

**WRITING ABOUT HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT**  
**JOUR 304.01 (22702)—SPRING 2022**  
**UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND**  
**JEPSON 108, WED. 3:00-5:30 P.M.**

**INSTRUCTOR**

Professor Karen Masterson

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Office: Weinstein Hall, 4th Floor, Journalism Department

Office Hours: By appointment

**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

We start by reading award-winning storytelling about different aspects of health and the environment. Then we segue to you finding your own interesting and compelling stories to tell about health and environmental issues in Richmond. To get you started, we will study and track the stated goals of city and state-level officials, and measure those goals against reality on the ground. Because this course has a special emphasis on public health, we will pay close attention to the state's Health Opportunity Index and Richmond City Public Health Data, plus other statistics, environmental assessments and community-related reports. We'll discuss the "built environment" and what that means to health indicators. We'll explore where and how practitioners and neighborhood-level advocacy groups influence change. Then you will explore an anecdotal representation of a major issue in the city that you will then write about using different formats. These will be submitted as drafts to the class "workshop" (explained below), during which you will be given detailed guidance on how to improve your storytelling techniques.

**COURSE LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

I believe students learn by doing. This means you will write and rewrite, a lot. In addition to learning from my edits, you will read each other's writing and offer feedback. You will learn how to find the written mishaps in other works, which will help you find the mishaps in your own writing.

By the end of the course, you will have:

- 1) field-level knowledge of how policy makers, stakeholders and practitioners interact to address the city's public health and environmental problems;
- 2) experience drafting and revising written works that make complex public health and environmental concepts accessible to a general audience;
- 3) experience editing student papers with an eye for improving grammar, clarity, brevity, substance and creativity.
- 4) training in storytelling techniques that include 1) a complication-to-resolution story arc; 2) tight prose built on brevity, clarity and diverse sources; 3) a well-studied and contextualized view of the topic, and 4) transparency, honesty and accuracy.

## **COURSE READINGS**

### **Books**

*The Elements of Style*, Fourth Edition, 1999, by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White.

*The Associated Press Guide to News Writing*, by Rene J. Cappon, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, 1999.

Selected stories from *The Medical Detectives*, by Berton Roueché, 1991.

Selected stories from *The Best American Science and Nature Writing*, edited by Ed Yong, 2021 (handouts).

### **Articles**

Required daily news reading: *The Richmond-Times Dispatch* (free through UR library), *Henrico Citizen* (free)

Each week we will analyze long-form writing, starting with:

- “Mrs. Kelly’s Monster,” by Jon Franklin, *The Baltimore Sun*, 1978. Won the Pulitzer Prize, 1979.
- “The Mosquito Killer,” by Malcolm Gladwell, *The New Yorker*, July 2, 2001.
- “What Ph.D.s Can Learn About Talking with Reporters,” by Rick Weiss, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2021
- Ernie Pyle on U.S. Army hospital ship *Seminole*, 1944

Other magazine articles will be assigned as they appear in a range of major publications.

## **COURSE DEADLINE RULES**

Because of the work and pace of this course, you must stick to the timeline and turn in work by the stated deadline. For this reason, no late assignments will be accepted without approval in advance. Failure to meet a deadline could result in a lower grade, depending on the circumstances. Everything must be posted to Blackboard (i.e., do not send assignments via email).

## **ATTENDANCE**

This course is discussion and workshop-oriented, so attendance is required. Please arrive on time and be prepared to participate. If you are unable to attend class, be sure to let me know via email. If you expect to miss more than one class because of illness or other emergency, please be sure to provide me with a note from your dean or advisor so I may work with you on making up any missed assignments.

## **OVERVIEW OF ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING**

You have four main assignments.

- 1) A 1,000-word expository paper that explores the background of one major problem in Richmond, preferably one that is related to public health or the environmental, but other topics are possible.
- 2) A 1,200-word story that anecdotally represents the issue addressed in your 1,000-word paper, and that uses as background a summary of that information. Your story must be relevant and carry weight. It must take you off campus—in other words, you must

explore the issue “on the ground” with real people. It may be written in any non-fiction format—news story, essay, feature story or analysis. The story must be readable and have a point, and be crafted with a beginning, middle and end, using journalistic techniques that include a lede, nut graf and kicker, plus quotes from sources.

- 3) A condensed version of your story written as an 800-word opinion piece. This is an exercise in brevity. You will have to bring forth your most salient points using your own voice while cutting the word length by almost half—without losing any meaning or purpose.
- 4) A 700-word profile of me. This is a challenge you should think about and prepare for, starting now. Here’s a hint for success: Write what you know.

