

**NUTR 0306: Communicating Health Information to Diverse Audiences
(a.k.a. Writing about Health and Nutrition for a Variety of Audiences)**

Fall 2022

Class Meetings:	Wednesdays, 6:00-8:00 pm, Jaharis 118
Instructor(s):	Laurie LaRusso, MS, ELS, Ph: 781-775-2903 Email: Laurie.Larusso@tufts.edu
Office hours:	By appointment (email, phone, Zoom or in person)
Teaching Asst.:	None
Office hours:	N/A
Semester Unit Hours:	1.5
Prerequisites:	NUTR 0220

Course Description: This intensive writing course will reinforce the concrete writing skills and knowledge required of a competent and thoughtful health/medical writer. The course is structured around weekly writing assignments, detailed feedback from the instructor on each assignment, class discussions, in-class exercises, in-class writing, peer editing, and short supplementary readings. Classroom discussions and assignments will explore the reporting of nutrition and health topics in a variety of media, audience analysis, evaluating sources, infographics, and editorial content development.

Course Objectives: This course will teach students to write about nutrition and medical science accurately and elegantly while tailoring their writing to specific audiences (e.g. general audiences, journalists, patients, health care professionals). After taking this course, students will be able to:

- Tailor writing to specific audiences
- Identify newsworthy stories
- Develop and pitch story ideas
- Analyze scientific studies for strengths, weaknesses, and relevance
- Write accurate, engaging articles/pieces about health/medicine
- Effectively utilize infographics
- Evaluate credibility of published sources

Texts or Materials: All course materials are available on Canvas.

In addition, suggested texts for those with interest in pursuing a writing career:

- *A Field Guide for Science Writers: The Official Guide of the National Association of Science Writers*. Deborah Blum, Mary Knudsen, Robin Marantz Henig (Editors). Oxford University Press, 2006.
- *Health Writer's Handbook, 2nd Edition*. Barbara Gastel. Ames, Iowa: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.

Academic Conduct: Each student is responsible for upholding the highest standards of academic integrity, as specified in the Friedman School's Policies and Procedures manual (<http://nutrition.tufts.edu/student/documents>) and Tufts University policies (<http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/Academic Integrity.pdf>). It is the responsibility of each student to understand and comply with these standards, as violations will be sanctioned by penalties ranging from failure on an assignment and the course to dismissal from the school.

Classroom Conduct: Class attendance is required. Students should email the instructor if they will miss a class. Grades may be reduced for excessive/unexcused absences.

Assessment and Grading: Assignments (weighted equally):

- Query letter
- Audience analysis
- Science news release
- Research news article
- Patient education/infographic piece
- Feature article

Students will have the opportunity to rewrite 2 writing assignments on which the initial grade was a B+ or lower. Rewrites can be submitted up until 1 week after the last class.

Grading Range: A passing grade in the course is B- or better. Course grades will be based on the below:

A	≥95%
A-	90 - <95%
B+	87 - <90%
B	84 - <87%
B-	80 - <84%

Assignments and Submission Instructions: Assignments should be submitted on Canvas by 6:00 pm on the due date. Assignments received after the deadline will not be accepted or graded unless an extension is approved in advance. Students who are unable to complete an assignment on time for any reason should notify the instructor by email or phone prior to the deadline, with a brief explanation for why the extension is needed. Grades may be reduced for late assignments.

Accommodation of Disabilities: Tufts University is committed to providing equal access and support to all students through the provision of reasonable accommodations so that each student may access their curricula and achieve their personal and academic potential. If you have a disability that requires reasonable accommodations please contact the Friedman School Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at 617-636-6719 to make arrangements for determination of appropriate accommodations. Please be aware that accommodations cannot be enacted retroactively, making timeliness a critical aspect for their provision.

Course Schedule at a Glance

This schedule is subject to modification at the instructor's discretion.

