

**JOMC 153.6, "News Writing"
Fall 2013**

Assistant Professor Ryan Thornburg
Classroom: Carroll 142
Office: 219 Carroll Hall

8-10:30 a.m., TR
Office Hours: on demand

About This Course

Students in News Writing will learn about and practice the journalistic writing process – from identifying the values and elements of a news story, to the curiosity and verification of the information gathering process to the presentation of news using brevity and precision. They learn to tell true stories that are memorable and relevant to specific audiences. Students also learn about the influence and interplay between advertising and news and among professional advocacy writing, narrative nonfiction and the professional detachment found in consumer-oriented news sites.

What You Will Learn

We'll start the semester by taking a critical look at how professional editors and reporters decide what's news, and how professional advocates, advertisers and audience behaviors effect those decisions.

Students will learn how to discern and select information for a news audience, and how to present that information with brevity and efficiency, whether the medium is Twitter, broadcast television or print newspapers.

Through grammatical and stylistic rigor as well as fact-checking and basic digital text production, students learn how precision or imprecision of information can affect audience perceptions and behavior.

Armed with that appreciation of precision, students learn how to use multiple independent sources to verify information – and how to highlight or omit information for the purpose of influencing a particular audience.

These lessons are learned through rigorous and critical reading and discussion of professional news stories in a variety of media, as well as regular in-class writing assignments that stress the professional discipline of deadlines and the pressure they put on those journalistic values of brevity, precision and verification.

These lessons of these frequent in-class assignments are reinforced and amplified with out-of-class project work that incorporates each of the individual goals of the class. News Writing is not aimed at preparing the student for any particular professional career path, but instead provides the foundation of clear, curious and precise thinking that students need to excel in a variety of professional settings both inside and outside of media.

Reading the News

The single most important factor in determining your level of success in this course is the volume and variety of news you read.

If you are like most Americans, most of your news consumption comes from television. You might also get much of your news via Facebook, Twitter or other online news sources. In this class you will learn to reach those audience of news skimmers, but you will also be required to become a more critical consumer of news from all sources. As you begin to study journalism and mass communication, it's particularly useful to read the print edition of a national newspaper like The New York Times or Wall Street Journal as well as a local paper. If you read news critically, you will be circling words, writing notes and highlighting passages.

Students are expected to stay abreast of campus, town, state, national and international headlines from a diverse set of fields from arts to business to politics to science to sports. Students are also expected to read in-depth at least a handful of stories every day and come to each class prepared to critique the news judgment and writing style of the stories' authors.

- Wall Street Journal: [WSJ.com/studentoffer](http://www.wsj.com/studentoffer).
- New York Times:

Required Textbooks

Producing Online News: Digital Skills, Stronger Stories. Also available online at <http://www.cqpress.com/product/Thornburg.html> (Aug. 26)

Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing, Sixth Edition, Yopp, McAdams and Thornburg. (Aug. 26)

UnSpun: Finding Facts in a World of Disinformation (Sep. 4)

Associated Press Stylebook (Mobile or online editions are also available from <https://www.apstylebook.com/apbookstore/invoice.php>) (Sep. 11)

You may find it useful to use Twitter to ask questions about AP style. You can either tag your post with the #apstyle (See examples here: <http://twitter.com/#search?q=%23apstyle>) and/or send your question to @APStylebook (Which you can follow here: <http://twitter.com/APStylebook>).

CoursePack (Sept. 18)

(Most of the texts required for class – including the material in the CoursePack – are available on reserve in the Park Library in Carroll Hall and will be on E-Reserve through the UNC Libraries website.)

Course Schedule

Assignment details and due dates can be found on our Sakai site.

