

## **MASSCOMM 340: Section 1413**

### **Feature Writing**

Fall 2015 – 3 credits – Bakeless 0309 – MW – 3-4:15 p.m.

Instructor: Dennis Owen Frohlich, Ph.D.  
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#### **Office Hours**

Monday: 11 a.m. to Noon  
2 p.m. to 3 p.m.  
Wednesday: 11 a.m. to Noon  
2 p.m. to 3 p.m.  
Friday: Noon to 1 p.m.

If these times do not work for you, please email me three (3) possible times that work better for you.

#### **Required Texts**

Sumner, D. E., & Miller, H. G. (2013). *Feature & Magazine Writing: Action, Angle and Anecdotes*.  
Third edition.

The Associated Press Stylebook 2015.

Electronic and online readings will also be required throughout the semester. Electronic readings will be posted to BOLT, and online readings will be linked in the course syllabus.

#### **Catalog Description**

Studies theory and techniques of feature writing, its practices and principles, its organizational characteristics, and skills of conducting in-depth interviews. The course builds upon MASSCOMM 230, which focuses on news writing. This course is an elective for students majoring in Mass Communications. MASSCOMM 230 is a prerequisite for taking this course. Open to non-majors.

#### **Course Objectives**

After successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain the characteristics of feature writing
- Distinguish between and write different types of features

- Employ various research techniques while gathering information, including human sources, documents, and online sources
- Integrate various non-fiction storytelling techniques into feature stories
- Organize a feature story using necessary elements and tie them together with a clear and compelling focus
- Research freelance writing opportunities and write persuasive query letters

### **Class Meetings**

Class will meet twice a week in Bakeless, room 0309. Some of the readings for that week will be discussed in lecture, but not every part of the reading will be discussed. You are still responsible for completing your readings, even if we don't have time to discuss them. Class sessions will include lecture, discussions, hands-on activities, and student presentations. You are expected to attend class and to participate.

Lectures slides will be available on BOLT after class concludes. During class, do not focus on trying to write down everything that's on the slides: you can get this information after class. Instead, take notes on what's NOT mentioned on the slides, such as discussions we have, questions that other students ask, videos we watch, or other media presented during the lecture.

### **Assignments**

Your grade will be based on the following assignments. Assignment descriptions are included in this syllabus, and more descriptive assignment sheets—plus grading rubrics—are available on BOLT.

Attendance:	100 points
Feature Story Analysis 1 (Profile):	50 points
Feature Story Analysis 2 (How-To, Explanatory, Overview):	50 points
Feature Story Analysis 3 (Trend, Issue):	50 points
Query Letters (4 total):	200 points
Feature Story 1 (Profile):	100 points
Feature Story 2 (How-To, Explanatory, Overview):	100 points
Feature Story 3 (Trend, Issue):	100 points
<u>Final Feature Story (Your Choice):</u>	<u>250 points</u>
<b>Total:</b>	<b>1,000 points</b>

### **Grading**

Grades are calculated by totaling all points from graded work. Grading will be based on the following scale:

A	920-1,000
A-	900-919

B+	880-899
B	820-879
B-	800-819
C+	780-799
C	720-779
C-	700-719
D+	680-699
D	600-679
F	0-599

The grading scale is non-negotiable. A final grade of 879, for instance, is a B. All grades are final unless questions about grades are addressed in writing within **2 weeks** after the grade is posted. If you have concerns about your grades please check with me *sooner* in the semester rather than *later*.

The reason I do not round up grades is to remain fair for all students. If I round up a grade for a student who is one point below the cut-off, what do I do for the student who is 2 points below the cut-off? Three points? Five? At some point, there has to be a cut-off to ensure fairness.

### **Attendance**

Attendance is required. If you leave class early without speaking to me, or arrive late, that does not count as attendance. Attendance will be taken via a sign-in sheet. If you miss the sign-in sheet as it is passed around, it is your responsibility to sign in before you leave.

Attendance will be taken 20 times throughout the semester, worth 5 points each time it is taken. You are allowed **2 unexcused absences** during the semester. If you miss class due to illness, school activities, military service, or other university-approved reasons, please email me before class time, if possible, so that I don't make you absent.

### **Assignment Descriptions**

The following are brief descriptions of your assignments this semester. More detailed directions will be given in class. Grading rubrics can be found on BOLT so you understand what I am looking for.

