

# MEJO 753.1

Instructor: Ryan Thornburg

Tuesday/Thursday. 12:30-1:45 p.m., CA 132

## I. INTRODUCTION

JOMC 753 teaches students to report and write news on deadline according to acceptable professional standards. Students practice reporting and writing a variety of formats, with particular emphasis on the growing consumption of news on mobile devices, longer-form narrative news writing for print and reporting for interactive multimedia.

The course emphasizes respect for and correct use of the language, with particular stress on spelling and grammar, style consistency, accuracy and clear writing. Attention is also paid to bias, libel and ethical considerations. Students will use research and interviewing to produce stories.

The faculty of the School of Media and Journalism at UNC-Chapel Hill believes strongly that anyone interested in a career in any communications field must be able to write clear, tight copy with care and precision. The key words for any writing are full, fair and accurate.

## II. PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

JOMC 753 abides by standards the communications professions follow and expect of graduates of a professional school such as the School of Journalism and Mass Communication.

Writing ability — Grammar and spelling; ability to tell a good story well; use of quotes, anecdotes and descriptive detail; use of active voice and strong verbs; ability to write leads that are inviting and that hit the point of the story; ability to write tightly and to organize information in logical, compelling sequence.

Reporting ability — Pursuit, digging, enterprise, diligence; ability and eagerness to see and pursue promising angles; ability to seek and obtain anecdotes, details and quotes that provide documentation and add liveliness to copy; ability to see the need for and to get both sides of the story; ability to cultivate good sources.

Speed, productivity and efficiency— Speed on deadline; speed and efficiency in completing non-deadline assignments; ability and willingness to manage more than one assignment at a time; ability and willingness to make frequent, substantive contributions to the content of the paper.

Accuracy — Skill with basic factual information such as names, addresses, dates and figures; ability to identify and make use of the best sources, whether they are documents, references or people.

Work habits — Punctuality, reliability, readiness to go beyond the minimum requirements of the job; interest in assuming and ability to assume more than minimum responsibility; ability and willingness to anticipate and fulfill the demands of an assignment without prompting; ability to deal even-handedly with peers and supervisors, to accept constructive criticism and to offer constructive suggestions; interest in all areas of the news operation; knowledge of community, regional, national and international events; regular and thorough reading of the newspaper.

Judgment — Commitment to fairness and balance; ability to recognize and assess possible adverse consequences of actions; knowledge of, respect for and observance of the news department's policies.

Potential — Likelihood that the reporter is a candidate for a more challenging reporting assignment or a supervisory position; evidence that he or she possesses the characteristics of leadership and supervisory ability expected of supervising editors.

The expectations of this newspaper are found in all other mass communications jobs. The work accomplished in “Newsriting & Reporting” will be the basis for students in subsequent courses in the School, whether they are skills or conceptual courses. At the end of the course, students will be better writers.

### III. PROFESSIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

Work produced by students in this course will be made available to news outlets such as the Raleigh Public Record and N.C. Health News. Partnering with professional news organizations allows students to experience and reflect upon the practical implications of writing and reporting for a specific audience. It also underscores the importance of accuracy, deadlines and other professional standards. Grades in this course will be determined solely by the instructor. The instructor will act as a first line of coaching and editing, but students can expect additional suggestions and edits from the professional at our partner organizations.

### IV. MULTIMEDIA COURSE INTEGRATION

This course is designed to work in conjunction with the multimedia storytelling and production skills that students will be learning in SMJ 782. While grading of these two courses is independent, students are expected to integrate the audio and visual elements they develop in SMJ 782 into their assignments in this course. Through this integration of multimedia elements, students will learn how and when to use different media to highlight different news values and elements and to achieve various effects with audiences on a variety of platforms.

## III. GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### A. Course Materials

#### 1. Required Texts.

See the [Reading Assignments](#) section of the Sakai site.

#### 2. Recommended Texts.

The following texts are helpful for those who need more work on writing and grammar. They can be found at a bookstore or online retailers.

