Journalism 868: Information in Context

About our class

Welcome to J868, a graduate course that will help you sharpen your writing skills.

This course is designed to help you think about writing as a tool for problem-solving or taking advantage of an opportunity..

The course also aims to help you think about writing, not as something magical, but as a process that requires skills and decision-making about how best to communicate your message.

In this class, we'll learn about writing to:
--Provide information.
--Persuade or change attitudes or behavior.
--Connect with audiences.

One of the goals of this class is to get you thinking about writing with a purpose for targeted audiences with a clear message for a specific form of media. With everything you write, you want to think about:

Purpose ➔Audience ➔Message ➔Medium

In this class we'll explore writing for both traditional and social media.

The goals of the class are to help you learn to:

- Write carefully, clearly, and concisely.
- Write on deadline.
- Use research from credible sources to support your ideas.
- Write with specific goals in mind – to inform, persuade, or connect.
- Analyze audiences and write to meet their interests and needs.
- Write for a variety of media platforms.
- Think creatively and critically about writing as a means to communicate ideas for a company or organization.

How you'll learn

This is not a top-down class. I provide structure for the course but will rely on students to identify areas of importance to you and to pursue those opportunities on

your own and to share your ideas with the class. The goal is to empower you and help create a mindset of constant learning.

The best ways to learn about writing are to read what others have written and to write yourself. In this class we'll do both. You'll have reading assignments each week, and you'll write every week. I'll work to give you constructive feedback on your writing to help you improve.

Each week, I'll post readings and assignments on the course Blackboard site by Monday morning. You'll want to read instructions carefully and note deadlines.

Readings

I realize that many of you have jobs, and I realize some of you are taking this course to help you do your jobs better, so I've tried to make the assignments short and practical.

To access readings, go to the course Blackboard site. Readings are organized week by week. Don't panic if you see a long list of readings. They're short. And some of the readings are graphic images or videos.

Also, I've also organized readings, realizing that you may not have time to read all of them. I'll mark some as "must read for this week;" some as "read if you have time;" and others as "nice to know." (Readings are color-coded: Red for "must-read," green for "read if you have time," and gold for "nice to know.") Most of the readings are taken from trade or industry publications, although readings may include some scholarly articles from time to time.

There is no textbook for this course. However, everyone should buy a copy of the *Associated Press Stylebook*. The AP stylebook is a tool (like a dictionary) that journalists use to ensure clarity and consistency; strategic communications professionals also use it for those same reasons. The AP stylebook helps with grammar and punctuation, but it also helps with Internet, sports, and business terms. For example: Are you working on a master's degree, a master degree, or a masters degree? Is KU part of the Big 12, Big Twelve, or Big-Twelve basketball conference? Does your company have a website, a Web site, or a Web site? The AP stylebook will tell you that the first one in the series is correct.

You can buy the stylebook online (Amazon, for example). You can get an online stylebook for Kindle or tablets by going to Apstylebook.com. You can also go to the same website to buy the spiral-bound copy of the stylebook. You can buy the current or you can buy an older version. (Try to get a version from 2012 or later since that will include the most up-to-date business and internet terms.)

Your assignments

Each week we'll have a writing assignment. Assignments will be made on Monday and are due the following Monday. (See the Class Schedule for specifics.)

Detailed assignment directions and grading rubrics are posted on the course Blackboard site, but here's a preview.

You'll complete the following assignments this semester:

Discussion board

Reading and writing about writing: For each week in the semester, you'll find a series of readings posted on Blackboard. I'll also post a discussion question about those readings, and you will want to write a short paragraph (five to eight sentences) responding to that question. The questions will be based on the "must read" articles. The goal of this assignment is to help us think about, understand, and analyze the readings. The response paragraphs should be based on your own thoughts, ideas, and experiences. You will write six responses, and post those responses on Blackboard under the "Response to Class Readings" tab. There are eight weeks in the class, so this means you can skip two weeks (but you should still do the readings). Due: Six Mondays of your choice through the session.

Writing about yourself: At the beginning of the semester, you will write a three-paragraph biography about yourself. Keep is short and simple. It can be serious or funny, but it should be factual. Your goal is to introduce yourself to your classmates. This is an ungraded but mandatory assignment. You will lose 50 points if you do not complete this assignment on time. Due: Monday, Jan. 22.

Longer Form

Feature story: You should interview one person and write a profile story about him or her. You don't have to write about the person's entire life. Instead, think about interviewing the person to answer *this question:*

- Tell me about a time when you witnessed a historic event. This can be an event that you saw in person or an even that you saw on television.

Ideally, you want to conduct the interview in person or by phone. That way you can follow up on interviews by listening and asking questions. Interviews by email typically are less informative and more time consuming. Due. Monday, Feb. 19.

