

COM 285: News Writing & Reporting
Shippensburg University, Spring 2018
Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9:30 – 10:45 a.m., Rowland Hall 202

<p>Professor: Kyle Heim, Ph.D. Office: Rowland Hall 123 Office hours: Tue. & Thurs., 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. Wed., 4 – 5 p.m. or by appointment</p>	<p>Professor's email: krheim@ship.edu Office phone: (717) 477-1152 Course website: http://d2l.ship.edu</p>
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Course description

COM 285 is a course that focuses on the journalistic style of writing and is intended for students who plan to become professional writers. It teaches the basic journalistic formats and strategies used in print and online media such as the summary lead, delayed lead and conventional news-story format. COM 285 teaches students to write with economy and clarity.

Course objectives

COM 285 explores the fundamentals of journalism. During the semester, students will learn to:

- develop news judgment
- understand and apply Associated Press style
- recognize the essential elements of news and develop story ideas
- develop the central point of a story and organize information
- write news leads that encompass major elements of the story and emphasize the strongest angle of the news
- understand story structure and how to write the body of the story clearly and concisely
- write accurately by gathering credible source material and verifying information
- develop strong interviewing skills and note-taking techniques
- use attribution and quotations effectively
- cover speeches and meetings
- write obituaries
- edit and rewrite stories effectively under deadline pressure
- incorporate digital media and social media in the reporting process

Required texts and materials

- *Writing and Reporting for the Media*, 11th edition, Bender, Davenport, Drager and Fedler (2016). ISBN: 978-0190200886
- *Associated Press (AP) Stylebook* (2016 or 2017 edition)
- *Webster's New World Dictionary* (pocket-sized edition or online)
- Portable flash drive (thumb drive)

Special note about COM 285

COM 285 is the first course in the Print and Online Media sequence and will help prepare you for future courses in the sequence. Some of you may be Public Relations or Electronic Media students taking the course as an elective. COM 285 will help you develop the ability to gather, analyze and report information accurately and concisely, which is just as valuable in public relations and broadcasting as it is

in print and online journalism. If you are taking the course as an elective, you are still required to follow the principles and practices of print and online journalism in this course. Despite your varied interests and professional emphases, you're all print journalists for purposes of this class.

Professional values and competencies for C/J majors and minors

The Communication/Journalism Department faculty sets the goal of developing within each student the following core professional values and competencies as defined by the Accrediting Council for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (ACEJMC) [competencies addressed in this course are in **bold**]:

1. Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications
3. **Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communication**
4. Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society
5. Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information
6. **Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity**
7. **Think critically, creatively and independently**
8. **Conduct research and gather information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work**
9. **Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve**
10. **Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness**
11. Apply basic numerical and statistical concepts
12. **Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work**

Class format

Most class periods will begin with a brief lecture or class discussion. Because the focus of this class is writing, however, students should be prepared to write in class every day. **Bring your textbook and AP stylebook to class every day.**

Email and D2L

Please check your Shippensburg email account and D2L regularly, including before class. I use email and D2L to communicate important class information to students, including any cancellations due to illness, inclement weather or other unforeseen circumstances. When corresponding with me by email, **please include a subject line and mention that the email is regarding COM 285.** I respond to emails as quickly as I can, but **please allow 24 hours for a response or up to 48 hours on a weekend.**

Attendance and classroom etiquette

- **Attendance is mandatory,** and students are expected to arrive on time. An attendance sheet will be circulated at the start of class each day. It is your responsibility to sign the sheet. The attendance sheets will serve as the official record of attendance. If you come to class late, after the attendance sheet has circulated, you may be marked absent that day.