<u>Week</u>	<u>Topic & Lecturer</u>	<u>Assignments Due</u>
Week 1	Audience Analysis and Readability of Materials	None
Week 2	Newsworthiness	Audience analysis
Week 3	Health/Medical Feature Stories	Topical outline for feature article
Week 4	Science News Release	Query letter
Week 5	Research News Articles	Science news release
Week 6	Infographics	Research news article
Week 7	Patient Education Materials	None, work on feature article
Week 8	Editorial Content Development	Patient education/ infographic piece
Week 9	Evaluating Sources / Ethical Issues in Biomedical Communication	Feature article
Week 10	Careers in Biomedical Communications	Rewrites

Course Topics, Learning Objectives and Assignments

This schedule is subject to modification at the instructor's discretion.

Week 1: Audience Analysis and Readability of Materials

Learning objectives:

Upon completion of this week, students will be able to:

- 1) Identify the intended audience and expected goals of a publication
- 2) Assess readability of a publication based on specific characteristics of readable materials

Preparation for class:

None

In-class activity:

Discussion of audience characteristics; audience analysis; characteristics of readability; evaluating the readability of written materials. Class exercises: (1) comparative audience analysis, (2) readability analysis, (3) simplifying word choices, (4) outlining an audience analysis.

Assignments due at next class:

Write an audience analysis (700-1000 words) of two different publications that address the same health/medical/nutrition topic for two different audiences (i.e. patients vs medical professionals). Good places to start are CDC, NIH, and MedlinePlus websites.

Week 2: Exploration of Newsworthiness

Learning objectives:

Upon completion of this week, students will be able to:

- 1) Describe the characteristics of newsworthy health/medical stories
- 2) Identify stories that are/are not newsworthy

Preparation for class:

Chloe Reichel. 3 steps to determine whether a medical study is newsworthy. Poynter Institute, May 23, 2019. <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2019/3-steps-to-determine-whether-a-medical-study-is-newsworthy/>

In-class activity:

Discussion of recent nutrition and health headlines; analysis of what's news, what's hype, what's newsworthy, what's not, and why. Class exercises: (1) "newsworthy or not?" analysis of press releases, (2) applying newsworthiness criteria, (3) finding a newsworthy press release, (4) brainstorming topics for your feature article.

Assignment due at next class:

Select a topic for your feature article assignment (due Week 9)—a 1200-word piece on a topic of your choice for either a consumer magazine or a health professional publication. Create a topical outline and list of intended interviews using the template provided. Note: You may (but are not required to) use the same topic as your query letter (due Week 4) .

Week 3: Health/Medical Feature Stories**Learning objectives:**

Upon completion of this week, students will be able to:

- 1) Develop a story from idea to pitch to article
- 2) Write a query letter for a health/medical story incorporating all the essential elements

Preparation for class:

Read some health/medical articles from your favorite magazines or websites--or just popular ones if you don't have any favorites. Be prepared to explain what you like about them.

In-class activity:

Discussion about the characteristics of good news or magazine stories about health/medicine; markets for health/medical stories; pitching a story (a.k.a., the query letter); framing ideas for specific publications/audiences; finding/choosing interview subjects. Class exercises: (1) brainstorming ideas for a query letter and feature article, (2) drafting sections of a query letter.

Assignments due at next class:

Write a query letter to a consumer or health professional magazine of your choice. Note: You may (but are not required to) use the same topic for your feature article (due Week 9).

Week 4: Science News Releases**Learning objectives:**

Upon completion of this week, students will be able to:

- 1) Explain the objective of a science news release
- 2) Write an accurate news release about a scientific study incorporating all the essential elements

Preparation for class:

Go to <https://www.healthnewsreview.org/> and choose the PR News Release Reviews tab. These are reviews of the quality of science news releases from major research institutions and journals. Read the reviews of a few releases and be prepared to discuss.

In-class activity:

Discussion of news release format; components of a science news release; audience for science news releases; industry-written releases vs releases from research institutions and journals. Class exercises: (1) evaluation of a science news release and its corresponding research study, (2) writing components of a news release.

Assignments due at next class:

Write a 450-word science news release on a study selected by the instructor.

Week 5: Research News Articles (i.e., reporting study results from scientific journals)**Learning objectives:**

Upon completion of this week, students will be able to:

- 1) Explain the objective of a research news article
- 2) Write an accurate news story about a scientific study incorporating all the essential elements

Preparation for class:

Schwitzer GA. Guide to Reading Health Care News Stories. *JAMA Intern Med.* 2014;174(7):1183-1186.

