSITY RESOURCES

Georgetown offers a variety of support systems for students that can be accessed on main campus or at the downtown location:

- MPS Writing Resource Program
202-687-4246
<http://writingcenter.georgetown.edu/>
- Academic Resource Center
202-687-8354 | arc@georgetown.edu
<http://ldss.georgetown.edu/>
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services
202-687-6985



<http://caps.georgetown.edu/>

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES POLICY

Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (arc@georgetown.edu; <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm>) before the start of classes to allow time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

GEORGETOWN HONOR SYSTEM

All students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic and personal integrity in pursuit of their education at Georgetown. Academic dishonesty in any form is a serious offense, and students found in violation are subject to academic penalties that include, but are not limited to, failure of the course, termination from the program, and revocation of degrees already conferred. All students are held to the Honor Code. The Honor Code pledge follows:

In the pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life, I commit myself to respect and uphold the Georgetown University Honor System: To be honest in any academic endeavor, and To conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community, as we live and work together.

PLAGIARISM

Stealing someone else's work is a terminal offense in journalism, and it will wreck your career in academia, too. Students are expected to work with integrity and honesty in all their assignments. The Georgetown University Honor System defines plagiarism as "the act of passing off as one's own the ideas or writings of another." More guidance is available through the Gervase Programs at <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/53377.html>. If you have any doubts about plagiarism, paraphrasing and the need to credit, check out <http://www.plagiarism.org>.

SYLLABUS MODIFICATION

The syllabus may change to accommodate discussion of emerging topics. Also, the schedules of guest speakers may require some shifting of our agenda. The instructor will make every effort to provide as much advance notice as possible for any alterations. **There will be additional, weekly reading and journal assignments that are not on this syllabus.**



CLASS SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 (WEDNESDAY, MAY 20)

A short history of feature writing

We'll discuss the defining characteristics of feature writing and explain what distinguishes the genre from straight news. We'll trace the history of feature writing -- also known as creative nonfiction, narrative journalism, or long-form -- over the last century and discuss its role in the modern media.

Assignment: Post a straight news article and a feature article about the same subject. Explain how the two writers approached the same subject in different ways.

Deadline: 5 p.m. May 27

WEEK 2 (WEDNESDAY, MAY 27)

The elements of storytelling

We'll discuss what makes a good story, the importance of conflict and resolution, scene and dialogue. We'll discuss how feature writers have adapted the traditional techniques of fiction to produce great journalism.

Assignment: Post a feature article and explain how the author used traditional storytelling elements.

Deadline: 5 p.m. June 3

WEEK 3 (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3)

Reporting

We'll discuss the elements of reporting with a special emphasis on how feature writers deploy facts in narrative journalism.

Assignment: Visit someplace in Washington or the surrounding area where you have never been. Find a subject for your short feature, identify potential sources, and start reporting.

Deadline: 5 p.m. June 10

WEEK 4 (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10)

Structure

We'll discuss the art and craft of structuring a feature story.

Assignment: Post a feature article you admire and explain in detail how the writer structured the piece. Begin outlining your short feature.

Deadline: 5 p.m. June 17

WEEK 5 (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 17)

The Art of the Interview



We'll discuss how to conduct an effective interview and the relationship between journalists and their journalists.

Assignment: Short feature

Deadline: 5 p.m. June 24

WEEK 6 (WEDNESDAY, JUNE 24)

Writing Profiles

We'll discuss the art and craft of writing a profile.

Assignment: Short feature revision

Deadline: 5 p.m. July 1

WEEK 7 (WEDNESDAY, JULY 1)

Reported Opinion

Some of the best feature stories are written by journalists who make strong arguments. We'll discuss the craft of long-form opinion writing.

Assignment: 1) Detailed outline of profile. 2) Post a deeply reported piece with a strong argument. Did the author make her case? Why or why not?

Deadline: 5 p.m. July 8

WEEK 8 (WEDNESDAY, JULY 8)

Workshop

We'll discuss your journals, your short features, and your progress on your profiles.

Assignment: First draft of profiles

Deadline: 5 p.m. July 15

WEEK 9 (WEDNESDAY, JULY 15)

Editing

We'll discuss the art of editing and learn how to work with an editor to turn a rough draft into a polished and publishable final product.

Assignment: Edit another student's profile.

Deadline: 5 p.m. July 22

WEEK 10 (WEDNESDAY, JULY 22)

Workshop

Peer critiques of Group 1 profiles.

Assignment: Read Group 2 profiles. Group 1 revised profile.



GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
School of Continuing Studies
Journalism

Deadline: 5 p.m. July 29

WEEK 11 (WEDNESDAY, JULY 29)

Workshop

Peer critiques of Group 2 profiles.

Assignment: Group 2 revised profiles.

Deadline: 5 p.m. Aug. 5

WEEK 12 (WEDNESDAY, AUG. 5)

Feature Writing and the Modern Media Landscape

At many publications, the traditional distinctions between straight news and feature writing have blurred. We'll discuss the role of feature writing in today's media and the future of this genre.