- **Students are responsible for keeping track of their own attendance.** I will use the attendance sheets to record attendance at the end of the semester.
- **Students are permitted two unexcused absences during the semester.** More than two unexcused absences will result in the lowering of your final course grade as follows:
 - **3 or 4 unexcused absences** = final grade lowered by a **half-grade** — for example, from an A- to a B+ or from a C+ to a C. NOTE: Shippensburg University does not use C- or D+ grades, so a C would be lowered to a D.
 - **5 or 6 unexcused absences** = final grade lowered by a **full letter grade** — for example, from a B to a C.
 - **7 or more unexcused absences** = student automatically **fails the course**, regardless of his or her performance on assignments and other coursework.
- **An absence will be excused ONLY** if a student (1) notifies the instructor in person or via email **BEFORE** the absence, **AND** (2) provides official written documentation of the reason for the absence by presenting an official signed, dated note from a doctor (not merely a simple slip from Etter), coach, lawyer, other instructor or the Dean's Office **either before the absence or within a week after the absence**. If you know you will miss more than one class due to illness, it is recommended that you notify the Dean's Office, which will notify all of your instructors of your absences (but this does not guarantee they will all excuse the absence).
- **IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS AND QUIZZES MISSED DUE TO AN UNEXCUSED ABSENCE CANNOT BE MADE UP AND WILL EARN A GRADE OF ZERO.** If you miss an in-class assignment or quiz due to an excused absence (see details above on what counts as an excused absence), it is your responsibility to make arrangements with the instructor to make up the missed work within one week of your return to class.
- If you are absent, you are still responsible for material covered in class that day. Consult a classmate to obtain notes and any assignments or handouts you missed. If you still have questions, email me or visit me during office hours. I do not email copies of lecture notes or PowerPoints to students who miss class.
- Quizzes and in-class assignments may take place at the beginning of class. Students coming to class late will not be given extra time to complete a quiz or assignment.
- Please observe basic courtesy during class. **Cell phones, tablets, laptops and other electronic devices must be turned off or silenced and put away. Headphones may not be worn during class. No food or drink is permitted in the computer labs.**

Coursework (more details to follow)

- **QUIZZES** — You will take eight timed quizzes on D2L outside of class during the semester. These quizzes will test your mastery of Associated Press style. In addition, you will take four quizzes in class during the semester covering lecture material, assigned reading and current events. Your two lowest quiz scores will be dropped, and the remaining 10 quiz scores will count toward your final course grade.
- **FINAL EXAM** — You will take a comprehensive exam at the end of the semester covering grammar, spelling, punctuation and AP style; lead writing; and story writing.
- **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS (in class and outside of class)** — You will complete numerous assignments throughout the semester to develop and practice your news writing and reporting skills. Many of the assignments will be exercises in the textbook; others may require you to conduct interviews or cover events outside of class. I will ask you to upload most assignments to folders in D2L, but you may be asked to print some assignments and submit them in hard-copy form at the start of class. Unless instructed otherwise, please use the following format:
 - All assignments must be completed in Microsoft Word and submitted as ***.doc or *.docx** (not *.pdf) files. Handwritten assignments will not be accepted.

- All assignments must be typed in **12-point Times or Times New Roman** font.
- All assignments must be **double-spaced**, and **paragraphs must be indented**.
- All assignments must contain the following information in the upper left corner of the first page: **your name, the date and a slug** (one to three words describing the assignment or the topic of the story).
- Any assignment submitted in hard-copy form that is longer than one page must be **stapled**.

Publication requirement

Students in COM 285 must have **a minimum of two articles published during the semester**. The articles may be published in the student newspaper, The Slate, or its website, theslateonline.com, or in a local newspaper/website. The articles must be news stories, not opinion pieces or reviews of movies, music, books, TV shows, etc. Sports or arts/entertainment stories that are factual in nature and require interviewing and reporting are fine. One story must be published by midterm (before spring break), and the second must be published by the last week of classes. Publication of your work is important for many reasons, but the most important one is to begin building a clip file — a portfolio of your work to show professionals when you prepare to leave Ship.

After a story has been published, email me a link to it on the website or submit a photocopy or scan of the page in print. If scanning a print story, please scan the full page and make sure the date and your byline are visible. If sending a link via email, include **“COM 285 publication”** in the subject line.

Failure to meet the publication requirement will result in your final grade in the course being lowered by a half-grade — for example, from an A- to a B+ or from a C+ to a C. NOTE: Shippensburg University does not use C- or D+ grades, so a C would be lowered to a D.

