

Feature and Opinion Writing (COMM 262)

Fall 2020

Wednesdays 5:30-8 p.m. CST via Zoom

School of Communication – Virtual

Class Description:

Students will learn about writing feature stories, from idea generation to detail-oriented reporting to crafting engaging stories for both print and online readers. They will then focus on opinion writing in formats ranging from tweets to full-length columns and learn the reporting skills needed to communicate impactful opinions.

Instructor contact information:

Rex Huppke

Email: rhuppke@luc.edu (preferred) or rhuppke@gmail.com.

Cell: 312-203-8064

Office hours: By appointment.

Required texts and materials:

AP Stylebook

Local daily and Sunday newspapers (print or online)

Class objectives:

Simply put, I want students to become better writers. I want each individual to begin the process of finding an authentic writing voice. That's not easy, but this will be a start. We'll hone in on the reporting skills necessary for powerful feature and opinion writing and examine the craft that is behind any good feature story or opinion piece.

What students should expect each week:

- A news quiz. Along with basic questions about notable local and national news, students will sometimes be asked to give a short opinion or analysis of one major news story or suggest a feature story idea off the news. There may also be questions from the week's reading.
- A reading assignment.
- A class discussion of the week's reading assignment.
- An in-class writing drill. This could range anywhere from crafting a lede to writing a short feature or opinion piece (on deadline) to simply writing a cogent tweet in response to a news event.
- Discussion and review of work produced during in-class writing drill.

What I expect from students each week:

- Honesty and accuracy. Those are the two most important qualities any journalist can possess. If you make a mistake, say so. Own it and make it right. But try REALLY HARD to not make any mistakes.
- Engagement. This class will work best if we are talking and exchanging points of view. **I expect you to ask questions and share opinions and not be afraid of any idea that might bubble up in your head. Everyone's voice is valuable, and I expect to hear all your voices each week.**
- Professional, ethical behavior and respectful dialogue.
- Hard work. The point of this class is to learn and get better. That takes work, and I can assure you that effort will be weighed heavily in grading. **The best students will not necessarily be the ones who are the most naturally gifted writers.**

Grading:

A. Grades for quizzes and writing assignments will be posted on Sakai, generally within a week.

B. If requested, a midterm evaluation will be presented to student by instructor one-on-one or via phone.

C. Written assignments with a grade of C+ or lower may be redone and re-evaluated once if they are handed in the next week after receiving grade. If the second draft of the written assignment shows sufficient improvement, the student's grade for that assignment will be raised a maximum of half a letter grade. (C+ would go up to a B-, a C- would go up to a C etc...)

D. Students will be graded on class participation, written assignments, quizzes, attitude and attendance.

E. Late work/missed assignments will be accepted and will be graded down by one full grade. All assignments must be completed, but no credit will be given later than one week after original due date. If assignments are not completed, student will not pass the course.

F. **Attendance is crucial for this class.** We only meet once a week, so if you miss a class, you're effectively missing an entire week of the semester. In the case of an absence, it is a student's responsibility to contact the instructor to report the absence and to receive homework assignments AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. After one excused absence, additional absences due to illness will require a doctor's note. Additional absences for any other reason must be cleared in advance by the instructor, but the reason will have to be quite compelling. Absences will negatively impact your class participation grade.

G. Spelling, grammar and style mistakes on final drafts will be subtracted from the final grade.

H. Students will NOT be graded based on instructor's agreement or disagreement with the point of view/position taken by student in an opinion piece.

Total possible points for the semester: 1,000

Breakdown of points:

- News quizzes: 100
- Columnist summaries: 100
- Class participation: 100
- Feature story 1: 100
- Feature story 2: 200
- Column 1: 100
- Column 2: 100
- Final Exam Piece (Feature Story or Column): 200

Full-semester grade scale:

A: 1,000 - 940

A-: 930 - 900

B+: 890 - 880

B: 870 - 830

B-: 820 - 800

C+: 790 - 780

C: 770 - 730

C-: 720 - 700

D+: 690 - 680

D: 670 - 630

D-: 620 - 600

F: 590 – 0

Class recordings

In this class software will be used to record live class discussions. As a student in this class, your participation in live class discussions will be recorded. These recordings will be made available only to students enrolled in the class, to assist those who cannot attend the live session or to serve as a resource for those who would like to review content that was presented. All recordings will become unavailable to students in the class when the Sakai course is unpublished (i.e. shortly after the course ends, per the [Sakai administrative schedule](#)). Students who prefer to participate via audio only will be allowed to disable their video camera so only audio will be captured. Please discuss this option with your instructor.

