

Journalism & Electronic Media 450
Information Sciences 450
WRITING ABOUT SCIENCE AND MEDICINE
NOTES TO STUDENTS

COURSE DESCRIPTION IN CATALOG

Writing workshop to analyze examples of successful science writing and write a series of articles for the general public based on scientific journals, news conferences, technical meetings, and interviews.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

This writing workshop is for students who wish to explore communicating scientific, technological, and medical information to the general public. At the conclusion of this course, students should be able to conduct background research on scientific topics and write:

- Stories for general audiences based on information gleaned from scientific journals, news conferences, technical meetings, and interviews with scientists.
- Query letters to popular science and general interest magazines and newspapers.
- Science feature stories for popular science and general interest magazines, newspapers, and websites.

Because this course is designed as a writing workshop, the schedule and assignments may be modified to fit the needs and interests of the students who enroll.

REQUIRED READING

Articles assigned for reading are available through Hodges Library on-line course reserve or as handouts. Whenever reading is assigned, you must bring a copy of the article to class so that we can refer to it in our discussion.

There is no textbook for this course, but you will need to buy a specific issue of *The New York Times* so that we can analyze its Science Times section together. You will also need to buy or obtain a magazine of your choice that regularly publishes some popular science articles. We will analyze these magazines and their articles in class.

CLASS MEETINGS

Tuesdays and Thursdays from 3:40 to 4:55 p.m. in 314 Communications Building

Students are also expected to attend the Hill Lecture (Tuesday, March 11 at 8 p.m.) and the Hill Lecture master class (Tuesday, March 11 at 3:30 p.m.). Both events are held on campus.

There may be two or three field trips depending on student availability. Participation is recommended but not required because field trips must extend beyond the regular class period. Students receive extra credit if they participate in field trips.

ATTENDANCE

You are now a working writer. Be at work (in class) unless you have a medical reason to be absent. Please notify me in advance if you cannot be at work (in class). Each unexcused absence deducts from your grade for Participation. Excessive absences reduce the remainder of your grade.

HANDICAPS OR OTHER PROBLEMS

Please notify the Office of Disability Services (974-6087; <ods@tennessee.edu>; 2227 Dunford Hall) about handicaps or other problems that may affect your work so that they can help you and me find accommodations.

INTEGRITY

Compliance with University of Tennessee academic ethics, as explained in *Hilltopics*, and with the standards of professional journalism is expected. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade and possibly expulsion from the university.

Writing that you have submitted in another class or have previously published or that has been critiqued or edited by a writing instructor or a professional editor may not be submitted in this course without the explicit permission of the instructor.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT FROM THE COLLEGE

The College of Communication & Information recognizes and values diversity. Exposing students to diverse people, ideas, and cultures increases opportunities for intellectual inquiry, encourages critical thinking, and enhances communication and information competence. When all viewpoints are heard, thoughtfully considered, and respectfully responded to, everyone benefits. Diversity and fairness unite us with the wider professional and global community.

INSTRUCTOR AND OFFICE HOURS

Mark Littmann, Ph.D.
Professor, Hill Chair of Excellence in Science Writing
267 Communications Building
974-8156 (office); 588-6661 (home); 776-0822 (cell)
E-mail: littmann@utk.edu

Office hours: Generally Monday through Friday 2–3 p.m. — but call ahead. I am also available at most other times by appointment. You are always welcome to drop by at any time without an appointment and I will see you if I possibly can.

GRADING

Your out-of-class writing assignments will count for about 80% of your grade in the course.

Your class presentation and leadership of a discussion of a science writer's work will provide about 5% of your grade.

The remaining 15% of your grade will be based on your participation in class discussions, because your contributions make the class more interesting and valuable to your colleagues and me.

Please come to class ready to discuss the assigned readings. Please also study the background reading requested by some guest speakers and come to class prepared to interview all guests.

If you wish, you may revise one of your articles for a higher grade. To earn a higher grade, your revision must go beyond fixing typographical and grammatical errors. You must improve as needed the organization or research base or presentation of your story. Your revised article can raise your grade but cannot lower it unless there are ethical problems.

You are welcome to write an additional article for extra credit on a subject of your choice (but please check your story idea with me in advance). Extra-credit articles can raise your grade but cannot lower it unless there are ethical problems.

Graduate students must submit an extra story in order to earn graduate credit. This article (about 750 words) will count about 10% of your grade.

Summary of Writing Assignments

(and *approximate* grading weight)

Brief science column story (about 250 words)	10%
Short feature story on a local scientist and his or her research (about 750 words)	15%
Query letter (about 300 words)	5%
Longer science feature story (about 1,200 words)	25%
Notes on reading assignments	15%
Other writing: informal notes on magazines and on <i>New York Times</i> science section, article proposal notes, and draft excerpt from final article	10%