

Syllabus

Campbell

COMM 2311: Intro to Writing for the Mass Media

Fall 2018

*"The chief glory of every people arises from
its authors."*

- Johnson

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Course Number, Section Number and Course Title:

COMM 2311-005/006/014 Introduction to Writing
For the Mass Media

Time and Place of Class Meetings:

005, M-W-F 9-9:50

006, M-W-F 10-10:50

014, T-R 9:30-10:50



Description of Course Content:

Introduction to Writing for the Mass Media is designed to teach critical thinking, reporting and writing techniques for the converged media. This course is a cornerstone class in the sense that students entering any communication field - newspapers, public relations, broadcast journalism or advertising - will call upon the skills developed and nurtured in this class.

Some of you plan careers as newspaper or magazine journalists. Others will pursue broadcast journalism, advertising, public relations, corporate communications, international communications, interactive media and other mass communications-related professions. These varied fields are united by one characteristic: the need for practitioners who are skilled writers.

And that's what this course is all about. COMM 2311 will introduce you to a different style of writing than you've perhaps practiced before - writing for a mass audience. What we will do is applicable to all of the sequences offered by the UTA Department of Communication.

The basic premise is this: Writing is a craft. You learn to write by writing and you get better by re-writing. So you will have the opportunity to do both.

We also study editing in the context of writing. Editing includes re-write (revision), but also includes changes in grammar, spelling, punctuation, usage and AP style. In other words, **writing is hard work.**



And what if you have no intention to pursue a career that is news-related? It doesn't matter. This course only *seems* to deal with news. The real skill-set of the course is writing for a mass audience - and you can use that in news, advertising, public relations or online media of all types.

During the course of the semester, we will learn writing techniques as applied to newspapers, broadcast media, the internet, advertising and public relations, with extensive practice in research and writing. Coursework will include:

- Studies in what "news" is and the values that make things newsworthy, as well as in how to identify "fake news" and avoid spreading it.
- Basic media writing; avoiding common grammar problems; writing effective ledes;
- Research and interviewing skills;
- Reporting and writing utilizing various styles, including news, features, profiles, web and public relations;
- Copy editing; and

- Studies in libel, ethics and responsible journalism.

Please note: Although this is an introductory course, it is a college-level writing course. Consequently, you will be asked to write nearly every class period.

Student Learning Outcomes:

By semester's end, students should be able to:

- Comprehend the concepts, ideas and foundations of the freedom of speech and of the press, including an understanding of the role the media plays in today's society.
- Demonstrate an understanding of media law and ethics - specifically, truth, accuracy and fairness - as well as the role of diversity and multi-culturalism within sources and the newsroom;
- Conduct research while using ethical and legal principles to produce quality work;
- Understand the theories and principles of reporting and writing for the media, including the presentation of information - images, graphics, visual communication and the written word;
- Be current with today's news and information disseminated through various media - local, national and international;
- Use creative, critical and independent thinking to interview sources, conduct research and write unbiased media stories;
- Comprehend fundamental numerical and statistical concepts and utilize them in the writing and reporting of articles and become familiar with basic technology and software;
- Apply basic Associated Press style and utilize correct grammar when reporting and writing articles, as well as become comfortable editing stories utilizing journalistic style, ethics and principles;
- Understand and be able to produce quality journalistic stories, specifically news, feature and opinion-editorials, while working under deadlines; and
- Critically evaluate their work and the work of others utilizing the principles of accuracy, fairness, clarity, style and grammatical correctness.



Weekly current events quizzes	10 percent
Weekly AP style quizzes	20 percent
Writing assignments	40 percent
Mid-term exam	10 percent
Final exam	10 percent
NewsU Language Primer	10 percent

Penalties for errors on writing assignments: 1-5 points for basic grammar, style and punctuation errors, 5-10 points for misspelled names and mispegged ledes, and 20-50 points for fact errors. I will not accept late submissions except for excused absences (documented medical mishaps, etc.; see university policy for excused absences). Please note: All writing assignments must be typed. I won't accept handwritten assignments.

Required Textbooks and Other Course Materials: *Writing and Reporting News* by Carole Rich, 8th ed. *The Associated Press Stylebook* (latest edition). *NewsU Language Primer* (interactive electronic textbook).

NewsU Language Primer:

Please see instructions page in Blackboard for enrollment.

The three assessments in the NewsU Language Primer make up 10 percent of the final course average. The following are deadlines for NewsU:

Deadline to sign up for NewsU TBA
Assessments: Students must complete all assessments by TBA
(Close time is 11 p.m. on the dates noted above.) The average of the three assessments count as 10 percent of your overall grade.

