

JOMC 711: Writing and Editing for Digital Media

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Course overview

Digital media combine and converge skill sets, tools and technologies. They also blur the traditional roles of producer and consumer, publisher and reader, message sender and message receiver.

These transformations and the demands they place on writers and editors are the focus of this course. Of special concern are the changes these media force in terms of learning how to effectively communicate in and with them, in particular in journalistic contexts. Beyond exploring these convergences, this course also asks students to put that learning into practice and to learn by doing.

Understanding our increasingly fragmented audiences and exploring how different media behave will help students better develop content for digital formats and environments, especially those in and for journalism. Students will analyze the technical and rhetorical possibilities of online environments, including interactivity, hyperlinking, social media, sourcing and non-traditional storytelling. Students will also learn practical skills to help them succeed in writing for online environments.

This course is about writing — clearly, precisely, accurately, with energy and voice, and for specific audiences. Fortunately, good writing is valued online. The course is about writing in and for digital environments, with a focus on journalistic environments and contexts, and about communicating effectively in those online environments. Learning how to achieve balance and a careful, deliberate blend of these elements is a primary goal, and accomplishing it will require new skills.

Course philosophy

The point of view taken in this course is that we all may be part of a larger content development and management team. We are principally writers, therefore, though at times the point of view is that of a site editor, someone charged with maintaining consistent editorial, graphic design and management policies for a website or group of sites. As editors, we are agents for the reader as well as the writer.

Whether we are content creators or site editors, we recognize that first and foremost we are storytellers. Throughout history humans have taught, learned,

entertained and communicated with stories. Stories transmit information and transfer experience.

This course emphasizes digital storytelling. This emphasis values a journalistic approach to information gathering, writing, editing and publishing online. Journalism, in other words, serves the journalist and non-journalist alike, especially online, where the democracy of production and publishing are even threatening the relevance of such distinctions.

Specifically, this course aims to:

- further develop students' **abilities to write** clearly, precisely, accurately, with energy and voice, and for specific digital audiences;
- teach journalism and communication students **practical skills** for writing and developing content for digital publishing and delivery;
- teach how to **purposefully blend** text, graphical content, multimedia and links;
- explore how trends in personal publishing and social media are **forcing change** in journalism and other information professions;
- give students a comprehensive resource for online journalism, one that deals with digital media as their own distinct forms of communication rather than merely adjuncts to print or broadcast.

The course is divided into three sections:

- **Foundations**, a section devoted the fundamentals of writing well and the elements of journalism;
- **Practice**, a section that breaks down the individual skill sets, questions and considerations important when planning and creating content for digital environments and online publications;
- **Contexts**, a section that looks at personal publishing, citizen journalism, social media and society, and business communication and its environments.

Course schedule

FOUNDATIONS

Weeks 1 & 2 – The Values of Writing Well

Objectives: Review and further develop writing skills applicable to virtually any medium. Identify weaknesses in writing and begin improving in those areas.

Week 3 – Writing Well Online

Objective: Learn how writing for online environments differs from writing for traditional print media and what remains constant.

PRACTICE

Week 4 – Writing Well Online

Objective: Learn to adapt style and specific writing techniques for digital formats.

Week 5 – Social Media and Society

Objectives: Social media offers exciting opportunities for digital writers and editors. This module explores strategies for effective and tactical use of social media, and it considers ethical implications.

Week 6 – Display Copy

Objectives: Learn to write headlines, subheads, captions and lists.

Week 7 – Writing for Spaces and Places

Objectives: Plan and curate written content for the digital spaces and digitally distributed media.

Week 8 – Online Public Relations

Objectives: Learn how PR is changing in the digital era.

CONTEXTS

Week 9 – Blogito Ergo Sum

Objectives: Explore the fields of personal publishing, including blogging and microblogging (or tweeting).

Week 10 – We the People, Part I

Objectives: Explore how democratic digital media are transforming communications. Learn how to add value in this era of pro-am journalism. Also explored are social networking and its implications for information industries.

Week 11 – We the People, Part II: News as Conversation

Objectives: Learn what news organizations are doing to engage readers into a conversation and to build and maintain community online.

Week 12 – Writing for Spaces in Business

Objectives: Explore how businesses and institutions are embracing online information spaces and how they are using them to communicate both internally and externally.

Week 13 – The Future of Digital Storytelling

Objectives: Much of the media landscape and ecosystem would have been unimaginable even a decade ago. What does the future hold, and not just for media, but for journalism and its goal – a self-governing democracy?

Week 14 – Reflection, Contemplation and Closure

Objectives: Contemplate learning experiences. Complete revisions. Wrap up loose ends. Say our goodbyes.

