



COJO F456/656 Science Writing for Popular Media

3 Credits

Spring, 2024

COVID-19 statement

Students should keep up-to-date on the university's policies, practices, and mandates related to COVID-19 by regularly checking [this website](#). Further, students are expected to adhere to the university's policies, practices, and mandates and are subject to disciplinary actions if they do not comply.

General Information

Instructor:	Lynne Snifka	Office Location:	105A Bunnell Building
Email:	lmsnifka@alaska.edu	Office Hours:	Wed., 10 a.m. – Noon Thur., 11:15 a.m. – 12:30 p.m., and by appointment
Telephone:	907-474-7761	Course Type:	Lecture
Course Location:	Zoom, Canvas	Meeting Time:	T, 6-9 p.m.

Zoom Meeting ID: [TBA](#)

Prerequisites

WRTG F111X; WRTG F211X, WRTG F212X, WRTG F213X or WRTG F214X

Course description

Students write, read and analyze science articles, social media posts, blog posts and/or press releases. Course work includes writing and reading assignments, class workshops and conferences with the instructor. Emphasis on recognizing, finding and developing science stories; structuring articles; capturing reader interest; maintaining accuracy; and getting published. Scientists are welcome.

Course Readings/Materials

Textbooks: *Ideas Into Words: Mastering the Craft of Science Writing*; Elise Hancock
The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2022
The Associated Press Stylebook, 56th Ed.

You will also be assigned many readings from magazines, newspapers, and other sources.



Technology Requirements

In order for you to get the most out of our time together, it will be important to have regular access to a computer and a location with high-speed internet service in order to attend class and download online materials in Canvas. At various points during the semester you will need to download course material and then upload completed assignments. Use of your @alaska.edu email account ensures you do not miss any important information from me or from other university departments. You should also have Microsoft Word installed on your computer in order to review my feedback on some assignments. If you do not currently have Word, you can download it using your UA credentials [here](#).

Course Goals

Science can be exciting, and life changing. But too often science communication gets bogged down in technical jargon and concepts too complicated for the lay reader. One of the primary goals of this course is development of the ability to analyze science writing of all kinds and determine what does or doesn't "work." Another is to take those analytical insights and apply them in your own writing. The goal is to not only be able to translate complicated scientific methods, discoveries, developments, etc. for the lay reader, but also to demonstrate their usefulness in peoples' lives.

Student Learning Outcomes

The goals for this course include teaching students to:

- Be able to recognize a good science story, and be able to differentiate between a "story" and a "topic."
- Translate scientific and medical jargon into terms understandable by the lay reader
- Write clear, simple interesting articles and other materials that both educate and entertain the general public
- Recognize what makes a story successful (or not) and be able to read science and other journalism critically
- Further refine and polish writing skills learned in lower-level classes
- Hunt down story ideas using scientific journals, the internet, libraries, researchers and other sources

Instructional Methods

Though this is an online class, you are expected to attend our Zoom meetings **on time and on camera**. The course will utilize lecture, group discussion, in-class writing exercises, peer editing, and one-on-one consultation with the instructor.



Explanation of Student Effort

This is an upper division, writing intensive course. To succeed, you should plan to spend a minimum of nine hours per week outside the classroom. There may be several weeks when that amount of effort is NOT required, but several weeks when MORE than nine hours are required. Time management is essential. There's a lot of reading (The good news is that most of it is things people read for pleasure.) and a lot of writing – and the writing gets more intense as the semester progresses. Note: In the past, almost every student underestimates the amount of time it will take to report and write a story.

WRITING

We will not devote much time to grammar, spelling, usage, punctuation, and other basics. If I notice you have a particular problem in one or more of these areas, I will point it out and refer you to the Writing Center for tutoring. My evaluation includes accuracy in spelling—especially the names of people, places, businesses, and government agencies. You will lose points for each misspelled word and each grammar or usage error. You get one free pass on this. If you refer to “Baker’s and their dog” instead of “the Bakers and their dog” in your first draft, you get a warning. Do it in your second draft and you’ll lose points.

