

# Journalism 435

## Writing Magazine Nonfiction

Fall 2007

Mondays - 6:30 to 9:50 p.m.

ASC 240

Michael Parrish

**Journalism 435** is designed to teach students an appreciation and understanding of general-interest magazine journalism—including how editorial decisions are made on magazines and how magazine nonfiction differs from newspaper journalism. More important, the class gives students intensive experience in writing and analyzing magazine articles. Students are required to write (and rewrite) two lengthy articles, along with shorter pieces such as magazine evaluations and query letters. Students will also evaluate and discuss each other's work in class, with each student acting as if he or she is the editor of the piece. Twenty or so professionally written articles are provided by the instructor for class discussion as well.

### Assignments:

All written assignments should be sent by email, as a Word attachment, to all students, and to me—48 hours before the next class (by 6:30 p.m. the Saturday night before the next Monday class). That gives you two days to read, edit and print out your editorial comments on your classmates' work. All elements of each writing assignment should be in a single Word document. Put your name and a page number on every page. Bring these hard copies with your comments on your classmates' work, as well as work of your own that is due, to the next class. All work should be submitted in 12-point Times New Roman, single-spaced, with one-inch margins.

### Grades are based as follows:

- First article (1,500 words)—40%.
- Second article (2,000 words) -- 40%.
- Delivering self-edited, clean copy—10%.
- Class participation—10%.
- Only rewritten articles are graded.
- There is no final examination.

**Grade Scale:**

A = 95 to 100%  
A- = 90 to 94.9%  
B+ = 87 to 89.9%  
B = 83 to 86.9%  
B- = 80 to 82.9%  
C+ = 77 to 79.9%  
C = 73 to 76.9%  
C- = 70 to 72.9%  
D+ = 67 to 69.9%  
D = 63 to 67.9%  
D- = 60 to 62.9%  
F = 59.9% and below

**Attendance:**

On-time attendance and meeting deadlines are extremely important, just as they are when you work for a magazine. Assignments turned in late may not receive feedback from me, and that will naturally lower the grade they receive. If, by such event as a natural catastrophe of Southern California-wide proportions, or you otherwise know that you won't make a class, please email me immediately (mparrishm@usc.edu). If I don't respond soon, or if yours is an especially time-sensitive emergency, call my cell phone: 213-500-3510. Email is generally the best way to set up a convenient time to talk with me about a question you may want to discuss between class sessions. I won't be keeping regular office hours but will be happy to meet you before class or at another mutually agreeable time and place. If you do miss a class, however, it's up to you to borrow notes from other students as appropriate. I won't meet you to repeat a class discussion or lecture that you didn't attend.

**USC Annenberg School of Journalism - Academic Policies:**

**Plagiarism:** Plagiarism is defined as taking ideas or writings from another and passing them off as one's own; in journalism, this includes appropriating the reporting of another without clear attribution. The following is the Annenberg School of Journalism's policy on academic integrity as published in the University catalog: "Since its founding, the USC School of Journalism has maintained a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found guilty of plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will receive a failing grade in the course and will be dismissed as a major from the School of Journalism. There are no exceptions to this policy."

**Academic Accommodations:** Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability are required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP when adequate documentation is filed. Please be sure the letter is delivered to the professor as early in the semester as possible. DSP is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. The office is located in the Student Union, Room 301, and the phone number is (213) 740-0776.

**Internships:**

The value of professional internships as part of the overall educational experience of our students has long been recognized by the School of Journalism. Accordingly, while internships are not required for successful completion of this course, any student enrolled in this course who undertakes and completes an approved, non-paid internship during this semester shall earn academic extra credit herein of an amount equal to one percent of the total available semester points for this course.

**Schedule** (subject to change):

**Week 1 - August 27:** Introduction to class, including a definition of magazines and magazine journalism and how it differs from newspaper journalism. This class session also includes a detailed look at the type of writing and reporting that is expected of magazine journalists—as well as the students in the class.

Reading assignment: Tom Wolfe's "The New Journalism," People magazine piece (NY Times), origin of the term "magazine."

Written assignment: Students will buy and study current copies of three magazines: Vanity Fair, Cosmopolitan, Los Angeles magazines. Students will write one or two sentences on each, defining their editorial formulas. Students will also write 200 words on the article in any of these magazines that he or she liked best; 200 words on the one liked least.

**Labor Day - September 3:** No class.

**Week Two - September 10:** First assignment due (editorial formulae of the three magazines, loved/hated article assessments). Class discussion of these as well as how magazine editors choose articles, determine readers, find ideas—and how that relates to writers and writing. Brief history of magazine journalism. Discussion of Tom Wolfe's "The New Journalism." Also, a look at query letters and information on how to write them.

Reading assignment: Articles including "How to Write Irresistible Query Letters" by Lisa Collier Cool and "The Secrets of Superlative Salesmanship" by James Morgan, "Deciphering the Masthead" by C. Michael Curtis, an excerpt from "On Writing," by Stephen King, plus sample query letters.

Writing assignment: Each student will write three original query letters, each outlining a different article that he or she would like to write. One of these will be the subject of the student's first feature.

