Journalism 3173: Magazine Writing

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Magazine writing requires mastery of both reporting and creative language skills. So this course builds especially upon the skills taught in Jour. 3003 (Producing Mass Media Messages), Jour. 3004 (Information for Mass Communication), and Jour. 3101 (Reporting). All written work should demonstrate pride in the craft of language. That means it must be in English that is clear, grammatical, idiomatic, correctly spelled, and properly punctuated. It will be read and graded on that premise. All assignments should be typed. You will be asked to think and often to act like a free-lance writer.

Course Goals:

- To give you experience in researching, writing (on deadline), and submitting for publication different types of articles that are found in magazines and in newspaper in-depth sections today.
- To help you improve your writing. Goals include the development of a mature vocabulary, crisp, fresh phrasing, a story organization so sharp and well-focused that it seems almost effortless, and all the other attributes of writing that enhance comprehension, readability, and interest for those above the see-Spot-run level. The ultimate criterion: Is it publishable in a quality publication?
- To give you experience in analyzing different articles—those published, your own, and your peers’—for content, form, and style.
- To help you learn to benefit from criticism.

Course Requirements:

Writers must satisfactorily complete the work for the class on deadline; incompletes are not given in this course.
Professional standards of reliability and attention to class obligations will be expected. Attendance at all lectures, discussions, and critique sessions is required.
Original work is required. Material developed for another course or for earlier publication is ineligible for submission.
All writers are encouraged to publish work developed for this course. However, material may not be published in advance of the instructor's scrutiny of the work if it is to be used for credit in this course.
This course has no final exam. The primary requirements are the writing and revising of magazine articles as follows:

1. A personality profile of about 1,500 words, due Thursday, May 1; rewrite due Tuesday, May 20. Include a source list both times.
2. An article of about 2,500 words, due Thursday, May 15; rewrite due Thursday, June 5.
Include a source list both times.

PLEASE NOTE: The revised versions of articles #1 and 2 must be submitted ready to be mailed to the editor of your choice—in manuscript form, accompanied by appropriately stamped, addressed envelopes, according to the guidelines we will discuss in class. Only one of your two articles may be written for the Minnesota Daily.

Other required assignments include: one 600-word sketch; a detailed list of at least five articles you could write for this class, with target publications; theme and audience reports for each article; a report on article leads; and a query letter. All assignments will be discussed in greater detail in class. (In the meantime, please see pp. 5-6 of this syllabus.)

Your final grade will be based primarily on the quality of the articles you write, and on the successful completion of ALL assignments on deadline. The quality of the contribution you make to your classmates during discussions and critiques will also figure in your final grade. You must write with a minimum of errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Gross errors will lower your grade, as will errors of fact. Grades are not curved in this class. Your instructor's role is much like that of an editor.

Note: The rewritten versions of articles #1 and 2 will be graded, not the initial versions.
(However, if the latter are late, your grade will be lowered for the former.)

Deadlines:

ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS, WITHOUT EXCEPTION. Grades will be lowered on late assignments.

Critique Sessions:

Both of your articles will be critiqued in depth by the class. To make this as productive as possible, you will be required to supply copies of your article in advance to the members of your critique group. More on this in class.

Books:

The textbook is Free-Lancer and Staff Writer (William L. Rivers, 5th edition, paperback, 1992), available in Williamson Bookstore. A copy is also available on reserve in Sevareid Library.

Reading Schedule:

The sooner you read Free-Lancer and Staff Writer in its entirety, the better. Each week, I will highlight the parts of the text that are germane to the topics we are covering in class. Read chapters 1-6 as soon as you can during week 1. A supplementary text which you need not buy is Writer's Market 1997. It is available in most libraries, including Sevareid and at Williamson Bookstore. A helpful supplementary text is Andre Fontaine and William Glavin, The Art of
Writing Nonfiction, 2nd ed. If you need a dictionary, American Heritage's is recommended; available in Williamson Bookstore.