Additionally, many organizations and publications use a specific writing style or even have their own style guides. In this class, ***you are expected to use AP Style in your writings***. The Stylebook is a required text and should be a great help to you. I will also cover many of the oft-used points of AP Style. Like grammar and usage, you get one free pass before you begin to lose points.

You may use the first person for only one of your stories (aside from the essay assignment), but only if you receive my permission.

Finally, it is expected that your writing for this class will be ***original work***. Please do not submit papers you wrote for another class. If I find that you have submitted a duplicate story, you will receive a zero for the assignment. This does not mean you can’t use the same “raw material.” For example, if you wrote about the permafrost tunnel in Fairbanks for another course, you may not re-version it for this one. But you could write about climate change, cite the tunnel as an example of a place where the change is observable, and use quotes from a previous interview. If you are unsure about whether it’s appropriate to use something, ask!

REPORTING

I expect a significant amount of original reporting for each of your articles. I will clarify “significant amount” in class, but it is very likely more than you expect.



COJO F456/656 Science Writing for Popular Media

Spring, 2024

REVISION

Revising one's work is perhaps the best habit of any writer. You will be required to do more than one draft of several major assignments, incorporating my feedback and, in some cases, the feedback of your peers.

Evaluation

As mentioned, my evaluation of your work includes the basics: spelling, grammar, usage, and AP Style. It also includes meeting what I call the "technical requirements" for each assignment (number of sources, number of people quoted, etc.), which will be outlined when the assignment is distributed. Additionally, you'll be evaluated on story structure, progression, clarity of science explanation, and character development (if applicable). Finally, any kind of writing is, by its nature, personal. Of the thousands of words in the English language, you make choices about which ones to use and what order to put them in. Evaluation, too, has a subjective component. The overall "feel" I get from the creativity and execution of your storytelling will be a minor factor in your assignment grades.

A note that in my classes, everyone begins as a "C" student. It is up to you and your work to elevate that grade to a "B" or an "A." I do not grade on a curve. I do not indulge in "grade inflation"—if you get an "A" in this course it's because you've done exceptional work.

COJO 456 Grading:

800-word article (assigned subject): 5%

800-word article revision: 5%

Story List: 5%

1,500-word article draft: 5%

1,500-word article revision: 10%

Essay Assignment: 5%

3,000+ word article draft: 10%

3,000+ word article revision: 20%

In-Class Writing Exercises: 10%

Reading Response Assignments: 10%

Participation: 10%

Attendance: 5%



COJO F456/656 Science Writing for Popular Media

Spring, 2024

COJO 656 Grading:

1,000-word article (assigned subject): 5%

1,000-word article revision: 5%

Story List: 5%

2,000-word article draft: 5%

2,000-word article revision: 10%

Essay Assignment: 5%

3,500+ word article draft: 10%

3,500+ word article revision: 15%

Book Responses: 10%

In-Class Writing Exercises: 10%

Reading Response Assignments: 10%

Attendance + Participation: 10%

There are no exams in this course.

Course Policies

1.) Expectations On Coursework

ASSIGNMENT FORMAT

Coursework should be typed, double-spaced and in an easy-to-read 12-point font such as Times New Roman, Calibri, or Helvetica. Assignments should be submitted via Canvas in .docx or .doc format. I use the “track changes” feature in Word to provide feedback. If you are unfamiliar with how this system works, please refer to [this tutorial](#).

The first page of your assignment should look like this:

Jane Doe – **name**

COJO 456 (or 656) – **course**

Story One Draft – **assignment name as it appears on the assignment instructions**

January 11, 2022 – **date**

Your uploaded file name should be your last name and the name of the assignment.

Example: R. Smith Story One.docx

Pay attention to your assignment formatting. The consistency aids me in grading, and you in organization and revision. If your assignment is not properly formatted, you will lose five points.

