

# Course Outline of Record

Los Medanos College

2700 East Leland Road

Pittsburg CA 94565

(925) 439-2181

Course Title: Writing for the Media

Subject Area/Course Number: JOURN-010

New Course  OR Existing Course

Instructor/Author: Cindy McGrath

Subject Area/Course No.: JOURN-010

Units: 3

Course Name/Title: Writing for the Media

Discipline(s): Journalism, Mass Communication

Pre-Requisite: none

Co-Requisite: none

Advisory: Eligibility for ENGL-100

## Catalog Description

This course provides an introduction into collecting, evaluating and writing information and news for print, Internet and broadcast media audiences. It also addresses issues of law and ethics pertinent to the media industries.

## Schedule Description

Learn the basics of collecting, evaluating and writing information and news for the print, Internet and broadcast media. You'll be taught to gather information through interviews and observation, and from public records. You'll study the difference between fact and opinion, and write news, feature and opinion articles. And you'll examine issues of law and ethics pertinent to media writers and audiences.

Hours/Mode of Instruction: Lecture \_\_\_\_\_ Lab 54 Composition 36 Activity \_\_\_\_\_ Total 90

(Total for course)

Credit  Credit Degree Applicable (DA)  
 Credit Non-Degree (NDA)  
(If Non-Credit desired, contact Dean.)

Grading  Pass/No Pass (P/NP)  
 Letter (LR)  
 Student Choice (SC)

Repeatability  0  
 1  
 2  
 3

Please apply for:

LMC General Education Requirement and/or Competency & Graduation Requirement(s):

Communication and Critical Thinking

Transfer to:  CSU  UC  IGETC LDTP Course is Baccalaureate Level:  Yes  No

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**Signatures:**

Department Chair \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Librarian \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Dean/Sr. Dean \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Curriculum Committee Chair \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
President/Designee \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
CCCCD Approval Date (Board or Chancellor's Office) \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**For Curriculum Committee Use only:**

STAND ALONE COURSE: YES NO

**FOR OFFICE OF INSTRUCTION ONLY. DO NOT WRITE IN THE SECTION BELOW.**

Begin in Semester \_\_\_\_\_ Catalog year 20\_\_\_\_/20\_\_\_\_ Class Max: \_\_\_\_\_  
Dept. Code/Name: \_\_\_\_\_ T.O.P.s Code: \_\_\_\_\_ Crossover course 1/ 2: \_\_\_\_\_  
ESL Class: Yes / No \_\_\_\_\_ DSPS Class: Yes / No \_\_\_\_\_ Coop Work Exp: Yes / No \_\_\_\_\_  
Class Code  A Liberal Arts & Sciences SAM Code  A Apprenticeship Remediation Level  B Basic Skills  
 B Developmental Preparatory  B Advanced Occupational  NBS Not Basic Skills  
 C Adult/Secondary Basic Education  C Clearly Occupational  
 D Personal Development/Survival  D Possibly Occupational  
 E For Substantially Handicapped  E\* Non-Occupational  
 F Parenting/Family Support  F Transfer, Non-Occupational  
 G Community/Civic Development \*Additional criteria needed  
 H General and Cultural  1 One level below transfer  
 I Career/Technical Education  2 Two levels below transfer  
 J Workforce Preparation Enhanced  3 Three levels below transfer  
 K Other non-credit enhanced  
 Not eligible for enhanced

Course approved by Curriculum Committee as Baccalaureate Level: Yes / No

LMC GE or Competency Requirement Approved by the Curriculum Committee: \_\_\_\_\_

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## Institutional Student Learning Outcomes

