Introduction for Faculty Colleagues

In Communications 110 at Elon University, students learn to write in a variety of media forms. They also experience work situations professional writers face. One assignment that simulates media working conditions is the speech story. Students attend a speech given at Elon and write a news story about it on a short deadline.

Chronological note-taking isn't the goal of the assignment; instead, students have to determine the main ideas of the speaker and organize their writing around them. They also must write objectively, without inserting their opinion of the speaker and her ideas into the story. We also hope that students learn through the assignment the importance of thinking of their audience when writing. What context must be provided to general readers to understand the event and the topics discussed during it? What elements in the speech would interest or be of the most importance to readers? Students also get practice writing in a journalistic style, from the story's lead to its closing quote. Finally, the assignment gives students practice writing under a tight deadline as the story must be sent electronically to the instructor within a few hours after the speech.

The following speech story assignment is not much changed from the way many of the communications instructors structure this assignment. (Credit goes especially to Elon Associate Professor Janna Anderson for the assignment.) But what is different, at least for me, is the detailed rubric I've created to accompany the assignment. I had given students a general rubric for this assignment, but the new one should clarify my expectations.

This assignment is not as intense as it may seem. While students send me their stories on deadline, I do not grade those versions, except to make sure they were sent in on time. I have them bring hard copies of those stories to the next class, which is devoted to peer editing. I then allow them to revise their stories before handing in the hard copies. The new rubric should make the editing sessions more productive.
The Assignment I Distribute to Students

COM 110 – Media Writing
Speech Story Assignment

Connection to Course Goals
An objective of this course is to give you practice writing in various media styles. This assignment requires you to report on an event and write a news story about it that is suitable for a print or an online news publication. Specifically, you will write an objective speech-coverage story using print journalism form and style on deadline for a general audience.

Process
1. Review the speech stories on Moodle that we studied in class. Pay close attention to their structure.

2. Research the event and the speaker beforehand. Write a paragraph or two providing background information on the speaker and on the event.

3. Attend the assigned speech. Take notes during the speech. Do not take down everything that is said. Note only what you think are the speaker’s main ideas and the ideas that would be of most interest to your readers. Also make sure to record several direct quotes by the speaker.

4. Interview and get quotes from at least two audience members after the event to get their reaction to the speech.

5. Review your notes. Figure out four or five points from the speech that you think would interest readers. Decide what idea the speaker conveyed is the most important.

6. Write a 400-600 word double-spaced story on the event. The story must have these elements:

   a. An appropriate, informative lead that focuses on a main point in the speech.

   b. A background paragraph or paragraphs soon after the lead with appropriate contextual information. Note: You don’t have to put all background information in these paragraphs. Look at the sample stories to see how background information can be woven throughout a story.

   c. Information on main ideas conveyed by speaker and quotes from the speaker to back up those ideas. You will include direct quotes,
partial quotes and paraphrases. Please review the textbook and previous lessons on the correct way to attribute. Remember that we use the first and last name of the speaker on first reference and use the last name on subsequent references. Also remember to use the speaker’s name throughout the piece when referring to things he or she has said.

d. Audience reaction to end the story. Include at least two quotes from audience members. (You may have to interview more than two audience members to get interesting reactions.)

7. Use the rubric while writing and revising the story. It will help you remember what to include in the assignment.

8. Send your story to me electronically by 3 a.m. xxxx xxx. Bring a hard copy of the story to the next class for peer editing.

Email me at esabo@elon.edu if you have questions.

**Grading**
This will count as a writing assignment. The rubric adds up to 100. I grade on a 10-point scale, with 90-100 being an A, 80-90 being a B, etc.
# Speech Story Rubric

**Name:** ______________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>Professional (10)</th>
<th>Skilled (8-9)</th>
<th>Developing (6-7)</th>
<th>Novice (0-5)</th>
<th>Your score</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Deadline</strong></td>
<td>Turned story in on time in required format (double spaced, short paragraphs, between 400 and 600 words).</td>
<td>Turned story in on time but slight problems with format.</td>
<td>Turned story in but was not written using required format.</td>
<td>Missed deadline.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Accuracy (Counts double)</strong></td>
<td>All facts are correct.</td>
<td>All major facts are correct.</td>
<td>Major facts are correct, but misspellings on subsequent references.</td>
<td>Factual errors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appropriate lead</strong></td>
<td>Lead is appropriate and accurate and catches readers' attention. Little or no rewriting required.</td>
<td>Lead is appropriate and accurate and captures attention but needs minor editing.</td>
<td>Lead is adequate but does not capture readers' attention and needs rewriting because it is unclear or wordy.</td>
<td>Lead is inappropriate and/or inaccurate and needs rewriting.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organization</strong></td>
<td>Logical organization of facts and quotes. Smooth transitions between paragraphs.</td>
<td>Logical organization of facts and quotes. Some transitions could be improved.</td>
<td>Organization of quotes and facts could be improved. Transition problems.</td>
<td>Many problems with organization. Main ideas missing and/or minor points given too much attention. Transition problems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Appropriate background information provided on the speaker, event and topics.</td>
<td>Appropriate information given but needs editing.</td>
<td>Background information is too detailed for story and/or is inadequate.</td>
<td>Little attempt made to help readers understand speaker, event or issues.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Objectivity</td>
<td>Story is written in third person and does not contain the writer's opinion.</td>
<td>Story is written in third person. A few descriptive words contain opinion.</td>
<td>Story is written in third person, but there are several instances of writer's opinion.</td>
<td>First person used outside of quotes. Writer's opinion throughout.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quotations</td>
<td>Story contains partial, direct and indirect quotes. Quotes support substance of story. Attributions are done correctly. Audience reactions are included.</td>
<td>Story includes partial, direct and indirect quotes that support the story. Audience reaction included. Minor problems with attribution.</td>
<td>Story is missing either the audience reaction or one of the types of quotes required. Some problems with attribution.</td>
<td>Story is missing at least two of the required types of quotes.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grammar and spelling</td>
<td>No spelling or grammatical errors.</td>
<td>No spelling errors. A few grammatical errors.</td>
<td>No spelling errors. Several grammatical errors.</td>
<td>Many misspellings and grammatical errors.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP Style</td>
<td>AP style is followed.</td>
<td>A few AP style errors.</td>
<td>Several AP style errors.</td>
<td>AP style errors throughout.</td>
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**Total Score** (out of 100):