Members of a community

Each student in this course should recognize his or her membership in a learning community. We are partners exploring issues in an online environment.

I am a Sakai user like you, but I'm not an expert. I am a WordPress user, but I am not a software developer. Technical or computer-related issues or challenges, therefore, are yours to overcome, though certainly I (and your classmates) will help any way we can. We are all in this together.

In this course, we do not have the benefit of body language or face-to-face contact, the absence of which serves to dehumanize us to some extent, so we have to work a bit harder at understanding **and** at being understood. We perceive only what is typed on the screen.

A suggestion mainly for discussion but also when posting to your blogs, periodically ask yourself:

- Have I made an effort to initiate dialogue? To give information? To seek information? To elaborate? To summarize? To clarify? To seek consensus?
- Am I being encouraging? Sympathetic? Do I show interest?
- Am I meeting the requirements for participation in others' learning?
- Is there evidence of critical thinking and reflection in my postings and comments?

Weekly discussions

Each week we will discuss issues and questions related to the lecture material, which is presented in the study book chapters. We will also discuss current events related to online writing, design, personal publishing, social media and technology.

Discussion questions and prompts will be posted on Sakai each week, and the subsequent discussions are critical to our online learning experience. We do not have the benefit of real-time, synchronous classroom lectures and discussion, instead putting a focus on our regular and frequent participation online. Your involvement is vital, and it is, therefore, a significant part of your grade.

Submit your reactions to the questions and post new questions, thoughts and ideas. These posts can and should include thoughts and opinions, additional research and information about the topic, helpful websites, journal and newspaper articles and other related sources from which the class might benefit.

Please do not use the forums for anything other than class-related discussion and assignments. One-line, "I agree!" posts fail to push the discussion forward.

Sakai

All course materials and links will be available on the class Sakai site at <http://sakai.unc.edu>. Folders for each week contain a list of items to be read/viewed during that time. You also will find details of assignments due and links to weekly discussion questions. We will use the Sakai forums for discussions.

The ITS Response Center provides 24/7 assistance with Sakai requests and questions via:

- Phone: 962-HELP(4357)
- Submit a Help Request
- Live Chat (M-F 9am - 6pm)

You can also get help with Sakai from Rachel Lillis, assistant director for e-learning at the journalism school. Contact her at lillis@email.unc.edu.

Setting up a blog

In the first week, you will create a blog specifically for this course. If you have never used a blog or created one, have no fear. It is easy. Even if you already have a blog, it is strongly recommended that you **create a new one to this course**.

The recommended blog platform is WordPress, available for free at <http://web.unc.edu>. WordPress is open-source software, providing great latitude in experimenting with code, features and content. It also has user-friendly templates.

You will use your blog to publish most of the assignments, putting into immediate practice the skills and techniques we will be discussing. The blogs also provide a kind of diary for the learning experiences this course will create, making them useful beyond the semester. The important thing now is to set up your blog and add the URL to the Class Blogroll folder in Sakai. You'll find instructions on how to do that on our course site.

Textbooks

- *Writing and Editing for Digital Media*, 2nd edition, by Brian Carroll
- *Associated Press Stylebook*, 2015 edition (available at <https://www.apstylebook.com>)

Grading

Here are the four components used to determine your grade for the course:

- 1) Weekly projects and assignments described in the course book that you will post to your blog by midnight Sunday night (50%)
- 2) Moderation of weekly discussion, with the length of duty to be determined by the number of students enrolled in the course (10%)
- 3) Class participation and professionalism, the latter of which primarily relates to discussion but includes your interactions with everyone, including the instructor, in all contexts. Participation refers primarily to our weekly discussions. Students are required to post a minimum of **five meaningful posts per week**, with "meaningful" excluding one-line posts. Fewer than five substantial posts results in a weekly participation mark of "L" or "Low Pass," unless the total is zero, in which case the weekly mark is "F" (40%)

NOTE: Any student who earns four (4) "Low Pass" grades in the course, either for weekly assignments or for participation (or, more accurately, lack of participation) in discussion, will automatically earn a "Low Pass" for the course. Similarly, any student who earns or receives two (2) zeroes in the course, either for weekly assignments or for a lack of participation in discussion, will automatically earn a "Low Pass" for the course. Zeroes are typically "earned" by failing to submit a weekly assignment or by not participating in discussion for a week or more.

A word about UNC's graduate school grading system: It is different from the traditional A/B/C/D +/- system by which most of us were measured as undergraduates. Per the UNC Graduate School handbook, the grade scale used for graduate-level courses numbered is:

- H for High Pass
- P for Pass
- L for Low Pass

- F for Fail
- IN for work incomplete

This grade scale **does not equate** with the A/B/C/D scale. An H is very rare throughout UNC's graduate-level programs. It is not the equivalent of an A, nor is a P the equivalent a B or C. **It is a different system.** A grade of P in no way communicates deficiency. As UNC journalism and mass communication graduate students tell each other, "P is the first letter to get to Ph.D."

