

Barbara Gastel, MD, MPH
47G Veterinary Teaching Hospital
Phone: 845-6887 (office), 731-8781 (home)
E-mail: bgastel@cvm.tamu.edu

Office Hours:
when door is open,
when "I'm here" sign is up,
and by appointment

VIBS 660.600
REPORTING SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY
Fall 2011
Wednesdays, 9:00 to 11:45 a.m., VRB 208

This course is designed mainly to help you become more adept at writing for the public about science and technology. Other goals include increasing your knowledge of the science journalism world, enhancing your skill in editing popular science stories, broadening your familiarity with science and technology, and helping you to write for scientific and technical readerships.

These goals will be pursued largely through classroom activities, readings, conferences with the instructor, and (of course) writing assignments. Classroom activities will include discussion of topics in science/technology reporting, analysis of science/technology stories from the popular media, and workshops on class members' writing. Because much of your learning will depend on your participation in class, you will be expected to attend the course regularly; only in exceptional circumstances should more than two sessions be missed.

Readings for the course will include both writings on and examples of science/technology reporting. The required books are

- *The New York Times Reader: Science and Technology*, edited by S. Holly Stocking. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2011.
- *A Field Guide for Science Writers*. 2nd edition. Deborah Blum, Mary Knudson, and Robin Marantz Henig, editors. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. (available electronically through Texas A&M library)
- *Ideas Into Words: Mastering the Craft of Science Writing*. Elise Hancock. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003. (available electronically through Texas A&M library)
- *News and Numbers: A Writer's Guide to Statistics*. 3rd edition. Victor Cohn and Lewis Cope, with Deborah Cohn Runkle. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011.

An optional book that registrants may wish to use is

- *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper*. 7th edition. Robert A. Day and Barbara Gastel. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011.

Core reading assignments are noted on the schedule below, and other readings may be announced in class. As well as completing the assigned readings, you should follow current coverage of science and technology.

During the course, you should meet with the instructor twice for conferences on your work. One conference should be before mid-semester and the other after. Opportunities for additional conferences are readily available.

The graded assignments, the dates they are due, and the percentages of your grade they will constitute are as follows:

news story based on a journal article	9/7	5%
points from <i>Field Guide</i>	9/14	5%
choice of conference sessions to cover	9/21	5%
points from reading	9/28	5%
profile of a scientist	10/12	15%
analysis of a science magazine	10/19	5%
proposal for feature article	10/26	5%
news story on journal article of choice	11/2	5%
feature article or alternative assignment	11/16	25%
quiz on <i>News & Numbers</i>	11/30	5%
final project	11/30	20%

All writing assignments should be word-processed and double-spaced, with an unjustified right margin; pages should be numbered. Except when otherwise specified, please bring copies for the instructor, your classmates, and yourself.

The writing assignments are described on the schedule below, and further guidance will be provided in class. Normally, 10 points will be deducted for each day an assignment is late. However, one assignment may be submitted one week late without penalty. You are encouraged to publish writing you do for the course.

Grading of assignments will be as follows: A+:98, A:95, A-:92, B+:88, B:85, B-:82, etc. To receive a grade in the A range, work must be of essentially professional quality. *Rewrites will be permitted of the writing assignments due in September and October. If you submit an acceptable rewrite two weeks or less after the assignment is returned to the class, your grade for the assignment will be increased by two points. Please write REWRITE at the top and submit the graded original with it.*

The success of a course such as this one depends on contributions from the students as well as from the teacher. Suggestions for making the course more educational and more enjoyable are appreciated at any time.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

<u>Date/Session</u>	<u>Main Activities and Writing Assignments</u>
8/31	Introduction to the Course
1	Discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Scope of Science and Technology Reporting • Historical Perspectives on Science Writing • Basics of the Science Writer's Craft • Newsworthiness in Science

Introduction: Sources of Story Ideas and Information

Workshop: Examples of News Stories Based on Journal Articles

9/7

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Discussion: Reading Assignment Due Today

[Note: In this course, you should be actively engaged with the reading. As you read, please ask yourself questions such as the following:

- What material in this reading is especially useful, interesting, insightful, or otherwise worthwhile?
- What points in this reading seem debatable? What counter-arguments might be made?
- How well is the item written? If the item is clear and interesting, what aspects of the writing make it so? If the item is confusing or dull, how could it be made more clear or interesting?