Grading and evaluation

COM 285 is a writing-intensive course, and students should be prepared to write extensively. The bulk of your grade will be based on the quality of your writing. Final semester grades will be determined by averaging grades as follows:

Writing assignments (in class and outside of class)	70 percent
Quizzes (AP quizzes on D2L and reading/current events quizzes in class)	15 percent
Final Exam	15 percent

A point system will be used to grade individual assignments. Mechanical errors (spelling, grammar, AP style, typos, biased language, etc.) will result in points being deducted. **There will be a deduction of ½ point for each grammar or spelling error. Students will be allowed three AP style errors for each assignment without penalty. However, on the fourth such error, ½ point will be deducted for each mistake.** Accuracy is a key element of journalism because people rely on the media to provide them with complete and accurate information to help them with their decision-making. Therefore, **a major factual error in a story (such as misspelling someone’s name or giving them the wrong title), will result in a zero (0) grade for the story.**

All work will be evaluated and graded as follows:

- **A/A- = Publishable as is.** The story has no errors. It shows a superior command of facts, news judgment, organization and writing.
- **B+/B/B- = Could be published with some revision.**

- **C+/C = An average job.** Not a story that someone would stop and read unless he or she really needs the information. Some basic organizational or writing problems.
- **D = A poor piece.** It lacks fundamental judgmental and or writing skills. May have a minor fact error or major spelling or grammatical errors. Omission of two or more important facts (story is not complete). Contains major problems in organization and language usage. Fails to meet basic writing standards. Needs substantial editing, rewriting and reorganization.
- **F = Unacceptable work.** Story has too many fundamental problems or fails to meet deadline. Contains a major fact error.

Final grades will be determined using the following **percentage-based** scale:

Percentage	Grade	Percentage	Grade	Percentage	Grade
93.0% – 100%	A	83.0% – 86.9%	B	70.0% – 74.9%	C
90.0% – 92.9%	A-	80.0% – 82.9%	B-	60.0% – 69.9%	D
87.0% – 89.9%	B+	75.0% – 79.9%	C+	0% – 59.9%	F

Students who have more than two unexcused absences during the semester or who fail to complete the publication requirement will have their final course grade lowered according to the policies outlined above (under “Attendance and classroom etiquette” and “Publication requirement”).

Deadlines

Deadlines are critical in any media-related profession. All assignments are **due on the deadline date and time**. Assignments **WILL NOT BE ACCEPTED PAST THE DEADLINE**, unless they are late because of an excused absence or reasons previously arranged with the instructor. Work that is missed because of an excused absence must be submitted the day the student returns to class. **Assignments submitted past the deadline will earn a zero.** Assignments for this class will consume a good deal of your time. Plan accordingly.

Ethical standards, plagiarism and academic dishonesty

Students are expected to complete **individual and original work** for this class. For the professional writer, plagiarism results in the loss of credibility and employment. In this class, plagiarism may result in an **F** for the course. It may also subject the student to departmental and/or university sanctions. The university’s Academic Dishonesty Policy may be found in the Shippensburg University Undergraduate Catalog (<http://www.ship.edu/catalog>). All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the department, Dean’s Office and Office of Student Affairs. Penalties for violation of the policy include grade reduction, assignment of a failing grade for the course, suspension and expulsion from the University.

Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) statement

Students with disabilities are not required by law to identify themselves to SU and the Office of Disability Services; however, if a student desires accommodations, he or she is obligated to complete the necessary forms and provide disability documentation at the time other requests are made. It is the policy of Shippensburg University to accommodate students with disabilities, pursuant to federal law, state law, and the University’s commitment to equal education opportunities. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the Office of Disability Services at the *beginning* of the term (120 Horton Hall; 717-477-1329).

Commitment to a safe learning environment

Shippensburg University faculty support a safe campus environment for all. No one on this campus has the right to threaten you or make you feel intimidated in any way. More specifically, unwanted advances, harassment, aggressive or violent behavior, and sexual assault will not be tolerated. A comprehensive list of reporting options and support services, including confidential resources, can be found at http://www.ship.edu/no_more/.

Shippensburg University and its faculty are committed to assuring a safe and productive educational environment for all students. In order to meet this commitment and to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and guidance from the Office for Civil Rights, the University requires faculty members to report incidents of sexual violence shared by students to the University's Title IX Coordinator. The only exceptions to the faculty member's reporting obligation are when incidents of sexual violence are communicated by a student during a classroom discussion, in a writing assignment for a class, or as part of a University-approved research project. Faculty members are obligated to report allegations of sexual violence or any other abuse of a student who was, or is, a child (a person under 18 years of age) when the abuse allegedly occurred. Such reporting must be made to the Shippensburg University Police at 477-1444, the Department of Human Services (DHS) at 800-932-0313, and the University's Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs at 477-1308. Information regarding the reporting of sexual violence and the resources that are available to victims of sexual violence can be found at: www.ship.edu/No_More/Sexual_Misconduct/Sexual_Misconduct_Information/

Learning Center resources

If you feel you need extra help to improve your academic performance in this course or any of your other courses, please consider making an appointment with a tutor or learning specialist in the Learning Center (LC). The LC is located on the lower level of Lehman Library, right below Starbucks, and can also be reached at 717-477-1420.