The use of all video recordings will be in keeping with the University Privacy Statement shown below:

Privacy Statement

Assuring privacy among faculty and students engaged in online and face-to-face instructional activities helps promote open and robust conversations and mitigates concerns that comments made within the context of the class will be shared beyond

the classroom. As such, recordings of instructional activities occurring in online or face-to-face classes may be used solely for internal class purposes by the faculty member and students registered for the course, and only during the period in which the course is offered. Students will be informed of such recordings by a statement in the syllabus for the course in which they will be recorded. Instructors who wish to make subsequent use of recordings that include student activity may do so only with informed written consent of the students involved or if all student activity is removed from the recording. Recordings including student activity that have been initiated by the instructor may be retained by the instructor only for individual use.

Health and Safety On Campus

While we are virtual this semester, I'm including the following link to health and safety rules and advice for any student coming on campus:

<https://www.luc.edu/returntocampus/healthandsafety/requiredpersonalsafetypractices.shtml>

School of Communication Statement on Academic Integrity:

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate truth as it is honestly perceived. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students of Loyola University Chicago are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty.

Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. These examples of academic dishonesty apply to both individual and group assignments.

Academic cheating is a serious act that violates academic integrity. Cheating includes, but is not limited to, such acts as:

- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled examination without the consent of the teacher;
- Providing information to another student during an examination;
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an examination;
- Using any material or equipment during an examination without consent of the instructor, or in a manner which is not authorized by the instructor;
- Attempting to change answers after the examination has been submitted;

- Taking an examination by proxy. Taking or attempting to take an exam for someone else is a violation by both the student enrolled in the course and the proxy.
- Unauthorized collaboration, or the use in whole or part of another student's work, on homework, lab reports, programming assignments, and any other course work which is completed outside of the classroom;
- Falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines; or
- Any other action that, by omission or commission, compromises the integrity of the academic evaluation process.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, language, work, or intellectual property of another, either by intent or by negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express all thoughts. Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of specific words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources, and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Submitting as one's own material copied from a published source, such as Internet, print, CD-ROM, audio, video, etc.;
- Submitting as one's own another person's unpublished work or examination material;
- Allowing another or paying another to write or research a paper for one's own benefit; or
- Purchasing, acquiring, and using for course credit a pre-written paper.
- Submitting the same work for credit in two or more classes, even if the classes are taken in different semesters. If a student plans to submit work with similar or overlapping content for credit in two or more classes, the student should consult with all instructors prior to submission of the work to make certain that such submission will not violate this standard.

The above list is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is both an act of personal, professional courtesy and of intellectual honesty. Any failure to do so, whether by intent or by neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism. A more detailed description of

this issue can be found

at https://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicintegrity.shtml .

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor's assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. The instructor may impose a more severe sanction, including a grade of "F" in the course. All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the Associate and Assistant Deans of the School of Communication. Instructors must provide the appropriate information and documentation when they suspect an instance of academic misconduct has occurred. The instructor must also notify the student of their findings and sanction.

The Associate and Assistant Deans of the School of Communication may constitute a hearing board to consider the imposition of sanctions in addition to those imposed by the instructor, including a recommendation of expulsion, depending on the seriousness of the misconduct. In the case of multiple instances of academic dishonesty, the Dean's office may convene a separate hearing board to review these instances. The student has the right to appeal the decision of the hearing board to the Dean of SOC. If the student is not a member of the SOC, the dean of the college in which the student is enrolled shall be part of the process. Students have the right to appeal the decision of any hearing board and the deans of the two schools will review the appeal together. Their decision is final in all cases except expulsion. The sanction of expulsion for academic dishonesty may be imposed only by the Provost upon recommendation of the dean or deans.

Students have a right to appeal any finding of academic dishonesty against them. The procedure for such an appeal can be found at:

http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicgrievance.shtml .

The School of Communication maintains a permanent record of all instances of academic dishonesty. The information in that record is confidential. However, students may be asked to sign a waiver which releases that student's record of dishonesty as a part of the student's application to a graduate or professional school, to a potential employer, to a bar association, or to similar organizations.

Students with Disabilities:

Any student with a learning disability that needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities confidentially to the instructor. The instructor will accommodate

that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of course content and processes. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.

Student Accessibility Center (SAC):

If you have a special circumstance that may have some impact on your course work and for which you may require accommodations, please contact the SAC as soon as possible. Formal arrangements must be made through the office before course adjustments can be made. Additional information about the services available at Loyola, including eligibility for services, is on the SAC website: <https://luc.edu/sac/sacstudents/>.

