

COM-087-1: Writing for the Media

Syllabus – Fall 2024

“Journalism is the first rough draft of history” - Philip Graham

Room: Voskuyl Library, 204

Course Meeting: M/W/F 11:30-12:35

Instructor: Dr. Paul Mena

Email: pmena@westmont.edu

Office: Deane Hall 107B

Office Hours: M/W/F 9:10 to 10:20 AM
M/W/F 1:15 to 1:50 PM

Required Texts

- *Inside Reporting: A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism*, Tim Harrower (3rd Edition)
- *The Associated Press Stylebook*, 56th edition (2022-2024)

Supplemental materials will be added to Canvas

Course Description

Catalog Course Description: “COM 087 Writing for the Media (4) A conceptual and practical course that introduces the fundamentals of media writing, with an emphasis on journalistic writing and reporting. The course focuses on helping students develop writing and reporting skills for print and electronic media.”

Course Introduction

Welcome to COM-087! This writing-intensive course provides both a conceptual and practical understanding of the fundamentals of media writing, with an emphasis on journalistic writing and reporting. The course focuses on helping students develop writing and reporting skills for print and electronic media as well as an understanding of the role of media writing and journalism in society. Throughout the course, students will achieve the ability to write clearly and concisely. The course will introduce students to the process of writing news, from understanding what makes a story newsworthy to the research, reporting, and writing of news articles. In this sense, students will gain experience gathering information and interviewing sources. The course emphasizes the importance of working to a deadline, editing, and enacting media literacy practices. In this sense, the course helps students to put their writing skills into applied practice, working within the conventions of journalism writing. Students' work will be evaluated for clarity and style in addition to content. Students will also get an appreciation of the role of journalists in a democratic society and the ethical principles of journalism. We will discuss how journalists can serve their communities from a Christian perspective. Additionally, we will explore the legal issues surrounding journalism and writing for the media.

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Course Learning Outcomes

Because this course is one part of your broader Westmont education, the course learning outcomes have connections to that broader education. This course is part of the Communication Studies major, so it will contribute to your achieving some of the outcomes of that program as well. You can see below the connections between the course and the Communication Studies program.

Communication Studies Program Learning Outcomes

1. Create effective and appropriate written and oral messages
2. Employ communication theories, perspectives, and principles knowledgeably
3. Apply ethical and biblical principles and practices

COM-087 Learning Outcomes

Writing for the Media fulfills the writing-intensive course Westmont's general education requirement. The main learning outcome for this GE requirement is this: "Students will communicate in written form for a variety of purposes and audiences across the curriculum." The specific student learning outcomes for the achievement of this are:

- Students will be able to write clear, concise, and straight-to-the-point articles for a broad audience.
- Students will be able to apply journalistic conventions to their writing

Relative to departmental/major goals, by the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Report and write hard news and feature stories for print and online news outlets.
- Articulate principles of ethical journalism and best practices in writing for the media.
- Articulate how their faith informs their work as storytellers.

COM Program Outcomes -> Course Outcomes	Oral and Written Communication	Disciplinary Knowledge	Biblical and ethical principles
Write hard news and feature stories for print and online	Major Assignments,	Lecture, Readings, Assignments	Lecture, Readings
Principles of ethical journalism	Writing Assignments, Tests, Exam	Lecture, Readings, Assignments,	Lecture, Readings
Faith and storytelling	Writing Assignments	Lecture, Readings	Lecture, Readings, Assignments, Exam

Assignments

- **In-Class Writing Assignments:** Throughout the semester, there will be in-class writing assignments that will help students apply course concepts, practice writing techniques, and prepare for the major assignments.
- **News Story:** For this course, you will research, report and write a news story (400-600 words) about a topic of your choice. The story should have three interviewees, a photo, and at least three hyperlinks. This assignment requires that students interview people in person or by phone, Zoom, or other online means. A revision may raise the assignment grade.

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- **Feature Story:** Students will write a feature story (500-700 words) on a topic of their choice. The story should have at least four sources (interviewees), two photos or one multimedia element, and at least three hyperlinks. This assignment requires that students interview people by phone, email, Zoom, or other online means. A revision may raise the assignment grade.
- **Q&A Story:** You will interview a professor, student, staff member, alum, community member, or church member. Write up the interview in a Q&A format (400-600 words). The story should have a photo and at least three hyperlinks. A revision may raise the assignment grade.
- **Tests:** You will complete two tests on key concepts of media writing and journalism. Tests will be multiple choice and short answers.
- **Participation:** Class participation is critical for succeeding in this course. Students will be rewarded with a perfect score as long as they attend classes and actively contribute to class discussions. It is expected that students come to class ready to discuss the assigned readings.
- **Final Exam:** A final exam will include material from lectures and readings, as well as a self-assessment of what you have learned in the course.