**Week 3 - September 17:** Class discussion of the merits of each student's query letters, with students acting as editors. Each student is assigned one of his or her ideas to write as the first article assignment. Students pick the staggered deadlines they prefer for turning in their first drafts.

Reading assignment: Overviews of the magazine industry, including Michael Wolff's "Boys to Men" and Paula Span's "Between the Covers." Special readings for next week's guest lecturer.

**Week 4 - September 24:** Guest lecturer.

Reading assignment: Articles including O'Connell Driscoll's "Brooke Shields Walks on Glass" and Pat Jordan's "Trouble in Paradise."

**Week 5 - October 1:** First group of articles due. Class discusses and evaluates articles, giving writers guidance for revisions.

Reading assignment: Articles including "Killer in the Courtroom" by Joe Morgenstern and "Michael Stipe Has Great Hair" by Tom Junod.

**Week 6 - October 8:** Second group of articles due. Same procedure as week 5.

Reading assignment: Articles including "Sin City" by Michael Walker, "I'm on the Olympic Team? Bummer!" by Allen St. John and "The Trouble with Rehab" by Christopher Noxon

**Week 7 - October 15:** Third group of articles due.

Reading assignment: To be determined by guest speaker.

**Week 8 - October 22:** Rewrites due. Guest speaker.

Second set of query letters assigned.

Reading assignment: Articles including "Shattered Glass" by Buzz Bissinger and "Phoney Slave Tale" by Gabriel Snyder.

**Week 9 - October 29:** Queries due. Members of the class take turns acting as editor, determining the merits of each others' query letters. Each student is assigned one of his or her ideas to write as the second article assignment. Students pick the staggered deadlines they prefer for turning in their first drafts. Signup for individual conferences.

Reading assignment: Meeting the editors - articles including "If You're a Little Mouseburger, Come with Me. I was a Mouseburger and I Will Help You" by Nora Ephron and "The Lion in Winter" by Michael Gross.

**Week 10 - November 5:** Individual conferences. Each student meets privately with the instructor to discuss his or her progress, special needs, specific problems.

No reading assignment.

**Week 11 - November 12:** First group of articles due.

Reading assignment: Articles including: "The Price of Admission" by Steve Friedman, "The Freelance Life" by Melissa Ludtke Lincoln, "The Answers to Freelance Writers' Most-Asked Questions" by Judy Mandell and "Beyond Good Writing Style" by Cindy T. McDaniel and Sara Horton.

**Week 12 - November 19:** Second group of articles due.

Reading assignment: "Hot Magazine Jobs" from Folio Magazine and editorial salary survey.

**Week 13 - November 26:** Third group of articles due.

Reading assignment: "The Carver Chronicles" by D.T. Max, "He Edits Best Who Edits Least All Things, Especially Mine" by James Thurber and "The Best Copy Editor in the World" by Laurie Winer.

Week 14 - December 3: Final rewrites due.

# MICHAEL PARRISH

- 2003 - Adjunct lecturer, nonfiction magazine editing and writing, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Southern California; freelance book editor.
- 1997 - Writer, magazine/newspaper features: The New York Times (science, business, travel), Los Angeles Times (travel), Worth, Playboy, Outside, InvestmentNews, Electronic Media; contributing writer, Medical Economics; Microsoft Investor; Environmental News Network ([www.enn.com](http://www.enn.com)); PortfolioCorner.com; writer, University Access, a Web-based educational publisher.  
Author of *For the People: Inside the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office, 1850-2000* (Angel City Press, 2001)
- 1996 - 1997 Writer, Web indexing project: Luckman Interactive, Los Angeles.
- 1995 - 1996 Magazine/newspaper reporting: science, health, technology, energy, travel.
- 1989 - 1995 Staff writer, Los Angeles Times business pages. Beats: energy, environment, utilities, agriculture
- 1985 - 1989 Founding editor, Los Angeles Times Magazine (now West).
- 1979 - 1985 Writer, magazine features.
- 1977 - 1979 Assistant editor, Los Angeles Times Op-Ed and Opinion pages.
- Other editing experience: San Francisco Magazine, LA newspaper, City (San Francisco), Los Angeles Free Press, San Francisco Fault, I.F. Stone's Biweekly.
- Major articles published in Smithsonian, Worth, Health, Life, Playboy, American Health, Outside, Oceans, Glamour (also wrote the column Jake: A Man's Opinion), New Age Journal, California, New West, Los Angeles, Rocky Mountain magazines; the Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, San Francisco Examiner; Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego Readers.
- Has reported from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Hong Kong, Australia, West Africa, Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Alaska & most of the American West.
- Has been interviewed on "Life & Times," KCET-TV; "Pacesetters," KTLA-TV; "Between the Lines," KLCS-TV; "Connie Martinson Talks Books"; "Which Way, L.A.?" KCRW; "The Ira Fistell Show" KABC; "Airtalk" and "Talk of the City," KPCC; "Beneath the Surface," KPFK; Sisters in Crime.
- Has reading privileges at the Huntington Library.
- Has taught magazine feature writing at UCLA Extension.
- Was a writer/researcher on "That's My Line," a syndicated TV magazine of Goodson-Todman Productions.
- Peace Corps volunteer, Niger, West Africa; B.A. (English) Reed College.