Magazine Writing, 4610 (sections 1 and 2), Spring Semester 2012
University of Utah, Department of Communication

Syllabus subject to change.

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"The most original authors are not so because they advance what is new, but because they put what they have to say as if it had never been said before."
—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Prerequisites:

COMM 1610. If you haven’t taken this course already, you need to see me ASAP. Really. I’m not a total stickler about the prereq, and I’m happy to consider other qualifications as fulfilling this requirement, but you MUST talk to me about it.

Class Objectives:

This course seeks to refine students’ journalistic writing skills in the genre of magazine feature writing and sub-genres and will follow the premise that good magazine writers are storytellers as much as they are purveyors of facts. Students will explore creative writing techniques unique to magazine nonfiction and will hone their writing, editing, and research skills in preparation for careers in the magazine industry. The goal is to develop students’ abilities to analyze
issues, brainstorm ideas, and write and edit quality stories for magazine publications.

Class Format:

In contrast to newspaper writing, magazine writing is often the ‘story behind the story’ or event. It employs not only elements of journalism, but also elements of creative writing. Balancing reportorial skills with the creative writing techniques will be key for this course and attained through discussion of organization, voice, word choice and the writing of magazine articles.

For the first section of the course, we will focus on basic concepts of magazine writing and learn how to employ creative craft elements so that the reader gradually becomes conscious of a guiding human intelligence within the story conversing with the reader in print, instead of just a presentation of facts. We will explore these concepts via discussion, comparison, and the actual writing of a feature article, which we will then workshop and revise (throughout the semester) for a finished product worthy of publication. The second section of the course will focus on using our magazine writing skills to write within a variety of magazine genres. Writers often use their research from one story to fuel other stories for different publications. We will explore these dynamics, as well as the different expectations of various magazine genres. We will also workshop each story with the goal of producing publishable work. Lastly, we will explore business issues pertaining to the magazine industry, including working with an editor, pitching stories, writing query letters, managing your time as a writer and understanding contracts.

As mentioned, workshops and crafted revision are very important aspects of magazine writing. Often the workshop aspect can seem daunting to new writers, however, it is part of the industry. More importantly, the editing process teaches you how to be a good editor, which is key to being a good writer. I also believe that the best writers read more than they write (and revise even more). Throughout the course, readings of published magazine stories will be used as a
basis for comparison, and the in-class writing assignments will become the building blocks for students’ own stories.

**Course Objectives**

By the end of Magazine Writing 4610, students should be able to …

- Analyze a variety of writing situations
- Balance creative writing techniques with reportorial skills
- Adapt writing effectively to a given rhetorical situation and purpose, taking into account audience needs and expectations, and genre possibilities and constraints.
- Research and make rhetorical decisions within virtual writing environments.
- Understand the interview and research process required for magazine writing
- Write with an awareness of the ethical dimensions of writing.
- Use the collaborative dimensions of writing to best meet own writing purposes.
- Design and format documents according to conventions.
- Edit and revise based on intent, content and voice
- Attribute sources appropriately for a given genre or discourse.
- Write with a minimum of surface error.

**Required Texts**

*The Art and Craft of Feature Writing* by William E. Blundell

*Writing Articles About the World Around You* by Marcia Yudkin (Buy online).

*Reading Compilation—Magazine Articles* (Electronic—via Canvas)

(See syllabus for schedule of readings)
Assignments

- Feature Article 250pts
- Genre 1 assignment 100pts
- Genre 2 assignment 100pts
- Genre 3 assignment 100pts
- Query Letters 100pts
- Magazine Reading Responses 100pts
- Workshop Process 50pts (ALL 50pts lost if miss a workshop day)
- In-class assignments 150pts
- First-drafts of stories 200pts (50pts each)

(Note: Late assignments are strongly discouraged. If late, you will be docked 5 percentage points each day the assignment is late, and you may not be eligible for instructor’s feedback depending on schedule.

NO ASSIGNMENTS WILL BE ACCEPTED AFTER ONE WEEK OF THE ORIGINAL DUE DATE.)

Assignments MAY NOT be turned in via email.

Participation and Attendance

Participation counts toward 15% of your grade in this course (made up by your Reading Journal, Workshop Process, and general participation). The success of this course depends upon student participation.

