

Literary Journalism

EN/W 330A -- Spring 2007

Prof. Cindy Simoneau

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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Literary Journalism is an in-class writing course designed to build on the skills and techniques of journalism learned in the news writing curriculum. The course takes journalism writing to a more advanced and detailed level.

The course will analyze the style and history of nonfiction writing to the New Journalism movement. Students will study the various writing styles, techniques and methodology of experienced journalists and will test these skills on their own writing and storytelling.

Students will also produce analysis of the readings, a participant in weekly group discussions about the readings; write several short assignments, designed to apply various techniques of storytelling; read and critique the work of others in the course; and produce a magazine-length final project.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

"Bird by Bird," Anne Lamott
"Literary Journalism," Norman Sims and Mark Kramer
"In Cold Blood," Truman Capote
Other magazine selections and literary excerpts selected by the instructor

ALSO REQUIRED:

"The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual"

GROUP PROJECT TEXTS (CHOOSE 1):

"Coyotes: A Journey Through the Secret World of America's Illegal Aliens," Ted Conover
"Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas," Hunter Thompson
"Crazy Salad," Nora Ephron

ALSO RECOMMENDED:

"The Elements of Style," William Strunk, Jr. and E.B. White
"The Elements of Grammar," Margaret Shertzer

INDIVIDUAL PROJECT (CHOOSE 1):

Hiroshima," John Hersey

"Miami," Joan Didion

"The Boys on the Bus," Timothy Crouse

"The Right Stuff," Thomas Wolfe

Or your own choice (see instructor)

COURSE REQUIREMENTS/GRADES:

WEEKLY READING ASSIGNMENTS/GROUP DISCUSSIONS

(10 percent of final grade):

Students are expected to complete the designated reading assignments by the assigned date. As part of the reading requirement students will be working in groups (usually 2-3) in which you will discuss the readings and prepare a group commentary on the topics, issues and questions posed by the instructor. Each student will submit a written analysis of the reading including their own and the group's conclusions. (Group sessions may be conducted in person or in online discussions at the discretion of the group members. Students will rotate group partners).

CLASS PRESENTATION/GROUP READING ASSIGNMENT

(5 percent of final grade):

Students will choose one book from the list of recommended texts on which to make a written and oral class presentation. The review will detail how the author uses descriptive writing techniques in the book detailing examples. Students must also provide a brief summary of the book and a critique detailing the author's success in reaching the readers. Written assignments should be 750 words. Students must bring copies for the class on the date of their oral presentation, or make arrangements with the instructor to make copies in advance. More than one student may select the same text, but must coordinate their presentations with other students. The instructor must approve the final text assignments and dates of presentation.

INDIVIDUAL READING ASSIGNMENT

(10 percent of final grade):

Students will choose one book from the list of recommended texts on which to make a written presentation. Similar to the group project, the review will detail how the author uses descriptive writing techniques in the book detailing examples. Students must also provide a brief summary of the book and a critique detailing the author's success in reaching the readers. Written assignments should be 750 words. Due at last class date.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

(50 percent of final grade):

Students will be assigned to write six assignments of a minimum of 600 words as detailed by instructor. These writings will use various storytelling techniques as discussed in class and will drawing on students' personal experiences. Three copies of these assignments will be turned in at the start of the class on the assigned date. Students may also be assigned shorter in-class or homework writing assignments.

REWRITES:

Students are encouraged to rewrite all special writing assignments (not reading analysis). Rewrites must be submitted with original-graded version of work. Grades will be raised to no higher than an A- level.

CRITIQUES

(5 percent of final grade):

Students will be assigned to critique at least one other student's work for the short writing assignments. Critiques should follow professional journalism standards for both style and constructive criticism. It is extremely important and valuable to the writer to give an honest evaluation of the work including following Associated Press style, grammar, spelling, punctuation and analysis. Critiques must be turned in to the instructor at the start of the following class. Critiques will be evaluated and graded before being distributed. The instructor will also independently critique and grade each student's work.

FINAL PROJECT

(15 percent of final grade):

Students will be assigned a final reporting and writing project. It will be a non-fiction profile of an interesting person with good descriptive writing showing personality, work, life, volunteer activities, accomplishments, impact on others. All final project topics must be approved by the instructor. Length for the final project is 2,000-3,000 words and is expected to be of magazine publishable quality.

- Plan to spend time with your subject: Observe your subject doing something you can describe and incorporate in a scene(s) in your profile. Find a narrative thread to tell your story.
- Be certain that the reader receives a clear detailed picture of what your subject looks like and where the action takes place.
- Interview at least three other persons about your subject and use their quotes. This adds perspective to your description and background reporting about this person.
- Research your subject so that you can give the reader perspective on your subject.

Start on the final project immediately. There are interviews to conduct, research to be conducted and drafts to write. Time is always short so work on this throughout the semester.

PORTFOLIO

(5 percent of final grade):

Students are required to use a three-ring binder with page protectors to compile all work and class handouts. Use section dividers to separate class handouts, reading assignments, short writing assignments and drafts of your final project. Portfolios will be reviewed by the instructor at midterm and the end of the semester as part of a discussion about the student's progress in the course.

