

Spring 2026 South Plains College Syllabus  
News Writing COMM 2311-601 M & W 11 – 1245 p.m.

Instructor: Margaret S. Kirby Office: CM 154 Levelland Campus Phone: 716-2451

e-mail: [mkirby@southplainscollege.edu](mailto:mkirby@southplainscollege.edu) The fastest way to reach me, other than coming to my office during office hours, is to e-mail me.

I should respond within 24 hours unless you e-mail me on a Friday. In that case, it may be Monday before I can respond to you.

**Office Hours:** Face to face hours are held in my Levelland office, CM 154. Virtual meetings can be scheduled on Collaborate by appointment.

- Tuesdays 830 - 9 a.m.; 11 – 12 p.m.; 3 - 4 p.m.
- Thursdays 830 – 9 a.m.; 11 – 12 p.m.; 3 – 4 p.m.
- Fridays 9 a.m. – 12 p.m.

\*\*\*\* I will be available at the Lubbock Downtown Center, in Room 1019 from @ 130 to 230 p.m. most Mondays and Wednesdays. Please just ask if you need help with something.

**Prerequisites:** None **Credit:** 3 semesters hours

**Description:** Fundamentals of writing for the mass media. Includes instruction in professional methods and techniques for gathering, processing, and delivering content.

The first half of the semester will concentrate on the basics of news and reporting as well as online news writing. The second half will concentrate on broadcast news writing.

**Supplies Needed:** Items used to take notes; folder or notebook where you will save syllabus, schedule, notes, handouts, and graded stories.

**Course Requirements:** Students must attend all class/ lab meetings and complete all assignments.

**Required Textbook:** Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual. NY: The Associated Press. **We will provide you with a digital access.**

**Evaluation:** Students' grades in this class will be determined by the following:

900 – 1000 points = A

800- 899 points = B

700 – 799 points = C

600 – 699 points = D

Below 600 = F

There are no “weighted points” in this class. They are all worth the same.

**The Blackboard gradebook will display a current “running grade” so you know where you stand throughout the semester. It will display in percentages not points. Here are the basic percentage/grade calculations.**

**90 – 100% = A**

**80 – 89% = B**

**70 – 79% = C**

**60 – 69% = D**

**Below 60% = F**

In addition to classwork exercises and assignments, you will write stories. Some will be short, others will be longer. The goal is to publish as much of your writing as possible on the SPC online newspaper. [www.TexanMosaic.com](http://www.TexanMosaic.com)

You will have one midterm exam. Your final exam will take the form of a script for a video story.

In addition to stories, assignments, quizzes and midterm exam, your final grade will include 100 points of participation which is determined by the grid below.

### **Participation**

Missed (Classes/labs for semester)	Class Contributions	Grade Range
0-2	Frequent contributions; well considered comments	90-100
0-2	Infrequent contributions or ill-considered comments	80-90
0-2	Rare or no comments	70-80
2-3	Frequent contributions; well considered comments	70-80

2-3	Infrequent contributions or ill-considered comments	60-70
2-3	Rare or no comments	50-60
3-4	Frequent contributions; well considered comments	50-60
3-4	Infrequent contributions or ill-considered comments	40-50
3-4	Rare or no comments	30-40
More than 4		30

There are no "weighted points" in this class. Points are tallied at the end of the semester to calculate your grade based on how many points you earned out of how many were available. In the event that we don't reach the 1000 point earned possibility, Blackboard will keep track of your points and calculate your grade accordingly.

## **Tutoring Info**

### **SPC Tutors**

Tutoring is FREE for all currently enrolled students. Make an appointment or drop-in for help at any SPC location or online! Visit the link below to learn more about how to book an appointment, view the tutoring schedule, and view tutoring locations.

<http://www.southplainscollege.edu/exploreprograms/artsandsciences/teacheredtutoring.php>

### **Tutor.com**

You also have 180 FREE minutes of tutoring with Tutor.com each week, and your hours reset every Monday morning. Log into Blackboard, click on the tools option from the left-hand menu bar. Click on the Tutor.com link and you will automatically be logged in for free tutoring. You may access tutor.com tutors during the following times:

Monday – Thursday: 8pm-8am

6pm Friday – 8am Monday morning

**For questions regarding tutoring, please email**

[tutoring@southplainscollege.edu](mailto:tutoring@southplainscollege.edu) or call 806- 716-2538.

**Student Learning Outcomes:** Upon successful completion of this course, students will:

Demonstrate proper media writing and editing styles.

Modify writing styles to fit various media platforms.

Demonstrate effective information gathering skills and techniques.

Demonstrate understanding of laws, ethics, and responsibilities of media writing.

**Technical Requirements:** It is in your best interest to have reliable access to Internet service and a computer so that you can send and receive e-mail, access lectures, write stories as long as 3 pages, submit assignments, participate in Collaborate sessions, and take exams. Please do NOT try to complete this class using only the SPC app on your smartphone. **You will NOT pass the class unless you can reliably participate in labs.**

**Technical Skill Requirements.** Be comfortable with the following:

- Microsoft Word or being able to save Word compatible files (.doc); **an alternative is to convert assignment files to .rtf or .pdf and if you use a Mac you MUST convert your files to .pdfs. I cannot open .pages.**
- Using email for communication, attaching documents
- The ability to download video files, or to stream files
- The ability to take digital photographs and upload them as .jpg files into assignment windows on Blackboard. **I cannot open .heic files. Look at the file extension on any photo your phone takes. It may default as an .heic. If you don't know how to convert that to a .jpg file, we need to chat.**

**Deadlines:** The assignments in this class will be deadline driven. You must keep track of deadlines and submit work when it is due.