#### **Feature Story Analysis (50 points each)**

For these assignments you will analyze feature stories that are similar to the first three feature stories you write. For example, before Feature Story 1 (Profile), you will examine a profile feature of your choosing. Examining what previous writers have done well, and what they could improve on, will help your own writing

#### **Query Letters (50 points each)**

After you come up with ideas for your feature stories, but before you start researching them, you will write pitch letters to real publications, addressed to real editors. Many freelance writers

write feature stories, and knowing how to pitch and market your story ideas is an indispensable skill. You are not required to actually submit your pitch letters. However, after the feature stories have been graded, you are free to modify your pitch letters and market your feature stories for publication.

### **Feature Story 1 (Profile) (100 points)**

Your first feature story will be a profile of somebody of news interest. The profile should not be of somebody you know personally, but of somebody who has an unusual story to tell or has recently had a newsworthy accomplishment. You will interview this person, and to supplement, you will interview two other people.

### **Feature Story 2 (How-To, Explanatory, Overview) (100 points)**

For your second feature, you have a choice in writing a how-to, explanatory, or overview feature story. The topic you cover should be of interest to your intended readership. You can explain how to do something or how something works, or you can break a complicated issue down to make it more understandable. You will interview at least three people.

### **Feature Story 3 (Issue, Trend) (100 points)**

Feature stories allow reporters to dig deeper into controversial issues. For this assignment, you will explore a controversial or contentious issue, or report on a cultural, technological, or moral trend in society. This feature will require extensive research, and you will interview at least three people who represent diverse viewpoints on the issue.

### **Feature Story 4 (Your Choice) (250 points)**

By the end of the semester, you will have written the major types of feature stories. These first assignments were heavily guided, but for this last feature, you write a story of your own choosing. In this feature, you will incorporate ideas discussed all semester about structure, writing, style, and research. You will interview at least three people. This feature will serve as the final exam.

### **Late Work**

Please read the syllabus carefully to know how to turn in assignments and when they are due. Most assignments will be submitted electronically to Bolt. When submitting assignments electronically, you will have a 10-minute grace period to account for possible issues when uploading your assignment, after which time the assignment will be considered late. Please do not wait until the last minute to submit assignments.

Assignments turned in late will receive a 30% penalty. Late work will **only** be accepted for **24 hours** after the due date. Work turned in later than 24 hours will not be accepted.

If you are going to miss class or a due date, please notify me **BEFORE THE DUE DATE** if at all possible. If you have an excused absence, I will still accept your assignment.

**Extra Credit**

You can earn extra credit by publishing any of the articles written for this class (any of the first three feature stories: as the last feature story is turned in at the end of the semester, you won't have time to get it published). For each published article, you can earn an additional 40 points: 4% of the final grade. Not only that, but you'll have another clip to add to your portfolio, which is more important than any grade.

For these feature stories, you already wrote pitch letters and selected publications to send them to. So use them! You might have to modify the letters slightly, as now your articles are written.

After getting an article published, please send me the link (if it is published electronically) or a scan of the newspaper/magazine copy. The clip should include your name and the date of publication.

You are free to submit your articles for publication only **AFTER** they have been graded. If you publish them before you get your grade back, you are not eligible for extra credit.

If for some reason the publication decides to sit on an article until after the semester ends (which might happen with feature stories), please send me a confirmation email or something from the publication letting me know that the article **WILL** be published in the future.

**Academic Honesty**

All work completed for this course must respect the intellectual property of others. When using somebody else's copyrighted material, whether words, images, media, or ideas, proper credit must be given. If direct quotations are used, they must be enclosed in quotation marks and properly cited. If copyrighted material is used indirectly, it must still be properly cited!

If in doubt, include a citation. If you have any questions at all, ask your instructor *before* the assignment is submitted. *Ignorance of what constitutes plagiarism is not an excuse!*

The academic community is operated on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. Bloomsburg's PRP 3512: Academic Integrity Policy applies to cases in which cheating, plagiarism, or other academic misconduct have occurred in an instructional context. Students found guilty of academic misconduct are subject to penalties, either determined by the instructor or the Provost, depending on the seriousness of the offense. Informational resources about academic honesty for students can be found at [http://www.bloomu.edu/policies\\_procedures/3512](http://www.bloomu.edu/policies_procedures/3512)

**Special Needs**

Any students eligible for classroom accommodations are invited to meet with Dr. Frohlich to discuss their concerns and to present their disclosure forms from the Students with Disabilities Center.

Our university provides reasonable accommodations to students who have documented disabilities. If you have a documented disability that requires academic accommodations and are not registered with the Students with Disabilities Center, please contact this office in the Warren Student Services Center, Room 043 as soon as possible to establish your eligibility.

