SYLLABUS
Nutrition 306: Writing about Health and Nutrition for Diverse Audiences
(a.k.a Communicating Health Information to Diverse Audiences Part B)

A practitioner's approach to writing about nutrition, health, and medicine in a variety of print and online media. This course will reinforce the concrete writing skills and knowledge required of a competent and thoughtful health/medical writer. A review and analysis of nutrition and health topics presented in print and online media is included. The course is structured around class discussions, in-class exercises, selected readings, and writing assignments. Classroom discussions and assignments will explore the reporting of nutrition and health, audience analysis, and evaluating sources.

Textbook:

Note: Not ordered via bookstore; widely available via Amazon or other online booksellers.

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Course Outline

Pre-Course Reading

Sept 5 Course Overview and Exploration of Newsworthiness
Course objectives; Overview of health/medical writing for various audiences; Factors that determine newsworthiness

In-class activity: Discussion of recent nutrition and health headlines, as well as PLoS Medicine articles. What's news? What's hype? What's newsworthy?

Reading Assignment: Textbook Chapters 7-10, 14, 15, 20

Weekly Assignment Due Sept. 12:
1. Select 3 'newsworthy' nutrition/health/medical stories from Eurekalert.org and be prepared to explain why they are newsworthy. Bring to class. Do not email.

2. Select a topic for your feature article assignment (due Oct. 24)—a 1200-word story on an herbal/dietary supplement or other alternative therapy for either a consumer health publication or a health professional publication. You may also use this topic for your query letter (due Oct. 10). Create a topical outline and list of intended interviews. Email this to the instructor.
Sept 12  Audience and Readability
Who is your audience? How old are they? What is their social, ethnic, or cultural background? What do they already know? What do they want to know? How educated are they? How can we evaluate the “readability” of written materials?

In class activity:
Lecture/discussion of various audience and readability issues; audience analysis exercise

Reading Assignment:

Writing Assignment Due Sept. 19:
Write a 1-2 page analysis of two different documents provided via the CDC website that each address the same topic from two different perspectives (i.e. intended for two different audiences).

Sept 19  Dissecting a Science News Release

In-class activity:
Review of newsworthiness assignment
Evaluate a press release and its corresponding research study

Reading Assignment:
Textbook Chapters 2, 3, and 23

Writing Assignment Due Sept. 26:
Write a 450-word press release on a study selected by the instructor.

Sept 26  Reporting Study Results from Scientific Journals
What is the source of the information? How is the study designed? Is there statistical significance, biological importance, clinical significance? Who do the results affect? What is the take-away message?

In-class activity:
Evaluation/analysis of a published research study

Reading Assignment:
Textbook Chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, 25

Writing Assignment Due Oct. 3:
Write a 600-word research news article (based on a study selected by the instructor) for a web-based news service (e.g. Reuters Health) using the template provided.

Oct 3  Telling Health/Medical Stories
What makes a good health/medical story; Markets for stories; Pitching the story; How and who to query; Framing your ideas for specific publications; Finding/choosing interview subjects

In-class activity:
Discussion of characteristics of a strong news story, reporting about controversial issues, pitching a story (aka, the query)

Reading Assignment:
Textbook Chapter 16

Writing Assignment Due Oct. 10:
Write a query letter to a consumer or trade magazine of your choice
### Oct 10 Patient Education Materials
Developing patient education materials; The editorial process and perspective; Content development; Editorial style guides

**In-class activity:**
Discussion of various formats of patient education materials; Editorial team exercise

**Reading Assignment:**
Textbook Chapter 18 and the Association of Healthcare Journalists Statement of Principles

**Writing Assignment Due Oct. 17:**
Write a 700-word patient education handout (from the topic list provided by the instructor) that physicians can give to patients with a newly diagnosed condition or upon referral for a procedure (approx. reading level 7th-8th grade).

### Oct 17 Evaluating Sources for Accuracy and Legitimacy
Criteria for assessing the quality of health/medical information; Commercial sponsorship; Conflict of interest; Who are the experts? How do you find them?

**In-class activity:**
Discussion of evaluating credibility of online sources; source evaluation exercise

**Writing Assignment Due Oct. 24:**
1200-word feature article on the health effects of an herbal/dietary supplement or other alternative therapy for either: *AARP: The Magazine* or a health professional publication

### Oct 24 Ethical Issues in Biomedical Reporting
Copyright; Conflict of interest; Privacy and confidentiality; Plagiarism; Recycling old stories; Looting press releases; Authorship criteria; Ethical scenarios

**In-class activity:**
Small group discussions of ethical issues and case studies

**Writing Assignment Due Nov. 7:**
Rewrites

************** NO CLASS ON OCT. 31 **************

### Nov 7 Putting Risk in Perspective
Writing about health and medicine often involves writing about risk. A look at the numbers and the reality of many commonly reported health risks.

**Writing Assignment Due Nov 14:**
Rewrites

### Nov 14 Preparing for Your Writing Career
- A look at careers in health/medical writing
- Essential items for the health/medical writer’s bookshelf (and virtual shelf!)
- Marketing your skills/experience/expertise

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<th>GRADING:</th>
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<td>Assignments (all weighted equally):</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Audience Analysis</td>
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<td>- Press Release</td>
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<td>- Research News</td>
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<td>- Query Letter</td>
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<td>- Patient Education</td>
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<td>- Feature Article</td>
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<td>Class attendance is required. Grades may be reduced for excessive/unexcused absences.</td>
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<th>REWRITE POLICY:</th>
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<td>Students will have the option to rewrite 2 of the writing assignments on which the initial grade was a B+ or lower.</td>
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<th>SUBMITTING ASSIGNMENTS:</th>
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<td>Assignments should be EMAILED to the instructor by 6:00 pm on the due date. Grades may be reduced for late assignments.</td>
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