To aid in classroom discussion, please keep notes about such items.]

Browsing: Some Magazines in the Sciences

Discussion: Sources of Story Ideas and Information:

- Periodicals and Books
- Government, Associations, and Other Institutions
- Online Resources

Workshop: Writing Assignment Due Today

Core Reading Due:

- *New York Times Reader*: Introduction and Chapter 1
- *Field Guide*: Chapters 1, 2, 7, 8, and 17
- *Ideas Into Words*: Foreword, Chapter 1, and Chapter 2
- “Late Night Thoughts about Science Writing” by Alton Blakeslee (*Quill*, November-December 1994, pp. 35-38)
- “The Basics of Associated Press Style” by Tony Rogers, journalism.about.com/od/writing/a/apstyle.htm
- “How to Structure News Stories” by Tony Rogers, journalism.about.com/od/writing/a/storystructure.htm

Writing Due: a news story based on a journal article

Instructions: Write a newspaper story based on the journal article and news release specified in class. Your story should run about 250 words. In preparing the story, you may consult background resources such as reference books, textbooks, and earlier journal articles. However, you should not look at popular stories based on this journal article, and you should not do interviews. Above your story, please indicate the newspaper or wire service for which it is intended. Below it, list two or more people (or types of people) to consider interviewing to develop the story more fully; say why you would interview each. Please bring copies of your article for yourself, the instructor, and your classmates.

9/14

3

Discussion: Covering Various Realms of Science

Discussion: Covering Conferences

Workshop: Some Stories from Conferences

Core Reading Due:

- *New York Times Reader*: Chapter 2
- *Field Guide*: Parts Four and Five
- "Conferences" (pp. 44-46) in *Health Writer's Handbook* by Barbara Gastel (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1998)
- "Publishing Excellent Conference Reports: Editors and Reporters Share Advice" by Barbara Gastel (*Science Editor*, July-August 2002, pp. 118-121)

Writing Due: identification and discussion of 10 points you found especially helpful or interesting in this week's reading in the *Field Guide*

Instructions: Please state, in your own words, 10 points in today's reading in the *Field Guide* that you found especially helpful or interesting. If possible, briefly discuss how you could envision applying each point in your work. You may use any format you consider appropriate. The assignment should run about 500 words (2 double-spaced pages).

9/21
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Discussion: Sources of Story Ideas and Information:
Scientists, Engineers, Physicians, and Other People

Workshop: Interviewing

Discussion: Some Profiles of Scientists; Profile Writing

Workshop: Writing Assignment Due Today

Core Reading Due:

- *Ideas Into Words*: Chapter 3
- "Interviewing Scientists" by S. Holly Stocking and "Scientists as Sources" by Lesa Hatley Major in *Encyclopedia of Science and Technology Communication*, edited by Susanna Hornig Priest (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2010)
- *Field Guide*: Chapter 18
- *New York Times Reader*: Chapter 4
- some other profiles of scientists

Exercise Due: choice of conference sessions to cover

Instructions: Imagine that you cover science, technology, or medicine for a wire service such as the Associated Press. From this standpoint, review the list of symposia for the 2012 American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) meeting. (This list is available at www.aaas.org/meetings/2012/program/symposia/tracks.) Identify three symposia on which you probably would like to write news stories; for each, say why you consider the topic newsworthy. Also identify three sessions from which you might like to gather material for possible future stories, and say how you envision using the material. This assignment should run about two double-spaced pages. It may be in any format that you consider effective.

