Department of English, University of Waterloo

English 408A: Writing for the Media
Winter 2008

Instructor: Kelley Teahen
Office: NH 3028
Office Hours: By appointment
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Classroom: PAS 1241
Times: Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 12:30 p.m. to 1:20 p.m.

Course Description:
This course will examine the genres used in writing for the media, both in journalism and in public relations, particularly within a Canadian context. Students will study the history of how these forms evolved, the importance of identifying audience in these styles of writing, analyze how these genres are employed, and also gain practical experience in writing and editing within these genres.

Learning Objectives:

➢ Be able to identify a wide variety of print journalism genres and demonstrate writing skills at a beginning professional level in those genres, meeting expectations around deadlines, form choice, accuracy, error-free texts, and clarity
➢ Be able to identify a wide variety of public relations genres and demonstrate writing skills at a beginning professional level in those genres, meeting expectations around deadlines, form choice, accuracy, error-free texts, and clarity
➢ Be critically engaged in news coverage and able to compare, and articulate, how media outlets differ in their approaches, and why
➢ Assess how and why language choices get made and affect media writing, applying semiotic and/or rhetorical theory

Required Texts:

1. Course Book for English 408A, Available at University of Waterloo Bookstore

Recommended dictionary: Oxford Canadian Dictionary.

Helpful writing texts:
Canadian Press Caps and Spelling.
Strunk and White, The Elements of Style.
Policies

1. No plagiarism please. You should all know the drill by now, and, if you don’t, the university policy is attached at the end of this course outline.
2. The assignments and portfolios must be turned in on time. One mark per day will be deducted for late assignments and portfolios (i.e., one day late, the 30-mark project is now marked out of 29). Alternate deadlines can be arranged if proposed well in advance of the set deadlines.
3. Because this is a writing course, and how you write is critical to assessment, marks will be deducted for spelling and grammar errors. Please do not be surprised by this. Proofread everything carefully.

Assignments

Media clippings collections and analysis, 15 per cent: series due at end of week five (Friday, February 8). This file will be graded for completion and for effort.

Journalism genre portfolio, 30 per cent: due at end of week six (Friday, February 15). Submit a portfolio and indicate which three items should be evaluated. The portfolio will contain at minimum three items, including a 500-word news report on a public event (choices will be made through a sign-up sheet on UW-ACE, to be set up by first week of classes); a feature piece of 700 to 1,000 words on a subject of your choice that includes sources of information from at least one interview as well as research; and an editorial column of 600 to 700 words expressing an opinion on a current event topic.

A paper (1,500 words), 20 per cent, due at end of week nine (Friday, March 14): written in MLA academic style, in which you analyze language use in journalism based on original research. In consultation with the lecturer, you will choose a topic and examine language used to discuss/describe that topic in three different eras. For example: Women in politics in 1960, 1980, and 2007. (The class will do a group, in-class analysis of language used to describe Quebec separatism as a model.).

Public relations genre portfolio, 30 per cent: due at end of classes, week 12 (Friday, April 4); will also accept on Monday, April 7. Submit a portfolio and indicate which three items should be evaluated. The portfolio will contain at minimum three items, including a news release; a fact sheet and backgrounder; and a “bundled item” of pieces that, together, promote an event (suggest a poster and PSA at minimum). Marks will be awarded for form as well as content.

The final five per cent will be awarded for contribution to class discussion.
Course Schedule and Readings

Week 1, Jan. 7, 9, and 11: Introduction

1.1 Course introduction, and defining the scope of what we will cover, and what we won’t cover (such as advertising and film)

1.2 Stylistic differences between academic and media writing
   o Canadian Press Stylebook, pp. 150-171
   o

1.3 History of media in Canada (readings in course book pages 2 to 20)
   o Canadian Newspaper Association ownership graphs 1990-2005
   o Current Canadian Newspaper Ownership listing
   o Canadian Marketing Association Chart of Media Ownership

Week 2, Jan. 14, 16, and 18: Writing for the Media: Journalism genres

2.1 News judgment (some call it news value): what becomes “news” (readings in course book pages 22-32)

   o Scanlan, pp. 152-162

2.3: Opinion and analysis writing
   o “Column Writing and Editorial Writing” (video No. 12) from News Writing video series; view at http://www.learner.org/resources/series44.html

Over weekend: track a major news story and pull news, feature and opinion writing related to that story. Analyze why this has become “news” at this time and place.
Week 3: Jan. 21, 23, 25: Writing for the Media: Journalism genres (part 2)

3.1 Classroom (group) discussion about the story and how it is covered in the various genres. Be prepared to hand in clippings and one-page analysis.