- General Education SLOs (Recommended by GE Committee)**  
At the completion of the LMC general education program, a student will:
1. read critically and communicate effectively as a writer and speaker.
  2. understand connections among disciplines and apply interdisciplinary approaches to problem solving.
  3. think critically and creatively
  4. consider the ethical implications inherent in knowledge, decision-making and action.
  5. possess a worldview informed by diverse social, multicultural and global perspectives.
- Occupational Education SLOs (Recommended by Occupational Education Committee)**  
At the completion of the LMC occupational certificate or degree, a student will:
1.  Be academically prepared to **obtain an entry-level or a mid-level position** in their industry.
  2.  Apply **critical thinking** to research, evaluate, analyze and synthesize information.
  3.  Demonstrate strong **communication skills** (written and/or oral) and **interpersonal skills** (customer service and team work).
  4.  Appropriately apply **industry materials and technology**.
  5.  Demonstrate the skills and knowledge necessary to take and pass **certification exams** for career **advancement** in their industry.
- Developmental Education SLOs (Recommended by Developmental Education Committee)**  
At the completion of the LMC Developmental Education Program, a student will:
1.  Demonstrate the skills necessary for the first transfer level courses in English and Math or for the English and Math competencies for the Certificate of Achievement.
  2.  Think critically to construct meaning and solve problems.
  3.  Read with comprehension.
  4.  Communicate effectively both in writing and orally.
  5.  Demonstrate the characteristics, habits, and attitudes of an effective learner.
- Student Services SLOs**
1. LMC students will demonstrate proficiency in the use of college on-line services.
  2. LMC students will demonstrate proficiency in self-advocacy.
- Library and Learning Support Services SLOs**  
LMC students utilizing various Library and Learning Support Services will:
1. access and effectively utilize available campus Library and Learning Support Services.
  2. apply knowledge learned and competencies gained from using Library and Learning Support Services to academic coursework and assignments.
  3. demonstrate information competency skills needed to meet the research demands of academic course work and life long learning.
- None of the Above**

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## Program-Level Student Learning Outcomes (PSLOs)

At the completion of the **Journalism Program**, the student should:

1. Be academically prepared to transfer to a journalism program at a four-year university or to obtain an entry-level job in journalism or a related field.
2. Demonstrate the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary for careers in journalism and related fields.
3. Possess a portfolio of published work suitable for internship/job applications and interviews.

## Course-Level Student Learning Outcomes (CSLOs)

At the completion of **Journalism 10**, students should be able to:

1. Use appropriate news judgment in identifying and evaluating news, and in developing thoughtful and creative story ideas on a wide range of topics — culture and the arts, sports and recreation, politics and the economy, education, religion, crime, social issues, business, science, the environment. (GESLO 2 and 3; OESLO 1 and 2; PSLO 1 and 2)
2. Identify sources of information for specific story assignments, and gather the required information through interviews, observation and analysis of records. (GESLO 1, 2 and 3; OESLO 1, 2 and 3; PSLO 1 and 2)
3. Evaluate and synthesize news and information, and present it clearly, accurately, thoroughly and objectively in basic news and feature stories that employ a variety of journalistic writing and presentation structures. (GESLO 1, 2 and 3; OESLO 1, 2 and 3; PSLO 1 and 2)
4. Research and write a persuasive review, column or editorial in which opinion is logically derived and supported by evidence. (GESLO 1, 2 and 3; OESLO 1, 2 and 3; PSLO 1 and 2)
5. Use mechanical and publication writing styles that feature appropriate word choice and tone, clear and concise language, attention to consistency, and avoidance of common errors in syntax, spelling and punctuation. (GESLO 1; OESLO 1 and 3; PSLO 1 and 2)
6. Identify and analyze legal and ethical issues pertinent to the news media, and apply moral reasoning to ethical dilemmas encountered by the free press. (GESLO 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5; OESLO 1, 2 and 3; PSLO 1 and 2)
7. Identify and analyze the biases of news organizations, journalists and their audiences, and apply guidelines for reporting and writing about racial, ethnic and minority groups. (GESLO 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5; OESLO 1, 2 and 3; PSLO 1 and 2)
8. Work as a reporter on deadline and under pressure, individually and with others, using computer and electronic equipment and other standard tools of the trade. (OESLO 4; PSLO 1 and 2)
9. Create a stringbook and maintain a basic portfolio of published work. (GESLO 1; OESLO 3; PSLO 3)

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## Assessments

**CSLO 1:** Students are assigned to generate ideas for their own stories, and for stories to be assigned to others. This includes developing newsworthy and/or interesting ideas for a specific audience, and identifying appropriate sources of information for those stories.