ATTENDANCE AND CLASS PARTICIPATION:

Students are expected to attend all classes. Final grades will be lowered after one absence. Late arrivals or early departures will count as a half-absence. Emergency or special circumstances should be arranged with instructor in advance of date required. Students are expected to telephone or e-mail prior to the start of class about absences or delays.

All cell phones and personal computers and devices should be turned off or to vibrate during class sessions, unless they are being used for class work and permission is granted by the instructor. Under no circumstances should class time be used to check personal messages.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS:

Students requiring special accommodations for any disability should notify the instructor at the start of the semester. All university requirements for disability accommodations will be followed. Any student requiring additional help on any assignment should make arrangements with the instructor. All requests for assistance will be handled one-on-one with the instructor.

Department grading standards

Here is the standard used in grading the reporting assignments:

“A” – Outstanding achievement. Publishable as is. No significant style errors. Shows superior command of facts, judgment, organization and writing. On some level, extraordinary.

“B” – Superior; better than average. Handled assignment very well. Very few style errors. Copy only needs a bit of rewriting and polishing before it could be published.

“C” – Acceptable; average job. Not a story someone would read unless the information was really needed. Several style errors. Some basic organizational or writing problems. Needs significant rewriting.

“D” – Minimal achievement but passing. Poor piece. Lacks fundamental judgment and/or writing skills. Frequent style errors. Important facts omitted.

“F” – Failure of news writing assignment. This rarely occurs because constant rewriting and revision will catch most grievous errors.

INTEGRITY AND ACADEMIC HONESTY:

Academic honesty is essential to the educational experience at Fairfield. All students are expected to participate fully in that experience by avoiding all dishonest behavior in relation to academic work. Such behavior may include (but not be limited to) failing to document borrowed words or ideas from other sources, handing in the work of another as one's own, submitting work you have written for another course without permission from both instructors, or copying during an exam. The consequences for such behavior can range, depending on the circumstances, from failure in the particular assignment to dismissal from the university. (See the university's [Student Handbook](#))

Some students mistakenly feel it is a violation of academic honesty to have other students (roommates, classmates, friends, boy/girl friends, etc.) to read drafts of their papers. Not only is it NOT a violation, I encourage you to do so. I want you to take other views of your writing into account, sort out comments good and bad, and rewrite as much as possible.

07 In addition, since critiques are required for this course, you are expected to keep this work confidential among your classmates and the instructor. Any distribution of work provided in these sessions outside the classroom, without the permission of the writer and instructor, will result in a course grade of "F." Also, proper attribution must be made for all primary and secondary sources.

WRITING FORMAT:

Criteria for the short-report writing exercises -- Content should be from a factual recounting of your personal experience -- no additional reporting is necessary for these exercises. Your goal is to engage the reader's interest. Write clearly. Capture some essential truth about the situation you are describing, and report it in a compelling manner. Follow the standard rules of grammar, punctuation and spelling. Follow the AP news-writing style guidelines.

Double-space all copies using 12-pt type.

Deadlines: Deadlines are final. Any deadline missed will automatically lower the assignment grade 5 percent, plus one point off for each additional 24 hours.

Evaluation -- Papers are expected to be submitted *ready for publication* in a finished, edited and grammatically correct form. AP Style is required. Papers will be graded on a A -- F scale. Papers will be evaluated for their content and story-telling effectiveness, and points will be taken off for errors, omissions and lack of clarity using the criteria set forth. Proofread and edit all writing.

SHORT REPORT WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (600 words):

- **Description of a Place:** Write a vivid description of a real, memorable place or a setting that you have visited and describe (implicitly or explicitly) how it affected you. Help the reader visualize this place with a careful selection of specific detail.
- **The story of a Journey:** Describe a memorable journey you have taken, alone or with others.
- **Profile Interview:** Select a person to be interviewed. You may interview a faculty member, a journalist or a friend. Write a brief mini-profile introducing this person to the reader. *Make certain to describe the subject's appearance* as part of your story.
- **A key Conversation:** Capture a compelling conversation. Bring the speakers to life. It can be a dialogue you had or one you observed. Report accurately what the speakers said and describe how they looked while they spoke, so the reader can visualize them.
- **Mind (inner voice):** Describe an important event or incident in your life, using only your inner voice -- a so-called stream of consciousness. Remember with your inner voice you are talking to yourself, not the reader. Write in present tense with your mind's voice; e.g., your thoughts. You may write your thoughts in italics if you find that helpful.
- **A complete Scene:** Write a complete scene with vivid description of place and characters and key dialogue. *Exercise #6 may be compiled from your reporting for your final project.*

- **OTHER WRITING ASSIGNMENTS** will be assigned for both in-class and homework deadlines as a method of applying the techniques learned in the reading assignments, and to prepare for the more formal assignments. Those grades will be averaged together then that grade average will be incorporated in calculations of writing grade.
- **Final Project:** Your final project will be assigned one grade. That grade will comprise ~~20~~¹⁵ percent of the final grade for the course.

1-- DEADLINE: **Monday, March 5:** A written proposal for your final project:

2-- DEADLINE: **Thursday, April 19:** FIRST DRAFT of the Final Project.

3 --DEADLINE: FINAL DRAFT of the Final Project. Due at end of the final exam period