**Reader's Digest Fund:**

SJMC has received money from the Reader's Digest Foundation to help pay for the costs of student (undergraduate and graduate) travel/research. The travel/research must be in connection with a news or magazine article. By all means take advantage of this opportunity. Details in class.

**Manuscript Form** (for final submission of magazine articles):

1. For formatting, see Rivers text, p. 348
2. Word process (or type) all articles. Make sure your ribbon is dark enough to produce easily readable type.
3. Use white, nonerasable bond paper only—not onion-skin or yellow copy paper.
4. Type only on one side of the page.
5. Begin typing your copy about 1/3 of the way down the first page.
6. In the upper left corner of the first page, place your name, address, and phone number (single-spaced).
7. Double-space all copy.
8. Try not to break sentences or paragraphs between pages. Avoid breaking words between lines.
9. Paper-clip the pages together in the upper left corner, and number the pages. Write "-30-" or "###" on the last page, at bottom, to indicate the end.
10. Strive for clean, error-free copy by carefully editing your article before you turn it in. Use a pencil for minor editing.

**Explanation of Assignments**

*Five Article Topics and Target Publications*
Due Tuesday, April 8. This is a description of five different articles you could write for this course. Include at least a paragraph on each. What will be your theme or focus? What appear to be likely sources (both documentary and personal)? For each article, describe the target publication. Don't just write "women's magazines," or "outdoor publications," but give a very specific example. Explain briefly how you will tailor your article to the specific audience requirements of the target publication.

*Theme and Audience Reports*
Due Thursday, April 10 and Thursday, April 24. One is required for each of the two major articles you will write for this course. Follow the guidelines in the paragraph above.
Query Letter
Due Tuesday, April 15. Using your textbook and information given in class, write a query letter to an editor about one of the articles you will produce for the class. Submit two copies of your query letter, along with an S.A.S.E. and a stamped letter addressed to the editor. (Your letter will be mailed to the editor.)

"Person" Assignment
Due Thursday, April 17. Many magazine and newspaper feature articles rest upon the reporter's ability to understand and translate people. The purpose of this assignment, then, is to help you develop empathy--to understand how people feel, what they are like, and what behaviors best show these feelings and preferences. In a 600-word sketch, describe a person. Use fiction techniques where appropriate (dialogue, dramatization, scene-setting, etc.). Show, don't just tell; try to use some anecdotes, specific description, and/or dialogue, etc. to make your sketch as vivid as possible. You should aim to make a point or a statement. The reader must be able to draw a conclusion: This person is joyful, This person is vain, this person is angry, this person has recently lost a loved one. THE STATEMENT IS TO BE WRITTEN AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PAGE, APART FROM THE BODY.

Report on Article Leads and Audiences
Due Tuesday, April 22. For this assignment, you will answer specific questions about the leads from five full-length magazine articles. Choose the five article leads from one issue of either a high-quality magazine (e.g., Atlantic, Harper's, Esquire, the New Yorker, the New York Times Magazine), or from one issue of one of the well-written consumer or trade magazines (e.g., Country Gentleman, Mother Jones, American Cinematographer, Quill). After you select the five article leads (all from the same issue) you wish to consider, type each on a separate sheet of paper (or attach a photocopy). Include a bibliographic citation (name and issue of the magazine, article title, and author). Then, for each lead, answer the questions below. The total length of your assignment (excluding the leads themselves) should be about five typed, double-spaced pages.

1. How would you classify the lead (according to the categories given in your textbook)? Mention all the categories the lead may fall into.
2. Is the lead effective? Would you want to read the rest of the article after reading it? Why or why not? Be very specific in your criticisms (both negative and positive). Give examples to support your answers.
3. If your answer to question 2 is no, how would you improve the lead? Submit a brief rewrite if you wish.
4. Now, look through a few other issues of the magazine. Who is the target audience? How can you tell? Consider, for example, the magazine's overall content and the nature of its advertising. (See Rivers text, pp. 78-83.)