

COMM 2311-001, Media Writing
Spring 2024
Texas A&M University-San Antonio

MEETING TIMES AND LOCATION

12:30-1:45 p.m. Monday, Wednesday, Room 321 of the Central Academic Building

INSTRUCTOR

Teresa Talerico, clinical assistant professor of communication

Phone: 210-784-2810 **Office:** Room 319B of CAB **Email:** ttalerico@tamusa.edu. Please do not message me through Blackboard. **Office hours:** virtual, by appointment

DO NOT SUBMIT PDFS UNLESS I SPECIFICALLY REQUEST THEM.

DESCRIPTION

This course teaches the fundamentals of news reporting and writing. It includes instruction in professional methods of gathering, processing and delivering content for print and online media. These methods are the foundation for journalists as well as public relations professionals. Students in 2311 learn to report and write news briefs, advance stories and event coverage for The Mesquite, our student-produced digital news site.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

- **Free e-textbook.** Our textbook is “Inside Reporting: A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism,” 3rd Edition, Tim Harrower, McGraw Hill, ISBN: 978-0073526171. You are not required to buy the print version, but if you want a copy, you can buy one through the university bookstore, Amazon or Chegg. Make sure to get the **3rd edition**.
- **Free Associated Press (AP) Stylebook.** Click the link for a free version offered by the University Library. If you want a print edition, you can buy one for \$34.95 at the following link. Please get the **56th edition**: <https://www.apstylebook.com/>
- **Newsroom 101: \$29.95.** This is an online series of quizzes and tests to help you learn AP Style. We will discuss how to sign up for Newsroom 101 in class.

OBJECTIVES

- Learn the mechanics of news reporting such as the Five W’s, interviewing and covering events.
- Develop sound news judgment and recognize news values.
- Learn to fact-check your stories to ensure accuracy.
- Write for media audiences using the conventions of journalistic expression.
- Write with clarity, brevity, precision and power. Write in simple declarative sentences.
- Use AP Style with correct spelling, punctuation and appropriate grammar.
- Understand journalistic ethics including objectivity, fairness, independence and truth seeking.

EVALUATION

30%: Mesquite assignments	15%: Final exam
20%: Homework and class exercises	15%: Quizzes
10%: Newsroom 101	10%: Online discussions

ASSIGNMENT CATEGORIES

Mesquite Stories: You will write or contribute to four stories for possible publication on mesquite-news.com.

1. **Brief** (a short news story). Students interview a source in class about campus news or an upcoming campus event to verify time, date and place (TDP), spelling of source’s name and title, and a detail about the event

that's not on JagSync. Write a brief of 150-200 words. One source, no direct quotes.

2. **Competitive advance** (preview story). Teams of students interview a source about an event. Each student will write a story that includes direct quotes from the source and details about the event that cannot be found on JagSync. 300-400 words. The student who writes the best story from each group will be eligible for publication with a byline. One source, multiple direct quotes.
3. **Competitive event coverage**. Teams of students will cover virtual or in-person events, such as a speech, club meeting, ceremony, festival/fair or other activities. The event can be in-person or virtual. Each student will write their own story about the event. 400-500 words. The best submission will be eligible for a bylined story published on mesquite-news.com. Two or more sources, multiple quotes.
4. **Team stories**. We might come up with some fun and interesting stories or content to produce near the end of the semester. Each student on a team will contribute something to the story.

Please note: You will learn how to revise stories according to my edits. That can include correcting grammar or AP Style, fact-checking or going back to sources for more information. All first drafts and revisions will receive a grade. You must double-check names, spellings, titles, numbers, times, dates, locations and other facts in stories. Accuracy is imperative in journalism and all communication fields. Get it right or risk an F on the assignment.

Homework and Class Exercises: These include in-class exercises and other non-Mesquite homework.

Online Discussions: Students will contribute to discussions based on reading the textbook or reviewing other course materials.

Newsroom 101: Students must buy a subscription for \$29.95. This is an online program to refresh your memory on punctuation and to learn Associated Press (AP) Style, which is used by journalists and PR practitioners. You MUST meet these deadlines throughout the semester. I will not go back and grade late Newsroom 101 work.