**CSLO 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8:** Students are assigned to write basic news, features and opinion articles of publication quality. To accomplish this, students gather news and/or information from human and/or traditional sources, requiring interviewing skills, as well as traditional and online research skills. Students must then assess and synthesize the information gathered, and organize it in a clear, concise and interesting way to either inform or persuade an audience. And they must do this on a deadline established by the instructor to simulate working newsroom conditions, taking care under pressure to be accurate, thorough, fair, culturally sensitive and legal in their approach to reporting. Students receive instructor feedback on their drafts to simulate newsroom editing suggestions, and then revise their stories based on that feedback. Students are also required to turn in both paper and electronic copies of their final work. The instructor may submit some of the students' best work to the student newspaper editor for possible publication in the college newspaper.

**CSLO 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8:** Students are assigned to a reporting team to collectively generate a story idea for an in-depth news or feature story. The team then researches and writes an in-depth news or feature story that includes original research, more than a dozen sources, a sidebar or infographic, art and/or photo ideas, and a presentation of the report to the class. To accomplish this, reporting team members work together to gather news and/or information from human and/or traditional sources, requiring interviewing skills, as well as traditional and online research skills. Team members must then assess and synthesize the information gathered, and work together to organize it in a clear, concise and interesting way to either inform or persuade an audience. And they must do this on a deadline established by the instructor to simulate working newsroom conditions, taking care under pressure to be accurate, thorough, fair, culturally sensitive and legal in their approach to in-depth reporting.

**CSLO 8:** Students give regular and impromptu oral reports in simulated classroom "news meetings" updating the instructor and the other class "reporters" on the progress of their stories and any problems they are encountering.

**CSLO 1, 2, 5, 6 and 7:** Students are given midterm and final exams that contain a variety of objective and subjective questions designed to assess these CSLOs. The questions are derived from textbook and supplementary readings, as well as from class lectures, activities and discussions.

**CSLO 5:** Students must complete a set of quizzes assessing their knowledge and use of AP style.

**CSLO 9:** Students are assigned to maintain a writing portfolio of all story drafts, including drafts with peer and instructor feedback, as well as their final revised versions. Students include in their writing portfolio a "stringbook" section for newspaper clippings and/or online print-outs of any work that winds up published. In addition, students must include in their portfolio a completed self-evaluation form that requires focused reflection on their own strengths and weaknesses as writers.

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## *Typical story assignment complete with potential problem* (CSLO 1, 2, 3, 6, 8)

Because of the nature of the course, many assignments are unique to each student, and so are the problems that befall them. I'm giving an example of both a typical news story assignment, as well as a problem that might occur for the student in carrying out that assignment: This is only one of many scenarios we walk through regularly.

**News story assignment:** The college's Finance Committee (a shared governance group made up of representatives of the student, academic and classified senates and the management council) is considering next year's operating budget that has been cut by action at the state level due to the bad economy. There is less money to go around, and the committee has scheduled a discussion for the next meeting (Tuesday at 2 p.m. in room 409) about whether to cut all budgets by 10 percent, or eliminate specific programs. Read the story published in the last issue about the state cuts, then identify sources you can talk with before the Finance Committee meeting. Make sure you arrive at the meeting early for pre-meeting comments, and get figures for a possible graphic.

**Potential problem:** It is a controversial topic, and when you get there, the committee chair tells you it is a closed meeting and asks you to leave. What do you do?

