

MEJO 153.12 Writing and Reporting General Requirements, Testing and Grading Fall 2021

When: Tuesdays/Thursdays 2-3:15 p.m.

Where: Carroll 141

Instructor: Hailey Allen Steele

Email: hgsteele@ad.unc.edu

Drop-in office hours: Tuesday 1-2 p.m. and Wednesday 12-1 p.m. in Carroll Hall 369, or by appointment via Zoom

I. What to expect from MEJO 153:

MEJO 153 concentrates on teaching students how to gather and organize information and how to write news articles, press releases, broadcast scripts and digital stories on deadline according to acceptable professional standards. The course emphasizes respect for and correct use of the language, with particular attention given to spelling and grammar, style consistency, accuracy and clear writing. Consideration is also paid to bias, libel and ethical considerations. Students will use research and interviewing in their work.

This course will be “flipped,” meaning that lectures and quizzes will be completed on your own time before each class session. All materials and instructions are found under the LESSONS tab on Sakai. Expect to spend one to two hours before each class period completing the day’s material. This will allow us to spend class time reporting, writing and editing.

The faculty of the Hussman School of Journalism and Media 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 in Communication

MEJO 153 abides by standards communication professions follow and expect of graduates of a professional school like the Hussman School of Journalism and Media. These skills are expected of a professional practitioner of journalism in any field.

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 get to the point; 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 all 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 organization.

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 operation; knowledge of community, regional, national and international events; regular and thorough reading of the news.

Judgment — Commitment to fairness and balance; ability to recognize and assess possible adverse consequences of actions; knowledge of, respect for and observance of the organization's policies.

The work accomplished in the writing and reporting 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 and releases 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 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. Required Materials

1. Texts.

- **Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing, Sixth Edition** (Pearson, 2013)
- **The Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law** (hard copy or online subscription)
- **The Hussman School stylebook accessible at <http://jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu/>**
- **Webster's New World Dictionary**

You can use yourdictionary.com for free, BUT you MUST selected only this version under Filter. If you rely on any other dictionaries in print or online, style errors might result.

2. A laptop computer.

You should bring your laptop to every class, as we will use our class time primarily for writing, reporting and editing your work. All undergraduate students, including students enrolled in MJ-school courses, must have a laptop for class use that meets or exceeds Carolina Computing Initiative minimum specifications. Be aware that some computers, such as Chromebooks, do not meet those specs. More information here. <https://cci.unc.edu/new-students/mjrecommendation>.

B. Course Requirements

1. **News Reading.** You will be required to read specific news publications and I may quiz you on the content during the semester. Recommended news publications will be listed on Sakai in the "Resources" section, or they will be specified as part of your lesson for the days preceding a quiz.

In this class you will learn to become a more critical consumer of news from all sources. As you begin to study journalism and media, you might find it particularly useful to read a national newspaper like The New York Times or Wall Street Journal as well as a local paper.

2. Attendance.* MEJO 153 is a professional course. You are expected to assume a professional attitude as a participant. Your active participation is required, and punctuality is essential. Most of the work you complete in this section of MEJO 153 will be done during class. Make-up work 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. (University attendance policy is below.)

3. Assignments and Deadlines.* All writing assignments must be double-spaced, copyedited and turned in on time. Every effort is made to simulate realistic professional conditions in class. All assignments must meet deadlines.

If accepted at all, 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.

****We are living in extraordinary days. Please approach yourselves and each other with patience, compassion and care. I will do the same, and we will get through this together.***

4. Outside Assignments. During the course, you may be expected to gather information and write stories about events outside of regularly scheduled class sessions. Individual instructors will determine assignments. You will be made aware of any expectations of any synchronous, required events well in advance.

5. Research. Stories, whether news articles or persuasive pieces, need facts. You will be required to do research 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 <https://guides.lib.unc.edu/reporting-news> .

C. Editing, Format and Style of Writing Assignments

1. Copy Preparation. I 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. I 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 their 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 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.

3. Consideration of Audience. When you write, you must consider your audience. For each assignment, I will tell you the intended audience.