Pretests 1-6	Jan. 31
A1 through ABC Review	Feb. 7
D1 through DEF Review	Feb. 14
G1 through GHI Review	Feb. 21
JKL1 through JN Review	Feb. 28
OP1 through OS Review	March 6
T1 through AP All	March 20
Punctuation/Commas	April 3
Punctuation/Apostrophes	April 10
Punctuation/Hyphens	April 17
General Punctuation Quiz	April 24
Posttests	May 1

Quizzes: The weekly quiz will cover lectures, readings, PowerPoints, handouts, AP Style and current events.

Final Exam: The final reviews what we learned this semester. It is an open-book test that you will take on your own time. It will be available online a few days before it's due.

Schedule for Each Week

Quizzes and homework assignments are due **the following Sunday**.

Online discussion posts are due **the following Tuesday**. Classmate responses and Newsroom 101 sections are due **Wednesday**.

The four Mesquite stories will be due on **Sundays** or on dates relevant to each story.

COURSE POLICIES

GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE / ChatGPT

Just don't. Writing, analytical and critical thinking skills are the backbone of our communication courses. All writing assignments must be prepared by students in their own words. Developing strong competencies in this area will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Look at it this way: You are learning to be a professional communicator. Writing is the bedrock of this profession, whether it's a news article, photo caption, radio spot, press release, narrative of a TV story or film script. If you can't write, why should an employer hire you when they can just use ChatGPT? Therefore, submissions generated by ChatGPT or other AI composition software are not permitted in my courses. I reserve the right to ask to see evidence of your original drafts, rewrites, etc.

The bulk of your work in COMM 2311 will comprise news stories that include **original** interviews and legitimate information from human sources on campus. You will need to provide a source list with the dates and locations of your interviews. You will need to attribute other information to whatever website, news article or other source that you used in your reporting.

I also will incorporate, where appropriate, personal reflections into your non-story assignments, such as asking you to relate your own personal experience to a particular topic.

Finally, we will include at least one assignment in which we **examine** and analyze tools such as ChatGPT. But please remember they are not a substitute for human creativity, originality or critical thinking. It's important for you to develop your own voice as a writer and communicator. However, we also must learn to understand such programs as we enter this new world.

ATTENDANCE AND ETIQUETTE

Show up to our class meetings on time and stay the whole period. Punctuality and attendance are crucial in journalism. Those arriving more than 20 minutes late are counted absent. Those who leave early are counted absent.

I will allow four absences for any reason. I drop your letter grade by 5 percent for each additional absence.

Read this course syllabus closely. You and the instructor must follow it as a legal contract. Knowing its contents will greatly enhance your likelihood of success. If you have questions or need help, contact me by email or in person. Follow assignment directions to the letter.

SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS

Journalism is a deadline-driven business. Meeting deadlines is extremely important. I deduct 10 points a day for late assignments.

For non-Mesquite homework, use Microsoft Word or Google Docs. Upload the file or link to the Google Doc in Blackboard. **For Mesquite stories**, always use a properly slugged copy of the story template in your personal folder in our Google Drive folder. Mesquite stories are submitted in Blackboard **AND** your personal class folder in Google Drive. Grades on assignments consider AP Style, content, accuracy, word usage, mechanics, spelling, grammar, clarity and thorough reporting. Proofread your work with care.

CODE OF CONDUCT

Students should follow the Student Rights and Responsibilities and Student Code of Conduct available [here](#). I will follow procedures in the code. Do not plagiarize. Your work shows your character. Make it your own. The instructor does not allow students to:

- use cell phones/personal electronics for non-academic use in class.
- work on anything other than class material during course time.

Anyone who fails to observe these will receive a warning and an absence for the first occurrence. Further violations may result in the student being asked to leave the class and/or to drop the course.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Please see the Weekly Modules in Blackboard for homework, quizzes, discussion forums, story assignments, Newsroom 101 and other exercises.

WEEK 1: JAN. 17

No class on Jan. 15 (MLK holiday).

Our first class meeting is Jan. 17: Introduction to Media Writing and a journalism movie.

WEEK 2: JAN. 22, 24

Conducting yourself as a journalist: news values, objectivity, honesty and accuracy. Assign Classmate Interview and Q&A.

WEEK 3: JAN. 29, 31

Newswriting tips. Connect with The Mesquite on social media and in The Mesquite Directory. Discuss News Briefs. TDP: Time, Date, Place. Group 1: Discuss Story 1/News Brief assignment.