Blogging

Blog post: Bloggers write for a variety of reasons. They want to share information about their personal experiences (vacation in Costa Rica, day-to-day adventures in motherhood); they want to encourage you to make a change (eat healthy foods, learn how to keep a positive attitude during cancer treatments), or they want to share their expertise (CDC blogs on disease prevention). For this assignment, you want to write a blog post persuading someone to do something. You have a lot of flexibility here. You could write a blog post about a product you enjoy (everyone should try the new Kit-Kat "Big Kat" bar) or an issue you feel strongly about (no one should text and drive). For this assignment, you should use at least two secondary sources (research others have done). You should cite your sources and make an argument for why you feel the way you do. Bloggers typically write in first-person (I think, I believe, I know), and you should do the same. Your goal is to make a point, using research and your own experiences and ideas. Blogs are short. You'll want to condense all that you've found into five to seven paragraphs. And blogs are conversational, so you'll want to write the way you talk. Due: Monday, Feb. 20.

Social media audit

Social media audit: For this assignment, you'll follow a person, business, or organization on Twitter for five to seven days, and monitor their tweets. You'll write a short paper (no more than two typed pages, double-spaced) about what you've learned. You can monitor a for-profit company or a nonprofit group (for example, American Airlines, the Red Cross, the Kansas City Chiefs). Or you can monitor a person (for example, President Donald Trump, talk show host Ellen DeGeneres, KC mayor Sly James). The choice is yours; just make it someone or something you're interested in. You'll want to answer these questions: Who is the person/company you followed? Provide a few details about them. How many followers do they have? What is the content of their Tweets? In other words, what were the tweets about? Are the tweets aimed at informing readers about something new? Persuading you to do something differently or think differently? Building a brand? What kind of reactions did the Twitter author get from followers? In thinking about your own writing, what can you learn from these tweets (both good and bad) that will help you become a more effective communicator? Due: Monday, Mar. 5.

Brand journalism/Content curation

We're seeing a shift in writing where organizations are producing their own content as well as looking for opportunities to appear in the media. This kind of writing demands that the writer is a good storyteller and not just a promoter of a product or brand. You will develop content in multiple forms designed to be housed on an organization's website.
Due: March 9.

How your work will be evaluated

I'll work to give you constructive feedback on each assignment. In assigning grades, I'll often use grading rubrics. They'll be posted when the assignments are posted online so you'll know how your work will be graded. Here are some general criteria.

A – The writing is excellent. With a few minor revisions, this could be published. The project follows directions. The writing is clear, succinct, and focused on an appropriate audience and appropriate media platform. The project shows superior creativity, critical thinking and research skills. Wow!

B – The writing is very good. With some minor revisions, this could be published. The project follows directions. For the most part, the writing is clear and succinct. The writing is focused on the appropriate audience and appropriate media platform. The project shows good creative and critical thinking. The article demonstrates very good research, although there may be some minor concerns with citing sources or the need to clarify why a source is credible.

C – The writing is satisfactory. This could be published, but significant revisions are necessary. Although the project follows directions, the writing is not clear and concise. There are passages that are confusing, or necessary information is missing. The writing may be targeted to the wrong audience or not clearly targeted to any audience. The writing may not be appropriate for the media platform. The project shows limited creative and critical thinking; it doesn't take a new, original approach. There are significant problems with the research; sources are missing, or they aren't credible.

D – Unsatisfactory. The work is poorly written, poorly researched. Sources aren't credible. There are major questions about what the author is trying to say, and significant information is missing.

F – Failing. The work is turned late, or is not original. The quality of the work is not what would be expected in a graduate course.

Here's how your grades will be calculated:

Writing about yourself – 0 points but mandatory
Discussion board posts - Reading about writing responses – 300 points (50 points for each post)
Interview – 150 points
Blog post – 150 points
Social media analysis – 100 points
Final project—300 points

You can earn a total of up to 1,000 points in the class.

To calculate your final grade, I'll divide the total number of points you earned by the total of points available in the class. So, if you earned 700 points, your final class grade will be 70 percent (700/1000=70). If you earn 850 points in the class, your final grade will be 85 percent (850/1000=85).

Students often ask about rounding up. If your final class grade is .5 or higher, your grade will be rounded up. If it is .4 or lower, the grade remains the same. For example: If your grade is 86.5, your grade will be rounded up to 87. If your grade is 86.4, your grade will remain an 86.

You will earn a number grade, but the final grade for the course will be translated into a letter grade. Here's how that works:

A = 93 and above	C = 73-76
A- = 90-92	C- = 70-72
B+ = 87-89	D+ = 67-69
B = 83-86	D = 63-66
B- = 80-82	D- = 60-62
C+ = 77-79	F = 59 or below

How we'll communicate

Since this is an online course, we won't have the opportunity to meet face-to-face, so we'll communicate through the course Blackboard site.

Blackboard allows us to discuss our readings. It also allows me to email you via your KU address. (If you have a personal email, Blackboard won't let me contact you through that.) You need to check your KU email regularly.

I'll also post class announcements on Blackboard. Those should show up as emails to you, too.

The easiest way to reach me is to email me at: theapes@ku.edu.

I don't have an office on campus but we can make an appointment to meet in person or speak on the phone.

Ethics, plagiarism and fabrication

Accuracy and transparency are the foundations of journalism, and they will be critical in this course on strategic communications.

