

COURSE SYLLABUS



Feature Writing

Course code: JRN 300

Term and year: Fall 2025

Day and time: Wednesday 15:00-17:45

Instructor: David Vaughan

Instructor contact: david.vaughan@aauni.edu

Consultation hours: 30 minutes, immediately after class

Credits US/ECTS	3/6	Level	Intermediate
Length	15 weeks	Pre-requisite	Composition, Reporting II
Contact hours	42 hours	Course type	HSC el, PS el, JC req, CEA

1. Course Description

This course moves beyond basic journalistic reporting and news writing. Students will gain experience in writing longer, impactful feature articles. We'll work on techniques to find angles and develop them into research-based non-fiction stories that have characters, show development and follow a structural, narrative arc from beginning to end. The class is run as a magazine newsroom, with students pitching their stories and workshopping their drafts. We shall also look at how we write differently for different platforms, and at multimedia aspects of feature writing, including audio and video.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

1. Carry out research and write their own feature stories
2. Find story ideas and conduct interviews to develop in-depth profiles
3. Be able to pitch stories and write for the university's print and online student magazine, *The Lennon Wall* and for other publications, including *Radio Prague International*
4. Explore the qualities of storytelling and how they differ from news
5. Identify skills required for writing features for different platforms, including radio/podcasting, film and hybrid platforms
6. Use multimedia elements as a supplement to feature-writing
7. Build a robust vocabulary of longform writing
8. Introduce tools for finding and framing interesting features
9. Learn to critique and be critiqued constructively, discuss complex issues openly and in-depth
10. Learn to work in a team, working on complex feature stories
11. Examine markets for journalism and learn how stories are pitched and sold

3. Reading Material

Feature Writing - The Pursuit of Excellence by Edward Jay Friedlander and John Lee, 7th Edition (plenty of copies available in the library)

Telling True Stories: A Nonfiction Writer's Guide from the Nieman Foundation at Harvard University by Mark Kramer and Wendy Call (one copy available in the library, scans of individual chapters will be made available through NEO)

Students should read extensively to keep up with best practices and for inspiration. At a minimum, they should read feature stories in international publications such as *The Atlantic*, *NPR*, *Wired*, *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Guardian* and *The Economist*. Glancing through the magazines in AAU's library will help keep you informed and give you ideas.

4. Teaching Methodology

The class will run like a newsroom; it will be informal and interactive, a "feature-writing lab." Students will learn by doing. Their stories will be discussed and critiqued in class by the instructor and by the students themselves. The instructor will also provide feedback to students individually about their work. Please also be ready to do in-class writing assignments on deadline. These in-class writing exercises will help acquaint you with common reporting situations and writing formulas.

5. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
Week 1 3 Sept	Topic: Introduction to Feature Writing Description: What's the difference between news writing and feature writing? What defines good and great feature writing? What subjects make for strong features? How do you find them? What are the elements found in features and how does their structure and approach differ from straight newswriting? Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 1, pp 25-35, chapter 2 Kramer & Call part I, part II, pp 19-27
Week 2 10 Sept	Topic: Interviewing Description: Building trust and respect and breaking through PR-speak to get at deeper truth. Finding great quotes and negotiating attribution. Using audio and video of the interviewee. Set Assignment 1: doing an interview preferably with someone who has a quite different background from your own. Write it up as a profile of that person. Record audio and/or video of that person. Take photos.
Week 3 17 Sept	Topic: Ideas and Angles Description: Finding your angle. How to recognise a story and let it develop. What is new? What sources have we not yet heard from on an issue? Whose story has not been told? How do we get their side? What format is best suited to the story? How do we retain balance at the same time? Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 3 Kramer & Call part II, pp 51-64
Week 4 24 Sept	Topic: Research