WEEK 4: FEB. 5, 7

Reporting 101. **Story 1/News Brief: Group 1.** Group 2 brainstorms questions for Story 1 interview next week. Fill out Student Schedule and Contract.

WEEK 5: FEB. 12, 14

AP Style: Numbers. **Story 1/News Brief: Group 2.** Ledes. People in the Newsroom, Pages in the Newspaper.

WEEK 6: FEB. 19, 21

Taking Notes. Interviewing. Recording Interviews. **Assign Story 2/Competitive Advance to Group 1.**

WEEK 7: FEB. 26, 28

Quoting Sources. Writing Advances. Using Google Drive. **Assign Story 2/Competitive Advance to Group 2.**

WEEK 8: MARCH 4, 6

Fact- and Quote-Checking. Viewing Feedback in Google Docs. Revising Stories. Obtaining Courtesy Photos. Observations.

SPRING BREAK: MARCH 11-17

WEEK 9: MARCH 18, 20

Covering Speeches, Meetings and Other Events.

WEEK 10: MARCH 25, 27

Photo Requests. Taking Photos. Headlines. Words to Zap.

WEEK 11: APRIL 1, 3

Corrections, non-traditional ledes and possessive punctuation. **Assign Story 3 to everyone.**

WEEK 12: APRIL 8, 10

Writing Flow: Transition Sentences and Poetry/Rhythm in Journalism. SPJ Code of Ethics. Punctuation Punks game in Kahoot.

WEEK 13: APRIL 15, 17

Class Exercise: Newswriting Tips from the Textbook. Writing Outlines (Captions).
Day 2: Localizing. **Brainstorm and cover team stories.**

WEEK 14: APRIL 22, 24

Social Media Assignment. Finish team stories.

WEEK 15: APRIL 29

40 Tips for Reporters. Discuss Final Exam.

****No class on May 1**

FINALS WEEK: MAY 5-11

FINAL EXAM: The final exam will open in Week 16 of Blackboard by 11:59 p.m. TK*. The due date is 11:59 p.m. TK.

*TK is newspaper slang for “to come” or “on its way, similar to “TBA.”

Important Dates:

Jan. 23	Last day to register
Jan. 31	Census Date
March 11-17	Spring Break
March 29.	Study Day. No Classes.
April 13	Last day to drop with an automatic W
April 20	Last day to withdraw from university
April 29	Last day of classes
April 30	Study Day. No Classes
May 1-7	Final exams
May 13	Grades due by noon

The complete academic calendar is available online:

<https://www.tamusa.edu/academics/academic-calendar/index.html>

IMPORTANT POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Academic Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to providing all students with reasonable access to learning opportunities and accommodations in accordance with The Americans with Disabilities Act, as amended, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. If you experience barriers to your education due to a disability or think you may have a disability, please contact Disability Support Services in the Central Academic Building, Suite 210, or at (210) 784-1335 or visit <https://www.tamusa.edu/index.html> or email us at **dss@tamusa.edu**. Disabilities may include, but are not limited to, attentional, learning, mental health, sensory, physical, or chronic health conditions. All students are encouraged to discuss their disability-related needs with Disability Support Services and their instructors as soon as possible.

Academic Learning Center: The Academic Learning Center provides free course-based tutoring to all currently enrolled students at Texas A&M University-San Antonio. Students wishing to work with a tutor can make appointments through the Brainfuse online tutoring platform. Brainfuse can be accessed in the *Tools* section of Blackboard. You can contact the Academic Learning Center by emailing tutoring@tamusa.edu, calling (210) 784-1307, or visiting the Central Academic Building, room 202.

Counseling/Mental Health Resources: As a college student, there may be times when personal stressors interfere with your academic performance and/or negatively impact your daily functioning. If you are experiencing emotional difficulties or mental health concerns, support is available to you through the Student Counseling Center (SCC). To schedule an appointment call 210-784-1331 or visit Madla 120.

All mental health services provided by the SCC are free and confidential (as the law allows). The Student Counseling Center provides brief individual and group therapy, crisis intervention, consultation, case management, and prevention services.

