

COMM 160: BASIC NEWS WRITING SKILLS

Semester: Fall 2012

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Special Thanks: Judy Maltz-Schejter was the previous instructor of this course, and she created much of this syllabus. I want to thank her for her course material.

Class Format: This course takes place via the ANGEL website (cms.psu.edu). All course material and testing will take place through ANGEL. All email should be sent to alyssa.appelman@psu.edu.

Course Description: This course provides an overview of basic grammar, punctuation, spelling and word usage. Students must pass the course with a grade of “C” or higher before they can take other skills courses in the journalism sequence. There are no prerequisites for this course.

Textbooks:

- Required textbook: Brian S. Brooks, James L. Pinson, and Jean Gaddy Wilson, *Working With Words: A Handbook for Media Writers and Editors*, 7th ed.
- Official dictionary: *Webster's New College Dictionary*, 4th Edition. You are not required to purchase this dictionary, but it will be the dictionary used as a reference for proper and preferred spellings of words during this course.

Technological Requirements: Students will need regular access to the Internet, to ANGEL and to computer programs, such as MS Word and PowerPoint.

Format and Attendance: This class takes place online via the *COMM 160: Basic News Writing Skills* course website on ANGEL. The course includes 12 units, a midterm exam and a final exam. For each unit, there is a folder that contains learning materials, practice drills and a graded assignment. Not all the folders will be available for you at once. Generally, you will have two weeks to complete each unit assignment. All the assignments are due at noon on Friday; every Monday, a new unit will be made available for you. I will send out weekly emails to remind you of the due dates.

Online Learning: Online learning environments differ from face-to-face classrooms:

- *Learning does not take place at fixed time intervals, allowing for flexibility in when and where you “attend class.”* Because there is no prescribed meeting time for this course, you may log in and complete your learning activities at a place and time that is convenient. You may also complete work ahead of schedule.
- *Learning is independent.* When you log in, you will not interact in “real-time” with each other or the instructor. You will be held accountable for (without the prompting of a face-to-face experience) keeping up with assignments, meeting deadlines and making sure you learn the material.

Email and Correspondence: All email should be sent to alyssa.appelman@psu.edu. I will not guarantee same-day response to e-mail messages, but I will do my best to check e-mail frequently throughout the day. I will read e-mail within 24 hours and respond within 48 hours, excluding weekends and holidays. Please plan accordingly. If your question pertains to material in a specific unit, please indicate that by writing the number of the unit in the subject line (e.g. Unit 2 Question).

Assignments: Each of the 12 units contains an assignment that will be automatically graded by ANGEL. You are required to complete all 12 weekly assignments. Your lowest grade will be dropped, so 11 will count toward your final grade. Each weekly assignment contains 40 questions, and you will be given 40 minutes to complete it. All assignments will be completed online and will be open-book.

Exams: You are required to complete a midterm exam and a final exam. The midterm exam will cover Units 1-6 and is due Oct. 19, and the final exam will cover Units 7-12 and is due Dec. 18. The midterm and final each contain 100 questions, and you will be given 100 minutes to complete each of them. Both exams will be completed online and will be open-book.

Assignment/Exam tips:

- **Timer:** Once you open a graded assignment or exam in ANGEL and click “begin,” the clock starts ticking. If you take a break, the clock continues running. It does not take a break when you do.
- **Internet:** Your time is limited, so make sure you do the graded assignments and exams in a place where you will have reliable Internet access. You do not want to waste time moving to another room should your Internet connections suddenly fail.
- **ANGEL maintenance:** ANGEL is unavailable from 4 to 6 a.m. every day. This is when it undergoes system maintenance. It is not a good idea to start a graded assignment close to then, if you want to take full advantage of your time allotment.
- **Individually:** The graded assignments are to be done individually. There is no point in even trying to do these assignments in groups because ANGEL has been programmed to deliver a different set of questions to each student.
- **Open-book:** Although the graded assignments are open-book, remember that your time is limited. Therefore, it is a good idea to commit the basic rules of grammar and punctuation to memory. This will save you precious time looking things up.
- **Textbook:** If a discrepancy arises as to the answer to a question, then the textbook trumps other sources. In other words, if your textbook says “A” is the correct plural form for a certain word, but the dictionary says either “A” or “B” can be used as the plural form, your answer will only be marked correct if you choose “A.”

Deadlines: The deadline for graded assignments each week is noon on Friday. The dates can be found at the end of this syllabus, on the ANGEL calendar and on the assignments, themselves. You have up to two weeks to complete each graded assignment. Graded assignments will not be available after this deadline. **LATE ASSIGNMENTS WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED.** There are no exceptions. I would advise that you work ahead.