READING RESPONSES/DISCUSSION

When you read a magazine or newspaper story for this class, you are required to write a response. This helps to distill your thinking and better contribute to our discussion. Each response should be about a page (a little shorter or longer is fine). For some of the readings, I will give you questions specific to that story. For all others, you should answer the questions below. Your answers may follow each question OR you may include your answers as part of a short essay. All of your remarks should be in complete sentences. In addition to answering the questions, feel free to reflect on the story: did you enjoy it? Did it fly by or feel long? What were its strengths? Weaknesses? Have you encountered work by this writer before? How does this story compare?

Reading Response/Reflection Questions

- Identify the nut graph in this story. (You do not have to retype the entire nut graph in your response. Instead, a page number or paragraph reference is sufficient; e.g. “The second full paragraph on page 4, which begins ‘After the fire...’) If you don’t think there’s a nut graph, note that.
- Are there major characters in this story? Name them.
- How is the science handled in this story? Was it easy to understand? Why or why not?
- What are the sources of conflict in this story, if any?
- Identify at least one particularly successful or unsuccessful passage. (This may be a sentence, a paragraph, or a section.) Defend your answer.

ARTICLE ADDENDUM

For each of your articles, you’re required to attach a short “addendum” to the final draft that provides the following information:

- The **specific** intended audience/publication for your story (**NOT ACCEPTABLE**: “a magazine that covers technology and those interested in mobile phones.” **ACCEPTABLE**: “This article is geared toward men who plan to take a vacation in the next 12 months. I would submit it to Esquire magazine because the format and tone match their “Restless Man” section. It is similar to recent articles in the magazine about the Grand Tetons and whitewater rafting in Colorado.”)
- A list of sources used for the story and what you used them for (including websites you consulted for research, book you read, friends you spoke to because you used them for background).
- The names AND contact information for each person you interviewed for your article.

DEADLINES

Each exercise and assignment in this course builds on those before it. It is essential that you keep current. Assignments are due on the date specified on the class calendar **by the start of class that day**. Any assignments submitted after the beginning of class will receive an automatic 25% deduction. If



another day passes, the automatic deduction increases to 50%. For example, let's say an assignment is worth 100 points. Due to errors in reporting and grammar, you earn 86 points. If that assignment is turned in two days late, your grade drops to 43 points. Keep in mind that your grade in this class is based on a point system, so if you do miss a deadline, it is still to your advantage to turn an assignment in (an "F" of 50 points is better than an "F" of zero).

2.) Attendance, Tardiness, Class Participation

ATTENDANCE

Again, this is an online, *synchronous* course. That means you are expected to attend the entirety of every class meeting, be on time, and be on video. "I don't have a good internet connection" is not a sufficient excuse for not using your camera. If you lack a strong, reliable internet connection, go somewhere that does (such as the UAF campus if you're in Fairbanks) and find a quiet spot where you can log on and be a part of the group. If you are not using your video camera, your presence will not be counted for that class meeting. Exceptions to the "video rule" include class breaks, in-class writing exercise breaks, short bathroom breaks, etc. – NOT going to the kitchen to make dinner.

Also, consider this a reminder that coming in late – even on Zoom – can be distracting to your classmates and me. It may also mean you miss important updates on upcoming deadlines, changes to the course calendar, etc. If you know you will be unable to attend class, or you will be late for class, let me know **BEFORE CLASS**.

Remember this class meets just once a week, so missing one class is like missing two or three in another course. Please make every effort to attend.

If you are unable to attend class, it is **your responsibility** to arrange for a classmate to provide you with information on lecture, assignments, etc. **You may not make up any in-class exercises for the class meeting you miss.** The exception to this rule is missing class for a valid, university-sanctioned reason. In general, an absence is considered official when the student is participating in an approved field trip or other UAF activity, has a doctor's note, or is granted a leave of absence from UAF for reasonable cause by an academic dean or director. If you plan to miss class, *you must send me an email prior to the class meeting so I have a digital record if it.* If you accumulate more than three *unexcused* absences, you will fail this course.

