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SYLLABUS

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SYLLABUS

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Writing and Reporting is an introductory laboratory course that teaches journalistic skills essential to writing across platforms. Practice in using news gathering tools, such as sourcing and interviewing techniques; writing stories, including leads, organization, quotations, and data; editing for grammar, punctuation, brevity, style, and accuracy; and critical thinking about news values and audiences.

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 stress on spelling and grammar, style consistency, accuracy and clear writing. Attention is also paid to bias, libel and ethical considerations. Students will use research and interviewing in their work.

COURSE GOALS

MEJO 153 abides by standards the communications professions follow and expect of graduates of a professional school such as 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

suggestions, interest in an 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.

YOUR INSTRUCTOR

Instructor: [Ryan Thornburg, ryan.thornburg@unc.edu](mailto:ryan.thornburg@unc.edu)

Department: *Hussman School of Journalism and Media*

REQUIRED MATERIALS

TEXTBOOKS

Explanation of required textbook and materials, if applicable.

The following texts are required

- Yopp and McAdams, [Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing, Sixth Edition](#)
- [The Associated Press Stylebook Online](#)
- [UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media Stylebook](#)
- Webster's New World College Dictionary, Fifth Edition

You will also need access to the following news sites:

- [New York Times \(free to UNC students\)](#)
- [WRAL](#)

- [The Daily Tar Heel](#)

Other readings specific to each lesson are listed on Sakai. Any readings not found in the required textbooks are available either through the Course Reserves tab or through links to free online versions.

LIBRARY SERVICES AND COURSE RESERVES

Students enrolled in this course have access to the UNC Library System. Visit [Distance Education Library Services](#) to access a wide array of online services and resources including Course Reserves, online databases, online journals, online books, and live help with research and library access. **Most online resources require you to log in with your Onyen and password.** If you have any trouble finding the resource that you need or logging in to a resource, you can contact the library through the contact information at Distance Education Library Services. You can chat live about your problem or send an email to request assistance.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EXAMS

The following components of this course will contribute to your grade.

WRITING EXERCISES: 50 PERCENT OF FINAL GRADE

You will be writing one or more practice writing exercises each week. During the first three weeks of the course, you will write approximately seven practice stories for which you will be given information you do not have to verify. These practice writing sessions will assess your news judgment as well as your ability to write with brevity, clarity and precision on deadline. During the final 12 weeks of the semester you will have about five advanced stories that will require outside research and reporting. In addition to your ability to write in journalistic style, these assignments will test your ability to verify information through documentary research, observation and interviews.

EXAMS: 30 PERCENT OF FINAL GRADE

During the course of the semester you will have three comprehensive exams.

- Comp 1 will be a writing assignment given during the fourth week of class

- Comp 2 will be a test or reading comprehension, grammar and AP style given during the 12th week of class
- Comp 3 will be a reporting and writing assignment due on the last day of class. (As of the start of the first day of classes, the University has not published a final exam schedule.)

READING QUIZZES: 10 PERCENT OF FINAL GRADE

Giving throughout the semester, these quizzes will test your understanding of the concepts presented in reading materials

WEEKLY NEWS DISCUSSION: 10 PERCENT OF FINAL GRADE

One of the hallmarks of successful students in this class is regular critical reading of contemporary journalism. Each week you will be required to post a critique of a news article that demonstrates your understanding of the concepts we are learning about and practicing.

GRADING SCALE

Percentages will be converted to letter grades according to the following scale.

Letter Grade	Percentage	Meaning
A	94–100%	Highest level of attainment / suitable for publication in a professional news source with minor edits
A-	90–93%	
B+	87–89%	High level of attainment / acceptable work from an undergraduate intern at a professional news organization
B	83–86%	
B-	80–82%	
C+	77–79%	Adequate level of attainment / but not yet appropriate for submission to a professional news source

C	73–76%	
C-	70–72%	
D+	67–69%	Minimal level of attainment. Shows growth but falls below standard
D	60–66%	
F	0–59%	Failing: Deficient. Unacceptable performance

COURSE POLICIES

ATTENDANCE

Much of the work for this class will be done asynchronously to accommodate remote learning across time zones. Synchronous class sessions will be announced in advance and held via Zoom. Recordings of the Zoom meetings will be recorded and made available for students.