Grading:

Grades are weighted as follows, and no extra credit will be offered.

- Unit assignments (11) = 50 percent
- Midterm exam (1) = 25 percent
- Final exam (1) = 25 percent

Letter grades are assigned as follows:

- 92.5 and above = A
- 89.5 and above = A-
- 87.5 and above = B+
- 82.5 and above = B
- 79.5 and above = B-
- 77.5 and above = C+
- 69.5 and above = C
- 59.5 and above = D
- 59.4 and below = F

Your grades for each assignment will be available for you to see as soon as the assignment is disabled, which is at noon every Friday. You will not be able to see your grade or which of your answers were correct or incorrect until the assignment is disabled.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Academic integrity is the pursuit of scholarly and creative activity in an open, honest and responsible manner, free from fraud and deception, and is an educational objective of the College of Communications and the university.

Cheating, including plagiarism, falsification of research data, using the same assignment for more than one class, turning in someone else's work, or passively allowing others to copy your work, will result in academic penalties at the discretion of the instructor, and may result in the grade of "XF" (failed for academic dishonesty) being put on your permanent transcript. In serious cases it could also result in suspension or dismissal from the university. As students studying communication, you should understand and avoid plagiarism (presenting the work of others as your own). A discussion of plagiarism, with examples, can be found at:

<http://tlt.its.psu.edu/plagiarism/tutorial/>. The rules and policies regarding academic integrity should be reviewed by every student, and can be found online at: www.psu.edu/ufs/policies/47-00.html#49-20, and in the College of Communications document, "Academic Integrity Policy and Procedures." Any student with a question about academic integrity or plagiarism is strongly encouraged to discuss it with his or her instructor.

NOTE TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services, ODS located in room 116 Boucke Building at 814-863-1807(V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit its website at www.equity.psu.edu/ods/. Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable academic adjustments.

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- think critically, creatively and independently;
- conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

Course Schedule: The weekly assignments are due at noon on Friday. At that time, the lessons will close and you will be able to see your grade. Note that the midterm exam is due Oct. 19 and the final exam is due Dec. 18. All of these due dates also are posted on the ANGEL calendar and on the assignments. Slight modifications to this schedule might occur during the semester. Keep an eye on your email for updates and reminders. The handouts and PowerPoints listed below all are available on ANGEL. The page numbers refer to pages in *Working with Words*.

Week	Dates	Topics	Reading	Assignment Due
1	Aug. 27-31	Course introduction	Course Introduction folder	
2	Sept. 4-7	Unit 1: Academic integrity and plagiarism	Unit 1 handouts	Sept. 7
3	Sept. 10-14	Unit 2: Parts of speech, sentence parts and sentence errors	Unit 2 handout, PowerPoint, pp. 27-35	Sept. 14

4	Sept. 17-21	Unit 3: Nouns, pronouns, plurals and possessives	Unit 3 handout, ANGEL tutorial, pp. 36-48, 52-53	Sept. 21
5	Sept. 24-28	Unit 4: Relative pronouns	Unit 4 PowerPoint, pp. 49-51	Sept. 28
6	Oct. 1-5	Unit 5: Verbs	Unit 5 PowerPoint, handout, pp. 54-80	Oct. 5
7	Oct. 8-12	Unit 6: Agreement	Unit 6 handout, pp. 81-90	Oct. 12
8	Oct. 15-19	MIDTERM EXAM: covers Units 1-6, due by noon on Oct. 19		
9	Oct. 22-26	Unit 7: Spelling	Unit 7 PowerPoint, pp. 190-222	Oct. 26
10	Oct. 29-Nov. 2	Unit 8: Misused and confused words and phrases	Unit 8 Handouts, pp. 113-168	Nov. 2
11	Nov. 5-9	Unit 9: Modifiers	Unit 9 pp. 93-107	Nov. 9
12	Nov. 12-16	Unit 10: Getting the word order right	Unit 10 Handout, PowerPoint, pp. 91-92, 108-112	Nov. 16
13	Nov. 19-23	Thanksgiving Break		
14	Nov. 26-30	Unit 11: Commas	Unit 11 Handout, PowerPoint, pp. 172-177	Nov. 30
15	Dec. 3-7	Unit 12: Other punctuation	Unit 12 Handout, PowerPoint, pp. 177-189	Dec. 7
16	Dec. 10-14	No new material, prepare for final exam		
17	Dec. 17-18	FINAL EXAM: covers Units 7-12, due by noon on Dec. 18		