

## MEJO 153 Writing and Reporting General Requirements, Testing and Grading Fall 2021

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### I. INTRODUCTION

This handout explains expectations of you as a student in MEJO 153, “Writing and Reporting.” The handout also describes the general types of assignments and tests in the course and the criteria instructors will use to evaluate and grade your work.

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.

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

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, 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. Course Materials

##### 1. Required Texts.

Yopp and McAdams, *Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing*, Sixth Edition

*The most recent Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*

*The Hussman School stylebook* accessible at <http://jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu/>

**4. Computers.** 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>. **Bring your laptop to class.**

## B. Course Requirements

**1. News Reading.** Your instructor may require you to read specific news publications and may quiz you on the content during the semester.

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. Attendance is required, and punctuality is essential. **There are no free cuts.** In some course sections, most of the work in MEJO 153 is 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.

**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.

**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>.

**6. Honor Code.** Students 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.

### **C. Editing, Format and Style of Writing Assignments**

**1. Copy Preparation.** Your instructor 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. Instructors 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 his or her 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, your instructor will tell you the intended audience.

#### **IV. TESTS AND ASSIGNMENTS — THE COMPONENTS OF GRADES**

The structure of assignments in this section of 153 may be different than other sections. In this section we will see newswriting through a broad lens that focuses on meeting the needs of a specific information audience and writing in a way that achieves product-market fit. This is appropriate for a professional school in a rapidly changing profession.

Your final grade will be determined out of about 1,160 points.

##### **A. Major Assignments: 675 points**

Students in this course will complete three major assignments, each worth 225 points. Two of the major assignments – an event-driven news story and a life profile – will be part of a final online writing portfolio must be completed before the end of the final exam period for this class. This semester that is 3 p.m. on Dec. 6.

The third major assignment, an FAQ, will be due Oct. 18.

##### **B. Daily News Critiques: 180 points**

Critical reading of a wide variety of news sources is one of the best predictors of success in this class. You will be required to read news every day and post a summary of one news article each day. These very brief daily news critiques will provide our topics for in-class discussion each Monday.

##### **C. Writing Exercises: 130 points**

On each Monday for the final 10 weeks of the semester students will distill a set of facts into a one-paragraph summary news lead on deadline. Students will be assessed on writing with precision and brevity as well as their news judgment.

##### **D. Warm-up Assignments: 75 points**

Before each major assignment, students will complete a low-stakes warm-up assignment that will include peer editing and feedback from the professor.

##### **E. Style Hunt: 50 points**

Each Monday two students will give a 5-minute presentation about a specific group of AP Style rules and how they help or hurt our ability to reach audiences. The first group presentation will be Sept. 20 and the last will be Nov. 20.

##### **G. Audience & Product Assignments: 50 points**

At the start of the semester students will complete interviews and observations of each other's information needs and habits and present those as a user persona. That user persona will become part of a news product canvas that will give each student their own topical focus for the semester.

## V. GRADING

### A. Grading Policy

Instructors in the Hussman School of Journalism and Media are known for their high standards and their fair but rigorous grading. The following statement sets forth the School's grading standards, which are followed in evaluating work in all of its writing and reporting courses. Instructors consider each assignment as a professional editor would, applying the same professional guidelines and standards that any good editor would in accepting or rejecting stories from reporters. The grading system here is the basis for other writing courses such as MEJO 253, "Intro to Public Affairs Reporting," and MEJO 332, "Public Relations Writing."

News and other professionals must be able to report and write and produce newsworthy, accurate, fair, complete, interesting, readable and mechanically clean stories. Thus, grades reflect a student's performance as a reporter, as a writer and as one who uses the language correctly. In evaluating the **writing**, the instructor considers the quality of the lead, use of language, economy of expression, readability, organization of material and transition, among other factors. In evaluating the **mechanical** dimension, the instructor considers spelling, grammar, punctuation, conformity to AP and UNC-CH style, proper copyediting symbols and similar factors. In evaluating the **reporting**, the instructor considers news judgment in gathering, evaluating and selecting information used in the story, accuracy, approach to the story, choice and use of appropriate sources, thoroughness, use of appropriate information-gathering methodologies and related factors.

### B. 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

MEJO majors must receive a C- or better in this course in order to meet the graduation requirement.

### **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](mailto: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](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 ([gvs@unc.edu](mailto:gvs@unc.edu); confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at [safe.unc.edu](http://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](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 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 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'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.