Please note: The online packet includes drills and practice tests to help you build comprehension and mastery, but only the assessments count toward your grade.

Additionally, you should bring your current UTA ID to every class, and make certain that your ID has available funds to print out your in-class writing assignments. You should also make sure you have a disk or drive on which to save your work. A friendly reminder that computers will freeze and bomb, and it's your responsibility to make certain your work is saved as it is written.

Description of major assignments and examinations with due dates:

Major Tests: Mid-term exam TBA; final exam TBA.
NewsU Language Primer: All assessments due by: TBA
Weekly AP Style quizzes each Monday (005/006)/Tuesday (014)
Weekly current events quizzes every Friday (005/006)/Thursday (014)
Weekly current events quizzes will cover material from the Wednesday hardcopy of The Shorthorn. One of the best ways to learn story structure is to read it. Any student in the communication department should read news everyday regardless of major. The Shorthorn is available free of charge across campus.

Expectations for Out-of-Class Study: Beyond the time required to attend each class meeting, students enrolled in this course should expect to spend at least an additional nine hours every week outside of class reading, studying and completing NewsU.

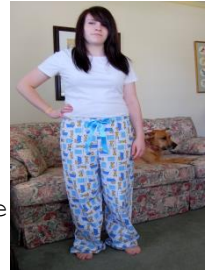
Lagniappe: Because I've just moved back to the DFW area from New Orleans, I'm still filled with the city's spirit, including the spirit of lagniappe - providing something extra as a bonus. So, from time to time and where appropriate, I will provide instruction in mindfulness.



The media industry is fast-paced and demanding, and its practitioners can be subjected to harsh criticisms. But by learning mindfulness techniques, by learning to stay in the moment, you can perform at a high level while being immune to attack. Because this is technically outside the scope of the course, I will not test you on this material. But I urge you to take it seriously because it can help you in your future work as a media practitioner, and it can help you now in what sometimes feels like your overwhelming role as a student. Instruction will include some classroom discussion as well as optional handouts/exercises distributed via Blackboard.

Attendance Policy: I expect students to attend class. Though it would be nice to traipse about in pajamas all day and learn the material or lounge languorously by the pool while absorbing the material via some process similar to osmosis, that simply is not the way this course is structured. I am not offering this section as a distance learning class. I will be in class and you should be there, too.

You should also note that, even if you have an excused absence, you are responsible for missed assignments and must make arrangements to find out what work you missed. All make-up work is due within a week of the excused absence, unless I grant you extra time. By the way, an **excused absence** involves verifiable illness, a death or severe illness in the immediate family, or participation in an official university-sponsored/affiliated event, such as a UTA football game. (Just kidding. "Go UTA football!" is not a chant we hear now or can expect to hear in the near future. On the other hand, we're undefeated since 1986!)



An excused absence does not include having to work. I recognize that many of you have to work to pay for school or to ensure you have enough beer money. However, any employer worth working for will allow you to schedule around your classes. So, unless you want to continue working at a job where you have to say, "Smoking or non?" or "Do you want fries with that shake?" you'll want to make sure work does not interfere with you coming to class. Otherwise, I'll have the super-size curly fries and a diet Coke, and I'll see you next semester when you retake the course.

If you have an **unexcused absence**, you may make up everything. However, the work will be considered late and will receive a letter grade lower than earned.

Please understand that attendance includes a punctuality quotient. Students are expected to be punctual; the media world is driven by

deadlines. Consider this your introduction to the media world. I will give current events quizzes at the beginning of class. If you are more than 10 minutes late, you may take the quiz but your grade is subject to the letter grade drop. You can make up style quizzes, but you must do so on your own time and must understand that you will be subject to the mandatory letter drop in grade. Please bear in mind that the weekly current events quizzes, along with the style quizzes, make up 25 percent of your final grade. A word to the wise...



Drop Policy: Students are responsible for processing the official class drop and add forms. Faculty cannot drop students from class. Students must go their "major" department to drop a class. If you are a communications major, go the Communications Department to drop the class. The last day to drop this semester is Nov. 1.

Americans with Disabilities Act: The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal

opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 - The Rehabilitation act of 1973 as amended. With passage of federal legislation titled Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens.

As a faculty member, I am required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Student responsibility primarily rests with informing faculty of his/her need for accommodation and in providing authorized documentation through designated administrative channels. Information regarding specific diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability. Also, you may visit the Office for Students with Disabilities in Room 102 of University Hall or call at 817-272-3364.

