

General Requirements, Testing and Grading

Summer 2017

I. INTRODUCTION

This handout explains expectations of you as a student in MEJO 153, “Writing and Reporting.” The handout also describes the general types of assignments and tests in the course and the criteria instructors will use to evaluate and grade your work.

MEJO 153 concentrates on teaching students how to gather and organize information and how to write news articles on deadline according to acceptable professional standards. Students practice writing effective leads and various types of stories. 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 the University of North Carolina at 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. MEJO 153 is required of all journalism majors, regardless of whether their intended careers are in newspapers, advertising, public relations, electronic communication, strategic communication, visual design, multimedia, social media or other communications fields. Communicators in all fields report or gather and assess information; consider audiences and language; write copy; and deliver the story or message.

II. PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

MEJO 153 abides by standards the communications professions follow and expect of graduates of a professional school such as the School of Media and Journalism. One major U.S. daily newspaper defines the skills it expects of its reporters this way and points to apply to any communications professional in any organization:

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.

Many of the expectations of this newspaper are found in other mass communications jobs. The work accomplished in the newswriting course 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 and better able to gather and evaluate information.

NOTE: Although we adhere to professional standards in this course, the stories you write in class should NOT be posted on the Internet or given to a potential employer as examples of your writing/reporting ability. The exercises are for class use only and sometimes will not represent real news events. In addition, you should not present material that has been substantially edited by a professor as your own work, as that might constitute plagiarism.

III. GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Course Materials

1. Required Texts.

Yopp, McAdams and Thornburg, *Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing*, Sixth Edition

The Associated Press Stylebook 2016 and Briefing on Media Law

UNC-CH School of Journalism and Mass Communication Stylebook [Digital Version] accessible at <http://jomc.unc.edu/stylebook>; printed version available on request from the Student Stores Copy Center

Webster's New World Dictionary

Each book is sold in the textbook division of Student Stores.

2. Recommended Texts as Suggested by Newswriting Instructors.

Jackson and Jamieson, *unSpun: Finding Facts in a World of Disinformation*

Thornburg, Ryan, *Producing Online News*

Kovach and Rosenstiel, *The Elements of Journalism*

Arnold, George T, *Media Writer's Handbook: A Guide to Common Writing and Editing Problems*

Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald, *When Words Collide: A Journalist's Guide to Grammar and Style*

Rene J. Cappon, *The Word*

3. Reserve Readings. Instructors may file materials in the School's Park Library.

4. Reference Materials. All classrooms have reference materials, such as dictionaries, almanacs, stylebooks, atlases, and telephone books. Many references can also be accessed online. Use these materials during class to double-check accuracy. You are also free to use materials in the School's Park Library during class time as instructors allow. **A Web site with names of local officials is available at <http://ibiblio.org/copyed/stafflink.html>.**

B. Course Requirements

1. News Reading. Your instructor may require you to read specific news publications and may quiz you on the content during the semester.

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 become a more critical consumer of news from all sources. As you begin to study journalism and mass communication, you might find it 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.

For commentaries on current issues in U.S. journalism, many students find it useful to read TRADE periodicals available in the School's library, such as *Editor and Publisher*, *American Journalism Review* and *Columbia Journalism Review*. Trade journals for public relations, advertising and other communications professions include *Advertising Age*, *Adweek*, *Broadcasting & Cable*, *News*

Photographer, O'Dwyer's PR Report, and PRWeek; the most recent issues of all of these titles are also in the library.

2. Attendance. MEJO 153 is a professional course. You are expected to assume a professional attitude as a participant. Attendance is required, and punctuality is essential. As one instructor notes: **There are no free cuts.** Most of the work in MEJO 153 is done during class sessions. Make-up work is almost impossible to schedule effectively and will be accepted only for excused absences at the discretion of the instructor. To be excused, you must notify the instructor in advance of your intended absence. Or email the instructor before the class session you will miss. All instructors have voice mail. If you cannot reach the instructor, leave a message with the School receptionist who answers the phone at 919-962-1204.

3. Assignments and Deadlines. All writing assignments must be typed, double-spaced, copyedited and turned in on time. Every effort is made to simulate realistic professional conditions in class. Some instructors might ask you to email assignments. Regardless whether assignments are printed out and turned in during class or emailed, late papers might not be accepted or might be lowered a letter grade. **All assignments must meet deadlines.**

Late papers will receive a reduced grade unless you and your instructor agree BEFORE the assignment is due that a delay is justified. On some assignments, the grade will be an F for failure to meet the deadline. Even if an assignment is excused as late, **no assignment will be accepted later than one week after its deadline.**

All reading assignments must be completed before the appropriate class sessions for which they are assigned. You are responsible for all assigned readings.