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Course Grading

Your course grade will be made up of the following:

In-Class Writing Assignments	15%
News Story	20 %
Feature Story	20 %
Q&A Story	20 %
Tests	10 %
Participation	5 %
Final Exam	10 %

Final Grade Total

A 94 - 100	C+ 77 – 79.99
A- 90 – 93.99	C 74 – 76.99
B+ 87 – 89.99	C- 70 – 73.99
B 84 – 86.99	D+ 67 – 69.99
B- 80 – 83.99	D 60 – 66.99
F 0 – 59.99	

About your instructor

Dr. Paul Mena teaches Writing for the Media/Introduction to Journalism, Multimedia Journalism, Media and Mass Communication, Misinformation and Fact-Checking, Studies in Communication Ethics, and Public Speaking. He received his Ph.D. in Mass Communication from the University of Florida. His research on journalism, fact-checking, misinformation, and credibility has been published in Journalism, Journalism Practice, Social Media + Society, Policy & Internet, and Media and Communication. He worked as a professional journalist in Ecuador for around 18 years, reporting for BBC News Mundo, El Pais (Spain), and Ecuadorian media. As a Fulbright scholar, he obtained his master's degree in Mass

Communications and Journalism Studies at the University of South Florida. Before teaching at Westmont College, he taught at the University of California Santa Barbara for four years.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance

Consistent class attendance is very important. Students will be allowed without penalty (beyond the possible loss of credit for missed or late work) no more than three absences per semester. Each additional absence will result in a 2-point reduction in the final grade. Missing more than five classes will be grounds for failing the class. Once a student reaches six absences, the instructor can also request that the student be dropped from the class. Students will not be penalized (beyond the possible loss of credit for missed or late work) for authorized absences for official school activities (such as varsity athletic events and official class field trips) or for a reasonable number of absences due to illness. Students who arrive 15 or more minutes late will be marked as absent.

Deadlines

You are responsible for readings and turning in assignments the day they are due. Journalism is a deadline-driven profession. Punctuality is key in assignment submission. Lateness will lower the assignment grade. If you cannot meet the deadline for an assignment, it is your responsibility to contact the instructor at least 24 hours in advance. Extensions are not guaranteed, but are at the instructor's discretion, on a case-by-case basis.

Assignment Submission

The three major assignments (News Story, Feature Story, and Q&A) are to be submitted via Google Docs (use your Westmont account). Each assignment should include at least one photo. Each document must be shared with the instructor (pmena@westmont.edu).

Revision Policy

Revising work is a key component of this course. Revisions of your stories are **due no later than one week from when you receive edit notes** on your original submission. You will submit a revision in order to improve your skills and potentially raise your grade. When revising the story, just resolve the comments/make the changes on the original document on Google Docs and then send the instructor an email to let him know that the new version of the story is ready.

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Professionalism / AP Stylebook

This course promotes excellence in journalism writing. Please develop a practice of consulting the AP Stylebook as you write and of assuming the role of first editor and proofreader before you submit your assignments. In addition, please conduct yourself accordingly when contacting sources. Students in this course are expected to interview people in person or by phone, Zoom, or other online means

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Westmont's expectation regarding honor and respect in the classroom

Westmont's Community Life Statement calls us to treat each other according to two commands from Jesus: "Love one another as I have loved you," and "Love your neighbor as yourself." In this class, we will embody these commitments as we interact with one another and with the class material. Please review the following webpage <https://www.westmont.edu/about/community-commitments/community->

[life-statement](#) You may also find it helpful to access the College's policy on Bias, Harassment, and Discrimination.

Academic Integrity

Honesty and integrity are fundamental values in academia. When students join our college community, they are expected, as apprentice scholars, to search for truth with integrity and accuracy. This quest requires humility about our abilities, respect for the ideas of others, and originality in our thinking. Since Westmont is a Christian community, the integrity of our scholarship is rooted in the integrity of our faith. We seek to be followers of Christ in the classroom, in the library, and at the privacy of our computers. Violations of academic integrity are a serious breach of trust within the Westmont community because they violate the regard for truth essential to genuine learning and Christian consistency. Such deception also hurts those students who do their work with integrity. Violations of Academic Integrity may consist of cheating (the use of unauthorized sources of information on an examination or other assignment), falsification (misrepresentation of facts in any academic project or obligation) or plagiarism (the use of someone else's words or ideas without giving proper credit).

Dishonesty of any kind may result in loss of credit for the work involved and the filing of a report with the Provost's Office. Major or repeated infractions may result in dismissal from the course with a grade of F. Be familiar with the College's plagiarism policy, found at <https://www.westmont.edu/office-provost/academic-program/academic-integrity-policy>

Academic Integrity and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Tools: A student should NOT substitute AI-generated text for original academic work.

