

News Editing
MCOM 3364-2 - 3 Credit Hours
Spring 2018
Dan Rather Communications Building #205
MW, 3:30-4:50 p.m.

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Office: Dan Rather Communications Building, Room 308A

Office hours: Monday and Wednesday afternoons 2-3 p.m., or by appointment

Course Description

This course focuses on editing for digital journalism publications. Topics include Associated Press style and mechanics, traditional and emerging headline writing styles, social media publication strategies, picture cropping and caption writing, fact checking and so-called “fake news.” The final unit of the course will explore coverage of controversial topics, including abortion, euthanasia, sexual assault and global warming, as well as a brief overview of framing theory. Prerequisite: MCOM 2362. Credit 3.

Course Objectives

This course is designed to provide you with:

- Experience editing journalistic writing for style and grammar,
- Expertise in headline writing for traditional and digital platforms,
- A cogent understanding of so-called “fake news” and proper fact checking skills; and,
- Informed editorial judgment concerning controversial topics in the news.

Required Textbooks

Borel, Brooke. (2016) *The Chicago Guide To Fact-Checking*. University of Chicago Press.

<https://www.amazon.com/Chicago-Fact-Checking-Writing-Editing-Publishing/dp/022629093X>

The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law 2017. The Associated Press, 2017.

https://www.amazon.com/Associated-Press-Stylebook-2017-Briefing/dp/0465093043/ref=sr_1_1/136-4228462-9604648?ie=UTF8&qid=1515523946&sr=8-1&keywords=associated+press+stylebook+2017

Schaefer, Mark. (2014) *Social Media Explained: Untangling The World's Most Misunderstood Business Trend*. Mark Schaefer.

https://www.amazon.com/Social-Media-Explained-Untangling-Misunderstood/dp/0615840035/ref=sr_1_15?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1515524190&sr=1-15&keywords=social+media

Additional readings, typically from scholarly journals or academic-oriented publications, will be uploaded to Blackboard periodically throughout the semester.

Course Requirements

There will be **weekly news quizzes on (almost) every Monday, administered via Scantron**, worth **10 percent** of your grade; there are 11 quizzes, but the lowest quiz grade will be dropped. **Editing assignments will be due on (almost) every Monday** worth **15 percent** of your grade; there are 12 assignments, but the lowest assignment grade will be dropped. You will **interview two working editors** in a newsroom; each interview will be worth **10 percent** of your grade. Your **final exam** will be worth **15 percent** of your grade. There is no participation grade.

News Quizzes – 10 percent total, one percent each

Most Monday classes will begin with a multiple choice quiz administered via Scantron. Bring your own scantrons; I will attempt to have a reserve supply, particularly in the early weeks of the semester, but please do not rely on it. Questions will focus on prominent news events during the previous week. The lowest quiz grade will be struck from the record, making each quiz worth 1 percentage point.

Editing Assignments – 15 percent total, 1.5 percent each

Editing assignments will be due most Mondays. You will be responsible for editing a piece of journalistic writing, particularly concerning Associated Press style formatting, grammar and fact checking. Clarity or writing preferences will typically *not* be included, but you will be expected to confirm names and details in the articles, including spelling, while proofreading for style and punctuation errors.

Interview Assignments – 20 percent total, 10 percent each

You will pursue, schedule and conduct interviews with working newsroom editors at the conclusion of Unit II and Unit IV. For Interview I, you will interview them on headline writing techniques, social media policy and their perspectives on how the two are evolving generally and in their newsroom; Interview II will focus on fact-checking strategies, how they determine credibility in sources or statistics and any difficult or controversial editorial judgment calls they have made during their careers. You will conduct these interviews, write a short introduction and report the interviews in a question-and-answer format. You may choose any working or recently retired news editor from any field or platform of journalism.

Exams – 30 percent total, 10 percent each

Each unit will conclude with a multiple-choice exam. Exams will not be multiple choice, but you are not required to provide a BlueBook.

Final Exam – 10 percent

A final exam will cover the same material in each of the four unit exams, but collected in one final exam. It will not be multiple choice, but you are not required to provide a BlueBook.