4. Outside Assignments. During the course, you will be expected to gather information and write stories about events outside of regularly scheduled class sessions. Individual instructors will determine assignments. Your instructor will give you specific guidelines for each of those assignments.

5. Research. Stories, whether news articles or persuasive pieces, need facts. You will be required to do research for your outside assignments as well as some inclass work as your instructor indicates. You can learn what's available to help you in your research by accessing the MEJO 153 resources guide provided by Librarian Stephanie Brown at <http://guides.lib.unc.edu/jomc153>. To improve your research skills beyond the information in the textbook, Google has two self-paced online courses (Power Searching and Advanced Power Searching) at <http://www.powersearchingwithgoogle.com/>. Attributed to your sources— whether human or document—any information acquired in a face-to-face, online or email interview or through research.

6. Libel and Privacy. Most students take MEJO 153 before taking MEJO 340 or MEJO 341. 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 the course on Newsgathering Liability at <http://www.newsu.org/courses/newsgathering-law>.

7. Honor Code. The University's Honor Code is in effect in MEJO 153 as in all other courses. There are times when professional reporters work together on stories, however. Your instructor will explain and clarify under which particular, limited circumstances such cooperation will be appropriate and acceptable in the course. On all other assignments, you are expected to do your own work and abide by the Honor Code of the University. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <http://instrument.unc.edu/basicframe.html>. You should review it.

Plagiarism is an increasing problem on this and other college campuses. You are to cite your sources appropriately and according to the assignment. The Code of Student Conduct states that expulsion or suspension can result from “(a)cademic cheating, including (but not limited to) unauthorized copying, collaboration or use of notes or books on examinations, and plagiarism (defined as the intentional representation of another person's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own).” If you have questions about citations or usage on your work, ask your instructor.

C. Editing, Format and Style of Writing Assignments

1. Copy Preparation. Your instructor will provide specific details on how to format and submit your written assignments. As the writer, it is your responsibility to copyedit all stories before turning them in. Instructors will evaluate copy as if the writer has made it ready for publication.

2. Copyediting and Style. Editing is part of the writing process, and any good writer reviews his or her work carefully to check for style, spelling, grammar, punctuation and accuracy. Latest editions of *The UNC-CH Stylebook* and *The Associated Press Stylebook* are the final authorities on style in MEJO 153. *Webster's New World Dictionary* is the dictionary on which AP bases its stylebook and should be your reference when either stylebook fails to cover a point in question. If any of the stylebooks are in conflict on a point, the *UNC-CH Stylebook* will prevail, the AP is next, then the dictionary.

You will need to become familiar with both stylebooks. Allow time to make both in-class and out-of-class assignments conform to style requirements. Points will be deducted from papers containing deviations from the stylebooks. Your instructor will give you periodic style quizzes to help you learn the more common style rules.

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>).

If you edit on a printout of an assignment, use correct copyediting symbols. *The UNC-CH Stylebook* contains copy-editing symbols and a programmed exercise designed to reinforce the correct symbols for you. You may have a quiz on them early in the semester.

Instructors may allow some peer editing, where classmates can edit each other's papers. Check with your instructor about the guidelines for peer editing.

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. MEJO 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 grammar help can be found at the Online Writing Lab at Purdue University at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/index.html>. Other sites to check are <http://newsroom101.com/>.

3. Consideration of Audience. When you write, you must consider your audience. For each assignment, your instructor will tell you the intended audience, such as the readers of The Chapel Hill Herald.

IV. TESTS AND ASSIGNMENTS — THE COMPONENTS OF GRADES

A. Common Competency Exams

The School of Media and Journalism administers three exams common to all students in MEJO 153 to test the students' level of competency at certain points in the course. The week-to-week reading list for the course incorporates the material you will need to have read and the skills you should have acquired by each competency test. Dates for these exams are included on the week-by-week schedule.

The first will test your ability to exercise sound news judgment and to write accurately. You will be asked to write a simple news story from a set of facts. You should apply news values in determining which facts and quotes to use and follow the inverted pyramid style of writing for organization. At that point in the course, you should also be familiar with AP and UNC-CH style. You will also be graded on spelling, punctuation, word usage and grammar.

The second will test your mastery of points and principles covered in assigned readings in *Reaching Audiences*, class lectures and any other material from the instructor. The exam will be short-answer questions, and you will be expected to be able to discuss briefly topics such as libel, ethics in journalism, research strategies and evaluation, interviewing techniques, reporting with numbers, the need for editing standards and the basic principles of good writing.

The third— the final exam — tests your ability to write a news story from your own notes taken from an event or other assignment. You are expected to produce a well-written and well-copyedited story, applying in practice all the skills and principles you have learned throughout the semester. More details will come from the instructor, and the date is in the week-by-week schedule.

