

Feature Writing

Course code: JRN 300

Term and year: Fall 2021

Day and time: Mondays 11:30 – 14:15

Instructor: Iva Roze Skochova, M.S.

Instructor contact: iva.skochova@auuni.edu

Consultation hours: By appointment

Credits US/ECTS	3/6	Level	Intermediate
Length	15 weeks	Pre-requisite	Composition, Reporting II
Contact hours	42 hours	Course type	HSC el, PS el, JC req, CEA

1. Course Description

This course moves beyond basic journalistic reporting and news writing. It will teach students how to write longer, impactful feature articles. We'll work on techniques to find angles and develop them into research-based non-fiction stories that have characters, show development and follow a structural, narrative arc from beginning to end. The class is run as a magazine newsroom, with students pitching their stories and workshopping their drafts.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Carry out research and write their own feature stories
- Find story ideas and conduct interviews to develop in depth profiles
- Be able to pitch stories and write for the University's print and online student magazine, *The Lennon Wall*
- Explore the qualities of storytelling and how they differ from news
- Build a robust vocabulary of longform writing
- Introduce tools for finding and framing interesting features
- Practice skills of interviewing for story as well as fact
- Learn to constructively critique and be critiqued
- Examine markets for journalism and learn how stories are pitched and sold

3. Reading Material

Feature Writing - The Pursuit of Excellence by Edward Jay Friedlander and John Lee, 7th Edition

Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writers' Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University by Mark Kramer and Wendy Call

Students should read extensively to keep up with best practices and for inspiration. At a minimum, they should read feature stories in international publications such as *The Atlantic*, *NPR*, *Wired*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair* and *The Economist*. Glancing through the magazines in AAU's library will help keep you informed and give you ideas.

4. Teaching Methodology

The class will run like a newsroom; it will be informal and interactive, a “newswriting lab.” Students will learn by doing. Their stories will be discussed and critiqued in class by the instructor and by the students themselves. The instructor will also provide feedback to students individually about their work. Please also be ready to do in-class writing assignments on deadline. These in-class writing exercises will help acquaint you with common reporting situations and writing formulas.

5. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
Class 1 Sept 6	Topic: Introduction to Feature Writing Description: What’s the difference between news writing and feature writing? What defines good and great feature writing? What subjects make for strong features? How do you find them? What are the elements found in features and how does their structure and approach differ from straight newswriting? Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapt 1, pp 25-35, chapter 2 Kramer & Call part I, part II, pp 19-27
Class 2 Sept 13	Topic: Ideas and Angles Description: Finding your angle. When a good feature writer sees a pack of journalists running in one direction, he goes the other way. How to avoid the traps of tired ideas and viewpoints and demand of yourself a fresh approach to the problem. What sources have we not yet heard from on an issue? How do we get their side? Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 3 Kramer & Call part II, pp 51-64
Class 3 Sept 20	Topic: Research Description: Good features come from intensive background investigation, exhaustive reading and serious time in the field. Organizing your detective work. Reviewing sources of important records and data. Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 4, pp 111-120 Kramer & Call part II, pp 39-45, pp 54
Class 4 Sept 27	Topic: Interviewing Description: Building trust and respect and breaking through PR speak to get at deeper truth. Finding great quotes and negotiating attribution. Assignments/deadlines: QUIZ – feature writing terminology
Class 5 Oct 4	Topic: Article Structure Description: Leads, nut graphs and kickers. Pace, color, tone, rhythm and transitions. Narrative arc. Pitching story idea for first article. Reading: Friedlander & Lee, chapter 6 Kramer & Call part III, pp 97-124
Class 6 Oct 11	Topic: Writer’s fingerprints Description: Finding your voice and presence in the story without becoming the story. Workshopping students’ articles. Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 8 pp 248-258 Kramer & Call part V, pp 149-162
Class 7 Oct 18	Topic: Back it up!