3.2 Review how media stories can be constructed: touch on broadcast as well as differences among print vehicles; working with photography, graphics, new possibilities with web
   - *Canadian Press Stylebook*, pages 177-182 (web); pp. 184-187 (broadcast style); pp. 355-374 (working with photos and illustrations)

3.3 Knowing your audience: style differences among media, based on audience. Examination beyond newspaper to include media geared to particular gender, age, geography, interest (examples in course book pages 41 to 62)
   - Weatherhead, Jennifer. “Autumn Romance.” *Elle Canada*, October 2007 (accessed online through mochasofa)

*Over weekend: track the same story as covered in tabloid, broadsheet, variety of media*

Week 4, Jan. 28, 30, and Feb. 1: Writing for the Media: Principles

4.1 Group discussions and comparisons of same story and how covered

4.2 Framing the story (*readings found in course book pages 64-90*):

4.3 Social construction of news (*readings in course book pages 86-116*)
- Standards from the Ontario Press Council

*Over weekend: analyze two major stories and point out from where the information came: how attributed; quoted, evidence of bias*

**Week 5, Feb. 4, 6, and 8. Writing for the Media: gathering your material**

5.1 Building the story: research, attribution and fact-gathering
   - Web links to journalistic resources (on UW-ACE)

5.2 Interviewing (with in-class demos): part 2 of how journalists find information

5.3 Review of forms of stories: how to pick the best form based on materials, audience and your medium
   - *Canadian Press Stylebook*, pp. 39-43 (covers news analyses, backgrounders) pp. 76-79 (covers profiles; ignore bit called “slugs”)

*On Friday, Feb. 8: Hand in clipping and analysis portfolio*

**Week 6, Feb. 11, 13 and 15. Writing for the Media: more than just politics and bloodshed**

6.1 Arts writing
   - [www.artsjournal.com](http://www.artsjournal.com); also *Canadian Press Stylebook*, pp. 58-62.

6.2 Sports writing
   - [torontosun.com](http://torontosun.com), [thestar.com](http://thestar.com), SI.com; also *Canadian Press Stylebook*, pp. 80-86.

6.3 “Lifestyles”: food, travel, fashion, and fitness.
   - [Epicurious.com](http://Epicurious.com), [mochasofa.com](http://mochasofa.com), [style.com](http://style.com); also *Canadian Press Stylebook*, pp. 65-67 and 89-90.

*Last class before reading week: journalism portfolio due on Feb. 15, 30 per cent*

**Reading Week Feb. 18-22**

**Week 7, Feb. 25, 27, 29: Media analysis**

7.1 and 7.2 Media analysis theory (*readings in course book pages 120 to 135*)
7.3 Research tips on finding newspaper materials from archived sources: class at Dana Porter Library (for essay assignment): handout from library.
   o See links through UW-ACE.

Week 8, March 3, 5, and 7: Media Analysis

8.1 Media analysis
   o Understanding Media Semiotics: review previous reading

8.2 Language in the media: gender and power: “agents” and “patients”

8.3 “First draft of history” reflecting politics and views of media ownership at the time.
   http://www.cjc-online.ca/printarticle.php?id=577&layout=html

Week 9, March 10, 12, 14: Introduction to Public Relations

9.1 Introduction to Public Relations, including defining your “publics”, and the communications theories behind PR practices (readings in course book pages 138 to 179)

9.2 How to communicate your story to your public(s) through media: discussion and tips

9.3 News releases (Readings in course book pages 180-207)

Media analysis paper due: 20 per cent
Week 10, March 17 and 19: Public Relations: genres

10.1 Media kits: bios; backgrounders; fact sheets (readings from course book pages 180-222)
- See Seitel, Fraser, F. *The Practice of Public Relations* class 9.3 reading.

10.2 In-class partner swap and group discussion: editing of news-release draft

Friday, March 21: Good Friday, so no classes

Week 11, March 24, 26, and 28: Public Relations: how to get your message out to the public

11.1 direct-mail letters, web, email and other ways to communicate directly with your audience(s): the quest for personalization and segmentation

11.2 What to use when: in-class discussion/quiz on picking the right form of communication for the right circumstances. Reviewing writing checklist for promoting events: posters, tickets, invitations, among other tools.
- Outline notes on UW-ACE by K. Teahen

11.3 Crisis communications: working with the media and writing needed to prepare; shifting from “managing the crisis” to “managing the risk.” (readings from course book pages 225 to 235)

Week 12, March 31, April 2, 4. Public Relations: persuasion at work

12.1 Understanding rhetoric in PR (readings in course book pages 237 to 249)

12.2: Your underwear is showing: seeing through PR efforts
- “Spin of the Day” from the Center for Media and Democracy
  [http://www.prwatch.org/spin](http://www.prwatch.org/spin) (posted on UW-ACE)

12.3: Course wrap-up: what have we learned? Where are we going from here?
*Public Relations writing portfolio due April 4: alternate date April 7 (last day of classes, Monday class time).*
Thou Shalt Not Cheat:

"Note on avoidance of academic offences:
All students registered in the courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for their actions. When the commission of an offence is established, disciplinary penalties will be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students are directed to consult the summary of Policy #71 which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (section 1; on the Web at wwwadm.uwaterloocaninfousecPoliciespolicy71.htm.

