

MEJO 157: News Editing

School of Media and Journalism | University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Spring 2019 | Mondays & Wednesdays, 3:30-5:45 p.m. | Carroll Hall 268

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Course Overview

This course will teach practical copy-editing skills as well as help students understand their professional responsibilities as editors making decisions about content. In this course, you will learn the fundamentals of editing for print and digital media. You will learn how to edit news stories and how to write photo captions, tweets and headlines. You will become an expert in AP style and gain an appreciation for accuracy of information and fairness in language. The goal is to help you become a better communicator, for your career and for your life.

Readings

- The Associated Press Stylebook, 2018 edition
- Stylebook of the School of Media and Journalism (jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu)
- You should also read a newspaper (either online or in print) such as *The New York Times* and *The News & Observer* as well as *The Daily Tar Heel*.

Newspaper Reading

If you'd like, you can view the front pages of *The News & Observer* and *The New York Times* at the Newseum website. Use the "list" option and scroll down to find North Carolina and New York. The Newseum does not store back issues, so you will want to check it every day or you will miss stories.

Assignments

Most of the work in this class will be what you would do at a news organization: editing stories, writing headlines, etc. You will also take a series of quizzes on AP style, current events and names in the news. The one out-of-class assignment will be a design critique of a daily newspaper.

Ground Rules

- You are expected to be in every class and to arrive on time. There are no excused absences. If you miss an in-class assignment, quiz or test, you will receive a zero. You may make up assignments only if you provide documentation of illness or other cause for your absence. If you cannot attend class because of a university-related trip, please let me know ahead of time so we can make arrangements.
- Be ready to participate in class discussions and class exercises. Please silence your phones at the start of class and refrain from texting and checking social media or email during class. You may leave the room to take a break at any time. Food is not allowed in the classroom.

Sensitive Course Content

As an editor, you may have to deal with sensitive language on subjects, including sexism, racism, crude language and violent crimes. Consequently, some of the content in this course may be considered sensitive. A number of resources and services are available through UNC's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) to help you cope with any challenges.

Academic Integrity

You are required to adhere to the [UNC Honor Code](#), which prohibits lying, cheating or stealing when these actions involve academic processes or University, student, or academic personnel acting in an official capacity; and the Campus Code, which prohibits students from significantly impairing the welfare or educational opportunities of others in the UNC community.

Accommodations

If you have a disability that may require reasonable accommodations to ensure that you have equal access to this course, you are encouraged to self-identify with either [Accessibility Services](#) or the [Learning Center](#), depending on your individual needs. Please notify the UNC School of Media and Journalism at (919) 843-9471 as well.

Diversity

The University's policy statements on Equal Employment Opportunity and Nondiscrimination are outlined [here](#). In summary, UNC does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Harassment

UNC does not tolerate harassment for any reason. It is also a violation of the Honor Code and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act (1964) and Title IX of the Educational Amendments. If you need assistance, inform the instructor or contact the [Office of the Dean of Students](#) at (919) 966-4042.

ACEJMC Competencies

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC) requires that, irrespective of their particular specialization, all graduates should be aware of certain core values and competencies. The full list of competencies is available [here](#). This course is particularly relevant to the following competencies:

- 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;
- 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.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge a few former professors and colleagues who helped inform this syllabus: Dr. Adam Saffer, who graciously allowed me to adapt his syllabus design, as well as David Gordon from Arizona State University and Andy Bechtel, who both inspired much of the course structure and content.

MEJO 157 ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

Grades	%	Points
AP style quizzes	20	300
Editing exercises	50	750
Design critique	10	150
Final exam	20	300
Total	100	1,500

Grades on exercises and quizzes will generally be given as letter grades (an A to an F). Your two lowest grades – one for a style quiz and one for an editing exercise – will be dropped at the end of the semester. However, the design critique and final cannot be dropped. At the end of the semester, I will use the following scale to calculate your grade:

- A = 93-100
- A- = 90-92
- B+ = 87-89
- B = 83-86
- B- = 80-82
- C+ = 76-79
- C = 70-75
- D = 60-69
- F = 0-59

Final grades will not be rounded up. Students have plenty of opportunities to improve their grades through extra credit.

