

MEJO 711: Writing and Editing for Digital Media

Fall 2019

Instructor: Andy Bechtel, associate professor

Email: abechtel@email.unc.edu

Website: editdesk.wordpress.com

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/andybechtel>

Course overview

Digital media combine and converge skill sets, tools and technologies. They also blur the traditional roles of producer and consumer, publisher and reader, message sender and message receiver.

These transformations and the demands that they place on writers and editors are the focus of this course. Understanding our increasingly fragmented audiences and exploring how communicators operate will help you develop content for digital formats. You will analyze the possibilities of digital environments. You will also acquire skills to help you succeed in writing for digital media.

This course is about writing — clearly, precisely, accurately, with energy and voice, and for specific audiences. Good writing is valued on screen just as it is on paper. Effective writing is, as an editor at the Los Angeles Times website once said, about putting the right words in the right order.

Course philosophy

Whether we are content creators or site editors, we recognize that first and foremost we are storytellers. Throughout history humans have taught, learned, entertained and communicated with stories. Stories transmit information and transfer experience.

Specifically, this course aims to:

- teach you skills for writing and developing content for digital publishing and delivery;
- teach you how to purposefully blend text, graphical content, multimedia and links;
- explore how trends in publishing and social media are transforming journalism and public relations.

Required readings

- *Writing and Editing for Digital Media*, 3rd edition, by Brian Carroll
- *Associated Press Stylebook*, 2019 edition (available at <https://www.apstylebook.com>)
- *Need To Know*, the daily email newsletter of the American Press Institute (subscribe at www.americanpressinstitute.org)

Diversity and inclusion

UNC-Chapel Hill is committed to providing a 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.

If you have any disability or other situation that might make it difficult to meet the requirements of the course, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. You should also contact the Department of Accessibility Resources & Service (AR&S) at 919-962-8300 or accessibility@unc.edu.

Honor code

The UNC honor system and code are in effect for MEJO 711. They are available in full at <https://studentconduct.unc.edu>.

In brief, the Honor Code is the heart of integrity at UNC-Chapel Hill. It says that all students shall “refrain from lying, cheating, or stealing.”

Plagiarism and digital media

We all use the internet for research. With a wealth of information available, including everything from pre-written essays to scientific papers, the potential for plagiarism is enormous. Keep in mind that as easy as it is for students to find and copy information from the internet, it is just as easy for instructors to find the same information.

To avoid plagiarism, remember that the same rules apply to information found on the internet as to information found in print sources:

- When you take ideas or quote from a source, you must paraphrase accurately and give credit by appropriately citing to the original source.
- If you take a sentence or phrase directly from a source, you must indicate it by using quotation marks around the direct quote and citing the source.

Course schedule

Weeks 1 & 2 – The Values of Writing Well

Objectives: Review and further develop writing skills applicable to any medium. Identify weaknesses in writing and begin improving in those areas.

Week 3 – Writing Well Online

Objective: Learn how writing for digital environments differs from writing for traditional print media and what remains constant.

Week 4 – Blogging, Wikis and the History of the Interactive Web

Objective: Understand and apply the evolution of digital writing and editing.

Week 5 – Display Copy

Objectives: Learn to write headlines, subheads, captions and lists.

Week 6 – Social Media and Society

Objectives: Explore strategies for effective use of social media and consider ethical implications.

Week 7 – Writing for Spaces and Places

Objectives: Plan and curate written content for digital spaces.

Week 8 – Journalism in the Digital Space

Objectives: Plan, report and post a news story.

Week 9 – More Journalism in the Digital Space

Week 10 – Digital Public Relations

Objectives: Learn how PR is changing in the digital era.

Week 11 – Digital Marketing

Objectives: Explore how digital media are changing marketing.

Week 12 – Optimizing for Search

Objectives: Use tools to help readers find information.

Week 13 – The Future of Digital Storytelling

Objectives: Examine trends with an eye toward what's ahead.

Week 14 – Reflection, Contemplation and Closure

Objectives: Contemplate learning experiences. Complete revisions. Wrap up loose ends. Say our goodbyes.

Members of a community

Students in this course should recognize their membership in a learning community. We are partners exploring issues in a digital environment.

I am a Sakai user like you, but I'm not an expert. I am a WordPress user, but I am not a software developer. Technical or computer-related issues or challenges, therefore, are yours to overcome, though certainly I (and your classmates) will help any way we can. We are all in this together.

Weekly discussions

Each week we will discuss issues related to the readings. The readings will come from the textbook, links to articles on Sakai and updates from the API newsletter.

Discussion questions will be on Sakai at the start of each week, and the discussions are critical to your learning experience. We do not have the benefit of real-time, synchronous classroom lectures and discussion, instead putting a focus on our regular participation online. Your involvement is vital.