## *Typical exam questions*

1. Imagine you are the editor of the LMC Experience. You have the following news budget (not included in this course outline due to length) for this week's issue and must decide which of the stories to place on the front page of the paper, and which to run inside. Select five of the following 10 "fictional" news stories for Page 1 news play and rank them in order of importance, with #1 being the top story. Explain what criteria you used to make your news judgments, and how each of them influenced your decisions on what to include on the front, as well as what to exclude. Be specific and thorough. (CSLO 1)
2. Using appropriate copyediting symbols and news style from the Style Guide and Grammar and Usage appendix, other related handouts, and college level grammar skills, edit the following story (not included in this course outline due to length) to fix all errors of spelling, usage, grammar and style. (CSLO 5)
3. The following information gathered for a news story contains information that is potentially libelous. What is potentially libelous, and if you were the reporter, how would you write the story to avoid the danger of libel? (CSLO 1 and 6)

*The manager of the Plaza Book Shop announced today that it is bankrupt and will close permanently at 5 p.m. Saturday. The store's manager explained, "We still don't know how she managed to do it, but one of our clerks embezzled more than \$100,000. In three months since we hired her, she drained all our accounts, so we can't buy any new merchandise; we can't pay for it. We've turned the matter over to the district attorney and are asking other merchants in the area to consider hiring our six other employees. They're good, hard-working people and shouldn't have to suffer like this. It's awful."*

4. You are the editor of your local daily and accepted an invitation to a party at the mayor's home. During the evening you overheard the mayor tell several jokes critical of the racial and religious minorities in your community. The mayor is a WASP (a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant) and has often been accused of insensitivity to the problems of the other groups in the city. In the past, the mayor always denied the charges. You were a guest in his home and were listening in — unnoticed — to his conversation with friends. Yet the mayor invited you, a member of the press, to his home and never said the party was "off the record." What would you do and why? (CSLO 1, 6 and 7)

## *Portfolio self-evaluation* (CSLO 9)

Once you create or update your stringbook (publication portfolio), assess the work you did this semester and complete the portfolio self-evaluation form. In addition to evaluating specific criteria like attention to deadline and overall quality of your writing, the form will prompt you to grade yourself for the semester and justify that grade.

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## Method of Evaluation/Grading

*Students will be graded approximately as indicated using the traditional A-F grading scale, but they should consult the first-day handout for details and modifications:*

Writing assignments and portfolio (stringbook) 60%

Class participation and lab activities 20%

Tests and quizzes, including final 20%

## Grading scale

A = 90-100%

B = 80-89%

C = 70-79%

D = 60-69%

F = 59% and below

**CSLOs and evaluation:** *Weighted percentages indicated next to the excerpted CSLOs below (see pg. 4 for complete wording) are approximations only and may change relative to actual assessments used by instructors teaching the course. They should serve as a guideline for instructors in structuring course activities, assignments and assessments included on the syllabus.*

1. Use news judgment in evaluating news and developing story ideas on a wide range of topics. — **10%**
2. Identify sources and gather information through interviews, observation and analysis of records. — **10%**
3. Evaluate and synthesize news and information, and present it in basic news and feature stories. — **25%**
4. Research and write a persuasive review, column or editorial in which opinion is logical and supported. — **10%**
5. Use appropriate mechanical and publication writing styles. — **10%**
6. Analyze legal and ethical issues pertinent to the news media, and apply moral reasoning to ethical dilemmas. — **10%**
7. Analyze biases of news organizations, and apply guidelines for writing about racial, ethnic and minority groups. — **10%**
8. Work as a reporter on deadline, using computer and electronic equipment and other standard tools of the trade. — **10%**
9. Create a stringbook and maintain a basic portfolio of published work. — **5%**

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## *Characteristics of A-level reporting/writing*

Consistently clear, concise writing  
Logically organized story structure  
Strong news judgment  
Accurate information; no GFEs  
Comprehensive reporting/sourcing  
Strong, relevant quotes  
Smooth transitions  
Excellent use of AP style  
Consistently correct grammar, spelling and usage  
Balance and objectivity in news and feature stories  
Opinion well supported in reviews, columns and editorials  
Consistent adherence to media law  
Consistent use of ethics in reporting  
Applies multicultural sensitivity consistently  
Stories consistently completed by deadline

## *Characteristics of A-level portfolio s*

Stringbook organized in reverse chronological order  
Clipped work intact and with straight edges  
Clipped work neatly adhered to clean pages  
Work affixed with rubber cement/spray adhesive  
Pages neatly labeled with publication, date, page #  
All work displayed in stringbook  
Classy presentation with black, white, off-white pages