Class Participation – 0 Percent

There is no grade for class participation. I'm am very much in favor of talkative, engaged and participatory classes, and I want every student to feel empowered and encouraged to leap into a lecture or class discussion at any point. However, I know speaking before a class or public group is challenging for many students. I do not want to give naturally extroverted students a leg up over those inclined towards introversion. If this were a class on public speaking, I'd probably feel differently, but this course is designed to measure your news editing abilities and judgment, not your affinity for public loquaciousness.

Extra Credit – Occasional opportunities for extra credit may arise as the semester progresses, and will contribute an additional one percentage point to your final grade. Two opportunities are plainly visible: A panel on fake news at the South Texas College of Law in Houston on February 3, and voting in the upcoming primary election on March 6.

Note: I don't care for whom you vote. Frankly, it's not my business. If you'd like to discuss individual candidates or the election that's fine, but as far as extra credit goes voting for Vermin Supreme or a major party candidate are equally acceptable.

Course Guidelines

Deadlines – Deadlines are absolute in newsrooms and media corporations, and are largely inflexible elsewhere in the so-called “real world.” Course deadlines are strict to reflect those priorities. Missing a deadline by up to 24 hours will result in a 10 point penalty on the assignment. After 24 hours, the student will receive a zero on the assignment. Exceptions can be granted for reasonable absences or uncontrollable events, including illness or family emergencies.

Attendance Policy – SHSU Student Handbook of University Policies states that regular and punctual class attendance is expected of each student at Sam Houston State University and that it is expected that each faculty member will keep a record of student attendance. A student will not be penalized for three absences or six tardies (defined as entering class after roll has been taken) when examinations or other assigned work has not been missed.

The Department of Mass Communication has adopted the policy that every absence or two tardies over the allotted three absences or six tardies will result in the loss of one letter grade. For example, if your class grade is a B and you have five absences your final course grade will be a D.

Additionally:

- Exceptions are for documented illnesses or family emergencies or for students attending SHSU activities in an official capacity. Documentation for illness or emergency should be presented upon the student's return to the classroom. Documentation for activities should be presented prior to the absence and contain the signature of the SHSU employee sponsor.
- Each semester hour of credit entails at least two additional hours of work outside the classroom per week: so for this 3 credit course, you should expect to do at least an additional 6 hours of work a week beyond class time. This is on average; some weeks may require more, others less.

Grading scale

A	90% and above
B	80-89%
C	70-79%
D	60-69%
F	59% & below

E-mail – You must be able to receive e-mail via your “@shsu.edu” account. You will be responsible for any messages you miss if you do not use this university-assigned address. Class announcements may also be posted on Blackboard.

Academic Dishonesty – All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The University and its official representatives may initiate disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

[Dean of Student's Office](#)

Student Absences on Religious Holy Days Policy – Section 51.911(b) of the Texas Education Code requires that an institution of higher education excuse a student from attending classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day, including travel for that purpose. Section 51.911 (a) (2)

defines a religious holy day as: “a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Section 11.20...” A student whose absence is excused under this subsection may not be penalized for that absence and shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment from which the student is excused within a reasonable time after the absence.

University policy 861001 provides the procedures to be followed by the student and instructor. A student desiring to absent himself/herself from a scheduled class in order to observe (a) religious holy day(s) shall present to each instructor involved a written statement concerning the religious holy day(s). The instructor will complete a form notifying the student of a reasonable timeframe in which the missed assignments and/or examinations are to be completed. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf_www/aps/documents/861001.pdf

Students with Disabilities Policy – It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If you have a disability that may affect adversely your work in this class, then I encourage you to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with me about how I can best help you. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: No accommodation can be made until you register with the Counseling Center. For a complete listing of the university policy, see:

http://www.shsu.edu/~vaf_www/aps/811006.pdf

Campus Carry Policy – Texas law allows the concealed carry of licensed handguns on certain parts of campus. Sam Houston State University policy allows the concealed carry of licensed handguns in university classrooms. Both state law and university policy require handguns be concealed at all times. If at any time a firearm becomes visible, the student will be asked to leave and given an absence for that class day. If the student becomes disruptive, University Police Department staff will be notified. If a firearm is discharged for any reason, deliberately or accidentally, UPD staff will be notified.

