MEJO 557: Advanced News Editing
Fall 2020

Course format: Face-to-face/hybrid
Meeting time: Monday-Wednesday, 2:45-5 p.m.
Meeting places: CA 33/Zoom
Instructor: Andy Bechtel
Email: abechtel@email.unc.edu
Website: editdesk.wordpress.com
Twitter: @andybechtel
Office hours: noon-2:30 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, CA 213; by appointment via Zoom.

Overview: Welcome to MEJO 557. In this course, you will learn how to edit news stories and how to write photo captions, tweets and headlines. 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 texts:
- "The Subversive Copy Editor (Second Edition)" by Carol Fisher Saller
- The Associated Press Stylebook, 2020 edition
- Stylebook of the UNC Hussman School (available at jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu)

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 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.

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.

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.

Health and safety: You must adhere to UNC-Chapel Hill's guidelines regarding face covering, social distancing and other measures to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

Accessibility: If you have a disability or other situation that might make it difficult to meet the requirements described in 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. On occasion, we may meet remotely via Zoom. If you cannot attend class because of a university-related trip, please let me know ahead of time so we can make arrangements.

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. You will also edit and post stories that were written and reported by students in other MEJO courses.

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

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

Guidelines for grading your headlines, tweets and captions

Headlines, tweets and captions are worth up to 25 points. Here's how 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 keywords 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.

Tentative schedule

Monday, Aug. 10
Topic: Introductions.

Wednesday, Aug. 12
Topics: What editors do; getting down to basics.
Reading: Punctuation section of AP Stylebook.
Assignment: Punctuation exercise.

Monday, Aug. 17
Topic: Eliminating redundancy, misspellings and other miscues.
Assignment: Conciseness/editing exercise.

Wednesday, Aug. 19
Topics: Editing a story and adding links.
Assignment: Practice editing a news story. AP style quiz.
Readings: AP Stylebook A-G.

Monday, Aug. 24 (Zoom)
Topic: Watching out for bias and avoiding stereotypes.
Assignment: Settling a style question.
Guest speaker: Laura Poole, freelance editor.

Wednesday, Aug. 26
Topic: Using news judgment.
Assignments: Using news judgment; AP style quiz.
Reading: AP Stylebook, H-R.

Monday, Aug. 31 (Zoom)
Topic: Editing for accuracy and credibility; checking facts, maps and charts.
Assignment: Fact-checking exercise.
Guest speaker: Stephanie Willen Brown, director of the Park Library.

Wednesday, Sept. 2
Topic: Editing and the law.
Reading: AP stylebook, S-Z.
Assignment: AP style quiz; libel exercise.

Monday, Sept. 7
No class; Labor Day.

Wednesday, Sept. 9
Reading: http://jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu
Assignments: Quiz on MEJO stylebook; story editing in WordPress.

Monday, Sept. 14
Topic: Headline writing.
Assignment: Critiquing headlines.

Wednesday, Sept. 16 (Zoom)
Topic: More headlines.
Assignment: Headline/editing exercise.

Monday, Sept. 21 (Zoom)
Assignment: Editing a features story from MEJO 356.

Wednesday, Sept. 23
Topic: Observing the editor-writer relationship.
Viewing: "Spotlight"

Monday, Sept. 28
Topic: Photos and captions.
Assignment: Caption-writing exercise.

Wednesday, Sept. 30 (Zoom)
Topic: Photo galleries.
Assignment: Putting together a photo gallery.

Monday, Oct. 5 (Zoom)
Topic: Layering information — headline, image and words.
Assignment: Story package in WordPress.

Wednesday, Oct. 7
Topic: Midterm exam.

Monday, Oct. 12
No class; University Day.

Wednesday, Oct. 14 (Zoom)
Assignment: Editing a features story from MEJO 356.

Monday, Oct. 19
Topic: Editing opinion pieces.
Assignment: Editing an op-ed column.

Wednesday, Oct. 21 (Zoom)
Topic: Editing and wikis.
Assignment: Creating and editing a local wiki page.

Monday, Oct. 26
Topic: Exploring alternative story forms.
Assignment: Remixing a news story.

Wednesday, Oct. 28 (Zoom)
Topic: Email newsletters.
Assignment: Curating an email newsletter.

Monday, Nov. 2 (Zoom)
Topic: Editing and social media.
Assignment: Tweeting the news.

Wednesday, Nov. 4 (Zoom)
Topic: Pushing the news.
Assignment: Writing push notifications.

Monday, Nov. 9 (Zoom)
Assignment: Editing a features story from MEJO 356.

Wednesday, Nov. 11 (Zoom)
Topic: Editing news obituaries.
Assignment: Editing a news obituary using Wakelet.

Monday, Nov. 16 (Zoom)
Topic: Review for final exam.

Exam week (date and time to be announced)
Assignment: Final exam.

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.