9/28
5

Discussion: Plans for Profiles

Discussion: Feature Writing in Science

Discussion: Crafting a Science Story, Part 1

Core Reading Due:

- *New York Times Reader*: rest of Part II

- *Ideas Into Words*: Chapters 4 and 5
- *Field Guide*: Chapters 4-6 and 19-21
- “Narrative in Science Communication” by James Shanahan in *Encyclopedia of Science and Technology Communication*, edited by Susanna Hornig Priest

Writing Due: identification and discussion of 10 points you found especially helpful or interesting in this week’s reading

Instructions: Please state, in your own words, 10 points in today’s reading that you think will be especially helpful in your writing. If possible, briefly discuss how you could envision applying each point. You may use any format you consider appropriate. The assignment should run about 500 to 750 words (2 to 3 double-spaced pages).

10/5
6

Progress Reports on Profiles

Discussion: Crafting a Science Story, Part 2

Discussion: Writing About Science for Magazines

Core Reading Due:

- *Ideas Into Words*: Chapters 6 and 7
- *Field Guide*: Chapters 9 and 10
- “Science in Magazines” by Ellen J. Gerl and “Science Magazines” by Declan Fahy in *Encyclopedia of Science and Technology Journalism*, edited by Susanna Hornig Priest
- Excerpts from *You Can Write for Magazines* by Greg Daugherty (Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 1999)
- “How to Write a Query Letter” by John Hewitt, www.poewar.com/how-to-write-a-query-letter
- “Visual Images in Science Communication” by Lawrence Mullen in *Encyclopedia of Science and Technology Communication*, edited by Susanna Hornig Priest
- some science feature stories from magazines

10/12
7

Discussion: Writing and Reviewing Books in the Sciences

Workshop: Profiles by Class Members

Core Reading Due:

- *Field Guide*: Chapter 13
- “Writing Books on Science Topics” by John Noble Wilford in *A Field Guide for Science Writers* [1st edition], edited by Deborah Blum and Mary Knudson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997)
- “How to Write a Book Chapter or a Book” in *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper*, 7th edition, by Robert A. Day and Barbara Gastel (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2011)
- “A Strategy for Reviewing Books for Journals” by Barbara Gastel (*BioScience*, October 1991, pp. 635-637)
- *New York Times Reader*: Chapter 8

Writing Due: profile of a scientist, engineer, or health professional

Instructions: Prepare a profile of a scientist, engineer, health professional,

or science writer. The profile should run about 1000 to 1500 words. At the beginning, state the word count and the publication for which the profile is intended. At the end, list all sources used. Please bring the specified number of copies to class.

(Note: If you wish to revise your profile after the workshop, you may submit the final version at the next session.)

10/19
8

Discussion: Writing Editorials, Op-Eds, Essays, Blogs, and Columns

Workshop: Writing Assignment for Today

Guest Segment by Science Writer Mike May (www.techtyper.com)

Core Reading Due:

- *Field Guide*: Chapters 12 and 22
- *New York Times Reader*: Chapters 7, 9, and 10
- selected writings by Mike May

Writing Due: analysis of a science magazine

Instructions: Identify a science magazine that you might like to write for, and review at least one issue of the magazine from the standpoint of a potential author. Also come up with an idea for an article in the magazine. Hand in

- an issue of the magazine
- a description of the magazine, focusing on items an author should keep in mind (for example: subject matter, audience, slant, types of articles, style) (Note: Please support your conclusions with evidence.)
- a one-paragraph summary of your idea for a story in the magazine

A total of about 500 to 600 words should suffice.

