

## JOMC 153: Writing and Reporting Summer Session II 2016

### **Instructor**

Pressley Baird

[presskay@live.unc.edu](mailto:presskay@live.unc.edu); @pressleybaird

423.523.5867

Office hours: By appointment

### **About this class**

Welcome to Writing and Reporting. In this class, you will learn how to write and report a wide variety of news articles on deadline. You'll learn how to use language correctly, with a particular emphasis on spelling and grammar, style consistency, accuracy and clear writing. We'll also talk about bias, libel, ethics, research, interviewing – and the journalism world beyond UNC.

### **REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Reaching Audiences, Sixth Edition.

The Associated Press Stylebook, 2015 edition.

UNC-CH School of Media and Journalism Stylebook:

<http://jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu>

### **RECOMMENDED TEXTS:**

Journalists of all kinds know what's in the news. A great way to keep up with a wide variety of news sources is to follow their accounts on Twitter or to subscribe to a daily email newsletter like [The Skimm](#), [Bit of News](#) or [FiveThirtyEight's Significant Digits](#). Locally, [The Point](#) newsletter covers big Triangle news.

You should read daily newspapers or news sources (either in print or online) that cover both national and local news. I recommend [The New York Times](#) or [the Wall Street Journal](#) for national news and the [News and Observer](#), [WRAL](#) and [The Daily Tar Heel](#) for local news. You should also read sources that keep tabs on the media industry, like [Poynter](#), [Nieman Lab](#) or the [Columbia Journalism Review](#).

### **ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:**

You must adhere to the University's honor code. Some assignments will be collaborative, but in general, there should be no sharing of information while you are working on assignments.

Journalists should strive to be independent and transparent in their work. (After all, that's what they ask of their sources.) If you get information or an idea from someone else, you must credit that person.

### **ATTENDANCE:**

Show up and be on time. Period.

Since this is an online class at an accelerated pace, assignments pile up quickly. You will receive assignments on Monday each week. Assignments are due by 5 p.m. Friday. **Make-up work will not be accepted. If you know you will not be able to make an assignment deadline one week, email me by that Monday at 5 p.m.**

### **ASSIGNMENTS:**

Most of your assignments will be what you would do at a news organization: reporting, writing and editing stories.

In a professional news organization, if you don't meet your deadlines, you don't last long. Meet your deadlines. If you can't, talk to me.

All assignments are listed on the Sakai site under Assignments. Assignments will "open" on Monday at 8 a.m. and are due by Friday at 5 p.m. on Sakai. If you have trouble submitting to Sakai for some reason, email me.

Unless explicitly stated, you must adhere to AP style and UNC style on all assignments.

### **GRADING:**

All JOMC 153 classes use the same grading system, and the system here will also be used in public affairs reporting and PR writing.

Your grade is broken down this way:

**70 percent:** All in-class work, including but not limited to stories; quizzes, including those on copy editing, AP and UNC-CH style, news names and events, language use and other subjects at the instructor's discretion; outside-of-class stories.

**30 percent:** Competency exams (including final exam)

Below is a guide to how writing assignments are evaluated in JOMC 153. Because we use a point system, you may earn a grade higher than 100 on an exceptional assignment.

Writing assignments are graded with three main categories in mind:

#### **1. Writing**

In evaluating writing, the instructor considers the quality of the lead, use of language, conciseness, completeness, readability, organization of material and transition, among other factors.

+5 for an exceptionally effective lead and supporting material

+5 to +10 for exceptionally effective organization and treatment of material

+2 for effective transition or introduction of material

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

-2 for ineffective or missing treatment of transition or introduction of material

-2 to -10 for 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

-5 to -10 for an ineffective lead that needs work or story that lacks supporting material for a lead

-15 to -20 for missing the lead entirely or burying it

## **2. Mechanics**

Some otherwise good writers fail to communicate clearly because they are weak in grammar, punctuation or spelling skills. That is unacceptable in any communications profession, and that is why such fundamental language skills are emphasized. Points are deducted for style, spelling, grammar and punctuation errors according to this scale:

-1 for a form error, such as failure to mark a paragraph for indenting or failing to show an end mark at the end of a story

-2 for each error or inconsistency in style

-2 for excessively long or complicated sentences or paragraphs

-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, or misplaced modifier

-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 Presley Baird would be -50. 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)

### **3. Reporting**

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:

+ 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

### **READING & DISCUSSION BOARD SCHEDULE:**

Keeping up with the reading is especially important in an online class. This will fill in the gaps between the online lectures and your assignments.

We will use the discussion board as a substitute for an in-class discussion about events in the news and how the media covers topics. I will start the discussion each week. You are expected to post at least once each week. Posting multiple times would be like being an active participant in an in-person class: It can only help you. For example, if you are on the border between an A and a B at the end of the semester, I will take into account how often you posted in the discussion board when I consider whether to bump you up.

*Week 1*

Course syllabus

AP stylebook

[UNC stylebook](#)

Reaching Audiences, ch. 1, 3-6 and Appendices A & B

Post in the discussion board at least once. You can respond to the instructor's questions, or you can post a news article you found interesting and tell us what you liked and disliked about the reporter's coverage of the issue.

*Week 2*

Reaching Audiences, ch. 2, 5-6, 8-11

NewsU modules:

<http://www.newsu.org/courses/online-media-law-basics-bloggers-and-other-publish>

<http://www.newsu.org/courses/newsgathering-law>

Post in the discussion board at least once. You can respond to the instructor's questions, or you can post a news article you found interesting and tell us what you liked and disliked about the reporter's coverage of the issue.

*Week 3*

Reaching Audiences, pg. 47-49, ch. 7

<http://www.poynter.org/news/media-innovation/7774/avoiding-numeric-novocain-writing-well-with-numbers/>

<http://www.wired.com/2012/04/can-an-algorithm-write-a-better-news-story-than-a-human-reporter/>

[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/explainer/2009/08/early\\_deadlines.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2009/08/early_deadlines.html)

<http://longform.org/posts/longform-podcast-43-margalit-fox>

Post in the discussion board at least once. You can respond to the instructor's questions, or you can post a news article you found interesting and tell us what you liked and disliked about the reporter's coverage of the issue.

*Week 4*

No reading

Post in the discussion board at least once. You can respond to the instructor's questions, or you can post a news article you found interesting and tell us what you liked and disliked about the reporter's coverage of the issue.

*Week 5*

Review AP and UNC style and any other portions of the class you struggled with.

Post in the discussion board at least once. You can respond to the instructor's questions, or you can post a news article you found interesting and tell us what you liked and disliked about the reporter's coverage of the issue.

*Week 6*  
COMP EXAM