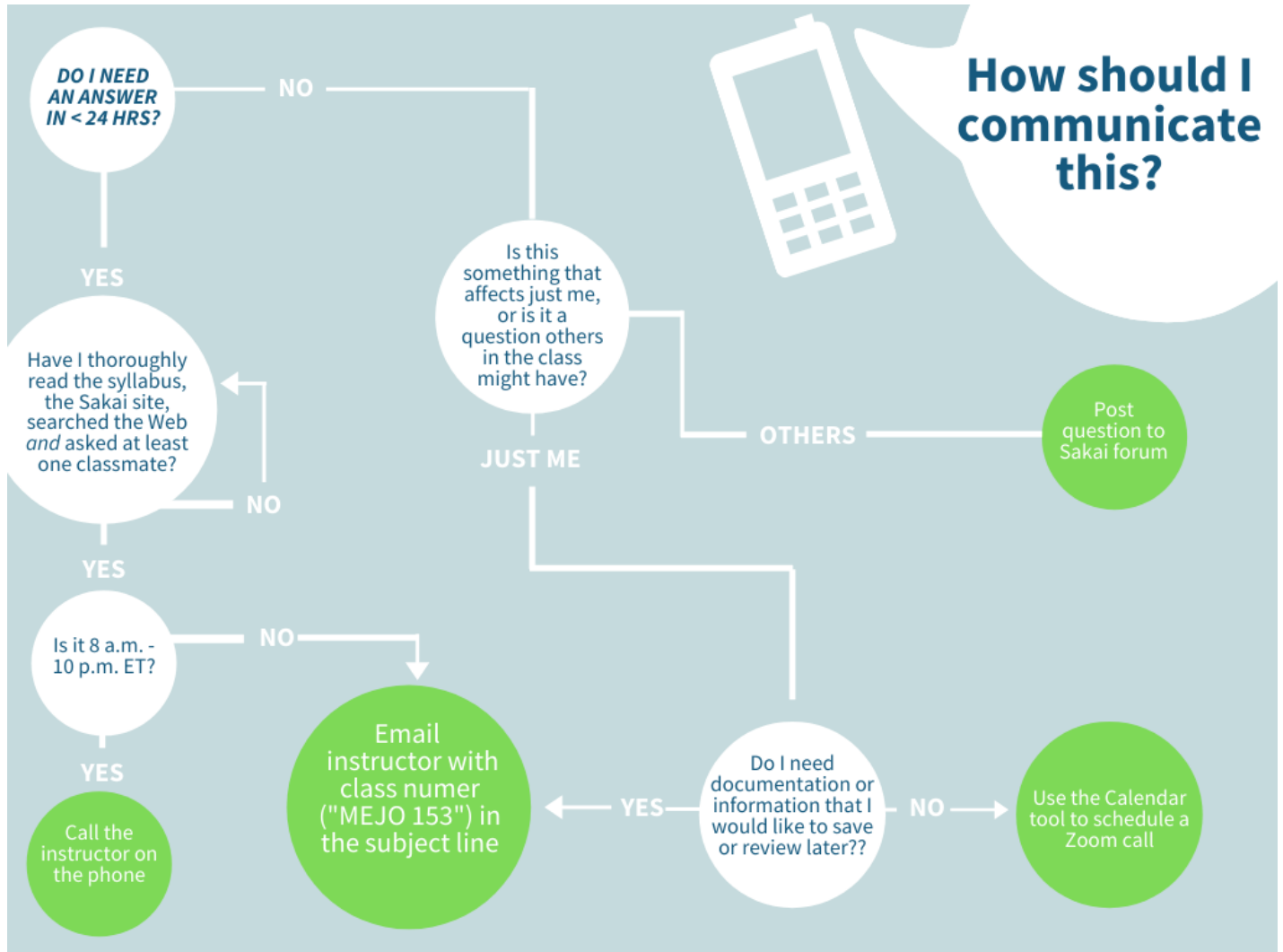
Community Standards for Online Video Sessions

- Students are expected to be online and ready to begin class prior to the start of each session.
- Students should begin sessions with video on if possible. They may turn video off when not speaking or participating in small group discussions.
- When speaking or participating in small group discussions, students will have their video on unless bandwidth limitations do not allow.
- Students should keep their audio muted when not speaking.
- The instructor will record all sessions and make them available online for enrolled students to view later. At the end of the semester, the instructor will delete any online and offline copies of these videos to which he has access.
- The audio and visual content of online class sessions are intended for use only by enrolled students and only during the session for which they are enrolled. Students will not do anything that would make audio or visual content from class sessions available to anyone not enrolled in the class. At the end of the course, students are expected to delete any copies of audio or visual content from class

students are expected to delete any copies of audio or visual content from class sessions that they have made.

COMMUNICATION

The asynchronous nature of this course is intended to open up more of my time to work with students individually. Much of this communication will occur in the comments and edits I make to your written assignments, but I will also be available to talk in person or via video chat.