10/26
9

Discussion: Science Reporting for Electronic Media

Viewing and Discussion: An Award-Winning Science Documentary

Core Reading Due:

- *Field Guide*: Chapters 11, 14, and 15
- “Science on Radio” by Aries Keck, “Science Documentaries” by José Azevedo, and “Television Science” by Ayelet Baram-Tsabari in *Encyclopedia of Science and Technology Communication*, edited by Susanna Hornig Priest
- “Bringing Science to a Television Audience” by Jon Palfreman, *Nieman Reports*, Fall 2002
- “Radio’s Relentless Pace Dictates Different Coverage” by Christopher Joyce, *Nieman Reports*, Fall 2002

Core Listening Due:

- some radio science stories

Writing Due: proposal for feature article

Instructions: Prepare a proposal for your feature article. The proposal may take the form of a query letter (proposal to editor) or a memo to the course instructor. Content should include, but need not be limited to, your proposed topic, the intended publication, and your plans for information-

gathering. The proposal need not exceed the equivalent of one to two double-spaced pages. It should make clear that the story idea is a good one and that you are well prepared to pursue it.

(Note: If you are a graduate student in a field other than science and technology journalism, you can either write the feature article you propose or do the alternative assignment noted below.)

11/2
10

Workshop: Proposals for Feature Articles

Discussion: Reporting Analytically on Research, Part 1

Workshop: News Story Due Today

Core Reading Due:

- *News and Numbers*: Front Matter and Chapters 1-5

Writing Due: a news story based on a journal article of your choice

Instructions: Identify a newsworthy scientific paper in a journal, and write a newspaper story about the research reported. Your story should run about 500 words. In preparing the story, you should not look at popular stories based on the journal article. However, you may consult whatever other written resources you wish, and you may do interviews. Above your story, please indicate the newspaper or wire service for which it is intended. Please bring copies of your article for yourself, the instructor, and your classmates. Also, please submit a copy of the scientific paper or an electronic link to it.

11/9
11

Discussion: Reporting Analytically on Research, Part 2

Discussion: Science Reporting from Institutions

Progress Reports on Feature Article or Alternative Assignment

Workshop: Writing Assignment for Today

Core Reading Due:

- *News and Numbers*: "A Guide to Part II" and Chapters 6-8
- *Field Guide*: Part Six and anything else not yet read
- "Government Public Information" by Gail Porter in *Encyclopedia of Science and Technology Communication*, edited by Susanna Hornig Priest

11/16
12

Discussion: Reporting Analytically on Research, Part 3

Workshop: Feature Article Due Today

Core Reading Due:

- *News and Numbers*: Chapters 9-12 and back matter

Writing Due: feature article or alternative assignment

Instructions: Prepare a feature article on a topic in science or technology. The article should be for a specific publication and should run about 2,000 to 3,000 words. At the beginning, please state the word count and the publication for which the article is intended. At the end, list all sources used. (Alternative assignment: If you are in a field other than science and technology journalism, you can do an alternative assignment that entails reading *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper* and writing about its applicability to your work. Instructions will be provided

during the course.)

(Note: If you wish to revise your writing assignment after the workshop, you may submit it as late as 5 p.m., Tuesday, November 23.)

11/23 Supper Seminar
13 (to be rescheduled for a mutually convenient date)

11/30 Quiz on *News and Numbers*
14 Workshop: Project Due Today
Wrap-Up

Writing Due: project of your choice

Instructions: Please prepare one of the following:

- another feature article (may be a profile)
- a portfolio of news stories on journal articles, scientific presentations, or both
- a review of one or more books about science or science journalism
- an article on some aspect of science reporting
- part or all of a scientific paper
- part or all of a proposal in the sciences
- part of a thesis or dissertation in the sciences
- other writing of a type discussed in this course (please see instructor for approval)

The assignment should total about 1000 words. As usual, the target publication should be specified, and all sources should be listed.

(Note: If you wish to revise your project after the workshop, you may submit the final version as late as noon, Monday, December 5.)

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact Disability Services, in Cain Hall, Room B118, or call 845-1637. For additional information, visit <http://disability.tamu.edu>.

Academic Integrity

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