Westmont's [academic integrity policy](#) prohibits us from "present[ing] another's work as our own." Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT attempt to do the work of writing and other creation for their users. Therefore, students should NOT substitute AI-generated content or ideas for original academic work. Westmont faculty members design assignments for students' incremental and active learning through methods such as reading, summarizing, discussion, and an authentic generative process in which a student does the work of critical thinking and message construction.

Reasonable Accommodation and General Wellbeing

Students who have been diagnosed with a condition that meets the criteria of a disability are strongly encouraged to contact the Accessibility Resource Office (ARO) as early as possible to discuss appropriate accommodations for this course. Formal accommodations will only be granted for students whose disabilities have been verified by ARO. These accommodations may be necessary to ensure your full participation and the successful completion of this course. Please email aro@westmont.edu and see the website for more information <https://www.westmont.edu/accessibility-resources>

COM-087 WEEKLY SCHEDULE

THIS SCHEDULE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE BY THE INSTRUCTOR DEPENDING ON THE PROGRESS OF THE COURSE.

Additional readings and resources will be posted on Canvas

Week	Topics	Readings	Due
Week 1:	Syllabus review	American Press Institute, "The elements of journalism"	

Aug 26, 28, 30	Principles and practices of journalism and media writing Newsworthiness	Harrower, Chapter 1	
Week 2: Sept 2, 4, 6	Media writing vs. academic writing Parts of a news story The Inverted Pyramid	Harrower, Chapter 2	
Week 3: Sept 9, 11, 13	Leads and nut graphs Quotation and attribution AP Style	Harrower, Chapter 3 AP Stylebook, Chapter: Punctuation	Sept 13, Test 1
Week 4: Sept 16, 18, 20	News reporting Finding sources and gathering information Story pitching News writing tips	Harrower, Chapter 4 Poynter's "The 11 Suggestions: An antique mirror on journalism's craft and values"	<u>Inverted Pyramid Assignment (In-class writing assignment)</u>
Week 5: Sept 23, 25, 27	Writing about an event Covering speeches	Harrower, Chapter 5	<u>Event Coverage Assignment (In-class writing assignment)</u>
Week 6: Sept 30, Oct 2, 4	Feature stories Writing a profile	Harrower, Chapter 6	Sept 30, News Story Assignment
Week 7: Oct 7, 9, 11	Writing human-interest stories Investigative reporting	Bradshaw, "How to write openings that hook the reader"	
Week 8: Oct 16, 18	Writing for the web Writing for social media	Harrower, Chapter 8 AP Stylebook, Chapter "AP social media guidelines"	
Week 9: Oct 21, 23, 25	Photojournalism Creating a photo story	Reynolds Journalism Institute, "Power of photojournalism" NPR, "A handy guide to making awesome photos"	<u>Photojournalism exercise (in-class writing assignment)</u>
Week 10: Oct 28, 30, Nov 1	Q&A articles The art of interviewing	PBS, The art of the interview Nieman Foundation, The craft (and art) of the interview	Oct 28, Feature Story Assignment
Week 11: Nov 4, 6, 8	Writing for the media: Ethical principles	Harrower, Chapter 7 SPJ's Code of Ethics	
Week 12: Nov 11, 13, 15	Writing for the media: Legal implications Media writing, libel, and privacy	AP Stylebook, Chapter: "Briefing on media law"	Nov 15, Test 2
Week 13: Nov 18, 20, 22	Media and editorials Writing an opinion piece	Poynter, Seven Steps to a Strong Opinion	Nov 20, Q&A Story Assignment
Week 14: Nov 25	Writing for Public Relations PR and Journalism	Harrower, Chapter 10	<u>News release (in-class writing assignment)</u>
Week 15: Dec 2, 4, 6	Writing for the media from a Christian perspective	Digital News Report 2023	<u>How faith can inform our work as</u>

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	Impact of new technologies on media writing Preparation for the final exam		storytellers (<u>in-class writing assignment</u>)
Week 16			Dec 10, 12:00 pm Final Exam

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Resources and Student Support Services

Westmont's emergency procedures

<https://www.westmont.edu/emergency>

Tutoring

<https://www.westmont.edu/voskuyl-library-home/tutoring>

Writer's Corner

<https://www.westmont.edu/writers-corner>

Research Help Desk and other Library Services

<https://www.westmont.edu/library>

Accessibility Resource Office (ARO)

<https://www.westmont.edu/accessibility-resources>

CAPS

<https://www.westmont.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services>

The COVE Career Services

<https://www.westmont.edu/cove-career-center>

Peer Coaches

<https://www.westmont.edu/center-student-success/peer-coaching>

Student Success Coaches (SSCs)

<https://www.westmont.edu/center-student-success/student-success-coaches>

WCSA's Take a Professor to Lunch/Richie's Program

<https://www.westmont.edu/student-life/campus-activities/westmont-college-student-association>