	Description: Good features come from intensive background investigation, exhaustive reading and serious time in the field. Organizing your detective work. Reviewing sources of important records and data. Going beyond your comfort zone. Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 4, pp 111-120 Kramer & Call part II, pp 39-45, pp 54. Submit Assignment 1.
Week 5 1 Oct	Topic: Article Structure Description: What is the story? How will you tell it? Pace, colour, tone, rhythm and transitions. Narrative arc. The unexpected. Pitching story idea for profile article. Reading: Friedlander & Lee, chapter 6 Kramer & Call part III, pp 97-124
Week 6 8 Oct	Topic: Writer's fingerprints Description: Finding your voice and presence in the story without becoming the story. Workshopping students' articles. Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 8 pp 248-258 Kramer & Call part V, pp 149-162
Week 7 15 Oct	Topic: Back it up! Description: Use and misuse of statistics, tables, data charts, report conclusions and surveys.
Week 8 22 Oct	Topic: Writing is re-writing Description: No great pieces started out that way and the good editor is your (difficult) best friend. Cutting the ballast, the pretence, the cliché and the dullness from your work. Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 9 Kramer & Call part VII, pp 197-211, 221-223
29 Oct	Midterm break
Week 9 5 Nov	Topic: Analysing feature stories. What makes a story work? Description: Case studies – students choose a feature story and present their analysis of the story.
Week 10 12 Nov	Topic: In-Class exercise. Description: Rewriting a video story as a feature.
Week 11 19 Nov	Topic: Working in multimedia Description: Feature writing for the net. Writing "boxes". Using sound, photos and video. Examining different platforms and their specific requirements.
Week 12 26 Nov	Topic: Pitching feature stories Description: Getting into print. How to pitch the right editor at the right publication at the right time - and do it effectively. Pitching ideas for profile articles. Reading: Friedlander & Lee chapter 8 Kramer & Call part IX, pp 263-271
Week 13 3 Dec	Topic: Journalism Ethics Description: Libel. "Authorization" of stories. Vox pops and Q&As Reading: Handout

	Deadline for submitting final article.
Week 14 10 Dec	Topic: Final wrap up Description: Summary of the main issues. Discussion of final article.

6. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Attendance and Class Participation	42	20	Learn to critique and be critiqued constructively, discuss complex issues openly and in-depth. Learn to work in a team.	1, 2
Assignment 1: Profile article	30	30	Carry out research and write your own profile story. Find story ideas and conduct interviews to develop in-depth profiles. Explore the qualities of storytelling and how they differ from news. Identify skills required for writing features for different platforms, including radio/podcasting, film and hybrid platforms. Use multimedia elements as a supplement to feature-writing. Build a robust vocabulary of longform writing. Introduce tools for finding and framing interesting features. Learn to critique and be critiqued constructively, discuss complex issues openly and in-depth.	1, 2, 3
Assignment 2: Feature article	30	35	Carry out research and write your own feature story.	1, 2, 3

			Find story ideas and conduct interviews to develop in-depth profiles. Explore the qualities of storytelling and how they differ from news. Identify skills required for writing features for different platforms, including radio/podcasting, film and hybrid platforms. Use multimedia elements as a supplement to feature-writing. Build a robust vocabulary of longform writing. Introduce tools for finding and framing interesting features. Learn to critique and be critiqued constructively, discuss complex issues openly and in-depth. Be able to pitch stories and write for the university's print and online student magazine, <i>The Lennon Wall</i> and for other publications. Learn to work in a team working on complex feature stories. Examine markets for journalism and learn how stories are pitched and sold.	
In-class graded exercises, pitches, and writing and multi-media lab	20	15	Explore the qualities of storytelling and how they differ from news. Identify skills required for writing features for different platforms, including radio/podcasting, film and hybrid platforms. Use multimedia elements as a supplement to feature-writing.	1

			Build a robust vocabulary of longform writing. Introduce tools for finding and framing interesting features. Learn to critique and be critiqued constructively, discuss complex issues openly and in-depth. Learn to work in a team, working on complex feature stories. Examine markets for journalism and learn how stories are pitched and sold.	
TOTAL	125	100%		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

7. Detailed description of the assignments

Attendance and Class Participation

Involvement in class and writing workshops, ability to discuss assigned readings, and attendance.