ALL deadlines are absolute. You need to get used to deadlines that exist in the off-campus world. All assignments will be due at the beginning of each class unless told otherwise. Late assignments may be penalized harshly if they are accepted at all.

**Absence Policy:** Students are expected to attend all classes and labs in order to be successful in this course.

I'm sure there will be multiple reasons why you might be absent this semester, such as illness or an official trip or activity authorized by the college.

**Excuses:** Don't bother to try lame ones. I've heard most of them and have used some of them myself. Only deaths of immediate family members (parents, grandparents, siblings – ONLY), or your own, may be considered for an excused absence in that category. Of course, you will need to provide proof (such as the

obituary notice). If you are ill, please offer a medical note as documentation in order to possibly complete “makeup” work. Students who are enrolled in at least 6 hours of classes may visit the Health & Wellness Center for medical care free of charge. Student athletes or those participating in other college-sponsored activities that require an absence, will be excused, with prior notice to me and appropriate documentation.

Please do **NOT** assume that I will contact you to tell you about missed work. You can assume there could be multiple classwork assignments each day of class. You may or may not be allowed to do “makeup” work depending on the length of your absence, the reason for your absence, whether you have supporting documentation to prove why you missed class, and what assignment it was that you missed. Some group assignments cannot be made up.

Do NOT assume that I will move deadlines for you unless you contact me and offer acceptable reasons why you cannot meet them.

**In the event that you miss your midterm exam, you must notify me within 48 hours about why. You may or may not be able to “make up” the missed exam. If you miss an exam due to COVID-19, you will take the exam the day you return.**

**Withdrawal Policy:** The last day to withdraw/drop with a grade of “W” this semester is scheduled to be April 30.

It is the student’s responsibility to withdraw from this course. Otherwise, students will be assigned their earned letter grade at the end of the course. Course averages will be updated frequently, and guidance will be provided throughout the term to help students decide whether they need to drop the class or not. For more information regarding drops/withdrawals, please visit <https://www.southplainscollege.edu/admission-aid/apply/schedulechanges.php>.

**Intellectual exchange, disabilities, non-discrimination, Title IX Pregnancy Accommodations, CARE Team, Campus Concealed Carry, COVID-19, AI statements, and a new digital ID/photo requirement!!!!, please visit:**

<https://www.southplainscollege.edu/syllabusstatements/>

Students are officially enrolled in all courses for which they pay tuition and fees at the time of registration. Should a student, for any reason, delay in reporting to a

class after official enrollment, absences will be attributed to the student from the first class meeting.

Students who enroll in a course but have “Never Attended” by the official census date, as reported by the faculty member, will be administratively dropped by the Office of Admissions and Records.

If it is determined that a student is awarded financial aid for a class or classes in which the student never attended or participated, the financial aid award will be adjusted in accordance with the classes in which the student did attend/participate and the student will owe any balance resulting from the adjustment.

### **Tardiness Policy:**

I enforce a 5-minute tardiness rule in all my face-to-face classes. I use the clock in the classroom or on my computer to check the time. You may come to class **up to** 5 minutes late. That’s the cutoff. If you arrive **after** that 5-minute window, you’ll be given one warning. The next time you arrive to class past the 5-minute window, you’ll be asked to leave. I may or may not have taken attendance already if you arrive 5 minutes late. It’s up to you to make sure you are marked present.

## **Academic Integrity**

It is the aim of the faculty of South Plains College to foster a spirit of complete honesty and a high standard of integrity. The attempt of any student to present as his or her own any work which he or she has not honestly performed is regarded by the faculty and administration as a most serious offense and renders the offender liable to serious consequences, possibly suspension.

Each student is expected to abide by absolute honesty. Infractions will result in penalties subject to an assignment of a grade of “F” for the course or expulsion from the college. Students should also regard civility online as a requirement to remain on the roll in class.

As future professionals, you are to communicate with each other in a professional and civil manner. Any successful learning experience requires mutual respect on the part of the student and the

instructor. Neither instructor nor student should be subject to others' behavior that is rude, disruptive, intimidating, aggressive, or demeaning. Student conduct that disrupts the learning process or is deemed disrespectful or threatening shall not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action and/or removal from class.

**Cheating:** Dishonesty of any kind on examinations or on written assignments, illegal possession of examinations, the use of unauthorized notes during an examination, obtaining information during an examination from the textbook or from the examination paper of another student, assisting others to cheat, alteration of grade records, illegal entry or unauthorized presence in an office are examples of cheating. Complete honesty is required of the student in the presentation of any and all phases of course work. This applies to quizzes of whatever length, as well as to final examinations, to daily reports and to term papers.

**Plagiarism:** Offering the work of another as one's own, without proper acknowledgment, is plagiarism; therefore, any student who fails to give credit for quotations or essentially identical expression of material taken from books, encyclopedias, magazines and other reference works, or from the themes, reports or other writings of fellow student, is guilty of plagiarism.