Estimated due dates for major assignments (subject to change)

Assignment	Draft due 11:59 p.m.	Rewrite due 11:59 p.m.	Points
Background paper	Feb. 7	Feb. 16	17
Story draft	Feb. 21	March 14	14
Final Story	n/a	March 30	14
Op-ed	April 4	April 20	10
Profile	April 11	April 22	10

**Format.** Papers must be double-spaced in 12-point font (preferably in MS Word). Include at the top: student name, email address, length in words, and DATE. Include a title, page numbers, and a source list that includes contact information for interviewees and citations for printed or online material. **ALL PAPERS BEING WORKSHOPPED MUST INCLUDE NUMBERED PARAGRAPHS.** Students may feel free to incorporate the published or spoken words of others, but must be vigilant with attributions to avoid plagiarism.

For your 1,200-word story, be sure to **record all interviews and post the audio files** with your draft submission.

**Deadlines and Directions.** *Schedules and assignments will be posted to Blackboard in the “Assignments” section every Friday.* See the syllabus for a rough outline of how the course is paced. These are subject to change, so be sure to watch the weekly postings in Assignments for actual dates and deadlines.

**Papers to be workshopped will be due by 11:59 p.m. on each Monday before the workshop.** This will give fellow students time to read and make edits and comments in Track Changes, and then repost to Blackboard before the workshop meets.

All assignments must be turned in on time, unless arrangement for late submission is worked out in advance. Post all assignments as an attachment to the course Blackboard site, preferably in **MS Word**. If not MS Word, use a format that is editable. **No PDFs.**

To post in Bb, go to the “Discussion” icon in the left column, click on the title of the assignment (e.g. “Feedback Loop Draft 1”), create a Thread, add your name to the subject line and attach your document.

## GRADING RUBRIC

One point is taken off for every day an assignment is late, unless otherwise worked out with me. For every class missed, 2 points are taken from class participation, unless otherwise worked out with me. Full credit for participation requires you to be active and engaged. Just showing up is worth 1 point. Adding substantively to the discussion earns the other 1 point.

Category	Possible Points	Total
Homework assignments	3 x 3	9
Background Paper/Revision	8.5/8.5	17
Story/Revision	14/14	28
Op-ed/Revision	5/5	10
Masterson Profile/Revision	5/5	10
Class Participation*	2 per week x 13	26
Total		100

\*Everyone gets ONE free pass on a missed class: no points lost, no questions asked. Anyone not using the free pass will earn 2 points in extra credit. **Free passes MAY NOT be used if your paper is being workshopped that week.** To miss your own workshop is to forfeit participation points for that week *and* half the points on the paper. If you are unable to make your assigned workshop date, *you* are responsible for trading spots with a student scheduled for another week. Any trouble rescheduling should be brought to my attention well in advance of the workshop.

A+: 98-100; A: 93-97; A-: 90-92; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-: 70-72; etc. (Do you need to know what comes after this?)

## INCLUSIVITY

University of Richmond believes in fostering inclusive learning environments and so does the Department of Journalism. Respecting diversity of all kinds is an intrinsic part of this course. All viewpoints expressed through respectful commentary are welcome. If you prefer to use nonbinary pronouns, please bring this to my attention.

## COURSE PROTOCOL

In the event of disruption of normal classroom activities due to an emergency situation or weather-related closure, I will hold class over Zoom.

## COURSE RESOURCES

**Blackboard.** This course requires you to use Blackboard for most assignments and to receive course-related emails through the Blackboard announcement tool. You must, therefore, activate your UR email account. I encourage you to check Blackboard and your UR email daily for updates throughout the semester.

## NO RECORD POLICY

One of the hallmarks of a University of Richmond education is small classes where faculty and students engage in robust discussions. The goal is always to allow students with varied perspectives to share and be heard. We frequently discuss and debate controversial events occurring in real time, and encourage you to offer your perspective on how these events affect you.

To encourage open and honest discussions, you are prohibited from capturing, copying, sharing, publishing, and/or posting on social media any recordings (audio or audio/video) in whole or in part. To do otherwise is to violate the Standards of Student Conduct; violators will be reported to the Westhampton and Richmond College deans, with the possibility of serious sanctions—including suspension or expulsion.