Assignment 1: Profile Article

An 800-1000 word profile (of a person of interest) based on interviews and supplementary sources. A well-supported, well-written profile.
Includes video/audio and photo material.

Assignment 2: Feature Article

A well-supported, well-written 800-1200 word feature article with a clear lead, nut graph, narrative arc and multiple sources.

In-class graded exercises, pitches and writing lab

Display working mastery of professional rules of reporting, interviewing, quoting, and writing as learned in reading assignments and lectures.

8. General Requirements and School Policies

General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU's academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work.

Electronic communication and submission

The university and instructors shall only use students' university email address for communication, with additional communication via NEO LMS or Microsoft Teams. Students sending e-mail to an instructor shall clearly state the course code and the topic in the subject heading, for example, "COM101-1 Mid-term Exam. Question". All electronic submissions are through NEO LMS. No substantial pieces of writing (especially take-home exams and essays) can be submitted outside of NEO LMS.

Attendance

Attendance, i.e., presence in class in real-time, at AAU courses is default mandatory; however, it is not graded as such. (Grades may be impacted by missed assignments or lack of participation.) Still, students must attend at least two thirds of classes to complete the course. If they do not meet this condition and most of their absences are excused, they will be administratively withdrawn from the course. If they do not meet this condition and most of their absences are not excused, they will receive a grade of "FW" (Failure to Withdraw). Students may also be marked absent if they miss a significant part of a class (for example by arriving late or leaving early).

Absence excuse and make-up options

Should a student be absent from classes for relevant reasons (illness, serious family matters), and the student wishes to request that the absence be excused, the student should submit an Absence Excuse Request Form supplemented with documents providing reasons for the absence to the Dean of Students within one week of the absence. Each student may excuse up to two sick days per term without any supporting documentation; however, an Absence Excuse Request Form must still be submitted for these instances. If possible, it is recommended the instructor be informed of the absence in advance. Should a student be absent during the add/drop period due to a change in registration this will be an excused absence if s/he submits an Absence Excuse Request Form along with the finalized add/drop form.

Students whose absence has been excused by the Dean of Students are entitled to make up assignments and exams provided their nature allows. Assignments missed due to unexcused absences which cannot be made up, may result in a decreased or failing grade as specified in the syllabus.

Students are responsible for contacting their instructor within one week of the date the absence was excused to arrange for make-up options.

Late work: No late submissions will be accepted – please follow the deadlines.

Electronic devices

Electronic devices (e.g. phones, tablets, laptops) may be used only for class-related activities (taking notes, looking up related information, etc.). Any other use will result in the student being marked absent and/or being expelled from the class. No electronic devices may be used during tests or exams unless required by the exam format and the instructor.

Eating is not allowed during classes.

Cheating and disruptive behavior

If a student engages in disruptive conduct unsuitable for a classroom environment, the instructor may require the student to withdraw from the room for the duration of the class and shall report the behavior to the student's Dean.

Students engaging in behavior which is suggestive of cheating will, at a minimum, be warned. In the case of continued misconduct, the student will fail the exam or assignment and be expelled from the exam or class.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism obscures the authorship of a work or the degree of its originality. Students are expected to create and submit works of which they are the author. Plagiarism can apply to all works of authorship – verbal, audiovisual, visual, computer programs, etc. Examples are:

- **Verbatim plagiarism:** verbatim use of another's work or part of it without proper acknowledgement of the source and designation as a verbatim quotation,
- **Paraphrasing plagiarism:** paraphrasing someone else's work or part of it without proper acknowledgement of the source,
- **Data plagiarism:** use of other people's data without proper acknowledgement of the source,
- **False quotation:** publishing a text that is not a verbatim quotation as a verbatim quotation,
- **Fictitious citation:** quoting, paraphrasing, or referring to an incorrect or a non-existent work,
- **Inaccurate citation:** citing sources in such a way that they cannot be found and verified,
- **Ghostwriting:** commissioning work from others and passing it off as one's own,
- **Patchwriting:** using someone else's work or works (albeit with proper acknowledgement of sources and proper attribution) to such an extent that the output contains almost no original contribution,
- **Self-plagiarism:** unacknowledged reuse of one's own work (or part of it) that has been produced or submitted as part of another course of study or that has been published in the past,
- **Collaborative plagiarism:** delivering the result of collective collaboration as one's own individual output.

At minimum, plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment and shall be reported to the student's Dean. A mitigating circumstance may be the case of novice students, and the benefit of the doubt may be given if it is reasonable to assume that the small-scale plagiarism was the result of ignorance rather than intent. An aggravating circumstance in plagiarism is an act intended to make the plagiarism more difficult to detect. Such conduct includes, for example, the additional modification of individual words or phrases, the creation of typos, the use of machine translation tools or the creation of synonymous text, etc. The Dean may initiate a disciplinary procedure pursuant to the Academic Codex. Intentional or repeated plagiarism always entail disciplinary hearing and may result in expulsion from AAU.

Use of Artificial Intelligence and Academic Tutoring Center

The use of artificial intelligence tools to search sources, to process, analyze and summarize data, and to provide suggestions or feedback in order to improve content, structure, or style, defined here as AI-assisted writing, is not in itself plagiarism. However, it is plagiarism if, as a result, it obscures the authorship of the work produced or the degree of its originality (see the examples above).

AAU acknowledges prudent and honest use of AI-assisted writing, that is, the use of AI for orientation, consultation, and practice is allowed. For some courses and assignments, however, the use of AI is counterproductive to learning outcomes; therefore, the course syllabus may prohibit AI assistance. A work (text, image, video, sound, code, etc.) generated by artificial intelligence based on a mass of existing data, defined here as AI-generated work, is not considered a work of authorship. Therefore, if an AI-generated work (e.g. text) is part of the author's work, it must be marked as AI-generated. Otherwise, it obscures the authorship and/or the degree of originality, and thus constitutes plagiarism. Unless explicitly permitted by the instructor, submission of AI-generated work is prohibited. If unsure about technical aspects of writing, and to improve their academic writing, students are encouraged to consult with the tutors of the AAU Academic Tutoring Center. For more information and/or to book a tutor, please contact the ATC at: <http://atc.simplybook.me/sheduler/manage/event/1/>.

Course accessibility and inclusion

Students with disabilities should contact the Dean of Students to discuss reasonable accommodations. Academic accommodations are not retroactive.

Students who will be absent from course activities due to religious holidays may seek reasonable accommodations by contacting the Dean of Students in writing within the first two weeks of the term. All requests must include specific dates for which the student requests accommodations.

9. Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage *	Description
A	95–100	Excellent performance. The student has shown originality and displayed an exceptional grasp of the material and a deep analytical understanding of the subject.
A–	90–94	
B+	87–89	Good performance. The student has mastered the material, understands the subject well and has shown some originality of thought and/or considerable effort.
B	83–86	
B–	80–82	
C+	77–79	Fair performance. The student has acquired an acceptable understanding of the material and essential subject matter of the course, but has not succeeded in translating this understanding into consistently creative or original work.
C	73–76	
C–	70–72	
D+	65–69	Poor. The student has shown some understanding of the material and subject matter covered during the course. The student’s work, however, has not shown enough effort or understanding to allow for a passing grade in School Required Courses. It does qualify as a passing mark for the General College Courses and Electives.
D	60–64	
F	0–59	Fail. The student has not succeeded in mastering the subject matter covered in the course.

* Decimals should be rounded to the nearest whole number.

Prepared by: David Vaughan

Date: 21.05.2025

Approved by: Seth Rogoff

Date: 27.08.2025