

Tufts University, Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy

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

Fall 2017

Class Meetings:	Wednesdays, 6:00-7:30, Jaharis 118
Instructor(s):	Laurie LaRusso, MS, ELS, Ph: 781-775-2903 Email: Laurie.Larusso@tufts.edu
Office hours:	Wednesdays 5:30-6:00 pm and 7:30-8:00 pm; by appt (email, phone or in person)
Teaching Asst.:	None
Office hours:	N/A
Graduate Credits:	0.5 credit
Prerequisites:	Nutr 220

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, and short supplementary readings. Classroom discussions and assignments will explore the reporting of nutrition and health topics in a variety of print and online media, audience analysis, evaluating sources, and editorial content development.

Course Objectives: This course will teach students to write about nutrition and medical research 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:

- Analyze scientific studies for their strengths/weaknesses and relevance of findings for a particular audience
- Identify newsworthy stories
- Develop story ideas
- Tailor their writing (both content and style) to specific audiences
- Evaluate the accuracy and legitimacy of published sources

Texts or Materials: *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. (Note: The 2005 paper and Kindle editions are also acceptable.) All course materials (i.e. slides, class exercises, other reading materials, class assignments) are posted on Trunk.

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](http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/AcademicIntegrity.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 (all weighted equally):

- Audience analysis
- Science news release
- Research news article
- Query letter
- 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.

Assignments and Submission Instructions: Assignments should be EMAILED to the instructor 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: Students with documented disabilities are entitled to academic accommodation appropriate to their needs. If you require accommodations for this course, please contact me confidentially prior to the end of the second week of classes.

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

<u>Week #</u>	<u>Topic & Lecturer</u>	<u>Assignments Due</u>
1.	Audience Analysis and Readability of Materials	Read textbook chapters 7-10, 14, 15, 20
2.	Exploration of Newsworthiness	Audience analysis
3.	Dissecting a Science News Release	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Select 3 newsworthy stories from Eurekaalert.org ▪ Topical outline for feature article
4.	Reporting Study Results from Scientific Journals	Science news release
5.	Telling Health/Medical Stories	Research news article
6.	Infographics	Query letter
7.	Patient Education Materials	None, work on feature article
8.	Evaluating the Credibility of Source Materials	Patient education/ infographic piece
9.	Editorial Content Development	Feature article
10.	Ethical and Career Considerations 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) Describe the characteristics of different audiences and their reasons for reading health information
- 2) Assess written materials to determine the intended audience and expected goals of the publication
- 3) Explain the strengths and limitations of readability tests

Preparation for class:

Textbook Chapters 7-10, 14, 15, 20

In-class activity:

Discussion of audience characteristics; audience analysis; readability; evaluating the readability of written materials. Class exercise: Comparative audience analysis.

Assignments due at next class:

Write an audience analysis (700-1000 words) of two different publications provided via the CDC website that each address the same topic for two different audiences.

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 which stories are/are not newsworthy and be able to explain why

Preparation for class:

- 1) Schwitzer G. How do US journalists cover treatments, test, products, and procedures? An evaluation of 500 stories. *PLoS Medicine*. 2008;5(5):e95.
- 2) PLoS Medicine Editors. False hopes, unwarranted fears: the trouble with medical news stories. *PLoS Medicine*. 2008;5(5):e118.

In-class activity:

Discussion of recent nutrition and health headlines; PLoS Medicine articles on health journalism; and analysis of what's news, what's hype, what's newsworthy, what's not, and why. Class exercise: analysis of press releases to determine newsworthiness.

Assignments due at next class:

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 at Class 8)—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. Email this to the instructor. Note: You may also use this topic for your query letter (due at Class 6).

Week 3: Dissecting a Science News Release**Learning objectives:**

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

- 1) Describe the format and components of a science news release
- 2) Explain the objective of science news releases
- 3) Write a news release about a published scientific study

Preparation for class:

Woloshin S, et al. Press Releases by Academic Medical Centers: Not So Academic? *Ann Intern Med.* 2009;150:613-618.

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 4: Reporting Study Results from Scientific Journals**Learning objectives:**

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

- 1) Describe the components of a research news article

- 2) Explain the objective of research news articles
- 3) Write a short research news article reporting the findings of a published scientific study

Preparation for class:

Textbook Chapters 2, 3, and 23

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 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.

Week 5: Telling Health/Medical Stories

Learning objectives:

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

- 1) Describe the essential components of a query letter
- 2) Explain the objectives of a query letter
- 3) Write a query letter pitching a health/medical news story

Preparation for class:

Textbook Chapters 1, 4, 5, 6, 25

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 your ideas for specific publications/audiences; finding/choosing interview subjects. Class exercise: Brainstorming ideas for framing your query letter and feature article.

Assignments due at next class:

Write a query letter to a consumer or health professional magazine of your choice

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 an infographic

Preparation for class:

None

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 the content of the piece and characteristics of the audience
- 2) Write a short patient education piece incorporating appropriate graphics or an infographic

Preparation for class:

Read Textbook Chapter 20

In-class activity:

Review/discussion of format and style for patient education materials; explanatory writing; sensitivity and preferred terminology. Class exercises: brainstorm ideas for and choose a topic, format, and style for your patient education writing assignment.

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: Evaluating the Credibility of Source Materials

Learning objectives:

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

- 1) Summarize the criteria for determining credibility of information sources
- 2) Analyze sources of health information to determine credibility

Preparation for class:

Textbook Chapter 18

In-class activity:

Discussion of criteria for assessing the quality of health/medical information; commercial sponsorship; conflict of interest; expert opinion; evaluating credibility of online sources. Class exercise: Evaluation of online consumer medical information.

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: Editorial Content Development**Learning objectives:**

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

- 1) Explain the different roles of the editor before and after a piece is written
- 2) Develop an editorial plan for a new publication or series

Preparation for class:

- 1) Read Textbook Chapter 16
- 2) Bring one or both rewrite pieces for peer editing

In-class activity:

Review/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:

Rewrites

Week 10: Ethical and Career Considerations in Biomedical Communications**Learning objectives:**

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

- 1) Explain appropriate ways to integrate and attribute the work of others into your written work
- 2) List 3 examples of conflict of interest in nutrition or health care communications
- 3) List 3 essential resources for a health/medical writer
- 4) List 2 strategies for networking online or in person

Preparation for class:

- 1) Review Association of Healthcare Journalists Statement of Principles
- 2) Read *Nutrition Today* article “Communicating about Nutrition. What Do Ethics Have to Do With It?”
- 3) Bring your questions about jobs, careers, freelancing, breaking-in, networking, and other writing career-related topics

In-class activity:

Discussion of copyright; conflict of interest; privacy and confidentiality; plagiarism; authorship criteria. Class exercise: Small group discussions of ethical case studies.

Discussion of careers in health/medical writing; networking; use of social media; 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.
