

LSC # 37
 Action Approved
2-21-91

COVER SHEET: Request for Approval to Use W-Designation

TYPE I. PROFESSOR COMMITMENT

- Professor CRAIG G. SWAUGER Phone X 4411
 Writing Workshop? (If not at IUP, where? when? _____)
 Proposal for one W-course (see instructions below)
 Agree to forward syllabi for subsequently offered W-courses?

TYPE II. DEPARTMENTAL COURSE

- Department Contact Person _____ Phone _____
 Course Number/Title _____
 Statement concerning departmental responsibility
 Proposal for this W-course (see instructions below)

TYPE III. SPECIFIC COURSE AND SPECIFIC PROFESSOR(S)

- Professor(s) _____ Phone _____
 Course Number/Title _____
 Proposal for this W-course (see instructions below)

SIGNATURES:

Professor(s) _____

Department Chairperson _____

College Dean _____

Director of Liberal Studies _____

COMPONENTS OF A PROPOSAL FOR A WRITING-INTENSIVE COURSE:

I. "Writing Summary"--one or two pages explaining how writing is used in the course. First, explain any distinctive characteristics of the content or students which would help the Liberal Studies Committee understand your summary. Second, list and explain the types of writing activities; be especially careful to explain (1) what each writing activity is intended to accomplish as well as the (2) amount of writing, (3) frequency and number of assignments, and (4) whether there are opportunities for revision. If the activity is to be graded, indicate (5) evaluation standards and (6) percentage contribution to the student's final grade.

II. Copy of the course syllabus.

III. Samples of assignment sheets, instructions, or criteria concerning writing that are given to students.

Provide 12 copies to the Liberal Studies Committee.
 Please number all pages.

Writing Summary

Feature Writing is an elective course for journalism majors, although non-majors with an interest in writing may be admitted. Since the journalism program is primarily print journalism -- and that means writing -- this particular course as an upper-level offering places strong emphasis upon not only writing skills but also story content.

The course focuses on two kinds of writing 1) stories by professional writers and 2) stories by the students, both of which will be studied and critiqued in class. The course uses a text, *On Writing Well* by William Zinsser, a highly regarded writing instructor. The material in the book is assigned at appropriate times throughout the semester.

The journalism program offers two sequences -- news/editorial and public relations. Both sequences must offer opportunities in writing specialized journalistic stories; Feature Writing is appropriate for students in either sequence.

Overall, the writing instruction stresses simplicity, directness and clarity. There is instruction in the use of the 'speaking voice' concept as well as methods of research and interviewing. Students are also introduced to the techniques of the more experimental 'New Journalism,' which presents devices used by Tom Wolfe and other New Journalists.

Each student is expected to produce 12 to 14 feature stories most of them as out-of-class assignments. These stories make use of feature story devices: description, extended quotes, examples, anecdotes, varied chronology, special leads and endings. Specific feature story subjects include profiles, descriptives, lifestyle, personal experience, or anything that offer students opportunities to write entertaining and endlessly interesting stories.

The evaluation of the student writing -- both by instructor and students -- is crucial to improving both skills and content, for the material covered in this course is handled in an incremental way, building from the writing of brief descriptions at the outset to fully developed profiles as a final project. Students have the opportunity to copyedit and suggest improvements during the class evaluations and then to rewrite stories for additional judgments by the instructor.

All writing is evaluated by the instructor (as explained in the syllabus) on the basis of writing skills development, content and feature story appropriateness. The student's final grade is based chiefly upon the instructor's evaluation of stories, with some subjective emphasis placed upon class participation. About one-sixth of the final grade is reflected by the grade on the final examination, which is a writing activity based on the Zinsser text.

GOALS

1. To determine what feature writing is, as distinguished from news reporting and other kinds of journalistic writing; that is, to characterize or define feature writing through a) a study of models in newspapers and magazines and b) the student's own writing and the instructor and peer evaluation of such writing.
2. To understand and appreciate the role/purpose of feature writing.
3. To become acquainted with and employ a variety of feature-story devices: description, extended quotes, anecdotes, examples, narration, feature story leads, endings, transitions.
4. To learn to write specific types of feature stories.
5. To discover, understand and employ the concept of 'speaking voice' in the writing process.
6. To improve research and interviewing techniques used in feature writing.
7. To write simply, directly, clearly.

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CLASS PROCEDURE

We will begin the course by trying to define feature writing, to determine its characteristics, to examine what we think are feature stories.

For the second meeting, please clip and bring to class what you believe is a feature story. Keep in mind that a feature story entertains; that it uses more quotes, more description; that it is more informal, subjective, and experimental; that it is based on facts; that it is generally longer and goes into greater depth than news stories. If it's a good feature story, it's endlessly interesting.

For a while then we will be characterizing feature stories. After that, we will be writing our own feature stories-- about 12 to 14 of them throughout the semester. Some writing will be in-class, most of it out-of-class.

Much of the class hour will consist of looking at stories professionals have written and that you-- the aspiring professionals--have written. A lot of the writing will be duplicated and it will be evaluated by both instructor and students. We will be fairly outspoken in making judgments about the writing. So I hope you are all not too thin-skinned.

Thus, the major activities will be 1) writing and 2) evaluating your writing. From time to time the writing assignments will be important enough and extensive enough to take the place of class meetings. It is important for you to turn in assignments on time (deadlines, you know) and for you to attend class regularly. You'll be interested in what your peers have to say about your writing.