Crisis support is available 24/7 by calling the SCC at 210-784-1331 (after-hours select option '2'). For more information and self-help resources, please visit www.tamusa.edu/studentcounseling

Emergency Preparedness: JagE Alert is Texas A&M University-San Antonio's mass notification. In the event of an emergency, such as inclement weather, students, staff and faculty, who are registered, will have the option to receive a text message, email with instructions and updates. To register or update your information visit: <https://tamusa.bbcportal.com/>.

More information about Emergency Operations Plan and the Emergency Action Plan can be found here:

<https://www.tamusa.edu/about-us/campus-information/safety/university-police-department/documents/emergency-operations-plan.pdf> and

<https://www.tamusa.edu/about-us/campus-information/safety/university-police-department/documents/emergency-action-plan.pdf>

Download the SafeZone App for emergencies or call (210) 784-1911. Non-Emergency (210) 784-1900

Financial Aid and Verification of Attendance: According to the following federal regulation, 34 CFR 668.21: U.S. Department of Education (DoE) Title IV regulation, a student can only receive Title IV funds based on Title IV eligibility criteria which include class attendance. If Title IV funds are disbursed to ineligible students (including students who fail to begin attendance), the institution must return these funds to the U.S. DoE within 30 days of becoming aware that the student will not or has not begun attendance. Faculty will provide the Office of Financial Aid with an electronic notification if a student has not attended the first week of class. Any student receiving federal financial aid who does not attend the first week of class will have their aid terminated and returned to the DoE. Please note that any student who stops attending at any time during the semester may also need to return a portion of their federal aid.

Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center: The Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center supports graduate and undergraduate students in all three colleges as well as faculty and staff. Tutors work with students to develop reading skills, prepare oral presentations, and plan, draft, and revise their written assignments. Our language tutors support students enrolled in Spanish courses and students composing in Spanish for any assignment. Our digital studio tutors support students

working on digital projects such as eportfolios, class presentations, or other digital multimedia projects. Students can schedule appointments through JagWire under the Student Services tab. Click on “Writing, Language, and Digital Composing Center” to make your appointment. The Center offers face-to-face, synchronous online, and asynchronous digital appointments. More information about what services we offer, how to make an appointment, and how to access your appointment can be found on our website at <https://bit.ly/WLDCCenter>.

Meeting Basic Needs: Any student who has difficulty affording groceries or accessing sufficient food to eat every day, or who lacks a safe and stable place to live, and believes this may affect their performance in the course, is urged to contact the Dean of Students (DOS@tamusa.edu) for support. Furthermore, please notify the professor if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable them to provide any resources they may possess.

Military Affairs: Veterans and active-duty military personnel are welcomed and encouraged to communicate, in advance if possible, and special circumstances (e.g., upcoming deployment, drill requirements, disability accommodations). You are also encouraged to visit the Patriots’ Casa in-person room 202, or to contact the Office of Military Affairs with any questions at military.va@tamusa.edu or (210)784-1397.

Religious Observances: Texas A&M University-San Antonio recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holidays according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes for regular session classes.

The Six-Drop Rule: Students are subject to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 1231 passed by the Texas Legislature in 2007. SB 1231 limits students to a maximum of six (6) non-punitive course drops (i.e., courses a student chooses to drop) during their undergraduate careers. A non-punitive drop does not affect the student’s GPA. However, course drops that exceed the maximum allowed by SB 1231 will be treated as “F” grades and will impact the student’s GPA.

Statement of Harassment and Discrimination: Texas A&M University-San Antonio is committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity and human dignity. To fulfill its multiple missions as an institution of higher learning, A&M-San Antonio encourages a climate that values and nurtures collegiality and the uniqueness of the individual within our state, nation, and world. All decisions and actions involving students and employees should be based on applicable law and individual merit. Texas A&M University-San Antonio, in accordance with applicable federal and state law, prohibits discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, sex, religion, national origin, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or pregnancy/parenting status. Individuals who believe they have experienced harassment or discrimination prohibited by this statement are encouraged to contact the appropriate offices within their respective units.

Texas A&M University-San Antonio faculty are committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students and for the university as a whole. If you have experienced any form of sex- or gender-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, domestic or

dating violence, or stalking, know that help and support are available. A&M-San Antonio's Title IX Coordinator can support those impacted by such conduct in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, and more. The university strongly encourages all students to report any such incidents to the Title IX Coordinator. Please be aware that all A&M-San Antonio employees (other than those designated as confidential resources such as counselors and trained victim advocates) are required to report information about such discrimination and harassment to the university. This means that if you tell a faculty member about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence, or other related misconduct, the faculty member must share that information with the university's Title IX Coordinator (titleix@tamusa.edu, 210-784-2061, CAB 439K). If you wish to speak to a confidential employee who does not have this reporting requirement, you can contact the Student Counseling Center at (210) 784-1331 or visit them in Madla 120.