- **Office Phone:** (919) 567-3681 (It will forward to my mobile if I'm not in my office.)
- **Email:** ryan.thornburg@unc.edu
- **Sakai forum**
- **Zoom office hour meetings scheduler:** [15-minute check-in](#) | [30-minute](#)

[2020 Office Hour Meetings Schedule](#) | [15 minute check-in](#) | [30 minute meeting](#) | [Group Office Hours](#) (reserved for groups of 2-5)

LATE SUBMISSIONS

Please see Assignments section and Lessons pages for deadlines. If accepted at all, late assignments 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.

EVALUATION OF WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Review your papers immediately and thoroughly. It's an important part of your learning. Your instructor turns papers around rapidly in the expectation that you will learn from your errors and avoid repeating them.

Grades are determined by plus and minus points on each assignment. Plus points are added when the work is above the ordinary, but not when the work is at an average level. Superior papers containing few errors can achieve scores above 100. Minus points will be deducted for each error and from work that falls below the minimum level of acceptability.

Below is a grading guide to three main areas your instructor will consider in deducting or adding points to your stories.

1. Writing

In evaluating writing, the instructor considers the quality of the lead, use of language, conciseness, completeness, readability, organization of material and transition, among other factors.

+5 for an exceptionally effective lead and supporting material

+5 to +10 for exceptionally effective organization and treatment of material

+2 for effective transition or introduction of material

+2 to +10 for excellence in quality of information gathered and used

-2 for ineffective or missing treatment of transition or introduction of material

-2 to -10 for ineffective organization or treatment of material, including but not limited to, wordiness; use of jargon or clichés; inclusion of unnecessary, non-newsworthy or obvious information; repetition; redundancy; inappropriate choice or use of quoted material; incorrect word choice

-5 to -10 for an ineffective lead that needs work or story that lacks supporting material for a lead

-15 to -20 for missing the lead entirely or burying it

2. Mechanics

Some otherwise good writers fail to communicate clearly because they are weak in grammar, punctuation or spelling skills. That is unacceptable in any communications profession, and that is why such fundamental language skills are emphasized. Points are deducted for style, spelling, grammar and punctuation errors according to this scale:

-1 for a form error, such as failure to mark a paragraph for indenting or failing to show an end mark at the end of a story

-2 for each error or inconsistency in style

-2 for excessively long or complicated sentences or paragraphs

-5 for each spelling error, and a typographical mistake (a typo) is considered a spelling error

-5 for each punctuation error, such as incorrect use of a comma, semicolon, colon or dash

-5 for each grammatical error, such as improper subject-verb agreement or noun-pronoun agreement, or misplaced modifier

-10 for a minor factual error, such as an inaccurate street address or the time element if the effect on the story is relatively insignificant

-50 for a misspelled name of a person, business, agency or institution on first reference, a misquote or other major factual error. Writing the School of Medias and Journalism would be a -50 because there is no “s” on the end of Medias. (Besides, it’s the School of Journalism and Media.) Until the first competency exam in MEJO 153, each major factual error will result in a deduction of 25 points, not 50, from a paper’s total grade. This grace period will allow you to become familiar with standards of verification and accuracy expected of communications professionals. After the first competency exam, such errors will receive the 50-point deduction. This deduction is not an arbitrary punishment. Such errors go to the heart of credibility for you and your organization. Errors can also have serious legal ramifications, such as libel suits.

-10 for misspelling a person's name on second or later references (e.g., Brown on first reference, Brwon on second reference)

3. Reporting

These reporting criteria apply to stories for which you gather the information:

+ or - 5 to 10 for source selection — quality and number of sources used; appropriateness of individual sources for the topic, including the level of expertise or authority involved (students could lose points here for relying too heavily on online sources, not having a variety of sources or not including a human source)

+ or - 5 to 20 for thoroughness of story — existence of loose ends, holes or unanswered questions; development of significant angles; inclusion of needed detail; information to make story fair and complete

+ or - 5 to 15 for story backgrounding — research necessary to make the story complete or to provide needed explanations; preparation for interviews or meetings; shows understanding of the general topic

+ or - 20 for legal errors, such as libel, violation of legal right of privacy, copyright

+ or - 20 for legal errors, such as libel, violation of legal right of privacy, copyright violation and others

NOTE: Many of these plus and minus points may be applied to the same story for recurring errors or for continual superior performance.

ACCREDITATION

The School of Journalism and Mass Communication's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and [competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate](#)] from our program.

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 a number of the values and competencies, with special emphasis on the last six bullet dots under "Professional values and competencies" in the link above.



Academic Policies and Services