Unit I: Copy Editing

Week 1:

January 17

Topic: Introductions & Overview

Quiz: Quiz 0 – not for grade

Readings: None

Due: Own a copy of the AP Stylebook

Week 2:

January 22

Topic: AP Style Mechanics: Commas, Semicolons, Numbers and Locations

Quiz: NQ1

Readings: Become familiar with AP Stylebook pages 1 – 313. Know how to browse for entries on particular topics.

Due: A1

January 24

Topic: AP Style Mechanics: Titles, Capitalizations, Hyphens

Quiz: No

Readings: Become familiar with AP Stylebook pages 1 – 313. Know how to browse for entries on particular topics.

Due: A2

Return: A1, NQ1

Week 3:

January 29

Topic: AP Style Mechanics: Fashion, Food, Religion and Sports

Quiz: NQ2

Readings: AP Stylebook pages 338 - 425

Due: A3

Return: A2

January 31

Topic: Editing Marks & AP Style Review

Quiz: No

Readings: AP Stylebook page 514

Due: A4

Return: NQ2, A3

Week 4:

February 5

Topic: Unit I Exam

Unit II: Headlines, Social Media and Photo Editing

February 7

Topic: Traditional Headline Writing

Quiz: No

Readings: None

Due: None

Return: A4

Week 5:

February 12

Topic: Seven Clever Clickbait Facts That Will Blow Your Mind

Quiz: NQ3

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: A5

Return: Unit I Exam

February 14

Topic: One Full Class on Headline Review

Quiz: No

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: None

Return: A5, NQ3

Week 6:

February 19

Topic: Social Media for News Organizations I

Quiz: NQ4

Readings: Schaefer, Blackboard readings

Due: A6

February 21

Topic: Social Media for News Organizations II

Quiz: No

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: None

Return: A6, NQ4

Week 7:

February 26

Topic: Photo Editing and Caption Writing

Quiz: NQ5

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: A7

February 28

Topic: Class Discussion with Working Editors: TBD

Quiz: No

Due: None

Return: A7, NQ5

Week 8:

March 5

Topic: Unit II Review

Quiz: NQ6

Readings: Review Unit II Readings

Due: A8

March 7

Topic: Unit II Exam

Due: Interview I

--- Spring Break ---

March 10 – 18

Topic: Relaxing, College Basketball, Travel

Quiz: No

Readings: None

Due: Stay safe! Have fun, but don't endanger yourself. Never drive when drunk or exhausted. Always have a designated driver, or have Uber or Lyft installed on your phone. Remember – in college, they're called "all-nighters" and "kegstands." In the real world, they're called "being a workaholic" and "alcohol abuse."

Return: None

Unit III: Fact Checking

Week 9:

March 19

Topic: Digital Fact Checking

Quiz: NQ7

Readings: Borel, Chapters 1 - 4

Due: None

Return: Unit II Exam, NQ6, A8

March 21

Topic: Establishing Source Credibility

Quiz: No

Readings: Borel, Chapter 5

Due: None

Return: NQ7

Week 10:

March 26

Topic: Fake News I

Quiz: NQ8

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: A9

Return: None

March 28

Topic: Fake News II

Quiz: No

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: None

Return: A9, NQ8

Week 11:

April 2

Topic: Class Discussion with Working Editors: Gardner Selby, PolitiFact Texas

Quiz: None

Readings: See Blackboard (ISOJ)

Due: A10

Return: None

April 4

Topic: Unit III Exam

Unit IV: Covering Controversy

Week 12:

April 9

Topic: Covering Suicide and Euthanasia

Quiz: NQ9

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: None

Return: A10

April 11

Topic: Covering Sexual Assault and #MeToo

Quiz: No

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: None

Return: NQ9

Week 13:

April 16

Topic: Covering Climate Change

Quiz: NQ10

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: A11

April 18

Topic: Framing Theory I

Quiz: No

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: None

Return: A11, NQ10

Week 14:

April 23

Topic: Framing Theory II

Quiz: NQ11

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: A12

April 25

Unit IV Exam

Return: A12, NQ11

Week 15:

April 30

Topic: Class Discussion with Working Editors TBD

Quiz: No

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: Interview II

Return: None

May 2

Topic: Why edit? Evolving language vs traditional rules

Quiz: No

Readings: See Blackboard

Due: None

Return: None

Week 16: May 7 – May 10

Topic: Final Exam, exact date TBD

Readings: Review All Class Readings

Due: None

Return: Interview II