Submit your reactions to the questions and post new questions, thoughts and ideas. These posts can and should include thoughts and opinions, additional research and information about the topic, helpful websites, journal and newspaper articles and other related sources from which the class might benefit.

Please do not use the forums for anything other than class-related discussion and assignments. One-line, "I agree!" or "Me too!" posts fail to push the discussion forward.

Sakai

All course materials and links will be available on the class Sakai site at <http://sakai.unc.edu>. Folders for each week contain a list of items to be read/viewed during that time. You also will find details of assignments due and links to weekly discussion questions. We will use the Sakai forums for discussions.

The ITS Response Center provides 24/7 assistance with Sakai requests and questions via:

- Phone: 962-HELP(4357)
- Submit a Help Request
- Live Chat (M-F 9am - 6pm)

Setting up a website

In the first week, you will create a website specifically for this course. If you have never created a site, have no fear. It is easy. Even if you already have a personal website, please create a new one for this course.

The recommended platform is WordPress, available for free at web.unc.edu. WordPress is open-source software, providing great latitude in experimenting with code, features and content. It also has user-friendly templates.

You will use your site to publish most of the assignments, putting into practice the skills and techniques we will be discussing. The sites also provide a kind of diary for the learning experiences this course will create, making them useful beyond the semester. The important thing now is to set up your site and add the URL to the Class Sites folder in Sakai. You'll find instructions on how to do that on our course site on Sakai.

Grading

Here are the components used to determine your grade for the course:

- 1) Weekly assignments that you will post to your site by midnight Sunday night (50%).
- 2) Class participation and professionalism, the latter of which primarily relates to discussion but includes your interactions with everyone, including the instructor. Participation refers to our weekly discussions. Students are required to post a minimum of **five meaningful posts per week**, with "meaningful" excluding one-line posts. Fewer than five substantial posts results in a weekly participation mark of "L" or "Low Pass," unless the total is zero, in which case the weekly mark is "F" (50%).

A word about UNC's graduate school grading system: It is different from the traditional A/B/C/D +/- system you are probably familiar with. Per the UNC Graduate School handbook, the grade scale used for graduate-level courses is:

- H for High Pass
- P for Pass
- L for Low Pass
- F for Fail
- IN for work incomplete

This grade scale does not equate with the A/B/C/D scale. An H is rare throughout UNC's graduate-level programs. It is not the equivalent of an A, nor is a P the equivalent a B or C. It is a different system. A grade of P in no way communicates deficiency. As UNC graduate students say: "P is the first letter to get to Ph.D."

Workload

1. Weekly assignments: Detailed instructions on these are on Sakai. Weekly assignments are due by 11:59 p.m. Sunday nights. Late work will not be accepted.
2. Leading discussion: When it is your week to lead class discussion, make sure you have done all of the assigned readings for that week and that you understand the material. This will mean reading ahead. The assigned readings are posted on Sakai sorted by week. Discussion leaders are responsible for coming up with questions to generate and sustain discussion on that week's topics.
3. Class participation and professionalism: Imagine that we share a pristine and beautiful swimming pool. Your instructor will serve as a lifeguard looking for danger, but we all have to work to keep the water clean and the pool safe and fun. Go out of your way to be nice.

"It's too much! I can't keep up! Information overload!" You may feel this way on occasion. Don't panic.

The "ounce of prevention" for this problem is to allocate a fixed amount of time each week to participate in the discussion and complete assignments. As the instructor, I will do the same. Best wishes for a successful semester!

Core values and competencies

This course covers the following competencies required by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- 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;
- 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 tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

MEJO 711 Fall 2019 Schedule At A Glance

Week	Due date	Topic	Assignments due Sundays at midnight*
Week 1	Aug. 25	Writing Well, Part I	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Site setup 2. Twitter account 3. Blog post 4. Need to Know subscription
Week 2	Sept. 1	Writing Well, Part II	Writing sample: where you're from
Week 3	Sept. 8	Writing Well Online	Writing partner critique
Week 4	Sept. 15	Blogging, wikis and history of interactive web	Revising your writing sample
Week 5	Sept. 22	Display copy	Headlines
Week 6	Sept. 29	Social media	Live tweeting
Week 7	Oct. 6	Writing for spaces and places	Email newsletter
Week 8		Journalism, part 1	Begin digital news story
Fall Break			
Week 9	Oct. 27	Journalism, part 2	Finish digital news story
Week 10		Digital PR	Begin digital press kit
Week 11		Digital marketing	Continue press kit
Week 12	Nov. 17	Optimizing for search	Finish press kit
		Thanksgiving	
Week 13	Dec. 1	Looking to the future	Curation using Wakelet
Week 14	Dec. 8	Contemplation and closure	Final revisions