Managing Life Crises and Finding Support:

Should you encounter an unexpected crisis during the semester (e.g., securing food or housing, addressing mental health concerns, managing a financial crisis, and/or dealing with a family emergency, etc.), I strongly encourage you to contact the Office of the Dean of Students by submitting a CARE referral (LUC.edu/csaa) for yourself or a peer in need of support. If you are uncomfortable doing so on your own, please know that I can submit a referral on your behalf – just email me or schedule a meeting with me during office hours. To learn more about the Office of the Dean of Students, please find their websites here: LUC.edu/dos or LUC.edu/csaa. The email is deanofstudents@luc.edu.

Mandated Reporter:

As a faculty member at Loyola University Chicago, I am committed to supporting students and upholding gender equity laws as outlined by Title IX. Therefore, if a student chooses to confide in me regarding an issue of gender-based misconduct, I am obligated to inform Loyola's Title IX Deputy Coordinator. The Title IX Deputy Coordinator will assist you in connecting with all possible resources for support and reporting both on and off campus.

Class meeting schedule:

Disclaimer: This syllabus may, and probably will, change as the semester progresses. You will be notified ahead of time of any substantive changes. The homework assignments listed here are also subject to change. Students will be

given clear homework instructions at the end of each class and in a weekly email wrap-up sent out on the day after class.

CLASS 1 (Aug. 26):

- Introductions and explanation of class goals
- What is a feature story?
- Feature story idea brainstorming session

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned feature stories and be prepared to discuss them in class; pick a columnist you will follow throughout the semester; come up with an idea for a feature story and be prepared to discuss it in class.

CLASS 2 (Sept. 2):

- Guest Speaker: Mark Jacob, former Chicago Tribune metro editor
- News quiz
- Discuss reading and feature story ideas
- Reporting tips

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned feature stories and be prepared to discuss them in class; decide on subject for Feature Story 1 and begin reporting; prepare a “doping” (a one-paragraph summary) for your story; write first evaluation of your chosen columnist.

CLASS 3 (Sept. 9):

- News quiz
- Discuss reading and progress on Feature Story 1
- Writing drill — Crafting a lede

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned feature stories and be prepared to discuss them in class; work on Feature Story 1; come up with idea for Feature Story 2.

CLASS 4 (Sept. 16):

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- In-class drill - polishing interviewing and observational skills

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned feature stories and be prepared to discuss them in class; finish draft of Feature Story 1; submit doping for Feature Story 2.

CLASS 5 (Sept. 23):

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- Receive feedback on first draft of Feature Story 1
- Writing drill or guest speaker

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned feature stories and be prepared to discuss them in class; prepare final draft of Feature Story 1; continue work on Feature Story 2 and prepare one-page update on story progress; write second evaluation of your chosen columnist.

CLASS 6 (Sept 30):

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- Writing drill — spot-news feature story

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned feature stories and be prepared to discuss them in class; prepare first draft of Feature Story 2.

CLASS 7 (Oct. 7):

- News quiz.
- Discuss reading
- Writing drill or guest speaker.

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned feature stories and be prepared to discuss them in class; prepare final draft of Feature Story 2; write third evaluation of your chosen columnist.

CLASS 8 (Oct. 14):

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- Receive feedback on Feature Story 2 draft

- Pivoting to opinion writing

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned opinion columns and be prepared to discuss them in class.

CLASS 9 (Oct. 21):

- No news quiz!
- Discuss reading
- Having an opinion: Who cares what you think?

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned opinion columns; prepare a doping for Column 1; write fourth evaluation of your chosen columnist.

CLASS 10 (Oct. 28):

NO CLASS THIS WEEK. WILL HOLD ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS EITHER THE WEEK BEFORE OR THE WEEK AFTER

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned opinion columns and be prepared to discuss them in class; write final draft of Column 1; decide whether you will write a feature story or an opinion column for your Final Exam Piece.

CLASS 11 (Nov. 4):

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- In-class writing drill — opinion on deadline

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned opinion columns and be prepared to discuss them in class; prepare “doping” for Column 2; submit an idea for your Final Exam Piece; write fifth evaluation of your chosen columnist.

CLASS 12 (Nov. 11):

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- Writing drill or guest speaker

Assignment for the following week: Read assigned opinion columns and be prepared to discuss them in class; write final draft of Column 2; work on Final Exam Piece

CLASS 13 (Nov. 18):

- News quiz
- Discuss reading
- In-class writing drill — tweeting an opinion; seeing both sides of an issue

Assignment for the following week: Prepare draft of Final Exam Piece.

****THANKSGIVING BREAK****

CLASS 14 (Dec. 2):

- Optional news quiz (Grade can sub-out your lowest previous grade)
- Guest speaker
- Go on to long and prosperous careers!