General participation includes attending class regularly, reading assigned readings, being prepared for class discussion, and fully participating in class activities (yes, this is subjectively judged). Participation will also include any small in-class assignments (style exercises, in-class writing prompts, etc.). Please let me know if you think you will be missing a class, and I will help you catch up with what we did in class, providing you have done the reading for the
assignment. If you’re not speaking up in class and contributing to the discussion, you will lose participation points.

The Workshop Process points are partially determined by how well your fellow students grade your participation in the workshop process during the class. Part of your final portfolio will be a form on which you grade the other members of your group. This does not entirely reflect the number of points you will receive, but it will highly influence my grading process. If you miss any of the workshop days (without prior notice/permission or a grievous head injury or some such) all 50pts are lost.

In-class assignments: Periodically, you will be required to complete assignments in class. How many points they are worth depends on how many we do throughout the semester.

Weekly Reading Responses: A good-sized percentage of the points in this class come from the Weekly Reading Responses. For these, you need to read a magazine article of your choosing (full-length feature, no “shorts”) and write a 3-4 paragraph response to the article. The response is not just your opinion of the article, but a thoughtful analysis of WHAT the author did and/or did not do well, how the article was constructed, what worked and what didn’t, etc. Preferably, use some reflection regarding the chapter readings assigned for that week. These responses will then be posted to the corresponding discussion section on Canvas. They are worth 10 points apiece, so you are required to do 10, total. Note there are 14 weeks possible: any extras you do are extra credit.

Please note: This is a difficult class, demanding both an ability to write in a manner both technically precise yet creative, lively and entertaining. The expectations for quality writing are very high.

This is also a reading-intensive class, as I strongly believe that you have to read good writing to be able to write well. I recommend strenuously that if you
haven’t read *The Elements of Style*, by Strunk & White, that you go out and read it immediately. It’s very short, and very helpful!

**Spring 2012 4610 SCHEDULE**

(Syllabus is subject to change at any time, e-mail notification will be given if/when that is the case).

**Unit One: Feature Writing**

**Week 1** (Jan 10 & 12) Magazine Basics

T 10 — Introduction to course


**Week 2** (Jan 17 & 19) Where’s the Story, Identifying Voice

T 17 — Read “Shaping Ideas” from A&C. Discuss extrapolating stories from newspapers and other idea files.

TH 19 — Read “Story Dimensions” from A&C and “Uncommon Ground” from *Salt Lake* magazine. *Come to class with some story ideas extrapolated from newspapers, etc.*

**Week 3** (Jan 24 & 26) Planning and Execution

T 24 — **NO CLASS**

TH 26 Read “Planning and Execution” from A&C and “Under One Roof” from *New Yorker*. 
**Week 4** (Jan 31 & Feb 2) Handling Key Elements, Creating the Nonfiction Character

T 31 — Read “Organization” from A&C and “Life After Death” from *Salt Lake* magazine. Discuss Interview questions & technique.

TH 02 — Read “Handling Key Elements” and “Medicating Young Minds” from *Time Magazine*. Discuss handling quotes, numbers and reporting.

**Week 5** (Feb 7 & 9) Editing

T 7 — Read “Word Craft” from A&C and “Zen and the Art of Hair” from Salt Lake magazine.

TH 9 — Read “Notes on Revision” (on Canvas) and “Self Editing” from A&C.

**Week 6** (Feb 14 & 16)

T 14 — Read “And Furthermore Part 1: Door Shut, Door Open” by Stephen King in *On Writing*. Discuss Paramedic method editing and editing process. **DUE:** STORY IDEA (one paragraph synopsis of angle and people). Be prepared to explain story idea to class.

TH 16 — Student work day — Bring materials to work on planning, interview questions, etc.

**DUE: QUERY LETTER for Feature Story**

**Week 7** (Feb 21 & 23)

T 21 — Student work day — Bring materials to email contacts, further outline, discuss with peers.

TH 23 — Writing day — be prepared to actually work on your article.
Week 8 (Feb 28 & Mar 1)

T 28— Workshop – Read and edit

DUE: FEATURE ARTICLE FIRST DRAFT

TH 01 — Workshop – Return edited copies to your peers, read and discuss.