	<p>Description: Use and misuse of statistics, tables, data charts, report conclusions and surveys.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Feature article due!</p>
Oct 25	MIDTERM BREAK – NO CLASS!
Class 8 Nov 1	<p>Topic: Writing is re-writing</p> <p>Description: No great pieces started out that way and the good editor is your (difficult) best friend. Cutting the fat, the pretense, the cliché and the dullness from your work.</p> <p>Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 9 Kramer & Call part VII, pp 197-211, 221-223</p>
Class 9 Nov 8	<p>Topic: Profiles</p> <p>Description: Personal data research using public records. Crime and justice system coverage. Privacy concerns. Reviewing midterm feature articles.</p> <p>Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 7, pp 198-217 Kramer & Call part II, pp 65-73</p>
Class 10 Nov 15	<p>Topic: Longform writing</p> <p>Description: Organizing complex, longform stories. Finding the right strategy/formula for your subject and tone.</p> <p>Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 7, pp 218-228 Kramer & Call part V, pp 125-148</p>
Class 11 Nov 22	<p>Topic: Pitching feature stories</p> <p>Description: Getting into print. How to pitch the right editor at the right publication at the right time - and do it effectively. Pitching ideas for profile articles.</p> <p>Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 8 Kramer & Call part IX, pp 263-271</p>
Class 12 Nov 29	<p>Topic: Multimedia reporting</p> <p>Description: Feature writing for the net. Journalism vs social media. Writing “boxes”</p> <p>Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapt 7, pp 225-228</p>
Class 13 Dec 6	<p>Topic: Journalism Ethics</p> <p>Description: Libel. “Authorization” of stories. Q&As</p> <p>Reading: Handout</p>
Class 14 Dec 13	<p>Topic: Final wrap up</p> <p>Description: Workshopping profiles</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Profile Article due!</p>

6. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Attendance and Class Participation	42	20	Involvement in class and writing workshops, ability to discuss assigned readings, and attendance.	1, 2
Assignment 1: Quiz	3	10	Quiz on feature writing terminology, editing, and definitions.	1, 2, 3
Assignment 2: Feature article	30	25	A well-supported, well-written feature story.	1, 2, 3

Assignment 3: Profile	30	30	A well-supported, well-written profile of a person of interest.	1, 2, 3
In-class graded exercises, pitches and writing lab	20	15	Display working mastery of professional rules of reporting, interviewing, quoting, and writing as learned in reading assignments and lectures.	1
TOTAL	125	100%		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

7. Detailed description of the assignments

Assignment 1: QUIZ

In class quiz on journalism terminology and definitions. Article structure. Editing and writing leads.

Assignment 2: Feature Article

A 600-1000 word feature article with a clear lead, nut graph, narrative arc and at least three sources. (Detailed instructions in handout)

Assignment 3: Profile Article

A 800-1000 word profile (of a person of interest) with at least three sources. Must include a "box." (Detailed instructions in handout)

8. General Requirements and School Policies

General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU's academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work.

Electronic communication and submission

The university and instructors shall only use students' university email address for communication, with additional communication via NEO LMS or Microsoft Teams. Students sending e-mail to an instructor shall clearly state the course code and the topic in the subject heading, for example, "COM101-1 Mid-term Exam. Question". All electronic submissions are through NEO LMS. No substantial pieces of writing (especially take-home exams and essays) can be submitted outside of NEO LMS.

Attendance

Attendance, i.e., presence in class in real-time, is expected and encouraged. However, the requirement that students miss not more than 35% of real-time classes is temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Absence excuse and make-up options

Should a student be absent from classes for relevant reasons (illness, serious family matters), s/he can submit to the Dean of Students an Absence Excuse Request Form supplemented with documents providing reasons for the absence. These must be submitted within one week of the absence. If possible, it is recommended the instructor be informed of

the absence in advance. Should a student be absent during the add/drop period due to a change in registration this will be an excused absence if s/he submits an Absence Excuse Request Form along with the finalized add/drop form.

Students whose absence has been excused by the Dean of Students are entitled to make up assignments and exams provided their nature allows. Assignments missed due to unexcused absences which cannot be made up, may result in a decreased or failing grade as specified in the syllabus.

