

CE0204 - Introduction to Magazine Writing

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Course Description and Learning Objectives

This course is an introduction to writing for commercial markets, specifically print and online magazines. Students will develop, research, and write nonfiction articles and learn how and where to market them through a series of assignments including blogging, reviews, and feature article proposals. The goals of this course are for students to

- gain an understanding of the publishing and writing process,
- build a habit of writing and revising frequently,
- develop analytical skills for commercial writing,
- consider how audience and purpose impact writing,
- and create foundations for future writing projects.

Course Components and Assignments

This course consists of four major components. Assignment prompts can be found at the end of this syllabus.

Wordpress blog	Students will create Wordpress blogs and post four entries throughout this course. This will act as a space to develop the habit of writing and introduce students to a growing writing market and platform for your work.
Review Article	Students will write, peer review, and revise a review article on a topic of their choice. Reviews are one of the most accessible and highly sought after types of articles in magazines and gives you skills for analytical and commercial writing.
Magazine Analysis Presentation	Students will choose a magazine to conduct an in-depth analysis of and present their findings. Because the magazine market is competitive and focused on providing content for a specific audience, prospective writers must know the magazine they are hoping to write for. This analysis will be the first step in the final feature article proposal assignment.
Feature Article Query Letter	Students will write a query letter, or pitch, for a feature article for the magazine of their choice. Many magazines rely on freelance writers who must pitch story ideas before completing the article. This assignment will serve as a jumping off point for future writing.

Course Outline and Schedule

Topics for the day’s exercises and lectures are listed as well as homework. All readings will be provided in class or will be accessible online. Please note that schedule is subject to change based on your feedback and interests.

Monday, July 6/20	Tuesday, July 7/21	Wednesday, July 8/22	Thursday, July 9/23
Topic: Introductions and review articles	Topic: Developing review criteria and developing a blog	Topic: How to write review articles and genres of reviews	Topic: Peer review of review article and magazine analysis
HW: (1) Read “The Roots” by Michael Walsh and “Diamond Dancers” by Sasha Frere-Jones. (2) Pick your topic for the review article and begin any background research (maybe you need to visit a place, rewatch a movie, eat some food, etc).	HW: (1) Begin developing your criteria and assessments. (2) Bring an example of the type of review you want to write (film, video game, restaurant, theater performance, etc). (3) Complete first blog entry.	HW: (1) Complete review assignment. Bring in 3 copies to be peer reviewed and one for me to comment on.	HW: (1) Complete magazine analysis assignment and be ready to present on Monday. Note that you will use this magazine for your final assignment, so make sure it’s one you are interested in writing for.

Monday, July 13/27	Tuesday, July 14/28	Wednesday, July 15/29	Thursday, July 16/30
Topic: Magazine analysis presentations and how to write feature articles	Topic: How to pitch an article and online magazine publishing	Topic: How to write profiles and interview practice	Topic: Peer review of revised review articles and presentations of article proposals
HW: (1) Read “The Show Must Go On” by Lindsay Tucker and “62 Places to Eat Your Way Through Maine” by Caroline Praderio. (2) Continue working on revision of the review article.	HW: (1) Complete fourth blog entry. (2) Read “The Outlaw” by Scott Haas. (3) Begin working on query letter.	HW: (1) Complete revision of your review article and bring 3 printed copies. (2) Complete query letter and email to whitney_james@emerson.edu	

Review Article Prompt

Reviews are a staple of magazines and almost all publications have them in some way, shape, or form. For example, *Consumer Reports* consists of only product reviews with very explicit and rigid criteria based on quantitative data that allows users to make informed purchases. On the long-form side, *The New Yorker* publishes film, television, book, theater, and music reviews that allow the writer to expound on their own ideas about a topic, trace the career of their subject, or evaluate a new trend of similar pieces. Entertainment magazines, such as *Rolling Stone* and *Entertainment Weekly*, feature reviews of various lengths and depths to inform their readers about what types of entertainment they should consume. Even gossip magazines include short reviews on subjects that would interest their audience.