Reading due dates are:

Aug. 21		Oct. 16	PON 7, pp. 170-190
Aug. 26		Oct. 21	
Aug. 28	RA: Chapter 5; PON: pp. 2-70	Oct. 23	
LABOR DAY		Oct. 28	
Sep. 4	UnSpun	Oct. 30	PON: Chapter 11, pp. 305-331
Sep. 9	RA: Chapter 2	Nov. 4	
Sep. 11	AP stylebook; RA Chapter 3	Nov. 6	PON: pp. 103-132
Sep. 16	RA: pp. 232-238 (Libel)	Nov. 11	NPR: 25-38, 92-118
Sep. 18	PON: 9, Numbers in the Newsroom pp. 1-46 (CoursePack or Reserves)	Nov. 13	
Sep. 23	NRW: 169-191 (CoursePack or Reserves)	Nov. 18	
Sep. 25	Vanishing Newspaper, pp. 1-46 (CoursePack or Reserves)	Nov. 20	PON: Chapter 8, pp. 195-238
Sep. 30	NRW: Chapters 7,20 (CoursePack or Reserves)	Nov. 25	
Oct. 2	PON 6, pp. 136-166	THANKSGIVING	
Oct. 7		Dec. 2	
Oct. 9	http://bit.ly/NCMediaLawHandbook (pp. 44-123)	Dec. 4	
Oct. 14	NRW: 61-107 (CoursePack or Reserves)		

Libel and Privacy

Most students take JOMC 153 before taking JOMC 340. To help students better understand liability surrounding newsgathering, including libel and invasion of privacy, it is recommended that they register at News University and take two online courses. Each takes about an hour and should be completed before the section on libel and ethics listed on the week-by-week syllabus. Registration is free and takes a few minutes. Questions from the two online courses might be included on the second competency exam. The course on Defamation, Privacy, and Copyright can be accessed at <http://www.newsu.org/courses/online-media-law-basics-bloggers-and-other-publish> and Newsgathering Liability at <http://www.newsu.org/courses/newsgathering-law>.

Grammar and Word Usage

To receive a degree in journalism-mass communication, students must pass the School's Usage and Grammar Exam with a score of 70 or higher. JOMC majors are encouraged to pass the exam while they are in this course if they have not already done so. Information on test dates for the spring and study guides are available at <http://jomc.unc.edu/usagegrammar>.

The UNC-CH Stylebook contains a good guide to punctuation rules. Other grammar books, such as Kessler and McDonald's *When Words Collide*, can be found in the School's Park Library on the second floor of Carroll Hall or can be purchased in the textbook division of Student Stores. Additional help can be found at the Online Writing Lab at Purdue University at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/index.html> or <http://newsroom101.net/site1/course/view.php?id=5>

GRADES

Your final grade in the class will be composed of about 20 small (mostly in-class) assignments, worth 60% of the final grade, and four large (mostly outside-of-class) assignments that are each worth 10% of the final grade.

Small Assignments – 60% (about 3% each)

During the course of the semester you will have about 20 small writing assignments, most of which will be completed in class. You can see many of the assignment descriptions and their due dates in Sakai. I may add or remove assignments based on the students' needs during the course of the semester.

Big Assignments – 40%

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE	PERCENT of GRADE
FAQ	Oct. 23	10
Volleyball	Nov. 16-18	10
Meeting Story/Column Package	Nov. 25-Dec. 2	10
Concepts Test (AP, grammar, math, law)	Dec. 5	10

Grading Scale

Grading throughout the semester in JOMC 153 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 from that 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 your assignments according to this scale:

90 and above	= A
80 - 89	= B
70 - 79	= C
60 - 69	= D
below 60	= F

Under the definitions established by the University of North Carolina at 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:

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

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

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

D = minimal level of attainment

F = failed; unacceptable performance

You are expected to produce acceptable work — at a C level at least. Failure to make a C- means the course must be repeated if it is a requirement for graduation.

The faculty of the School of Journalism and Mass Communication believes strongly that it is absolutely essential for anyone planning a career in mass communication to demonstrate at least minimum competency in JOMC 153. Undergraduate journalism majors must pass the course with a C- to receive credit.

EVALUATION OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

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 three main areas your instructor will consider in deducting or adding points to your stories.