Workload

1. Weekly assignments: Detailed instructions on these are included in folders for each week. Weekly assignments are due by 11:59 p.m. Sunday nights so that we are ready to re-set Monday morning for the next topic.
2. Leading discussion: When it is your week to lead class discussion, make sure you have done all of the assigned readings for that week and that you understand the material. This will mean reading ahead. The assigned readings are posted on Sakai sorted by week. Discussion leaders are responsible for coming up with questions to generate and sustain discussion on that week's topics. Facilitate online discussion by interacting and intervening enough to keep the discussion moving forward. Don't worry about how many posts are being made; concern yourself with the quality of discussion.
3. Class participation and professionalism: Imagine that we share a pristine and beautiful swimming pool. Your instructor will serve as a lifeguard looking for danger, but we all have to work to keep the water clean and the pool safe and fun. **Go out of your way to be nice.** More specifically, you are expected to make at least five substantive posts per week to the Sakai discussions for the week, or one each business day.

"It's too much! I can't keep up! Information overload!" These are familiar refrains. The "ounce of prevention" for this problem is to allocate a fixed amount of time each week to read the discussion threads and blogs, to make posts and to participate in the discussion. As the instructor, I will do the same.

Honor Code

The UNC honor system and code are in effect for JOMC 711. They are available in full at <http://honor.unc.edu>.

In brief, the Honor Code is the heart of integrity at UNC-Chapel Hill. It says that all students shall "Refrain from lying, cheating, or stealing," but the Honor Code means much more. It is the guiding force behind the students' responsible exercise of freedom, the foundation of student self-governance at UNC, which subscribes to the

view that members of the UNC community should be responsible for upholding the values that have been agreed upon by the entire community.

Plagiarism and digital media

Students increasingly use the Web to do research. With a wealth of information available, including everything from pre-written essays to scientific papers, the potential for plagiarism is enormous. Keep in mind that as easy as it is for students to find and copy information from the Web, it is just as easy for instructors to find the same information.

To avoid plagiarizing, remember that the same rules apply to information found on the Web as to information found in print sources:

- When you take ideas or quote from a source, you must paraphrase accurately and give credit by appropriately citing to the original source.
- If you take a sentence or phrase directly from a source, you must indicate it by using quotation marks around the direct quote and citing the original source.
- Because of paging and other issues, citing online sources can be confusing. For more information on how to cite Web-based sources, see the Citing Information tutorial (<http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruct/citations/>) or contact a reference librarian (<http://www.lib.unc.edu/ask.html>).

Academic integrity: Because academic integrity is the foundation of college life, academic dishonesty will result in automatic failure on the assignment in question. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, fabrication, submitting the same work in multiple courses and aiding and abetting. For definitions of these terms, please consult the instructor.

Online class statement

1. By enrolling as a student in this course, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the Acceptable Use of online resources. Please consult the Acceptable Use Policy (<http://help.unc.edu/1672>) on topics such as copyright, net-etiquette and privacy protection.

2. As part of this course you may be asked to participate in online discussions or other online activities that may include personal information about you or other students in the course. Please be respectful of the rights and protection of other participants under the UNC Chapel Hill Information Security Policies (http://its.unc.edu/ITS/about_its/its_policies/index.htm) when participating in online classes.

3. When using online resources offered by organizations not affiliated with UNC Chapel Hill, such as Google or YouTube, please note that the Terms and Conditions of these companies and not the University's Terms and Conditions apply. These third parties may offer different degrees of privacy protection and access rights to online content. You should be well aware of this when posting content to sites not managed by UNC-Chapel Hill.

4. When links to sites outside of the unc.edu domain are inserted in class discussions, please be mindful that clicking on sites not affiliated with UNC-Chapel Hill may pose a risk for your computer due to the possible presence of malware on such sites.

5. Online courses may at times require Web-based assignments that are public in nature and may be viewed by third parties online. This is especially true in social media and blogging platforms. Be mindful of the information you choose to share publicly as part of your assignments. Under the Federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) and UNC's FERPA regulation (http://registrar.unc.edu/AcademicServices/PoliciesProcedures/StudentRights/CCM1_042762), a student's education records are protected from disclosure to third parties. However, FERPA protection does not extend to material shared publicly by students.

Need help?

If you have special needs or challenges of any kind, including learning disabilities, please let me know.

Finally, I believe we are here for a good time, not a long time, so let's have some fun this semester!

Core values and competencies

This course covers the following competencies required by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.
- Contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.