## *Characteristics of A-level oral presentations*

Written outline clear and detailed  
Handouts/visuals on point and add valuable info  
Appears well prepared, knows material  
Material presented is clear and organized  
Material presented is thorough and on topic  
Material presented clearly connected to course content  
Makes appropriate use of time allotted for presentation  
Makes consistent eye contact with audience  
Speaks clearly with proper pronunciation  
Speaks loudly enough to be heard in the back of the room  
Speech is well paced  
Shows good presence, appears at ease  
Responds to questions with confidence

## *Characteristics of A-level class participation*

Consistently responds to questions without prodding  
Responses to questions thorough and thoughtful  
Often takes leadership role in group activities  
In-class worksheets thorough and thoughtful  
Consistently follows directions  
Consistently prepared for class

## *Characteristics of C-level reporting/writing*

Writing somewhat clear but wordy  
Coherent organization, but needs some revision  
Average news judgment  
Fairly accurate, but some stories contain GFEs  
Generally uses only two sources per story  
Generally good quotes but occasionally irrelevant  
Makes transitions but they're sometimes weak/missing  
Inconsistent use of AP style  
Several grammar/spelling/usage errors in most stories  
Opinion creeps into some news and feature stories  
Some unsupported opinion in opinion stories  
Occasional legal problems flagged in stories  
Occasional lack of ethical clarity in reporting  
Occasional lapses in applying multicultural sensitivity  
Many stories turned in on time, but some are late

## *Characteristics of C-level portfolio s*

Stringbook organized chronologically or out of order  
Clipped work shows uneven cutting  
Clipped work crooked; pages show fingerprints  
Work affixed with tape, glue, staples, paper clips  
Pages labeled but not neatly  
Some work missing from stringbook  
Scrapbook look with primary or pastel pages

## *Characteristics of C-level oral presentations*

Written outline somewhat clear, lacks detail  
Handouts/visuals loosely connected or superfluous  
Finds it necessary to rely heavily on outline, notes  
Material presented somewhat clear but disorganized  
Material lacks depth, some information off topic  
Material's connection to course content tenuous  
Presentation somewhat short or long  
Makes some eye contact, but looks down a lot  
Speaks somewhat clearly, occasionally mumbles  
Sometimes speaks too softly to be clearly understood  
Sometimes speaks much too fast or too slow  
Appears somewhat nervous in front of audience  
Answers questions but response lacks confidence

## *Characteristics of C-level class participation*

Responds to questions only if called upon  
Responses to questions show limited understanding  
Participates as a follower in groups, lets others lead  
Some in-class worksheets incomplete, lack depth  
Can follow directions but sometimes fails to do so  
Sometimes prepared, but forgets books/homework, etc.



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## Course Content

### I. Introduction

- A. Overview of the course
- B. The journalism lab experience
- C. AP news style from the start

### II. Meet the press in modern society

- A. Gatekeeping, agenda setting and status conferral
- B. Newsrooms and careers
- C. Changing concepts of news
- D. News judgment

### III. Collecting information

- A. Curiosity and creativity: Guides to developing story ideas
  - 1. Brainstorming techniques
  - 2. Idea budgets
- B. Sources of news and information
  - 1. Researching standard sources
  - 2. Navigating the Internet and researching online sources
  - 3. Planning and executing original research
  - 4. Evaluating information: discerning fact from opinion
- C. Observation, listening and note-taking
  - 1. Conversational and critical listening
  - 2. Using a recorder
  - 3. Tips for effective and accurate note-taking
- D. Interviewing techniques and issues
  - 1. Face-to-face interviews
  - 2. Telephone and e-mail interviews
  - 3. On-the-record and off-the-record information