The William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications does not allow plagiarism or fabrication. Neither do I.

Plagiarism means that you have taken someone else's words or ideas and have presented them as your own. Never do this. In the workplace, it's a fire-able offense. In this class, it means you will fail the class, possibly fail the course, and it could mean expulsion from the journalism school. If you include other people's ideas and words in any writing you do for this class, you must attribute to the original source.

Fabrication means that you made it up. This could be saying that you interviewed someone when you didn't. It could mean saying you did research when you didn't. It could be making up or embellishing a quote to make it sound more dramatic.

One word: Don't.

In this class:
- All your work must be original. It must reflect your own ideas, your own research, and your own writing.
- Your work must be accurate. You should not make up anything to make your work sound better or more interesting.
- You can use the internet for research, but you need to think about what you've learned and put it in your own words. Don't change a word or two and think the problem is solved.
- Never cut and paste from the Internet.
- Don't "double-dip." Don't use an assignment from another class (past or current classes) to meet a requirement for this class. Original work means that work is original to this class, not "recycled" from other class assignments.

Deadlines

In business and industry, deadlines are important. Missing a deadline can translate into canceled contracts, job loss, or money loss.

All deadlines for your work are announced in advance. Consequently, no late papers will be accepted.

If you have an emergency that might affect your work, let me know in advance, and we'll talk. Computer problems, lost work, last-minute vacations are not emergencies. Plan ahead. Again, talk to me if there's a problem.

You can work ahead and turn in assignments early. Just make sure that you turn in your work no later than the deadlines announced in the syllabus and the class schedule.

Special needs

The University of Kansas wants to help you learn. If you have an issue or concern that you think may affect with your learning, please let me know as soon as possible. You should also contact KU's Office of Student Access Services, which can arrange accommodations for you. You can contact the office by calling 785-864-4064 or by emailing: achieve@ku.edu. Here is a link to the website: https://access.ku.edu/

JSchoolTech opportunities

This is not required but you have the ability to take advantage of some great opportunities in Lawrence through J-School tech. Heather is a great resource, her contact information is listed below.

Required signups for all events (minus the open lab workshops) are at jschooltech.org/events

Teams
Teams will focus on project based learning and allow students to work across the Adobe Suite to solve client problems. A minimum of 6 students must sign up for a team to 'make'.

Video Team
   Every Other Monday 1 p.m. Room 119
Design Team
   Tuesdays 2 p.m. Room 119
Design Team
   Wednesdays 3 p.m. Room 119

Workshops
Basic Video Storytelling: Production and Editing with Premiere
Feb. 2
10 am - 1 pm
This workshop is for those new to video editing. You will get a chance to use a video camera, create a basic 5 shot sequence and then edit that in Premiere. Topics include: types of shots, shot sequencing, camera use, storyboards, basic editing techniques and Premiere navigation.

Digital Content Creation
Feb. 9
10 am - noon

Interested in creating digital content for social media and web? This workshop is for you. We will use Rpl, Spark and Clip to create stylized videos. Topics include: social media message and campaign strategies, overview of tools for social media and how to brand assets across channels.

Taking InDesign Digital
Feb. 16
10 a.m. - 1 p.m.
Did you know you can publish digital documents with InDesign with one click? Add in animation and interactivity and InDesign is way more than a print publishing tool - it is a digital powerhouse. Topics include: examination of how digital InDesign is used professionally, overview of interactive features, publish online options, and online dashboard with analytics.

Power Up Your Portfolio and Resume
Feb. 21
3 p.m. - 5 p.m.
This workshop is a collaboration between JSchoolTech and Career Office. We will spend the first half on pointers for a strong resume/portfolio. Learn what HR professionals and employers are looking for and maximize your potential. The second half will give you an opportunity to put it to practice. Join us in the labs to work on either your resume or portfolio with Steve and Heather both there to support you.

Create Multimedia on the Fly
Feb. 23
10 a.m. - noon
Whether you are news info or strat comm, storytelling is the name of the game. Learn to create multimedia stories on the fly with your phone as your creation tool. This workshop will use Clip, Lightroom, Spark and info.graphics (yes it's an app too) to create visual stories. You must bring an updated mobile device with the above apps downloaded and enough storage to create small video and photo assets.

Resume/Portfolio open lab
April 20
1 p.m. - 3 p.m.
This open lab is your chance to work on your portfolio or resume prior to a class (or job) deadline. These hours are drop in, so come in at any point to get help.

Resume/Portfolio open lab
April 27
9 - noon
This open lab is your chance to work on your portfolio or resume prior to a class (or job) deadline. These hours are drop in, so come in at any point to get help.

-- Heather Lawrenz, digital media specialist
"Education is what others do to you; learning is what you do to yourself."
- Joi Ito

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Jschooltech.org
@halawrenz
@jschooltech

University of Kansas
William Allen White School of Journalism
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Adobe Certified Educator
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Some final thoughts

My job is to help you get through this class and to help you improve your writing skills. Please don't hesitate to contact me. I'm happy to work with you anyway I can. --TH