Non-Discrimination Policy: *The University of Texas at Arlington does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, disabilities, genetic information, and/or veteran status in its educational programs or activities it operates. For more information, visit uta.edu/eos.*

Title IX Policy: The University of Texas at Arlington ("University") is committed to maintaining a learning and working environment that is free from discrimination based on sex in accordance with Title IX of the Higher Education Amendments of 1972 (Title IX), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in educational programs or activities; Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), which prohibits sex discrimination in employment; and the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination Act (SaVE Act). Sexual misconduct is a form of sex discrimination and will not be tolerated. *For information regarding Title IX, visit www.uta.edu/titleIX or contact Ms. Jean Hood, Vice President and Title IX Coordinator at (817) 272-7091 or jmhood@uta.edu.*

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS): Visit www.uta.edu/caps/ or call 817-272-3671 if you believe you need help in understanding personal issues, or in addressing mental and behavioral health problems. CAPS is committed to helping students make positive changes in their lives.

Academic Integrity: All students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.

I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.

All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University.



I expect students to uphold the highest levels of ethical conduct as expected of professionals in the field.

Unacceptable conduct includes, but is not limited to:

- Fabricating sources, information or quotes.
- Failing to properly attribute quotes or ideas.
- Asking someone to say you interviewed them when you didn't.
- Misrepresenting yourself to get information.
- Copying quotes or information from other publications or fellow classmates.



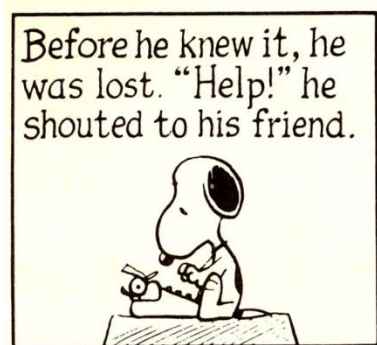
- Plagiarism of any kind.

- Surreptitiously researching an advertising principle on your i-Phone because you forgot to study for the weekly quiz.

At a minimum, violating rules of ethical conduct will result in a zero for the assignment. And, as we've discussed, zeros don't average well. I will not tolerate academic misconduct, and neither should you. Word.

Student Support Services Available: The University of Texas at Arlington supports a variety of student success programs to help students connect with the University and achieve academic success.

Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, please visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to resources@uta.edu or view offerings online at <http://www.uta.edu/universitycollege/resources/index.php>.



The IDEAS Center (2nd floor of Central Library)

offers free tutoring to all students, with a focus on transfer students, sophomores, veterans and others undergoing a transition to UT Arlington. To schedule an appointment with a peer tutor or mentor, email IDEAS@uta.edu or call 817-272-6593.

The English Writing Center (411LIBR) The Writing Center offers free tutoring in 20-, 40- or 60-minute face-to-face and online sessions to all UT Arlington students on any phase of UTA coursework. The center's hours are 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Mondays through Thursdays, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Fridays, and noon to 6 p.m. Saturdays and Sundays. Register and make appointments online at <http://uta.mywconline.com>. Please see www.uta.edu/owl for detailed information on the center's programs and services.

The Library's 2nd floor Academic Plaza offers students a central hub of support services, including IDEAS Center, University Advising Services, Transfer UTA and various college/school advising hours. Services are available during the library's hours of operation. Please see <http://library.uta.edu/academic-plaza> for more information.

Final Review Week: A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review

Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week unless specified in the class syllabus. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10 percent or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. Classes are held as scheduled during this week and instructors may give lectures and presentations.

E-Culture Policy:

The University of Texas at Arlington has adopted the University email address as an official means of communication with students. Through the use of email, UT-Arlington is able to provide students with relevant and timely information designed to facilitate student success. In particular, important information concerning registration, financial aid, payment of bills and graduation may be sent to student through email. In addition, I will, from time-to-time, send you important class information via email.

All students are assigned an email account and information about activating and using it is available at www.uta.edu/email. New students (first semester at UTA) are able to activate their email account 24 hours after registering for courses. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, and it remains active even after graduation from UT-Arlington. **Students are responsible for checking their email regularly. And it's a two-way street; I also will check email regularly**

Checking email a couple of times a day will go a long way toward making sure you don't miss anything important, such as a last-minute class cancelation or an assignment due-date extension. Please note: I may not, and will not, email grade information unless you initiate the conversation via your UTA email account.