**Students with Disabilities Center**

<http://www.bloomu.edu/disabilities>

Warren Student Services Center, Room 043

Phone: 570-389-4491

If you become sick during the course of the semester, or have some major personal crisis going on, please let me know as soon as possible so I can help you work around it. When I was an undergraduate, I was very sick one semester and missed a lot of classes, but my professors were willing to work with me. I'm sensitive to these issues and want to work with you, but if you do not tell me there's a problem I cannot help you.

### Course Schedule

**\*The current version of the course syllabus will be uploaded to BOLT with the revision date included in the file name\***

Week	Date	Topics
1	<p style="color: green;">Monday, August 24</p> <p>Wednesday, August 26</p>	<p style="color: green;"><b>August 24: CLASS BEGINS</b></p> <p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course Introduction and Overview</li> <li>• Types of Feature Stories</li> <li>• The Structure of a Feature Story</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 1: What Makes a Story Interesting?</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <p>No assignment.</p>
2	<p style="color: green;">Monday, August 31</p> <p>Wednesday, September 2</p>	<p style="color: green;"><b>August 31: ADD/DROP ENDS</b></p> <p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• News Values for Feature Stories</li> <li>• Generating Story Ideas</li> <li>• Refining Your Story Idea</li> <li>• Overview of Assignments Weeks 2-5</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 2: How to Find an Original Idea</li> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 3: Strong Angles and Focused Ideas</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feature Story Analysis 1 (Profile) to BOLT. <b>DUE Thursday, September 3 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> </ul>
3	<p style="color: red;">Monday, September 7</p> <p>Wednesday, September 9</p>	<p style="color: red;"><b>Labor Day, September 7: NO CLASS</b></p> <p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing Query Letters</li> <li>• Finding a Market for Your Story</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 6: To Market, To Market: Shopping Your Words Around</li> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 7: Pitch-Perfect Query Letters</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write Query Letter 1. <b>DUE Monday, September 14 at the start of class.</b></li> </ul>

<p>4</p>	<p>Monday, September 14</p> <p>Wednesday, September 16</p>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monday: Discuss Query Letters and Topics with Class</li> <li>Writing Profiles</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sumner and Miller, Chapter 12: Profiles: Slices of Life</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Submit Revised Query Letter 1 to BOLT. <b>DUE Wednesday, September 16 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> </ul>
<p>5</p>	<p>Monday, September 21</p> <p>Wednesday, September 23</p>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conducting Background Research</li> <li>How to Tell a Good Source from a Bad Source</li> <li>Long-Form Interviews</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sumner and Miller, Chapter 4: Digging Deep for Original Stories</li> <li>Sumner and Miller, Chapter 5: Talking Pointers</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feature Story 1 (Profile) to BOLT. <b>DUE Thursday, September 24 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> </ul>
<p>6</p>	<p>Monday, September 28</p> <p>Wednesday, September 30</p>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monday: Discuss Feature Story 1 (Profile) with classmates</li> <li>Overview of Assignments Weeks 6-9</li> <li>Starting Strong: Leads for Feature Stories</li> <li>Engaging Endings: Tying it All Together</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sumner and Miller, Chapter 8: Where to Begin: The First 100 Words</li> <li>Friedlander and Lee, Chapter 6: Writing the Newspaper Feature Story. [PDF available on BOLT]</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feature Story Analysis 2 (How-To, Explanatory, Overview) to BOLT. <b>DUE Thursday, October 1 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> </ul>

7	Monday, October 5  Wednesday, October 7	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing How-To, Explanatory, and Overview Stories</li> <li>• What to Do If Your Idea Doesn't Work</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 14: Eliminating the Ho-Hum From the How-To</li> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 15: Making a Timely Calendar Connection</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write Query Letter 2. <b>DUE Monday, October 12 at the start of class.</b></li> <li>• [Optional] Revised Feature Story 1 (Profile) to BOLT. <b>DUE Friday, October 9 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> </ul>
8	Monday, October 12  Wednesday, October 14	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monday: Discuss Query Letters and Topics with Class</li> <li>• Writing with Voice</li> <li>• Adding Flair to Your Writing</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 9: Action, Brevity and Style</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit Revised Query Letter 2 to BOLT. <b>DUE Wednesday, October 14 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> </ul>
9	Monday, October 19  Wednesday, October 21	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive Writing</li> <li>• Anecdotal and Thematic Framing</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 10: Anecdotes: Mining for Gold</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feature Story 2 (How-To, Explanatory, Overview) to BOLT. <b>DUE Thursday, October 22 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> </ul>
10	Monday, October 26  Wednesday, October 28  Friday, October 30	<p><b>October 30: LAST DAY TO WITHDRAW FROM CLASSES</b></p> <p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monday: Discuss Feature Story 2 (How-To, Explanatory, Overview) with classmates</li> <li>• Overview of Assignments Weeks 10-12</li> <li>• Writing Trend and Issue Stories</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 16: Writing About Trends and Issues</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feature Story Analysis 3 (Trend, Issue) to BOLT. <b>DUE Thursday, October 29 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> <li>• Query Letter 3 to BOLT. <b>DUE Friday, October 30 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> </ul>