- William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White, The Elements of Style
- Kovach and Rosensteel, The Elements of Journalism
- Clark, Roy's Writing Tools, a free audio version of Roy Peter Clark's book, Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer

### B. Course Requirements

#### 1. News Reading.

Come to class every day prepared to share your thoughts and questions about the news judgment and writing structure of global, national, local and campus news stories -- including politics, business, sports, entertainment and other topics.

#### 2. Attendance.

1. If you miss a class, you are responsible for anything you missed.
2. Before asking me what you missed, ask a classmate.
3. If you must miss a class, I will be more able to help you the earlier you let me know.
4. If you miss a in-class quiz or in-class writing assignment, I will not let you take it at a later date unless you make arrangements in advance.
5. If you miss more than two classes, your attendance grade will drop 10 points for each additional day missed.

#### 3. Assignments and Deadlines.

All writing assignments must be turned in as a Word document by the deadline specified. Because this is a professional class, every effort is made to simulate realistic professional conditions. That means meeting deadlines.

Late assignments that are late will immediately lose 10 points. They will lose an additional 10 points for each additional day they are late.

#### 4. Course Grade Components

- Narrative story. 35%. Due Nov. 19
  - Draft 2 due Nov. 5
  - Draft 1 due Oct. 13

- Data story. 35%. Due Nov. 24
  - Data interactive due Nov. 12
  - Data acquisition due Oct. 20
- FAQ/explainer. 10%. Due Oct. 6
  - Draft due Sept. 29
- Pitches for narrative and data stories. 5%. Due Sept. 22.
- Three basic stories. 10%. Due Sept. 9-18.
- Attendance, in-class exercises and quizzes. 5%

## 5. Grading Scale

Grading in JOMC 753 and in other writing and reporting courses in the School is conducted on a numerical scale. Each student begins each assignment with a raw score of 100. Points are added or subtracted according to the standards listed below. You may determine your approximate grade standing in the course by converting your numerical grades to letter grades on assignments according to this scale:

H(onors) = 96–100%

P(assing) = 75–95%

L(ow) = 64-74%

Using the definitions established by UNC-Chapel Hill, students who receive the following letter grades are considered to have reached the level of attainment defining that letter. Thus, letter grades received for reporting and writing courses may be interpreted this way:

**H** = highest level of attainment / suitable for publication in a professional news source with minor edits

**P** = high level of attainment / acceptable work from an intern at a professional news organization

**L** = adequate level of attainment / but not yet appropriate for submission to a professional news source

## C. Evaluation of Writing Assignments

Your instructor devotes a great deal of time and effort to evaluating papers. The instructor will return graded papers as soon as possible, often before assigning a new writing exercise.

Review your papers immediately and thoroughly. It's an important part of your learning. The instructor will turn papers around rapidly in the expectation that you will learn from your errors and avoid repeating them.

Grades are determined by plus and minus points on each assignment. Plus points are added when the work is above the ordinary, but not when the work is at an average level. In fact, it is not unusual to earn more than 100 on a paper. Superior papers containing few errors can achieve scores above 100. Minus points will be deducted for each error and from work that falls below the minimum level of acceptability.

Below is a grading guide to the two main areas the instructor will evaluate in your stories.

### 1. News judgement & organization:

- Leads: -20 (missing it altogether) to +5 (clever, brief and accurate)
- Story Organization: -10 to +10 for EACH ineffective organization or treatment of material, including but not limited to:
  - wordiness;
  - use of jargon or clichés;
  - inclusion of unnecessary, non-newsworthy or obvious information;
  - repetition;
  - redundancy;
  - inappropriate choice or use of quoted material;
  - incorrect word choice;
  - transition or introduction of material
- Legal & Ethical Issues:
  - -10 for a minor factual error, such as an inaccurate street address or the time element if the effect on the story is relatively insignificant
  - -50 for a misspelled name of a person, business, agency or institution on first reference, a misquote or other major factual error. Writing the School of Journalism and Mass Communications would be a -50 because there is no “s” on the end of Communication. This deduction is not an arbitrary punishment. Such errors go to the heart of credibility for you and your organization. Errors can also have serious legal ramifications, such as libel suits.
  - -10 for misspelling a person's name on second or later references (e.g., Brown on first reference, Brwon on second reference)
  - + or - 20 for legal errors, such as libel, violation of legal right of privacy, copyright violation and others