Go to <https://www.healthnewsreview.org/> and choose the News Story Reviews tab. These are reviews of the quality of science news stories in the popular media. Read the reviews of a few stories and be prepared to discuss.

In-class activity:

Discussion of scientific journal article format and content; analyzing and interpreting journal articles; research news article content and format; audience for research news articles. Class exercises: (1) analysis of a research study and identification of key points for the corresponding research news article, (2) writing components of a research news article.

Assignments due at next class:

Write a 600-word news article about a research study (selected by the instructor) for a web-based news service using the template provided.

Week 6: Infographics**Learning objectives:**

Upon completion of this week, students will be able to:

- 1) Identify the purpose and benefits of using infographics
- 2) Create a simple infographic to either enhance or replace a written publication

Preparation for class:

Look at the infographics examples provided and consider their purpose, effectiveness and visual appeal.

In-class activity:

Introduction to infographics; uses for infographics; different types of infographics. Class time will be largely devoted to a small group exercise in creating an infographic.

Assignments due at next class:

None; work on feature article due Week 9

Week 7: Patient Education Materials

Learning objectives:

Upon completion of this week, students will be able to:

- 1) Choose a format and style for a patient education piece based on content and audience characteristics
- 2) Write an effective patient education piece incorporating appropriate graphics or an infographic

Preparation for class:

Browse the patient education examples provided. Consider their format, style, tone, and graphics.

In-class activity:

Review/discussion of format and style of patient education materials; explanatory writing; sensitivity and preferred terminology. Class exercises: (1) brainstorm ideas for and choose a topic, format, style, and graphics for your patient education writing assignment, (2) Peer editing of patient education outlines. Rewrite consultations with the instructor.

Assignments due at next class:

Create a patient education piece on a topic of your choice. Options: a piece entirely in infographic format (including ≈250-300 words) or a written piece (≈500-700 words) with supporting graphics/infographics (approx. reading level 7th-8th grade).

Week 8: Editorial Content Development

Learning objectives:

Upon completion of this week, students will be able to:

- 1) Explain the different roles of an editor before and after a piece is written
- 2) Outline the basic elements of an editorial plan

Preparation for class:

Bring your feature article draft and/or a rewrite piece for peer editing.

In-class activity:

Discussion of the role of the editor; the editorial process and perspective; style guides; content development. Class time will be largely devoted to a team exercise in editorial/content development and a peer editing exercise.

Assignments due at next class:

Feature article: 1200-word piece on a topic of your choice for either a consumer magazine or a health professional publication.

Week 9: Evaluating Sources / Ethical Issues in Biomedical Communication

Learning objectives:

Upon completion of this week, students will be able to:

- 1) Analyze the credibility of health information based on established criteria
- 2) List 2 examples of conflicts of interest in nutrition and health care communications

Preparation for class:

- 1) Read *Nutrition Today* article "Communicating about Nutrition. What Do Ethics Have to Do With It?"
- 2) Read Center for Health Journalism blog: "Conflicts of interest in health care journalism. Who's watching the watchdogs?"

In-class activity:

Discussion of criteria for evaluating credibility and quality of health/medical information; commercial sponsorship; conflict of interest; copyright; plagiarism; privacy and confidentiality. Class exercises: (1) evaluation of online consumer medical information, (2) applying the CARS criteria for source evaluation.

Assignments due at next class:

Rewrites

Week 10: Careers in Biomedical Communications – Panel Discussion

Learning objectives:

Upon completion of this week, students will be able to:

- 1) List 3 essential resources for a health/medical writer
- 2) List 2 strategies for networking online or in person

Preparation for class:

Bring your questions about jobs, careers, freelancing, breaking-in, networking, and other writing career-related topics

In-class activity:

Panel discussion of careers in health/medical writing; networking; salary survey of health/medical writers; essential resources for health/medical writers; marketing your skills/experience/expertise.

Rewrites can be submitted up until one week after the last class.
