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Syllabus for the Summer 2008

“How not to write for peer-reviewed journals: Talking to everyone else”

Approach: To address the need for better science communication and to introduce you to this topic, this short course will teach you how to write an article related to your research (or other topics in marine science) geared to non-scientist audiences and to develop engaging graphics to accompany it. (If you have the necessary skills, your piece could be a video podcast or an audio slideshow). Your “diploma” at the end of the course will be an article published on *Oceanus*.

Relationship to JP activities: Involvement in this course is not a substitute for research. It is key that your advisors approve your enrollment and that they review your final document if it directly pertains to their research. We expect you to spend several hours per week with reading and writing assignments.

Scheduling: Classes will be held weekly on Tuesdays from 3:30 to 5 p.m. in the Watson Laboratory conference room. The first class will be June 10, with 10 to 11 classes to follow. Given the interactive nature of the class, we will not offer PTEL.

Web site: <http://www.whoi.edu/sites/writing>

How to send assignments and when are they due: Always by 4 p.m. Fridays—send to writing-homework@whoi.edu.

Instructors: Co-taught by Chris Reddy, Department of Marine Chemistry and Geochemistry, along with Lonny Lippsett, managing editor of *Oceanus*. Additional guests will address communications on the Web and graphics options, including photography, video, illustrations and animation. Sheila Clifford will assist with the logistics of the course.

About the mentors: For the course, each student will be assigned a mentor from among a group of professional journalists at WHOI or media outlets. Mentors will offer another independent set of eyes and ears (and shoulders) to help steer through the editorial process. We expect that your mentor three to four times during the course. Mentor assignments will be based on the background and interests of each mentor/student pair.

This course is supported by funds from The Henry L. and Grace Doherty Professor of Oceanography.

Course schedule

June 10, 2008—Week 1

1) “Science” is a language that most people don’t understand. If you talk to them in “science,” they will think you are arrogant. (They may have something there, too.)

Assignments:

- 1) Send in one piece of science writing that you think is good and one that you think is bad. Be prepared to discuss why.
- 2) Read Aguilar Soto et al for next class.

June 17, 2008—Week 2

Analyze pieces of science writing. The conversation should identify some of the fundamental methods and tools:

- 1) Ledes—different types (newsy, witty, intriguing, anecdotal/slowly unfolding)
- 2) Nut grafs—the summary and road map and relevance
- 3) Inverted pyramid style—structure
- 4) Belasco’s calling card: five sentences
- 5) Quotes—voice, even if you are writing in first person
- 6) Metaphor—comparing unfamiliar to the familiar
- 7) Simple, direct, clear writing—no polysyllabic obfuscation

Analyze drafts and process on the way from Aguilar Soto et al → *Oceanus* article, by identifying five sentences, lede, nut graf, and inverted pyramid.

Assign mentors

Assignments:

- 1) Find good ledes and nut grafs in science writing and send them in.
- 2) Read “Victims or vectors: a survey of vertebrate zoonoses from coastal waters of the Northwest Atlantic”
- 3) Write five sentences, a lede, and nut graf for “Victims or vectors...”

June 24, 2008—Week 3

How to tell stories not in words and print: photos, illustrations, animations, video, podcasts, audio slideshows, on the Web (Guest lecturers Katherine Spencer Joyce and Danielle Fino).

Looking at stories in non-verbal ways further opens the mind to what is essential to tell a story and what gets in the way. If you are interested in proceeding in one of these non-print variations, we’d need to identify that sooner rather than later and accommodate.

Assignment: Find good and bad illustrations and photos.

July 1, 2008—Week 4

Analyze and critique good and bad illustrations and photos sent in by you.

Analyze and critique ledes, nut grafs sent in by you. What works and doesn’t work and why?

Assignment:

- 1) The time has come: Write five sentences for your article.

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July 8, 2008—Week 5

Analyze proposed five sentences for your stories.

Assignments:

- 1) Read package of articles on Web site for discussion in July 15 class
- 2) ***Your first draft is due 4 p.m. Friday, July 19. THIS IS A STRICT DEADLINE. Chris and I need the weekend to critique these.***
- 3) You should be thinking seriously about graphics to accompany your article. Contact Chris, Lonny, and/or Katherine to brainstorm.
- 3) Scan Gopen article

July 15, 2008—Week 6

Writing tips

Assignments:

- 1) Finish your first draft, due 4 p.m. Friday, July 19

July 22, 2008—Week 7

Guests: Peter Lord, environmental reporter, Providence Journal

Assignment: Read package of first drafts of your classmates and prepare to discuss in July 29 class.

July 29, 2008—Week 8

Critique first drafts of writing and graphics, with a focus on ledes

Assignments:

- 1) Based on written and in-class critiques, take a stab at draft 2.
- 2) Draft 2 due 4 p.m. Friday, Aug. 8

August 5, 2008—Week 9

Guests: Liz Saito and William Kennedy

Assignments: Draft 2 due Friday, Aug. 8

Over weekend, read package of 2nd drafts of classmates and prepare to discuss in Aug. 12 class.

August 12, 2008—Week 10

Analyze draft 2s, showing how problems were solved.

Might also do the same with example(s) of graphics, if possible.

Assignment: Hand in draft 3 (or 4, or 5, or...) Writing is rewriting.

August 19, 2008—Week 11

Show some splendid finished products and celebrate.