3.) Plagiarism And Academic Integrity

Academic dishonesty applies to examinations, assignments, laboratory reports, fieldwork, practicums, creative projects, or other academic activities. Examples include, but are not limited to:



COJO F456/656 Science Writing for Popular Media

Spring, 2024

- a) presenting as their own the ideas or works of others without proper citation of sources;
- b) utilizing devices not authorized by the faculty member;
- c) using sources (including but not limited to text, images, computer code, and audio/video files) not authorized by the faculty member;
- d) providing assistance without the faculty member's permission to another student, or receiving assistance not authorized by the faculty member from anyone (with or without their knowledge);
- e) submitting work done for academic credit in previous classes, without the knowledge and advance permission of the current faculty member;
- f) acting as a substitute or utilizing a substitute;
- g) deceiving faculty members or other representatives of the university to affect a grade or to gain admission to a program or course;
- h) fabricating or misrepresenting data;
- i) possessing, buying, selling, obtaining, or using a copy of any material intended to be used as an instrument of assessment in advance of its administration;
- j) altering grade records of their own or another student's work;
- k) offering a monetary payment or other remuneration in exchange for a grade; or
- l) violating the ethical guidelines or professional standards of a given program.

For more, see [Students Rights and Responsibilities](#).

Evidence of plagiarism or fabrication in any assignment will result in a **minimum** penalty of an ***F for the course***. Further action, such as expulsion from the department and additional academic penalties, may be taken. To protect yourself from false accusations of plagiarism, keep all of your interview notes, research material and rough drafts until you receive your grade for the semester.

4.) Extended Absence Policy

Extended absences are defined as missed classes or course work by students beyond what is permissible by the instructor's written course policies. In the case of this course, that means more than TWO absences in a row, or more than THREE unexcused absences over the course of the semester. . Students may need to miss class and/or course work for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to:

- bereavement
- personal illness or injury
- serious illness of a friend, family member or loved one
- military obligations
- jury service
- other emergency or obligatory situations



For more information, go to the student handbook or the Center for Students Rights and Responsibilities.

5.) Classroom etiquette and student behavior guidelines.

As previously stated, you are expected to be on camera for this class. As I will utilize Power Point and written examples, it is highly advisable that you attend via computer rather than your phone. You should also remain on mute unless you're speaking. Classroom discussion is a significant part of the learning process in this course, and more robust conversation tends to occur when people can actually see one another. Please confine your use of chat to a minimum. Instead, use the "raise hand" function to participate, so we don't end up with overlap. If for some reason I don't see your hand raised and you think I'm about to move on, *please* unmute yourself and speak!

You are not expected to agree with, or even like, everything you read in this class. You are not expected to agree with your peers. Healthy debate contributes to learning, but demeaning language or name calling will not be tolerated. Be respectful of your classmates and me. Also keep in mind that while profanity may be a part of your everyday vocabulary, that may not be the case for everyone. If you have any questions about what constitutes acceptable behavior, or what's considered "going over the line," please contact me outside of class.

6.) UAF Incomplete Grade Policy:

Your instructor follows the University of Alaska Fairbanks Incomplete Grade Policy:

"The letter "I" (Incomplete) is a temporary grade used to indicate that the student has satisfactorily completed (C- or better) the majority of work in a course but for personal reasons beyond the student's control, such as sickness, has not been able to complete the course during the regular semester. Negligence or indifference are not acceptable reasons for an "I" grade."

For more information, see [the UAF regulations regarding grades](#).

Student Protections Statement

UAF embraces and grows a culture of respect, diversity, inclusion, and caring. Students at this university are protected against sexual harassment and discrimination (Title IX). Faculty members are designated as responsible employees which means they are required to report sexual misconduct. Graduate teaching assistants do not share the same reporting obligations. For more information on your rights as a student and the resources available to you to resolve problems, please go to the following site:

<https://catalog.uaf.edu/academics-regulations/students-rights-responsibilities/>.