### IV. Constructing stories

- A. The writing process
  - 1. Language and style: clarity, brevity, voice, word choice, pacing, parallelism, transition, using quotes, paraphrasing, attribution, news style
  - 2. Evaluating informational elements of a story and finding a focus
  - 3. Beginning the story: introductory angles, leads and nut graphs
  - 4. Body building
    - a. Structure: pyramid, inverted pyramid, hourglass, kite
    - b. Middles and endings
  - 5. Storyboard organization and nonlinear writing techniques for the web
- B. Effective storytelling
  - 1. Establishing a theme
  - 2. Descriptive techniques
  - 3. Narrative techniques
- C. Writing for new media
  - 1. Writing for broadcast vs. writing for print and online publication
  - 2. Planning a newscast
  - 3. The broadcast structure: lead, body, ending
  - 4. Teasers and lead-ins
  - 5. Copy preparation and style

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## V. Applying the techniques in specialty areas

- A. Beat reporting
  - 1. Cultivating and keeping sources
  - 2. Beginning and covering a beat
- B. Speeches, press conferences and meetings
  - 1. Media manipulation
  - 2. Writing advances
  - 3. Covering the events
- C. Crime and punishment
  - 1. Guidelines for covering crime stories
  - 2. Court procedures and reporting techniques
- D. Features
  - 1. Soft news
  - 2. Profiles and obituaries
  - 3. Sports and recreation
- E. In-depth reporting
  - 1. Planning the piece: think big, think long
  - 2. Identifying sources
  - 3. Story organization: break it up into manageable pieces
  - 4. Sidebars, informational graphics and photos
- G. Persuasive writing
  - 1. Types: Editorials, columns and critical reviews
  - 2. The “editorial I” vs. the “editorial we”
  - 3. Building strong arguments and avoiding logical fallacies

## VI. Media laws and ethics

- A. Access to information
  - 1. Open meetings laws
  - 2. Open records laws
  - 3. Shield laws
- B. Personal protection
  - 1. Copyright laws
  - 2. Libel laws
  - 3. Privacy laws
- C. Communications Decency Act and other online legal issues
- D. Media ethics
  - 1. Media in conflict: service or business? reporter or citizen? objectivity vs. subjectivity; right to know vs. right to privacy; fair trial vs. free press
  - 2. Political correctness
  - 3. Media manipulation
  - 4. Undercover reporting: deception and misrepresentation
  - 5. Moral reasoning: Potter’s Box, the Poynter model and other philosophical approaches
  - 6. Professional journalistic standards and codes of ethics
- E. Multicultural sensitivity
  - 1. Personal and cultural bias of readers, writers and media organizations
  - 2. The language of multiculturalism
  - 3. Minorities in the news and the ethnic beat
  - 4. Gender differences
  - 5. Guidelines for writing about special groups

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## Instructional Methods:

- Lecture
- Lab
- Activity
- Problem-based Learning/Case Studies
- Collaborative Learning/Peer Review
- Demonstration/Modeling
- Role-Playing
- Discussion
- Computer Assisted Instruction
- Other (explain)

## Textbooks:

**Current text:** Carole Rich, *Writing and Reporting News: A Coaching Method*, Wadsworth, 2009 (or updated edition)

**Supplementary:** *Associated Press Stylebook 2009*, Associated Press, 2009 (or current edition; updated regularly)

### ***Other approved texts for this course include:***

*(year as noted or updated edition)*

Fred Fedler, John R. Bender, Lucinda Davenport & Michael W. Drager, *Reporting for the Media*, Oxford, 2008

Tim Harrower, *Inside Reporting: A Practical Guide to the Craft of Journalism*, McGraw-Hill, 2007

Jerry Lanson & Mitchell Stephens, *Writing and Reporting the News*, Oxford, 2007

Melvin Mencher, *News Reporting and Writing*, McGraw-Hill, 2008

Missouri Group, Brian S. Brooks, George Kennedy & Daryl R. Moen, *News Reporting and Writing*, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007

James G. Stovall, *Writing for the Mass Media*, Allyn & Bacon, 2008

Jan Johnson Yopp, Katherine C. McAdams & Ryan M. Thornburg, *Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing*, 2009,  
Allyn & Bacon

***Other readers not listed here may be selected by faculty for individual sections to supplement an approved textbook***