Accuracy

Since accuracy is the most important aspect of journalism, we will adhere to rigid standards. As a copy editor, your job is to catch all errors of fact in headlines, stories, captions and graphics, and it's essential that you do not introduce errors. Any major error of fact that you introduce into a headline, story, caption, graphic, etc., in the process of editing will result in an "F" (55 percent) for that assignment. Major errors of fact include, but are not limited to, misspelled proper names, erroneous phone numbers, incorrect addresses, libelous statements and misstatements of the major facts of a story – in other words, anything that could require a published correction.

If you fail to find and correct errors of fact, misspellings, grammatical errors and typos that already exist in the material you are given, it will cost you points. Rubrics will be provided for exercises throughout the semester.

Extra credit

You can get extra credit by bringing in an error in a *print* publication and explaining how you would repair it. To cash in on this offer, turn in the error with a brief written explanation. Describe the mistake and how you would fix it. Examples of errors include a misspelled headline, a math error, a misplaced comma or bad word choice. Professionally produced print publications such as newspapers, magazines, and textbooks are fair game. So is this syllabus. Student publications, fliers on telephone poles and digital media are not. I am the final arbiter of what counts and what doesn't. You may get extra credit for up to four mistakes. Each one is worth five points.

I may offer other extra credit options, although any extra credit will be offered to the class as a whole, not to individual students seeking to bolster their grades.

MEJO 157 Tentative Schedule*

Date	Topics & Readings	Assignments
1/9	Introductions Review syllabus	
1/14	What editors do Introduction to basic grammar Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AP Stylebook: Punctuation section ● "The Slot: What Exactly Is a Copy Editor?" (on Sakai) ● "How to Copyedit the Atlantic" (on Sakai) 	<i>Punctuation exercise</i>
1/16	Grammar, style and syntax: Homophones, precision and sequence of tenses Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AP Stylebook: A-E 	AP style quiz: A-E
1/21	No Class: MLK Day	
1/23	Grammar, style and syntax: Lingo and clichés Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AP Stylebook: F-M 	AP style quiz: F-M <i>Grammar exercise</i>
1/28	Editing for accuracy Checking facts, maps and charts	<i>Fact-checking exercise</i>
1/30	Doing the math Poll stories Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AP Stylebook: N-R 	AP style quiz: N-R
2/4	Editing and the law Libel, ethics and crime stories	<i>Libel exercise</i>
2/6	Bias and stereotypes Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● AP Stylebook: S-Z 	AP style quiz: S-Z
2/11	Using news judgment Editing a story and adding links	<i>Editing exercise</i>
2/13	Writing headlines for print and web Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● MEJO Stylebook 	MEJO style quiz
2/18	Writing headlines for print and web Adding decks	<i>Headline exercise</i>
2/20	Writing headlines for print and web	<i>Headline exercise</i>
2/25	InDesign and InCopy	
2/27	InDesign and InCopy	<i>Editing exercise</i>
3/4	Writing and editing for digital media	<i>Editing exercise</i>
3/6	Writing and editing for social media	<i>Twitter exercise</i>
3/9 - 3/17	Spring Break	
3/18	Digital editing	
3/20	Digital editing	<i>Editing exercise</i>
3/25	Photos and cutlines	<i>Caption-writing exercise</i>
3/27	Layering information in print — headline, image and words	<i>Story package</i>

4/1	Layering information online – headline, image and words	<i>Story package</i>
4/3	Editing and design	
4/8	Editing and design	<i>Design exercise</i>
4/10	Photo galleries	<i>Photo gallery exercise</i>
4/15	Exploring alternative story forms	
4/17	Editing beyond news Guest speaker: Laura Poole, freelance editor	
4/22	Open lab for design critiques	
4/24	Presentation of critiques Final exam review	<i>Design critiques due</i>
4/30	Final Exam (4 p.m.)	

*The schedule is subject to change. Generally, changes will be made as quickly as possible to give students plenty of time to adjust. All changes will be announced via email and the syllabus will be updated in Sakai.