If you have to miss an exam, it is up to the individual instructor to schedule a make-up exam. You might receive a grade of zero on the exam if you miss it without an excused absence or if you do not make arrangements in advance.

B. Quizzes: Current Events, Language Use, Style

Because it is vitally important for communications professionals to be aware of what is happening locally, nationally and abroad, your instructor might quiz you on current events. Questions will be designed to test your broad knowledge of people and events; reading a daily newspaper online or in print will prepare you sufficiently for the quizzes.

Quizzes on subjects such as language use, style, spelling and grammar might also be given primarily in the early weeks but also throughout the course. Your instructor might choose to give quizzes on certain sections of the *Associated Press Stylebook* or *UNC-CH Stylebook*. All style quizzes are open book. The grades become part of your daily classwork grade.

C. Written Assignments

MEJO 153 is a laboratory class. You should expect to complete at least one writing assignment in nearly every class session. You are expected to compose your stories at the computer terminal, not to write them out in long hand first.

Your instructor might give you a handout with information from which to write a story, or he or she might read a set of facts to you. Many of the early assignments in the course will be based on previous Competency One exams to give you practice for the first exam. For almost all assignments, you will have 90 minutes to write and edit your story. You will also be expected to do research to supplement your information-gathering. Your instructor will set guidelines for those assignments.

In addition to the in-class writing assignments, you will have some written out-of-class assignments during the course, as noted earlier in the handout. Typical assignments would be a person-on-the-street interview based on a current event topic, an interview with a campus newsmaker, an event or a speech.

All written assignments should be properly edited and should follow the guidelines in this syllabus under copy preparation in Section III C.1.

D. Grade Percentages

The aim of the course is to make students competent in the basic writing skills needed for a successful communications career and for further studies in communications. Competency will be tested in the manner described in Part A of this section. Your overall course grade will be based on all in-class work, including participation in discussions, as well as your out-of-class work throughout the semester; on quizzes; on your scores on the two competency exams; your score on the final exam; and your participation in the weekly news discussions.

This is the way your grade will be computed:

70 percent: All in-class work, including but not limited to exercises in class; 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; book reports or reports on communications professionals, if assigned. (Writing assignments may carry more weight than quizzes in grading; for example, quizzes may be 10 percent and daily work 60 percent to make up the 70 percent. Check this breakdown with your instructor.)

10 percent: First competency exam

10 percent: Second competency exam

10 percent: Third competency exam (final exam)

V. GRADING

A. Grading Policy

Instructors in the School of Media and Journalism are known for their high standards and their fair but rigorous grading. The following statement sets forth the School's grading standards, which are followed in evaluating work in all of its writing and reporting courses. Instructors consider each assignment as a professional editor would, applying the same professional guidelines and standards that any good editor would in accepting or rejecting stories from reporters. The grading system here is the basis for other writing courses such as MEJO 253, "Intro to Public Affairs Reporting," and MEJO 232, "Public Relations Writing."

News and other professionals must be able to report and write and produce newsworthy, accurate, fair, complete, interesting, readable and mechanically clean stories. Thus, grades reflect a student's performance as a reporter, as a writer and as one who uses the language correctly. In evaluating the **writing**, the instructor considers the quality of the lead, use of language, economy of expression, readability, organization of material and transition, among other factors. In evaluating the **mechanical** dimension, the instructor considers spelling, grammar, punctuation, conformity to AP and UNC-CH style, proper copyediting symbols and similar factors. In evaluating the **reporting**, the instructor considers news judgment in gathering, evaluating and selecting information used in the story, accuracy, approach to the story, choice and use of appropriate sources, thoroughness, use of appropriate information-gathering methodologies and related factors.

B. Grading Scale

Grading throughout the semester in MEJO 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

Grades may be assigned plusses and minuses; for example, a numerical grade of 82 can be converted to a B-. Check with your instructor about a more detailed grading scale.

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 Media and Journalism believes strongly that it is absolutely essential for anyone planning a career in mass communication to demonstrate at least minimum competency in MEJO 153. Undergraduate journalism majors must pass the course with a C- to receive credit. Graduate students must earn at least a B-.

C. Evaluation of Writing Assignments

Your instructor devotes a great deal of time and effort to evaluating your papers. In courses in which students write frequently, instructors try to 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. Your instructor turns 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 three main areas your instructor will consider in deducting or adding points to your stories.

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 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 MEJO 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

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

REMEMBER IMPORTANT LOCAL OFFICIALS' NAMES AT THIS WEB SITE:

<http://ibiblio.org/copyed/stafflink.html>

This course teaches the following ACEJMC values:

- 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 basic numerical and statistical concepts.