If you need help in learning what constitutes an academic offence; how to avoid offences such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission; how to follow appropriate rules with respect to "group work" and collaboration; or if you need clarification of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your TA and/or your course instructor for guidance. Other resources regarding the discipline policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean."

"Students who believe that they have been wrongfully or unjustly penalized have the right to grieve; refer to Policy #70, Student Grievance, http://wwwadm.uwaterloocaninfosecpoliciespolicy70.htm."

Communications professional with 20 years of experience and a Master of Arts in English. Further studies completed in journalism, communications, and public relations. Skilled in strategic planning for communications, marketing, and media relations. A diplomatic team-builder who can pull together diverse sectors for a common project or cause. Experienced in teaching and coaching in writing, media training and public relations. Award-winning writer with exceptional research, copy-editing, project management and interview abilities as well as experience with publications in print and online, photography, layout and design. Experienced also in issues management, event planning, and managing relations with community partners, governmental leaders, and volunteers.

QUALIFICATIONS

University of Waterloo
March 2006 to present: Associate Director, Marketing and Communications, Department of Communications and Public Affairs.
Deputy director of department, with specific responsibilities for publications and improvement of web content. Editor of University of Waterloo Magazine, Seizing Opportunities, New Faculty Report, and other central university publications. Responsible for strategic planning, project management, and for chairing campus-wide marketing working group. Supervise team of writing and web staff. Provide backup and support in crisis communications, issues management, internal communications, government relations and media relations.
- In May 2006, asked by President David Johnston to undertake a special project of assisting Dean Ken Coates with government and community relations related to the Stratford campus explorations.
- 2006 and 2007: Lecturer, English 210H Arts Writing, St. Jerome’s University (federated with UW).
- 2008: Lecturer, English 408A, Media Writing, University of Waterloo

University of Western Ontario
2004 to 2006: Developed curriculum for new Writing for Public Relations course, part of the Diploma in Public Relations, and hired as course instructor. Responsible for course package creation, marking, administration and working with other instructors to ensure a cohesive education experience for students.

The Stratford Festival of Canada
2001 to 2005: Media Manager. Running the media office for Canada’s largest non-profit arts organization.
- Responsible for story generation, writing and editing for Festival publications, creating media materials (EPKs, image gallery, news releases), co-ordinating special events, and advising senior staff in strategic marketing planning, crisis management and media training. Held key role as Festival spokesperson.
- Significantly increased Festival’s coverage in national media and northeastern U.S. media; exceeded targets even in light of budget cutbacks.
- Cited as “the best publicist in Canada” by Marsha Lederman, national arts reporter, CBC Radio.

The London Free Press
1987 to 2000: Reporter, Copy Editor, Editorial Writer, Columnist and Section Editor
- Award-winning writer promoted to Section Editor with responsibilities for assigning, selecting and generating copy collaborating with a wide range of local and national writers.
- Expert at copy editing, layout, art and photo selection; trained as an editor for Quark Publishing System.
- Responsible for budget and long-term planning, including recruitment of freelancers.
- As a writer, covered a wide range of assignment areas, such as religion, education and equity issues. Skilled in opinion and analysis writing, researching, interviewing.
- Frequent public speaker in schools and community.

The Globe and Mail, The Winnipeg Free Press and freelance
1985 to 1987: reporting, writing and editing.
- Six-month contract as a copy editor and city news reporter at the Globe and Mail.
• In 1986, contract position in Winnipeg as a features reporter.
• Freelance included magazine writing, Globe and Mail stringer and contract with the National Independent.

EDUCATION

Professional Certificate in Communications and Public Relations
University of Western Ontario, six-course program completed in January 2004.

Bachelor of Journalism
University of King’s College, Halifax, 1985
• Scholarship student. Degree awarded with distinction. Copy editor of department newspaper. Worked from 1983 to 1985 at King’s as Alexandra Hall graduate don and academic tutor for undergraduate students.