News Judgment & Brevity

Leads: -20 (missing it altogether) to +5

Story Organization: -10 to +10 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

Hyperlinks:

- -15 inappropriate link destination
- -10 inappropriate departure text for hyperlinks (either in inline or related links)
- -5 other inappropriate link placement (too many, too early, back-to-back links)
- +15 appropriate use of internal/external links
- -5 missing a link that would have added critical value to the story

Precision

-2 for each error or inconsistency in style

-5 for each spelling error, and a typographical mistake (a typo) is considered a spelling error

-5 for each punctuation error, such as incorrect use of a comma, semicolon, colon or dash

-5 for each grammatical error, such as improper subject-verb agreement or noun-pronoun agreement, improper use of a word, or misplaced modifier

-25 broken link

Verification

-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. Until the first competency exam in JOMC 153, each major factual error will result in a deduction of 25 points, not 50, from a paper's total grade. This grace period will allow you to become familiar with standards of verification and accuracy expected of communications professionals. After the first competency exam, such errors will receive the 50-point deduction. 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)

These reporting criteria apply to stories for which you gather the information, including outside-of-class assignments and also to your selection of material furnished for in-class assignments:

+2 to +10 for excellence in quality of information gathered and used

+ or - 5 to 10 for source selection — quality and number of sources used; appropriateness of individual sources for the topic, including the level of expertise or authority involved (students could lose points here for relying too heavily on online sources, not having a variety of sources or not including a human source)

+ or - 5 to 20 for thoroughness of story — existence of loose ends, holes or unanswered questions; development of significant angles; inclusion of needed detail; information to make story fair and complete

+ or - 5 to 15 for story backgrounding — research necessary to make the story complete or to provide needed explanations; preparation for interviews or meetings; shows understanding of the general topic

+ or - 20 for legal errors, such as libel, violation of legal right of privacy, copyright violation and others

These criteria apply to live writing assignments:

-50 uncorrected fact error

-10 fact error corrected before next post

+10 for each factual response to audience inquiry during event

NOTE: Many of these plus and minus points may be applied to the same story for recurring errors or for continual superior performance.

Attendance and Deadline Policy

My absence and deadline policy begins with the premise that we expect each other to behave like professionals. I will hold you to those standards and I expect you to hold me to the same. In the professional world, deadlines don't wait on anything. And when you're out, someone else has to pick up the slack. What that means for this class:

- You can miss two classes without penalty. After that, 68 points will be deducted from your FINAL GRADE for each additional class missed. Use your 2 wisely (save them for any unfortunate illnesses, not to watch Oprah). The only exception to this will be a serious medical condition.
- If an assignment misses deadline, 25% is deducted. If the assignment is more than 24 hours late, 40% is deducted. More than 48 hours late is a 50% deduction. More than three days is a 60% deduction. Four days is 70%. Five days is 80%. Six days is 90% and seven days is 100%.
- No in-class work may be made up unless you receive my approval by requesting it at least three days in advance. I will generally grant approval for documented extended illnesses, deaths in the family, or University-related trips. With an approved absence, you must make up the work at a mutually convenient time within a week of your return.

Honor and Integrity

The University of North Carolina has had a student-led honor system for over 100 years. Academic integrity is at the heart of Carolina and we all are responsible for upholding the ideals of honor and integrity. The student-led Honor System is responsible for adjudicating any suspected violations of the Honor Code and all suspected instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the honor system. Information, including your responsibilities as a student is outlined in the Instrument of Student Judicial Governance. Your full participation and observance of the Honor Code is expected.

During the last quarter of the last century, professional media trade affiliations have each developed their own codes of ethics:

- Public Relations Society of America:
<http://www.prsa.org/AboutPRSA/Ethics/CodeEnglish/index.html>
- Society of Professional Journalists: <http://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp>
- National Press Photographers Association: <https://nppa.org/ethics>
- American Advertising Federation: <http://www.aaf.org/default.asp?id=1236>
- American Association of Political Consultants:
<http://www.theaapc.org/default.asp?contentID=701>
- American Association for Public Opinion Research:
http://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Code_of_Ethics/4249.htm

Two of the principals of the journalistic approach to writing are independence and transparency. That means that you report your stories “without fear or favor” as you interpret the evidence. And it also means that you show your work, enabling the audience to reproduce as closely as possible the evidence you used to create your story. When information or ideas come from someone else, you must give them credit. A good guide for the fair use of other people’s work in journalism can be found at <http://www.centerforsocialmedia.org/journalism>.