Unit Two: Magazine genres

Any word you have to hunt for in a thesaurus is the wrong word. There are no exceptions to this rule.

- Steven King

WARNING: THINGS GET INTENSE HERE ON OUT!

Week 9 (Mar 6 & 8) Profile & Personal Essay


Week 10 (Mar 13 & 15 — SPRING BREAK — NO CLASS)

Week 11 (Mar 20 & 22) Commentary & Review

T 20 Read Chapter 3, “Using What You Know” from WA, “Remember When Public Spaces Didn’t Matter,” USA Today and “No Big Deal if Mitt Gets the
White House,” Salt Lake Tribune. **Discuss Commentary. DUE: QUERY LETTER for Genre 1**

TH 22—Read “iTunes vs. Legal Napster” Knight Ridder, “What, Me Worry?” City Weekly. **Discuss Review. DUE: REVISED FEATURE.**

**Week 12 (Mar 27 & 29) Travel Writing & How-To**

T 27— Read WA Chapter 6: “Local News Worth Spreading” and “The Fringe Crowd” from WA. Bring in article that is of local and national interest (suggests a trend not just in community, but in nation). **Discuss Travel Writing. DUE: Draft of Genre 1 (Profile or Personal Essay). DUE: QUERY LETTER for Genre 2**

TH 29— Read “When Chronic Pain Strikes,” Natural Health magazine and “Nesting Newlyweds: Tips for Merging Decors,” Utah Bride & Groom magazine. **Discuss the How To / Self Help article.**

**Week 13 (Apr 3 & 5)**

T 3—**Workshop Genre 1. DUE: QUERY LETTER for Genre 3**

TH 5—Read Chapt.7 “Query Letters, Assignments and Completed Articles” from WA. **DUE: Draft of genre 2 (Commentary or Review)**

**Week 14 (Apr 10 & 12)**

T 10— Read Chap. 12 “Building Your Freelance Writing Career” from WA. Discuss process and contracts. Discuss final portfolio. **Workshop Genre 2.**

TH 12— Work day.

**Week 15 (Apr 17 & 19)**
T 17—Work Day. **Due: Draft of genre 3 (How-To or Travel)**

TH 19—Work day

**Week 16** (Apr 24 & 26)

T 24 Workshop. **Workshop Genre 3.**

TH 26—Open consultation / workday.

**Finals Week**

**DUE:** Final portfolios by 4PM on Thursday, May 3rd (See Portfolio Assignment Description for details).

**Other Information:**

**GRADING:** Final grades will be determined on a total point basis according to the following formula:

- 100-94% of the total points = A
- 93-91% of the total points = A-
- 90-88% of the total points = B+
- 87-84% of the total points = B
- 83-81% of the total points = B-
80-78% of the total points   = C+

77-74% of the total points   = C

73-71% of the total points   = C-

70-68% of the total points   = D+

67-64% of the total points   = D

63-61% of the total points   = D-

60% or less                 = E

Writing Center: Writing in college can be a challenge for anyone, from first-year student essays to resumes, to doctoral dissertations. At the University Writing Center, you can receive one-on-one advice on your writing, geared to your individual needs and challenges.

Writing Center tutors are students trained to help with a variety of writing issues. They are accomplished writers, and have undergone hours of training on tutoring and the elements of good writing from the faculty and staff of the University Writing Program. One half-hour session with tutor will improve your writing project and provide you with suggestions for additional improvements. Returning to the Center will allow you to improve in additional areas, simplify and improve your writing process, and build your confidence as a writer.

Best of all, writing center instruction is FREE to all University of Utah students.

Telephone: (801) 587-9122
Address: University of Utah Marriott Library
Second Floor
295 S 1500 East
Accommodation for Disabilities: If you need accommodation, please talk with me and/or someone at The Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester or as soon as you are aware that accommodation is necessary. The CDS is in the Union Building in room 162 or you can call them at 581-5487 (voice/TDD) or e-mail at info@disability.utah.edu.

CONTENT ACCOMMODATION POLICY: This course makes no accommodations for content or expectations.

Registration: Withdrawing from a course and other registration issues are a student’s responsibility. Please consult the university schedule for deadlines.

Incompletes: You can get one, but you gotta be maintaining a C average or better and you gotta complete at least 80% of the coursework.