<p>11</p>	<p>Monday, November 2</p> <p>Wednesday, November 4</p>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monday: Discuss Query Letters and Topics with Class</li> <li>Writing the Middle of the Story</li> <li>Transitions: Moving from One Idea to the Next</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weingarten, G. (2008 Pulitzer Prize Winner): <a href="#">Pearls Before Breakfast</a></li> <li>Saslow, E. (2013 Pulitzer Prize Finalist): <a href="#">Life of a Salesman</a></li> <li>Gonnerman, J. (2015 Pulitzer Prize Finalist): <a href="#">Before the Law</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[Optional] Revised Feature Story 2 (How-To, Explanatory, Overview) to BOLT. <b>DUE Friday, November 6 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> </ul>
<p>12</p>	<p>Monday, November 9</p> <p>Wednesday, November 11</p>	<p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identifying Good Quotations</li> <li>Simplifying Your Writing and Avoiding Clutter</li> <li>Experimenting with Tense and Voice</li> <li>Sign up for Writing Coaching Next Week</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sanders, E. (2012 Pulitzer Prize Winner): <a href="#">The Bravest Woman in Seattle</a></li> <li>Weingarten, G. (2010 Pulitzer Prize Winner): <a href="#">Fatal Distraction</a></li> <li>Schweitzer, S. (2015 Pulitzer Prize Finalist): <a href="#">Chasing Bayla</a></li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feature Story 3 (Trend, Issue) to BOLT. <b>DUE Thursday, November 12 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> </ul>
<p>13</p>	<p><b>Monday, November 16</b></p> <p><b>Wednesday, November 18</b></p>	<p><b>November 16, 18: INDIVIDUAL WRITING COACH IN LIEU OF CLASS</b></p> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sumner and Miller, Chapter 11: Briefs: Shortcuts to Publication</li> <li>Sumner and Miller, Chapter 13: Writing Nonfiction Narratives</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Query Letter 4 to BOLT. <b>DUE Thursday, November 19 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> <li>You must attend a writing coaching session this week!</li> </ul>

<p>14</p>	<p>Monday, November 23</p> <p>Tuesday, November 24</p> <p>Wednesday, November 25</p> <p>Friday, November 27</p>	<p><b>November 24: READING DAY</b> <b>Thanksgiving, November 25-27: NO CLASS</b></p> <p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feature Stories on the Web</li> <li>• Supplementing a Feature Story with Multimedia</li> <li>• Connecting with Your Audience</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No readings.</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b> No assignment.</p>
<p>15</p>	<p>Monday, November 30</p> <p>Wednesday, December 2</p> <p>Friday, December 4</p>	<p><b>December 4: LAST DAY OF CLASS (University)</b></p> <p><b>Topics</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Evolving Writing Industry</li> <li>• Course Wrap-Up: Where Do You Go From Here?</li> </ul> <p><b>Read</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 19: Advancing Beyond the Slush Pile</li> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 20: Before You Hit the “Send” Button: A Checklist</li> <li>• Sumner and Miller, Chapter 21: Careers in Magazine Publishing</li> </ul> <p><b>Assignments</b> No assignment.</p>
<p>16</p>	<p>Monday, December 7</p> <p>Wednesday, December 9</p>	<p><b>December 7-11: FINALS WEEK</b> Your final feature story, Feature Story 4 (Your Choice) will function as the final for this course.</p> <p><b>Assignments</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final Feature Story (Your Choice) to BOLT. <b>DUE Wednesday, December 9 at 11:55 p.m.</b></li> </ul>
<p>17</p>	<p>Friday, December 18</p>	<p><b>December 18: GRADES AVAILABLE TO VIEW ON ISIS</b></p>