For this assignment, you will write a review on a topic of your choosing. During this course, we will discuss and analyze review article examples, conduct peer reviews of first drafts, and revise drafts with a specific publication in mind.

First Draft: First drafts will be completed during the first week of classes. One of the best ways to develop a coherent and well-developed review is to include a rating system (think of Roger and Ebert's thumbs up system or Michelin's stars for restaurants). This first draft will include

- a description of the review subject and
- evaluation based on a rating system you develop

Due Thursday, July 9/23.

Revised Draft: During the second week of classes, you will revise your review based on peer feedback. You will build on your previous draft by considering a specific publication for your review. Make sure to keep the audience, purpose, and tone of the magazine in mind when revising. Because each publication has different conventions for reviews, you can keep or discard the rating system developed for the rough draft. The final product will

- be approximately 750-words,
- have a hed and dek (these are magazine publishing terms for a headline and the phrase or two that furthers the headline, explaining the story briefly and enticing the reader to keep reading)
- target a specific publication, and
- use 12 pt, Times New Roman or Times, double spacing, and numbered pages.

Due Thursday, July 16/30.

Magazine Analysis Presentation

In order to pitch stories to different magazines, you need to understand how different types of publications are structured, function, engage their readers, and what challenges and limitations they face. It's good practice to be very familiar with any magazine you are trying to write for, so in preparation for the final feature article pitch, you will research and present on the publication of your choice. This can range from general interest titles to niche or student magazines to alternative weeklies—just make sure that you would actually want to write for this magazine.

The presentation itself will be informal (no need to stress here!) and should last between 5 and 10 minutes. But you do want to take the analysis seriously.

The goals of this presentation are to (1) look closely at how a publication is put together, (2) look critically at the choices the staff has made, (3) think critically about the relationship between audience, writers, and text; (4) and prepare for your feature article pitch.

Questions to answer during your presentation:

- What is the history of the magazine? How was it started and why?
- Who is the audience of this magazine? What purpose does it serve for its target audience? How do you see that manifest in its design, content, etc.?
- How is the magazine organized? What types of information does it cover? What are some of the subjects or types of stories this magazine excels at?
- What types of articles could you pitch to this magazine? Give some examples of different types of feature articles that could be printed here.

Requirements:

- Presentation should address all the questions above
- Magazine's media kit must be a source
- Include visuals in the form of powerpoint, keynote, prezi, etc

Presentations will be given on Monday, July 13/27.

Feature Article Proposal/Pitch

Freelancing is one of the most common ways to get started in the magazine business and can be the principal way a writer makes their living. Because there are very few staff writer positions, most writers make their name as freelancers. Some of the most important writing a freelancer does is pitching articles to magazines through query letters. We'll look at examples of query letters to understand how to write one, but instead of writing developing a query letter, you'll give a short "elevator speech" that mimics the same format.

During the presentation of your query letter, you will tell us about your thought process for writing and query letter and read it aloud to the class. A major part of magazine writing is knowing how to sell your story to a specific publication, so this is great practice for the future! After the presentation, the class will offer constructive feedback for how to improve the pitch and write the query letter and give you a yay or nay vote for accepting the pitch.

The goals of this assignment are to (1) feel more confident presenting and pitching your work, (2) develop a strong plan for an article for a specific magazine, and (3) provide you with a stepping stone for future writing projects.

Structure of the query letter:

- ❖ Name of the publication you are pitching to (it should be the same from your magazine analysis, so listeners will be familiar with it)
- ❖ Summary of your perspective article
- ❖ Two reasons why the editors should be interested in publishing your work
- ❖ Plan for how you will research and compose the article
- ❖ How the article is connected with their magazine and audience

During presentations, your query letter will be projected on the board. Please email query letter to whitney_james@emerson.edu before class.

Presentations will be held on the final day of class.