EVALUATION

I will evaluate your writing by using a point system. For example, I may assign 20 possible points to a paper; you will then discover that I place a value of 16 or 18 or even 20 points on the paper. As the semester moves along, you will have some idea of how well you are doing (as you accumulate points). Now about those late papers: If you turn in a paper to me after the class hour (and that means finding it in my mailbox), it summarily loses one half its possible points. And the evaluation could further affect the number of points awarded. So, a fair warning--do your assignments on time and bring them to class. Letter grades are based on the following: 90-100 = A, 80-89 = B, 70-79 = C, 60-69 = D, below 60 = F.

I offer a special opportunity for you to acquire extra points (bonus points). This is the way it works: if a story you submit as a class assignment appears in published form (the Penn, Indiana Gazette, Greensburg Tribune-Review, for example) and you give me a clip of the story, I will award an additional 5 points. I encourage you to try to get your feature stories in print, for in addition to bonus points you may have a by-lined clip and possibly payment by the publication.

COPY PREPARATION

Some housekeeping matters: prepare your copy on 8 1/2 x 11 paper--typed and clean. At the top left of the first page place your name, slug line, and due date. Repeat on top left of succeeding pages. Please keep carbons or copies of all your stories.

TEXT

You will note that there is a text for this class: On Writing Well by William Zinsser Fourth Edition (Harper Collins). This remarkably interesting and instructive book is a course in writing in itself. We will use it from time to time in appropriate places but I urge you to read and absorb the entire book--and then keep it for your personal library. I also urge you to read a daily newspaper and a weekly news magazine. And read as many 'feature stories' as you can in newspapers and non-news magazines.

WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

1. Short descriptive--you will select a campus site and write a brief description of it, using concrete details.
2. Things that go unnoticed--you will base this feature story on a campus or community site and will describe such place for its uniqueness that is missed by most observers.
3. Job profile--you will interview a person on the job and write a feature story about the nature of his work.
4. Personal experience--you will write a feature story in an interesting, revelatory way about a significant experience you have had.
5. Seasonal, historical or anniversary story--you will research and write a feature story about a seasonal event or a historical happening or an anniversary.
6. Lifestyle--you will write a feature story on a style of living today.
7. Man-on-the-street--you will interview people on a controversial issue and write a feature story on your findings.
8. Extended descriptive--you will select a particular locale and write a feature story about it in a fully developed manner.
9. Critique story--you will write a feature story about a news event.
10. Personality profile--you will research and interview a person and then write an indepth profile.
11. Business feature--you will visit a business site for observation and interviews and write a feature story on the particular business.
12. Current stories--you will have the opportunity throughout the semester to write several feature stories on whatever is taking place at the time.

SAMPLE ASSIGNMENT: PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

This is a rare opportunity for you to write a feature story in the first person. The temptation to write first-person articles is strong; yet most stories are not suited to the first person. How to know whether or not to use the first person? Possibly by asking--were you a participant or an observer?

Publishable articles on personal experiences are rare. Why? Well, the experience must be thrilling, highly amusing or one that strikes home intimately to the reader. Thrilling experiences happen about once in a lifetime. Amusing experiences are more frequent but the writer must see the funny side of the experience and be able to tell it entertainingly (and in such an account the writer is usually the 'fall guy'). So writers of personal experiences overwhelmingly try to reach the reader through actions and revelations that the reader can relate to from his own experience.

The essentials of a personal experience story are:

- 1) sharing experience--the writer must work to get the 'reader' to participate; the writer must graphically describe actions and emotions. He should not write something from the distant past, for it's too hard to recall significant details and the effort to remember and to present memories graphically results in strained and artificial sentences.
- 2) unrelenting focus--the writer must avoid long introductions and digressions (these are major flaws). The great quality of personal experience is the unrelenting focus on the experience; the writer must keep the experience at the center of the reader's attention. So the question is: the writer justified in devoting so much attention to explaining his favorite person--himself? And he must be careful to tell enough about other people to avoid making them cardboard characters--and yet not letting people overwhelm the event. It's a delicate balance.

Some suggestions and comments:

- 1) Chronological form--that's not the only way to handle the story.
- 2) Facts--use sparingly, only as necessary.
- 3) Transitions--they are links to past and present.
- 4) Limited description of people. But a short description helps, makes a flesh-and-blood person rather than a name.
- 5) Flashback can be effective (a narrative within a narrative is then possible)
- 6) Don't let the narrative lapse. Keep the event in focus.
- 7) Keep paragraphs spare and crisp. Limit yourself to a straightforward description of what is said and done.
- 8) Give the reader the 'feel' of the experience. Describe emotions. Allow the reader to experience vicariously. But be careful not to let too much of the personal experience go over your emotions.
- 9) Preserve the narrative quality. Avoid temptation to raminate (talk or think over the experience). Go on.
- 10) Conclusion--make it neat and memorable.

Thus, the assignment is to write a feature story about a significant experience you have had. You may be guided to some degree by determining whether or not your experience is interesting and entertaining enough to be considered as a publishable story. That is, does it have some grit to it?

OFFICE HOURS

10:30-1:15 MWF; 9:30-11:15 TR

Davis 432