My email address is geoffrey.campbell@uta.edu. During the course of the semester, we'll also discuss, and practice, the use of social media as part of the media writing art. I am on Twitter at @g_a_campbell and Instagram at @g_a_campbell. We also have a class Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/UtaJourl345WritingForMassMedia/>. I will periodically post links to articles of interest to our studies here; however, the official means of communication is via UT Arlington email, and you will not be held accountable for anything I post via any means of social media *unless I also share the information in class or via UT Arlington email.*

Student Feedback Survey: At the end of each term, students enrolled in face-to-face and online classes categorized as "lecture," "seminar," or "laboratory" are directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback via the SFS database is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. Students' anonymity will be protected to the extent that the law allows. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law and aggregate results are posted online. Data from SFS is also used for faculty and program evaluations. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.



Bomb Threats: Don't do it. It's far better to take an F on an assignment than get prosecuted, which is exactly what will happen to you if you make a bomb threat. UTA will do everything within its power to trace the call and prosecute all responsible parties. Moreover, the University will make every effort to avoid cancelation of presentations/tests caused by bomb threats. Unannounced alternate sites may be available (assuming they're not being used by former Vice President Dick Cheney) and I will let you know where to meet in the event our regular classroom is not available.

Campus Carry: Effective August 1, 2016, the Campus Carry law (Senate Bill 11) allows those licensed individuals to carry a concealed handgun in buildings on public university campuses, except in locations the University establishes as prohibited. Under the new law, openly carrying handguns is not allowed on college campuses. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/news/info/campus-carry/>

Emergency Exit Procedures: Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit. Your instructor will be there to guide you.

When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.

Emergency Phone Numbers: In case of an on-campus emergency, call the UT Arlington Police Department at **817-272-3003** (non-campus phone), **2-3003** (campus phone). You may also dial 911.



Make-up Policy:

I have a very liberal policy on makeup. Students may wear makeup in class.

I'm a bit less liberal, however, about making up assignments. I allow students to make up all assignments except current events quizzes, though I reserve the right to give these assignments a letter grade lower than earned UNLESS students have excused absences. Moreover, all make-up work is due no later than one week after the student has returned from an excused absence. Otherwise, no dice. Thanks for playing. Don't let the door hit you on the rump on your way out.

Grade Grievance Policy: Please refer to the Catalog for specific information on this important topic. In a generic sense, students should first attempt to work out their grievance with the instructor involved. Should that prove unsatisfactory, students must file a written appeal on appeal forms available in departmental or program offices and submit them to the department chair or program director. Information specific to the procedures for each academic unit is available in the office of the academic dean.



Classroom Visitors Policy: Please refrain from bringing visitors with you to class. Even the dreamiest boyfriend/girlfriend sitting quietly next to you is a distraction, to you and to others

The Kitchen Sink:

Close readers of this syllabus will have noticed that it has so far contained nearly everything except the kitchen sink. Here now is the kitchen sink.



It is my expectation that we shall treat each other with mutual respect. My goal is to provide you with a thorough grounding in basic media writing and to help you improve your writing. My expectation is that you will come to class, participate in discussions and do your best. If we both work earnestly through the course of the semester, your best will improve.

I would prefer that we deal with any issues in an upfront and timely way. If you do not understand something, are annoyed by a teaching method or otherwise find yourself confounded

during the course of the semester, please talk to me. Don't let things fester. Let's talk them through. I would hate to learn at semester's end that you did not understand what I was talking about in the third lecture of the term. Let me know right away. My goal is to help you, not hinder you.

That having been said, you have to meet me half way. Writing is hard work, requiring figurative blood, sweat and tears - and actual toil. I will help you all that I can, but I can't do the writing for you. You will need to be diligent, punctual and willing to work hard. I pledge to do the same.

The UTA Department of Communication is a professionally oriented

academic unit that seeks to equip students to step immediately into positions in mass communication. The industries served by the school are fast-paced, high-pressure and demanding. These industries seek students who have the skills to perform from Day One. A UTA degree or a UTA transcript will not earn you a job or job success. These industries are looking for definite and demonstrable skills. An A in a



journalism class means you have demonstrated significant achievement. The unit does not give A's for effort or attitude or attendance or diligence of demonstrated responsibility in doing assignments promptly. Those are commendable and indeed do weigh in various degrees in your overall grade. But your grade will reflect your achievement of the objectives of the course. Remember, your work in school is not to cross another line off your degree plan - it is to build the skills and competencies that assure success in the field for which you are preparing.

So, if your achievement only rises to the level of a C, that is the grade you have earned and will receive. I'll still love you. But I'm not going to bump it up because you need to have a B to retain a scholarship or because you want to go to grad school or because of anything. Don't expect me to excuse a raft of absences because you've had a rough semester. Don't expect me to go easy on you in grading because I'm a nice guy. (Though I am. Really.) Don't expect me to pass you just so you can hop out of here with a sheepskin. I just wouldn't be doing you any favors by doing that. Very difficult courses follow this one. The job world is fast-paced and highly demanding. It's time, in short, to get serious. Maybe it turns out that this isn't your thing. No harm, no foul. Life is a journey, not a destination. No experience is wasted, unless you fail to absorb its value. But if mass communication is NOT your thing, better to learn that now rather than in the field and find yourself unemployed and unemployable.