Pregnant/Parenting Students: Texas A&M-San Antonio does not require a pregnant or parenting student, solely because of that status or issues related to that status, to (1) take a leave of absence or withdraw from their degree or certificate program; (2) limit the student's studies; (3) participate in an alternative program; (4) change the student's major, degree, or certificate program; or (5) refrain from joining or cease participating in any course, activity, or program at the University. The university will provide reasonable accommodations to pregnant students that would be provided to a student with a temporary medical condition and that are related to the health and safety of the student and the student's unborn child. These could include maintaining a safe distance from substances, areas, and activities known to be hazardous to pregnant individuals and their unborn child; excused absences because of illness or medical appointments; modified due dates for assignments; rescheduled tests/exams; taking a leave of absence; and being provided access to instructional materials and video recordings of lectures for excused absences, if these would be provided to any other student with an excused absence. Pregnant/parenting students are encouraged to contact the Title IX Coordinator with any questions or concerns related to their status (titleix@tamusa.edu; 210-784-2061; CAB 439K).

Texas A&M-San Antonio has also designated the Title IX Coordinator as the liaison officer for current or incoming students who are the parent or guardian of a child younger than 18 years of age. The Title IX Coordinator can provide students with information regarding support services and other resources.

Students' Rights and Responsibilities: The following statement of students' rights and responsibilities is intended to reflect the philosophical base upon which University Student Rules are built. This philosophy acknowledges the existence of both rights and responsibilities, which is inherent to an individual not only as a student at Texas A&M University-San Antonio but also as a citizen of this country.

Students' Rights

1. A student shall have the right to participate in a free exchange of ideas, and there shall be no University rule or administrative rule that in any way abridges the rights of freedom of speech, expression, petition and peaceful assembly as set forth in the U.S. Constitution.
2. Each student shall have the right to participate in all areas and activities of the University, free from any form of discrimination, including harassment, on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, religion, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, or veteran status in accordance with applicable federal and state laws.

3. A student has the right to personal privacy except as otherwise provided by law, and this will be observed by students and University authorities alike.
4. Each student subject to disciplinary action arising from violations of university student rules shall be assured a fundamentally fair process.

Students' Responsibilities

1. A student has the responsibility to respect the rights and property of others, including other students, the faculty and administration.
2. A student has the responsibility to be fully acquainted with the published University Student Rules found in the Student Handbook, [Student Code of Conduct](#), on our website, University Catalog and to comply with them, as well as federal, state, and local laws.
3. A student has the responsibility to recognize that student actions reflect upon the individuals involved and upon the entire University community.
4. A student has the responsibility to recognize the University's obligation to provide an environment for learning.
5. A student has the responsibility to check their university email for any updates or official university notification.

We expect that students will behave in a manner that is dignified, respectful, and courteous to all people, regardless of sex, ethnic/racial origin, religious background, sexual orientation or disability. Behaviors that infringe on the rights of another individual will not be tolerated.

Students are expected to exhibit a high level of honesty and integrity in their pursuit of higher education. Students engaging in an act that violates the standards of academic integrity will find themselves facing academic and/or disciplinary sanctions. Academic misconduct is any act, or attempt, which gives an unfair advantage to the student. Additionally, any behavior specifically prohibited by a faculty member in the course syllabus or class discussion may be considered as academic misconduct. For more information on academic misconduct policies and procedures please review the [Student Code of Conduct](#).

NOTE: Guidance for how to cite AI-generators, like ChatGPT, can be found here <https://apastyle.apa.org/blog/how-to-cite-chatgpt>

Important Dates:

January 16	First day of class
March 11-17	Spring Break – No classes
March 29	Study Day – No classes
April 13	Last day to drop with an automatic “W”
April 20	Last day to drop a course or withdraw from the University
April 29	Last day of classes
April 30	Study Day – No classes
May 1-7	Final exams

The complete academic calendar is available online:

<https://www.tamusa.edu/academics/academic-calendar/index.html>