Students are responsible for contacting their instructor within one week of the date the absence was excused to arrange for make-up options.

Late work: No late submissions will be accepted – please follow the deadlines.

Electronic devices

Electronic devices (e.g. phones, tablets, laptops) may be used only for class-related activities (taking notes, looking up related information, etc.). Any other use will result in the student being marked absent and/or being expelled from the class. No electronic devices may be used during tests or exams unless required by the exam format and the instructor.

Eating is not allowed during classes.

Cheating and disruptive behavior

If a student engages in disruptive conduct unsuitable for a classroom environment, the instructor may require the student to withdraw from the room for the duration of the class and shall report the behavior to the Dean.

Students engaging in behavior which is suggestive of cheating will, at a minimum, be warned. In the case of continued misconduct, the exam or assignment will be failed and the student will be expelled from the exam or class.

Plagiarism and Academic Tutoring Center

Plagiarism is “the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one’s own original work.” (Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd Edition, Random House, New York, 1993)

Turnitin’s White Paper ‘The Plagiarism Spectrum’ (available at <http://go.turnitin.com/paper/plagiarism-spectrum>) identifies 10 types of plagiarism ordered from most to least severe:

1. CLONE: An act of submitting another’s work, word-for-word, as one’s own.
2. CTRL-C: A written piece that contains significant portions of text from a single source without alterations.
3. FIND-REPLACE: The act of changing key words and phrases but retaining the essential content of the source in a paper.
4. REMIX: An act of paraphrasing from other sources and making the content fit together seamlessly.
5. RECYCLE: The act of borrowing generously from one’s own previous work without citation; To self-plagiarize.
6. HYBRID: The act of combining perfectly cited sources with copied passages—without citation—in one paper.
7. MASHUP: A paper that represents a mix of copied material from several different sources without proper citation.
8. 404 ERROR: A written piece that includes citations to non-existent or inaccurate information about sources
9. AGGREGATOR: The “Aggregator” includes proper citation, but the paper contains almost no original work.
10. RE-TWEET: This paper includes proper citation, but relies too closely on the text’s original wording and/or structure.

At minimum, plagiarism from types 1 through 8 will result in a failing grade for the assignment and shall be reported to the Dean. The Dean may initiate a disciplinary procedure pursuant to the Academic Codex. Allegations of bought papers and intentional or consistent plagiarism always entail disciplinary hearing and may result in expulsion from AAU.

If unsure about technical aspects of writing, students are encouraged to consult with the tutors of the AAU Academic Tutoring Center. For more information and/or to book a tutor, please contact the ATC at: <http://atc.simplybook.me/sheduler/manage/event/1/>.

Course accessibility and inclusion

Students with disabilities are asked to contact the Dean of Students as soon as possible to discuss reasonable accommodations. Academic accommodations are not retroactive. Students who will be absent from course activities due to religious holidays may seek reasonable accommodations by contacting the Dean of Students in writing within the first two weeks of the term. All requests must include specific dates for which the student requests accommodations.

9. Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage*	Description
A	95-100	Excellent performance. The student has shown originality and displayed an exceptional grasp of the material and a deep analytical understanding of the subject.
A-	90-94	
B+	87-89	Good performance. The student has mastered the material, understands the subject well and has shown some originality of thought and/or considerable effort.
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Fair performance. The student has acquired an acceptable understanding of the material and essential subject matter of the course, but has not succeeded in translating this understanding into consistently creative or original work.
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	65-69	Poor. The student has shown some understanding of the material and subject matter covered during the course. The student's work, however, has not shown enough effort or understanding to allow for a passing grade in School Required Courses. It does qualify as a passing mark for the General College Courses and Electives.
D	60-64	
F	0-59	Fail. The student has not succeeded in mastering the subject matter covered in the course.

* Decimals should be rounded to the nearest whole number.

Prepared by: Iva Skochova
Date:

Approved by: AK
Date: 2/8/2021