Master of Arts, English
Dalhousie University, Halifax, 1984
• Recipient of Dalhousie Fellowship. Concentrations in Renaissance theatre and 20th-century Canadian literature. Wrote thesis on the role of the small town in the works of Margaret Laurence and Alice Munro.

Honours Bachelor of Arts
St. Jerome’s University at University of Waterloo, 1983
• Dean’s list, multiple scholarship winner. English major, music minor, with other studies in theatre, history, French, psychology and political science. Winner of St. Jerome’s College Award in 1983.

PROFESSIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Recent conferences and knowledge upgrades:
• “Marketing, PR, and the Net” (CASE 2006)
• “Integrated Marketing and Branding” (CASE 2007)
• “Branding in a Sea of Change” (Canadian Marketing Association, 2007)

Guest Lecturer, 1993-2005
• St. Jerome’s University, Arts Writing, 2002-2005
• University of Western Ontario law school, Law and Social Welfare, Prof. Jeff Schlemmer, 1993-1999
• Other talks at Western law school, Western school of journalism, through the Sears Drama Festival, and at secondary schools in southwestern Ontario

Professional Member, Ontario Press Council, February 1999 to 2001
Elected to this 22-member body that adjudicates complaints against member newspapers. Involved in rulings on sensitive topics ranging from Muslim portrayal in papers to conflict-of-interest rules for columnists.

Represented southern Ontario on Board of Directors as reviewer and feature writer for Theatrum magazine. Worked on newsletter, strategic communications, special events and conference organization.

COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES

A Grand Night for Stratford, 2001 to 2005
Devised and executed media plan for sold-out fundraisers for cancer charities, held the past five years at the Stratford Festival Theatre. Also ran volunteer media plan for Impulse, a 2003 fundraiser for AIDS charities.

Women’s Community House Director, September 1998 to September 2001
One of 11 board members overseeing a 40-bed secure shelter and a second-stage housing complex. Elected to executive in 2000. Did speaking engagements in community on behalf of the shelter.

Karen Schussler Singers, 1995-2000; also backup vocals for singers Denise Pelley and Jackie Richardson
Sang and performed in Southern Ontario and Detroit with this London-based choir and also performed as backup singer in the music-drama The Gospel According to Jazz.

Organizer of Celebrate Green London gala; fundraising chair for this city-wide league of community groups.
Advisory Council, Centre for Ecology and Spirituality, 1992 to 1995
One of 10 community leaders advising this centre affiliated with the Elliott Allen Institute at U. of T. Tasks included goal-setting, newsletter, fundraising and assisting staff with conference and program organization.
10 SCENARIOS WHERE YOU NEED TO COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY TO THE PUBLIC

STUDENT NAME: ____________________________________________________________

In this assignment, define the public, or audience, for each scenario, and choose the best method (or methods) for communicating with your public.

1. Who: Medical Officer of Health
   Scenario: E-coli is found in a municipal swimming pool

   Audience
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

   Communication method(s)
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

2. Who: Owner of a videostore
   Scenario: Pornographic tapes were switched with children cartoon tapes by a disgruntled staff member.

   Audience
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________

   Communication method(s)
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________________
3. Who: President of a community association
Scenario: A developer wants the zoning law changed to put up a 20-storey apartment building in your neighbourhood; at present, the law allows only four-storey buildings, a policy the community association supports

Audience
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

Communication method(s)
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

4. Who: Executive volunteer member of a soccer league for children
Scenario: There are not enough volunteers signed up to run next season’s games

Audience
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

Communication method(s)
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

5. Who: Union organizer
Scenario: You are approached by a committee of workers from a non-unionized plant with 1,000 employees. This small group believes there is support for a union drive at the plant

Audience
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

Communication method(s)
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
6. Who: PR person for the local chapter of the Canadian Cancer Society
Scenario: The annual daffodil fundraiser sale is approaching April 1, and last year sales dropped dramatically

Audience

Communication method(s)

7. Who: Professional Association of Engineers
Scenario: For the past three years, the number of young women applying to engineering school has dropped. This concerns the association, which wants to encourage more women to enter the field

Audience

Communication method(s)

8. Who: Fire Chief
Scenario: Two nights in a row, someone has died in a house fire. In each case, the fire was started by candles left burning. In one house, there was no fire alarm; in another, the fire alarm was installed but the batteries had been removed.

Audience

Communication method(s)
9. Who: Downtown merchants association chairperson
   Scenario: The association opposes a plan to allow the building of a “big box store” mall on the edge of town

   Audience

   Communication method(s)

10. Who: Spokesperson for CN Rail
    Scenario: A train carrying tanks of chemicals harmful to humans has just derailed one kilometre north of Guelph, Ontario

   Audience

   Communication method(s)