IV. Grading, assignments and tests

A. Grading

Please read the document called *GRADING FOR MEJO 153 in Sakai resources*. It has important information about what is expected in your work and specific rubrics on how you will be graded. The first few quizzes/writing assignments will be an adjustment for many. AP Style and journalistic writing takes repetition and practice.

90 - 100 = A (highest level of attainment / suitable for publication in a professional news source with minor edits)
 80 - 89 = B (high level of attainment / acceptable work from an undergraduate intern at a professional news organization)
 70 - 79 = C (adequate level of attainment / but not yet appropriate for submission to a professional news source)
 60 - 69 = D (minimal level of attainment)
 <60 = 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. Undergraduate journalism majors must pass the course with a C to receive credit. Graduate students must earn at least a B.

B. Assignments

All assignments must meet deadlines. This is the way your grade will be computed:

70%: All in-class and Sakai quizzes and writing assignments. Quizzes are on copy editing, AP and UNC-CH style, language use and other subjects we cover. Quizzes are open book.

10%: First competency exam

10%: Second competency exam

10%: Final exam (Third competency exam)

Sakai readings, assignments and quizzes are due at the beginning of each class. You may work ahead. **Lessons on Sakai might include:** a short grammar or style video with a quiz, a reading assignment from the textbook and/or other source with a comprehension quiz, a PowerPoint lesson and finally, a “search and find,” in which you will be asked to come to class with an idea, a document, a writing example or other information explained in the lesson.

In person (or via Zoom), you will be working on reporting and writing assignments. All writing assignments must be typed, double-spaced, copyedited and turned in on time via the Sakai Assignments section. Every effort is made to simulate realistic professional conditions. You should expect to be assigned at least one writing assignment in nearly every class session.

Class assignments might include: writing an article from a handout of facts, doing research to supplement your information-gathering, gathering information and writing stories about events outside of regularly scheduled class sessions. Other 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. For specific rubrics on how assignments are graded, refer to the “Grading for MEJO 153” document in Sakai resources.

C. Exam dates

First competency exam: Thursday, Oct. 7

Second competency exam: Thursday, Nov. 11

Final exam (Third competency exam): Tuesday, Dec. 7 12 p.m.

Grammar and Usage Test: Thursday, Nov. 18 (Does not count as a grade in this course, but you must take it during 153.)

About Common Competency Exams

The Hussman School of Journalism and Media 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, broadcast, public relations and digital writing, 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-copied story, applying in practice all the skills and principles you have learned throughout the semester. You will either select the event to be covered or your instructor will assign it.

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.

D. Quizzes: Current Events, Language Use, Style

Quizzes for this course will be outlined in the course schedule on Sakai and completed outside of class. 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. You might be quizzed 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.

E. Written Assignments

You should expect to be assigned at least one writing assignment in nearly every class session. You might receive a handout with information from which to write an assignment, or I might read a set of facts to you. You will also be expected to do research to supplement your information-gathering. I will set guidelines for those assignments before or during each class meeting.

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

F. Usage and Grammar Test

In addition to coursework and exams, ***you will take the Usage and Grammar Test this semester during our class session on Thursday, Nov. 18.*** It is a timed 40-minute test given electronically through Sakai that consists of 100 multiple-choice questions. This test does NOT count as a grade in this course, but you are required to take the Usage and Grammar Test during the semester in which you are enrolled in 153. Passage of the test with a 70 or higher is required for graduation from the school. Study guides are available at <http://hussman.unc.edu/ugtest>.

V. Course Schedule

Weeks 1-8 Competencies *At the end of eight weeks of classes, students should be able to demonstrate the following competencies when writing a news story based on a set of facts:*

1. Select appropriate information from a set of facts to write a concise summary lead;
2. Organize the story properly, accurately and completely;
3. Copyedit the story according to AP and UNC-CH style;
4. Intro to writing online;
5. Use proper spelling and grammar;
6. Develop interviewing techniques;
7. Use quotes and attribution appropriately; and
8. Develop basic research skills using the Internet and other resources