Tentative Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and via email or D2L. The timeline for the course may need to be adjusted for severe weather or other unforeseen circumstances. **All reading and homework must be completed by the date on which it is listed.** NOTE: This schedule lists assigned reading and quizzes, but it does NOT list assignments. Assignments and their due dates will be announced in class, so it is important that you attend class regularly.

WEEK 1: Introduction to journalism and AP style

- **Tues., Jan. 23:** Introduction to the course
- **Thurs., Jan. 25:** AP style and grammar review

WEEK 2: Characteristics of news and newswriting style

- **Tues., Jan. 30:** READ Chapters 1 (“Journalism Today”) and 2 (“Selecting and Reporting the News”); **Reading/Current Events Quiz 1 (in class)**
- **Thurs., Feb. 1:** READ Chapter 3 (“Newswriting Style”)

WEEK 3: The language of news; basic news leads

- **Tues., Feb. 6:** READ Chapter 4 (“The Language of News”); **AP Style Quiz 1 (on D2L)**
- **Thurs., Feb. 8:** READ Chapter 7 (“Basic News Leads”)

WEEK 4: Basic news leads (cont.)

- **Tues., Feb. 13:** Writing news leads and headlines; **AP Style Quiz 2 (on D2L)**
- **Thurs., Feb. 15:** Writing news leads and headlines

WEEK 5: Beyond the lead

- **Tues., Feb. 20:** READ Chapter 9 (“The Body of a News Story”); **Reading/Current Events Quiz 2 (in class)**
- **Thurs., Feb. 22:** Body of a news story (cont.)

WEEK 6: Alternative leads

- **Tues., Feb. 27:** READ Chapter 8 (“Alternative Leads”); **AP Style Quiz 3 (on D2L)**
- **Thurs., March 1:** Alternative leads (cont.)

WEEK 7: Quotations and attribution

- **Tues., March 6:** READ Chapter 10 (“Quotations and Attribution”); **AP Style Quiz 4 (on D2L)**
- **Thurs., March 8:** Quotations and attribution (cont.); **first publication due**

March 13 & 15

- NO CLASS (Spring break)

WEEK 8: Body of a news story/interviewing

- **Tues., March 20:** REVIEW Chapter 9 (“Body of a News Story”); **AP Style Quiz 5 (on D2L)**
- **Thurs., March 22:** READ Chapter 11 (“Interviewing”)

WEEK 9: Speeches and meetings

- **Tues., March 27:** READ Chapter 15 (“Speeches and Meetings”); **Reading/Current Events Quiz 3 (in class)**
- **Thurs., March 29:** Speeches and meetings (cont.)

WEEK 10: Other story types

- **Tues., April 3:** READ Chapter 16 (“Brights, Follow-ups, Roundups, Sidebars and Obituaries”); **AP Style Quiz 6 (on D2L)**
- **Thurs., April 5:** Other story types (cont.)

WEEK 11: Feature writing

- **Tues., April 10:** READ Chapter 17 (“Feature Stories”); **AP Style Quiz 7 (on D2L)**
- **Thurs., April 12:** Feature writing (cont.)

WEEK 12: Online and social media

- **Tues., April 17:** READ Chapter 13 (“Digital Media: Online, Mobile and Social Media”); **Reading/Current Events Quiz 4 (in class)**
- **Thurs., April 19:** Online and social media (cont.)

WEEK 13: Visual journalism; public relations

- **Tues., April 24:** READ Chapter 14 (“Visual Journalism”); **AP Style Quiz 8 (on D2L)**
- **Thurs., April 26:** READ Chapter 20 (“Journalism and Public Relations”)

WEEK 14: Journalism ethics; wrap-up

- **Tues., May 1:** READ Chapter 6 (“Ethics”)
- **Thurs., May 3:** Wrap-up; review for exam; **second publication due**

WEEK 15 (May 7-11)

FINAL EXAM (date and time to be announced)