

MEJO 157: News Editing

Spring 2020

Meeting time: Monday/Wednesday, 8 a.m. to 10:15 a.m.

Meeting place: 142 Carroll Hall

Instructor: Andy Bechtel

Email: abechtel@email.unc.edu

Office hours, 213 Carroll: Monday/Wednesday 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Website: editdesk.wordpress.com

Twitter: [@andybechtel](https://twitter.com/andybechtel)

Overview: Welcome to MEJO 157. 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'll do a bit of print design, too. You'll 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.

Required materials: The Associated Press Stylebook, 2019 edition. Stylebook of the School of Media and Journalism (<http://jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu>).

Recommended materials: Editors know what's in the news. You should read a daily newspaper (either in print or online) such as The News & Observer or The New York Times as well as The Daily Tar Heel.

About your instructor: I am a journalist with about a dozen years of newspaper experience. The bulk of my career was at The News & Observer, where I worked in sports, at the newspaper's Chapel Hill bureau and as the lead editor on the Nation & World desk. I've also worked at the Greensboro News & Record and the Los Angeles Times.

Honor code: All students will conduct themselves within the guidelines of the university's honor system (<https://studentconduct.unc.edu>). You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility under the Honor Code, please see me or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle.

Diversity: UNC-Chapel Hill's policy on prohibiting harassment and discrimination is available at <https://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm>. The university is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community.

The university 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 status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

Accessibility: If you have a disability or other situation that might make it difficult to meet the requirements described of the course, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. If you have not done so already, you should also contact the Accessibility Resources & Service at ars@unc.edu.

Attendance: It's crucial. So is punctuality. If you miss an assignment because you are late, you may not make it up. If you miss class, 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.

Etiquette: Be ready to participate in class discussions and class exercises. Please silence your phones at the start of class. Please refrain from texting and checking social media and email during class. You may leave the room to take a break at any time. We'll also take a few minutes off midway through many class meetings.

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.

Grading: Your assignments will be graded on a point system. The more complex the assignment, the more it's worth. For example, an AP style quiz is worth 50 points. The final exam is worth 200 points. Most assignments are worth 100 points. At the end of the semester, I will divide the number of points you earned by the total possible points (typically about 1,600) and use the following scale to calculate your grade:

A = 93-100

A- = 90-92

B+ = 87-89

B = 83-86

B- = 80-82

C = 70-79, with +/- ranges the same as for B

D = 60-69

F = 0-59

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: a misspelled headline, a math error, a misplaced comma or bad word choice.

You may get extra credit for up to four such mistakes. Each one is worth five points. I may ask you to share some of your more interesting finds with the rest of the class. Professionally produced print publications such as daily newspapers, magazines, menus 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.

Guidelines for grading your story editing

Misspelled proper name: -50

Missing first reference: -15

Other fact error: -25

Misspelled word: -10

Style error: -5

Wordiness and redundancy: -5

Grammar error: -5

Punctuation error: -3 to -5

Other errors: -3 to -25

Point bonuses: On some assignments, you can get points by performing heroic acts of editing. These may include breaking a long sentence into two sentences or identifying a "hole" in a news story.

Guidelines for grading your headlines and captions

Headlines and captions are worth 25 points each. Here's how the grading works:

25: Shows unusual flair and cleverness. Represents the story or photo clearly and forcefully. A caption or headline that's truly exemplary.

23: Solid and publishable. Reflects the story or photo and attracts reader interest.

21: Usable but lacks precision and action.

18: Vague or difficult to understand, or has structural problems that hinder comprehension.

15: Contains a major flaw. Fails to use key words that reflect the news or misses the major angle of the story. Contains a punctuation error, such as use of a semicolon where a comma is needed. Has unintended double meanings.

0: Contains an obvious grammar error, such as subject-verb disagreement. Has a misspelled name, fact error or libelous content.

ACEJMC values and competencies relevant to this course

- 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.

Tentative schedule

Wednesday, Jan. 8

Topic: Introductions.

Monday, Jan. 13

Topics: What editors do; getting down to basics.

Reading: Punctuation section of AP Stylebook.

Assignment: Punctuation exercise.

Wednesday, Jan. 15

Topic: Eliminating redundancy, misspellings and other miscues.

Readings: AP Stylebook A-E.

Assignments: AP style quiz, A-E; conciseness/editing exercise.

Monday, Jan. 20

MLK holiday

Wednesday, Jan. 22

Topic: Watching out for bias and avoiding stereotypes.

Readings: AP Stylebook, F-M.

Assignments: Settling a style question; AP style quiz, F-M.

Monday, Jan. 27

Topics: Using news judgment; editing a story and adding links.

Assignments: Editing a news story.

Wednesday, Jan. 29

Topic: Editing beyond news.

Guest speaker: Laura Poole, freelance editor.

Readings: AP Stylebook, N-R.

Assignments: AP style quiz, N-R.

Monday, Feb. 3

Topic: Editing for accuracy and credibility; checking facts, maps and charts.

Assignment: Fact-checking exercise; editing news graphics.

Guest speaker: Stephanie Willen Brown, director of the Park Library.

Wednesday, Feb. 5

Topic: Editing and the law.

Reading: AP stylebook, S-Z.

Assignment: AP style quiz, S-Z. Libel exercise.

Monday, Feb. 10

Assignment: Practice with InDesign and InCopy.

Wednesday, Feb. 12

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

Assignment: Editing a story using InDesign/InCopy; quiz on MEJO stylebook.

Monday, Feb. 17

Topic: Headline writing.

Assignment: Critiquing headlines.

Wednesday, Feb. 19

Topic: More headlines.

Assignment: Headline/editing exercise.

Monday, Feb. 24

Topic: Adding decks and writing multiple-line headlines.

Assignments: Headline/editing exercise.

Wednesday, Feb. 26

Assignment: Headline blitz.

Monday, March 2

Topic: Digital editing.

Assignment: Editing a story and adding links in WordPress.

Wednesday, March 4

Topic: Editing and social media.

Assignment: Tweeting the news.

Spring break

Monday, March 16

Topic: Digital headlines.

Assignment: Critiquing digital headlines.

Wednesday, March 18

Topic: More digital editing.

Assignment: Editing a story and writing a headline/summary using WordPress.

Monday, March 23

Topic: Photos and captions.

Assignment: Caption-writing exercise.

Wednesday, March 25

Topic: Layering information in print — headline, image and words.

Assignment: Story package in InDesign/InCopy.

Monday, March 30

Topic: Layering information online — headline, image and words.

Assignment: Story package in WordPress.

Wednesday, April 1

Topic: Editing and design.

Assignment: Newspaper critique.

Monday, April 6

Topic: More on design.

Assignment: Putting together a page.

Wednesday, April 8

Topic: Photo galleries.

Assignment: Putting together a photo gallery.

Monday, April 13

Topic: Exploring alternative story forms.

Wednesday, April 15

Topic: More on alternative story forms.

Assignment: Remixing a news story.

Monday, April 20

Assignment: Open lab to work on critiques.

Wednesday, April 22

Topics: Presentation of critiques; review for final exam.

Assignment: Design critique due.

Friday, May 1 (4 p.m.)

Assignment: Final exam.