Week	Date	Topic	Textbook Readings
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1	Thurs. Aug. 19	Introduction	Course syllabus; Grading for MEJO 153.pdf
2	Tues. Aug. 24	Nature of news; copy editing	Ch. 1-2, Appendix A; AP and UNC stylebooks
	Thurs. Aug. 26	Editing as part of writing	Ch. 3, Appendices A, B; AP and UNC Stylebooks
3	Tues. Aug. 31	Writing and grammar	Ch. 4
	Thurs. Sept. 2	Leads	Ch. 5
4	Tues. Sept. 7	Leads	Ch. 5
	Thurs. Sept. 9	Story organization	Ch. 6
5	Tues. Sept. 14	Story organization	Ch. 6
	Thurs. Sept 16	Traditional and internet research	Ch. 9
6	Tues. Sept. 21	Interviewing	Ch. 10
	Thurs. Sept. 23	Quotes and attribution	Ch. 10
7	Tues. Sept. 28	Spot news	Ch. 7
	Thurs. Sept. 30	Other story formats	Ch. 7
8	Tues. Oct. 5	Speeches, news conferences	Ch. 7
	Thurs. Oct. 7	Writing for digital; social media	Ch. 8

Weeks 9-16: Competencies At the end of 16 weeks of classes, students should be able to demonstrate the following competencies while conceptualizing, reporting and writing an event-based news story:

1. How to research, organize and write a variety of types and formats of news stories;
2. Techniques of good writing and editing;
3. Watch for any libelous material;
4. Intro to public relations writing;
5. Intro to broadcast writing;
6. Ethics;
7. Familiarity with public records and documents.

Week #	Date	Topic	Textbook Readings
9	Tues. Oct. 12	No class	
	Thurs. Oct. 14	Review for Competency 1	
10	Tues. Oct. 19	Exam: Competency 1	
	Thurs. Oct. 21	No class	
11	Tues.	Bias and stereotypes	Ch. 11

	Oct. 26		
	Thurs. Oct. 28	Libel and ethics	Ch. 12
12	Tues. Nov. 2	Broadcast Writing	Ch. 13
	Thurs. Nov. 4	Public Relations Writing	Ch. 14
13	Tues. Nov. 9	Review for Competency 2	
	Thurs. Nov. 11	Exam: Competency 2	
14	Tues. Nov. 16	More difficult stories	
	Thurs. Nov. 18	Grammar and Usage Exam	
15	Tues. Nov. 23	Public records and documents	
	Thurs. Nov. 25	No class	
16	Tues. Nov. 30	Final exam review /LDOC	
FINAL	Tues. Dec. 7	Final (Third Competency Exam): 12 p.m.	

University and School Policies

Honor Code. I expect that each student will conduct themselves within the guidelines of the University honor system (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. You are expected to produce your own work in this class. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean C. A. Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

You are expected to produce your own work in this class. 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. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <http://instrument.unc.edu/basicframe.html>. You should review it.

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.

If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please see the course instructor or Senior Associate Dean Charlie Tuggle, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

ATTENDANCE:

University Policy:

No right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC).

SYLLABUS CHANGES

The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

ARS

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu. (source: <https://ars.unc.edu/faculty-staff/syllabus-statement>)

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

CAPS is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body through timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services, whether for short or long-term needs. Go to their website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

TITLE IX

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim – titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

POLICY ON NON-DISCRIMINATION

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's [Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination](#) offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, creed, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied. If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (see contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#), or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to improve; I appreciate any suggestions. More broadly, our school has adopted diversity and inclusion [mission and vision statements](#) with accompanying goals. These complement the University policy on [prohibiting harrassment and discrimination](#). In summary, UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and 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. The Dean of Students (Suite 1106, Student Academic Services Building, CB# 5100, 450 Ridge Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-5100 or [919] 966-4042) has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the University's nondiscrimination policies.

MASK USE

All enrolled students are required to wear a mask covering your mouth and nose at all times in our classroom. This requirement is to protect our educational community -- your classmates and me -- as we learn together. If you choose not to wear a mask, or wear it improperly, I will ask you to leave immediately, and I will submit a report to the [Office of Student Conduct](#). At that point you will be disenrolled from this course for the protection of our educational community. Students who have an authorized accommodation from Accessibility Resources and Service have an exception. For additional information, see <https://carolinatogether.unc.edu/university-guidelines-for-facemasks/>.