

## **MEJO 557: News Editing**

### **Fall 2021**

**Meeting time:** Monday-Wednesday, 2:45 p.m. to 5 p.m.

**Meeting places:** 253 Carroll. Some class meetings make take place on Zoom.

**Instructor:** Andy Bechtel

**Email:** [abechtel@email.unc.edu](mailto:abechtel@email.unc.edu)

**Website:** [editdesk.wordpress.com](http://editdesk.wordpress.com)

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

**Office hours, via Zoom:** Tuesdays from noon to 3 p.m. in Carroll 213, and by appointment at [unc.zoom.us/j/2132660379](https://unc.zoom.us/j/2132660379).

**Overview:** Welcome to MEJO 557. In this course, you will learn how to edit news stories and how to write photo captions, tweets, push notifications and headlines. You'll become an expert in Associated Press 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](http://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.

**Assignments:** The work in this course 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. The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus,

**Grading:** Your assignments will be graded on a point system. The more complex the assignment, the more it's worth. 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

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

- Authorized University activities
- Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by Accessibility Resources and Service and/or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (EOC)
- 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).

**Class attendance policy:** Attendance and punctuality are crucial because nearly all of the work you do in this course will take place in class. 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.

**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. 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. 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>.

**Title IX:** Any student who is affected 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](mailto:titleixcoordinator@unc.edu)), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office ([reportandresponse@unc.edu](mailto:reportandresponse@unc.edu)), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators ([gvsc@unc.edu](mailto:gvsc@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](http://safe.unc.edu).

**ARS:** UNC-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 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](mailto:ars@unc.edu).

**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 the website: <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit the facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health Services building for a walk-in evaluation to learn more.

**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](http://safe.unc.edu)) or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office, or online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>.

**Diversity:** I strive to make our 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 harassment 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 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.

**Honor code:** Students are expected to 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. 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.

**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](mailto:ars@unc.edu).

## **Tentative schedule**

### **Wednesday, Aug. 18**

Topic: Introductions.

### **Monday, Aug. 23**

Topics: What editors do; getting down to basics.

Reading: Punctuation section of AP Stylebook.

Assignment: Punctuation exercise.

### **Wednesday, Aug. 25**

Topic: Eliminating redundancy, misspellings and other miscues.

Readings: AP Stylebook A-G.

Assignments: Conciseness/editing exercise; AP style quiz.

### **Monday, Aug. 30**

Topics: Story editing and linking.

Assignment: Editing a news story.

### **Wednesday, Sept. 1**

Topic: Watching out for bias and avoiding stereotypes.

Reading: AP Stylebook, H-R.

Assignments: Settling a style question; AP style quiz.

Guest speaker: Laura Poole, freelance editor.

### **Monday, Sept. 6**

*No class, Labor Day*

### **Wednesday, Sept. 8**

Topic: Editing and the law; internships and careers.

Reading: AP stylebook, S-Z.

Assignment: AP style quiz; libel exercise.

### **Monday, Sept. 13**

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

Assignment: Fact-checking exercises.

**Wednesday, Sept. 15**

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

Assignments: Quiz on MEJO stylebook; story editing in WordPress.

**Monday, Sept. 20**

Topic: Headline writing.

Assignment: Critiquing headlines.

**Wednesday, Sept. 22**

Topic: More headlines.

Assignment: Headline/editing exercise.

**Monday, Sept. 27**

Topic: Observing the editor-writer relationship.

Viewing: "Spotlight"

**Wednesday, Sept. 29**

Assignment: Editing a features story from MEJO 356.

**Monday, Oct. 4**

Topic: Photos and captions.

Assignment: Caption-writing exercise.

**Wednesday, Oct. 6**

Topic: Photo galleries.

Assignment: Putting together a photo gallery.

**Monday, Oct. 11**

Topic: Layering information — headline, image and words.

Assignment: Story package in WordPress.

**Wednesday, Oct. 13**

Assignment: Midterm exam.

**Monday, Oct. 18**

Topic: Alternative story forms.

Assignment: News site critique.

**Wednesday, Oct. 22**

Topic: Alternative story forms.

Assignment: Remixing a news story.

**Monday, Oct. 25**

Assignment: Editing a features story from MEJO 356.

**Wednesday, Oct. 27**

Topic: Editing opinion pieces.

Assignment: Editing an opinion column.

**Monday, Nov. 1**

Topic: Pushing the news.

Assignment: Writing push notifications.

**Wednesday, Nov. 3**

Topic: Editing and wikis.

Assignment: Creating and editing a local wiki page.

**Monday, Nov. 8**

Topic: Email newsletters.

Assignment: Curating an email newsletter.

**Wednesday, Nov. 10**

Assignment: Editing a features story from MEJO 356.

**Monday, Nov. 15**

Topic: Editing and social media.

Assignment: Tweeting the news.

**Wednesday, Nov. 17**

Assignment: Live-tweeting an event.

**Monday, Nov. 22**

Assignment: Editing stories from MEJO 553.

**Wednesday, Nov. 24**

*No class; Thanksgiving.*

**Monday, Nov. 29**

Assignment: Work on site critiques.

**Wednesday, Dec. 1**

Topics: Presentation of critiques and review for final exam.

**Friday, Dec. 3 (4 p.m)**

Assignment: Final exam.

**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.



## **ACEJMC values and competencies relevant to this course**

The Hussman School of Journalism and Media accrediting body outlines several values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program.

Learn more about them here:

<http://www2.ku.edu/~acejmc/PROGRAM/PRINCIPLES.SHTML#vals&comps>

No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our classes are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In this class, we will address several the values and competencies, with special emphasis on the "professional values and competencies" listed below.

- 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.