Disabilities Services Statement

I will work with the Office of Disability Services to provide reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities. The Office of Disability Services implements the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and ensures that UAF students have equal access to the campus and course materials. I will work with the Office of Disabilities Services (208 Whitaker, 907-474-5655) to provide reasonable accommodation to students with disabilities uaf.edu/disability/

ASUAF advocacy statement

The Associated Students of the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the student government of UAF, offers advocacy services to students who feel they are facing issues with staff, faculty, and/or other students specifically if these issues are hindering the ability of the student to succeed in their academics or go about their lives at the university. Students who wish to utilize these services can contact the Student Advocacy Director by visiting the ASUAF office or emailing asuaf.office@alaska.edu.

Non-Discrimination Statement

The University of Alaska is an affirmative action/equal opportunity employer and educational institution. The University of Alaska does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, color, national origin, citizenship, age, sex, physical or mental disability, status as a protected veteran, marital status, changes in marital status, pregnancy, childbirth or related medical conditions, parenthood, sexual orientation, gender identity, political affiliation or belief, genetic information, or other legally protected status. The University's commitment to nondiscrimination, including against sex discrimination, applies to students, employees, and applicants for admission and employment. Contact information, applicable laws, and complaint procedures are included on UA's statement of nondiscrimination available at www.alaska.edu/nondiscrimination. For more information, contact:

UAF Department of Equity and Compliance
1760 Tanana Loop, 355 Duckering Building, Fairbanks, AK 99775
907-474-7300
uaf-deo@alaska.edu

Student Academic Support

- Speaking Center (907-474-5470, uaf-speakingcenter@alaska.edu, Gruening 507)
- Writing Center (907-474-5314, uaf-writing-center@alaska.edu, Gruening 8th floor)
- UAF Math Services, uaf-traccloud@alaska.edu, Chapman Building (for math fee paying students only)
- Developmental Math Lab, Gruening 406
- The Debbie Moses Learning Center at CTC (907-455-2860, 604 Barnette St, Room 120, <https://www.ctc.uaf.edu/student-services/student-success-center/>)



COJO F456/656 Science Writing for Popular Media

Spring, 2024

- For more information and resources, please see the Academic Advising Resource List (https://www.uaf.edu/advising/lr/SKM_364e19011717281.pdf)

Other Student Resources

- Disability Services (907-474-5655, uaf-disability-services@alaska.edu, Whitaker 208)
- Student Health & Counseling [**6 free counseling sessions**] (907-474-7043, <https://www.uaf.edu/chc/appointments.php>, Gruening 215)
- Center for Student Rights and Responsibilities (907-474-7317, uaf-studentrights@alaska.edu, Eielson 110)
- Associated Students of the University of Alaska Fairbanks (ASUAF) or ASUAF Student Government (907-474-7355, asuaf.office@alaska.edu, Wood Center 119)

Title IX

University of Alaska Board of Regents have clearly stated in BOR Policy that discrimination, harassment and violence will not be tolerated on any campus of the University of Alaska. If you believe you are experiencing discrimination or any form of harassment including sexual harassment/misconduct/assault, you are encouraged to report that behavior. If you report to a faculty member or any university employee, they must notify the UAF Title IX Coordinator about the basic facts of the incident.

Your choices for reporting include:

1. You may access confidential counseling by contacting the UAF Health & Counseling Center at 907-474-7043;
2. You may access support and file a Title IX report by contacting the UAF Title IX Coordinator at 907-474-6600;
3. You may file a criminal complaint by contacting the University Police Department at 907-474-7721. For more information please visit the [UAF Department of Equity and Compliance](#) webpage.

Any UAF employee or volunteer who reasonably suspects or observes minor abuse or maltreatment is required to report the incident. Reporting procedures are available on the UAF Protection of Minors. Violation of this policy by employees shall be reported as well.

Emergency Notification Plan

Students will receive emergency notifications via phone or email. Please check your UAOnline account to confirm your emergency notification settings. for more information, please refer to the student handbook. In cases where you do not have access to your devices, as your instructor, I will take responsibility to relay any emergency notifications.