At bottom, this is a writing course. You'll best learn to write great copy by writing, and writing often. Most of our time will be used to write. You should not use the time to work on assignments for other classes, surf the 'net, read email or listen to tunes.

So why am I going all dad on you and being so dadgum serious?

In COMM 2311 - Introduction to Writing for the Mass Media, students are shielded in large measure from the cruel vagaries of the outside world. Students often work from fact sheets carefully chosen/written by their instructors to help young journalism students learn the fundamentals of the craft without creating controversy or inviting trouble, undue scrutiny or embarrassment. In a very real sense, it is a class with training wheels.

"My only advantage as a reporter is that I am so physically small, so temperamentally unobtrusive, and so neurotically inarticulate that people tend to forget that my presence runs counter to their best interests. And it always does. That is one last thing to remember: writers are always selling somebody out.

■ Joan Didion



Nevertheless, there may be instances in which the training wheels come off. I may, for example, from time-to-time ask you to write stories outside of class based upon interviews with real live people in the community.

Suddenly and without fanfare, you may be set loose upon the outside world and in turn find yourselves outside the protective cocoon of the classroom. Bagging an interview with the dean but forgetting to put your cell phone on silent can prove particularly embarrassing, especially if you have Lady Gaga's "Love Game" for your ring tone and everyone in the room hears "I wanna take a ride on your disco stick." However, remember that the embarrassment extends beyond you. Obviously, you always and forever more are a reflection on your parents. Now you will in addition be a reflection on me, the Communication Department and UTA.

Accordingly, you need to behave like professionals. No eye-rolling, no *sotto voce* wisecracks to the student journalists beside you, no taking phone calls from your significant others while you're covering an event. Do attend the event well-prepared. Know the background of what you're covering so that you may write insightfully and with authority. In general, behave as though your grandmother or mother were watching your every move. Because in a very real sense, she is. Wherever you are, whatever you're doing, someone's mother or father or grandparent is always watching.

That may be an interesting point for you to reflect upon, especially given that in a very fundamental way, you are training in this class to be society's grandparent. Journalists are government watchdogs, protected under the U.S. Constitution precisely because the nation's founders believed that unchecked power is corrosive and corrupts. Consequently, the founders made sure that journalists were free to do their jobs. As the First Amendment to the Constitution explicitly states, "Congress shall make no law...abridging the freedom...of the press..." The framers didn't say, "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of manicurists," or "Congress shall make no law abridging the freedom of pipe-fitters." The framers said the government cannot stifle the press.

That freedom and that protection, of course, come with responsibilities. Journalists must act ethically. Journalists must be accurate. Journalists must not have conflicts of interest and should not cover issues or events in which they have a stake. And so on.



"As I look back over a misspent life, I find myself more and more convinced that I had more fun doing news reporting than in any other enterprise. It is really the life of kings."

■ H.L. Mencken

Journalism has been and is an important and noble profession. And dire reports about the demise of newspapers notwithstanding, journalism will continue to play a vital and integral part of our national life for the foreseeable future.

And the profession's rewards are many. Just listen to the Sage of Baltimore, renowned journalist H.L. Mencken. "As I look back over a misspent life," he wrote, "I find myself more and more convinced that I had more fun doing news reporting than in any other enterprise. It is really the life of kings." Quite simply, being a journalist is like having an all-access



backstage pass to history. And that's pretty cool.

My primary goal is to give you the tools you need to succeed as a media writer. In addition, I hope that you'll develop an active interest in the world around you and a desire to explain it to others. I would hope that you'd come to see that newspapers are not just for housetraining dogs and for wadding up as pillows in a pinch. And at bottom, I want to help you improve as writers generally and as media writers specifically. Your goal, no doubt, is to earn an "A." Fortunately, these goals are not mutually exclusive.

Let us then pledge to each give 100 percent this semester, to work hard, to work smart, to ask questions when we're confused or unsure and to give ourselves over to the task of improving ourselves. Let us, in the words of T.S. Eliot:

"...go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out
Against the sky
Like a patient etherized on a table;
Let us go, through half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust remnants without oyster shells;
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question...
Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'
Let us go and make our visit."

Good luck, write on and welcome to the media writers' fraternity!