### 2. Writing Style

- -2 for each error or inconsistency in AP or JOMC style
- -5 for each spelling error, and a typographical mistake (a typo) is considered a spelling error
- -5 for each grammatical error, such as improper subject-verb agreement or noun-pronoun agreement, improper use of a word, or misplaced modifier

## D. Assignment Details

### 1. Three Basic Stories (10%)

Between Sept. 8 and Sept. 17, each student will be assigned to write three basic news stories -- one from a press release, one based on an event such as a speech or a rally, and one based on a public meeting. We will assign public meeting dates during the first week of class. The public meeting and event stories will be due by noon the day after the meeting or event. The press

release story must be done no later than 7 days after the release. All three stories must be done by Sept. 18.

Length: 300-400 words each.

Meeting Story Examples:

- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/2015/08/20/northwest-cac-approves-new-office-complex/>
- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/2015/08/19/southwest-cac-gets-update-on-corridor-study/>
- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/2015/01/09/central-cac-votes-against-rezoning-cases/>
- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/2015/01/30/presentation-on-glenwood-place-draws-large-crowd/>
- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/2015/07/29/northwest-cac-votes-in-favor-of-new-retirement-village/>

Event Story Examples:

- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/2008/12/13/downtown-raleigh-rally-for-immigrant-rights/>
- <http://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2015/08/06/bone-marrow-collection-at-the-ncga/>

Press Release Story Examples:

- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/2009/02/12/free-circulator-bus-comes-online/>
- <http://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2015/08/07/rural-black-women-suffer-less-depression/>

## 2. FAQ/Explainer (10%)

Due dates:

- Draft - Sept. 29
- Final - Oct. 6

Examples

- <http://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2014/10/28/by-the-numbers-in-north-carolina-domestic-violence/>
- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/fracking-2/2012/06/21/explaining-fracking-bill/>
- <http://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2015/05/07/sepa-an-environmental-law-up-for-debate/>
- <https://www.ednc.org/flash-cards/special-education/#toc>

## 3. Written Narrative Story (35%)

Due dates:

- Draft 1 - Oct. 13
- Draft 2 - Nov. 5
- Publication date - Nov. 19

Length: 1,200 - 2,000 words (about 4-5 single-spaced pages), plus audio and visual elements.

Examples:

- <http://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/2015/06/23/from-clinic-to-campground/>
- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/2012/12/10/urban-farms-gardens-debated-for-new-zoning-code/>
- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/transit/2012/07/09/raleighs-bet-electric-car-only-time-will-tell/>

- <http://www.laweekly.com/news/in-the-gay-wing-of-la-mens-central-jail-its-not-shanks-and-muggings-but-hand-sewn-gowns-and-tears-5218552>

#### 4. Data Story (35%)

Due Dates:

- Data acquisition - Oct. 20
- Interactive/visualization - Nov. 12
- Publication date - Nov. 24

Length: 900-1,500 words, plus visual/interactive component

Examples:

- <http://www.northcarolinahealthnews.org/interactive-womens-reproductive-health-abortion-2013/>
- <http://www.psmag.com/nature-and-technology/whos-buying-electric-vehicles>
- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/2012/04/02/raleighs-disparity-in-growth-and-school-building/>
- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/2013/07/30/planning-commission-recusals-surged-in-2012/>
- <http://raleighpublicrecord.org/news/2013/12/12/raleighs-top-10-most-dangerous-intersections-of-2013/>
- <http://loudaustin.beckslarson.com/>