### HONOR CODE AND PLAGIARISM

Do your own work and carefully attribute information that comes from other sources. Anything drawn from the internet, other media sources or text books **may be used with attribution**. Ask me if you're unsure about something. Presenting fictionalized interviews, quotes, etc., as factual is an honor code violation and is a grave breach of trust.

Plagiarism and representing fiction as fact are grounds for failure in this course and possible university sanction.

### OFFICE HOURS

Please let me know if you have questions about something we discuss in class or if you have trouble with any of the material or assignments. The best way to reach me is through email. My office hours are by appointment. Please feel free to stop by my office any Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday, but I cannot guarantee my availability without an appointment.

### COURSE SCHEDULE (Spring 2022)

Expect to devote an average of 10 to 14 hours a week to this course. The following schedule is a tentative roadmap for all assignments and due dates. These are subject to change, based on how the semester goes. Each Friday, I will post to Blackboard under *Assignments* all finalized details for the coming week. If you have any questions, please ask!

Week/Date	Topic	Assignments due	Readings due
1 Jan. 12	<p>First hour: Intro, syllabus, discuss feedback loop</p> <p>Remainder: Librarian overview of news and research databases</p>	Think about broad topic you want to cover	<i>Richmond Times-Dispatch (RTD)</i>
2 Jan. 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>On Writing Well, in-class exercise</li> <li>Discuss student feedback loops</li> <li>ID important public health issues</li> </ul>	Feedback loop on public health problem in Richmond	<i>Elements of Style</i> , intro, chapters 1-2 <i>RTD</i> <u>"Mrs. Kelly's Monster"</u>

<b>3</b> <b>Jan. 28</b>	Discuss comedian's sense of structure Assigned readings, go over: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ledes</li> <li>• Nut grafs</li> <li>• Kicker</li> <li>• Pacing</li> </ul> Speaker from city health department	Bring printout of assigned stories and number paragraphs; highlight active verbs; find extraneous words; note anything that stands out	<i>Elements</i> , chs 3-4  <i>RTD</i>  Assigned stories
<b>4</b> <b>Feb. 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss proposals</li> <li>• Present analysis of chosen comedian</li> <li>• Sentence structure rewrite exercise</li> <li>• Student analysis of assigned stories</li> </ul>	Proposal for background paper  Comedian presentations	<i>Elements</i> , chs 5-6  <i>RTD</i>  Assigned stories
<b>5</b> <b>Feb. 9</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First WORKSHOP of background papers</li> <li>• Applying lessons on writing well</li> <li>• Pitch story ideas</li> </ul>	Background papers  Story idea proposal	<i>Elements</i> , chs 7-8  <i>RTD</i>  <i>Guide to News Writing</i> , chapter 2
<b>6</b> <b>Feb. 16</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WORKSHOP remaining background papers</li> <li>• Present story progress</li> </ul>	Background papers  Presentations on story progress and techniques used for journalistic interviews	<i>Guide</i> , chs 3-5 and 11  Assigned readings

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>7</b> <b>Feb. 23</b></p>	<p>WORKSHOP of story drafts</p>	<p>Story drafts, as assigned</p>	<p><i>Guide</i>, chs 6-8 Assigned readings</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>8</b> <b>March 2</b></p>	<p>Finish WORKSHOP of story drafts</p>	<p>Story drafts, as assigned</p>	<p><i>Guide</i>, chs 9-10 Assigned readings</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>9</b> <b>March 9</b></p>	<p>SPRING BREAK, no class</p>	<p>Do additional interviews and research, as needed</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>10</b> <b>March 16</b></p>	<p>Workshop revised story</p>	<p>Revised story, as scheduled</p>	<p>Reread <i>Guide</i>, chapter 11</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>11</b> <b>March 23</b></p>	<p>Workshop revised story</p>	<p>Revised story, as scheduled</p>	<p>Assigned readings: opinion pieces on public health issues  <i>RTD</i></p>

<p><b>12 March 30</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze the hierarchy of strong arguments</li> <li>Discuss assigned readings</li> <li>Pitch opinion piece proposal</li> </ul>	<p>Proposal for opinion pieces</p>	<p>Assigned readings: opinion pieces on public health</p> <p><i>RTD</i></p>
<p><b>13 April 6</b></p>	<p>Workshop opinion pieces</p>	<p>Opinion pieces</p>	<p>Assigned readings: profiles</p> <p><i>RTD</i></p>
<p><b>14 April 13</b></p>	<p>Workshop Masterson profile</p>	<p>Masterson profile</p>	<p>Assigned readings: profiles</p>
<p><b>15 April 20</b></p>	<p>Wrap up</p>		