Final Thoughts

I will push you this semester. This is a good thing. If you want your writing to be published, or even just enjoyed by your friends and family, hearing “what a treasure!” about every word you type will not help you. I want you to dig deep, report diligently, and be the best writer you can be. I am here to help you do that. I have been a professional editor for more than 20 years. And with rare exceptions, ***you will likely never again have this much access to an editor.*** Take advantage of your appointments with me, and make a lot of them. Come to my office hours. Ask questions.

COJO 439/639

TENTATIVE Course Schedule

Fall 2023

Date	Subject	Reading Assignment	Homework Assignment(s)	Due
1/11	Introduction, Syllabus Review, Reading Review, Translation Exercise	“The Placebo Effect,” “A Journey into the Animal Mind,” (BASW*) <i>Ideas Into Words</i> , Ch. 1 + 2	Reading responses for “Placebo” and “Animal Mind”	Translation Ex.
1/18	What makes good science writing / Frameworks/ How to find a story/50 Writing Tools (part 1)	“Rethinking Gray Water,” “Super Sex Me,” “Bro Bonds,” “Disturbing Twinkie” <i>Ideas Into Words</i> , Ch. 3	Story List, ONE reading response for ALL short stories	Reading Responses
1/25	Short & Sweet, Qualifying a Story, Interviewing Interviewing Exercise	“The Good Doctor,” “Frontier Couple” (link), “Hero of Lichenology” (BASW) <i>Ideas Into Words</i> , Ch. 4 + 5	Story 1, Reading responses (choose two stories)	Story List Reading Response
2/01	Profiles, Scenes, Reporting Deeply, Outlining a Story Scene Exercise	“Hand in Glove,” “Where Does All the Plastic Go?,” “This Girl,” “A Fish Story”	Reading Responses (see assignment on Canvas)	Reading Responses (choose two) Story One Draft
2/08	Guest Speaker: Ned Rozell 50 Writing Tools (part 2), Structuring a Story	“Birdbrain,” “Eight Arms to Hold You,” “Rabbit Fever,” <i>Ideas Into Words</i> , Ch.6	Story Two, Reading Responses	Reading Responses (see assignment on Canvas)
2/15	Story Two Pitch Session, Writing About Animals, 50 Writing Tools (part 3)	“A Memory of Webs Past,” “Sleep No More” (BASW), <i>Ideas into Words</i> , Ch. 7	Reading Responses	Reading Responses (choose two stories) Story One Final
2/22	Story Discussion, 50 Writing Tools (Part four)	No reading for next week b/c no class. Work on your STORY!		Reading Responses
3/01*	No Class – Lynne Out of Town – Story Exchange	No Reading – enjoy Spring Break!	Story Two Draft feedback provided this week	Story Two Draft 656 Students only: Book response one
3/08	SPRING BREAK – no class	“In the Company of Bears,” “Whale Fall,” “What Remains” (BASW)	Reading Responses (choose two stories)	



COJO F456/656 Science Writing for Popular Media

Spring, 2024

3/15	Guest Speaker – Joel Shukin The Science Essay	“Troubled Treasure” and “The Hidden Heroines of Chaos,” BASW	Science Essay, Story 3	Reading responses (choose two)
3/22	Catch up week – story discussion, any of the 50 Writing Tools we Missed	“Letting Go,” “Is Marijuana as Safe as We Think?,” “Mrs. Kelly’s Monster”		Story Two Final
3/29	Writing About Medicine/Health	“None of the Above,” “The Bell Curve,”		Essay
4/05	Story Discussion, Conference Signup	Conferences next week		Story 3 Draft
4/12	Class Replaced w Individual Conferences	TBA		
4/19		TBA		656 Students Only Book response two
4/26	Recommended Reading			Story 3 Final

*BASW denotes *Best American Science and Nature Writing 2020*, a required text for this course. All other stories will be available via Canvas.