

MEJO 153: Writing and Reporting | Summer 2022

Hussman School of Journalism and Media
The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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Time and Location: Online via Zoom, M-F, 9:45-11:15 a.m.

Zoom Link: <https://unc.zoom.us/j/93095565601>

Course Website: <https://sakai.unc.edu/portal/site/730cbec7-adda-4e4f-8543-fc74faa6dc61>

Office Hours: By appointment.

Welcome to MEJO 153! This handout explains expectations of you as a student in this course. The handout also describes the general types of assignments and tests in the course and the criteria I will use to evaluate and grade your work.

To stay on track during this fast-paced course, I will utilize Sakai's calendar feature. By clicking on each class date, you will find a) what we will be reviewing in class and b) what you need to complete for the following class period.

This is a working document, with changes to come as needed. I will notify you should that be the case.

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I. Introduction

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 professional standards. The course emphasizes respect for the correct use of 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. Basically, you are learning the basics.

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 such 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, television, radio, social media or other communications fields. Communicators in all fields report or gather and assess information; consider audiences and language; write copy; and deliver stories or messages.

II. Professional Standards

MEJO 153 abides by standards followed by communications professionals. All graduates of the Hussman School of Journalism and Media are expected to be able to adhere to these standards.

Writing Ability	Grammar and spelling; ability to tell a good story well; appropriate use of quotes, anecdotes and descriptive detail; use of active voice and strong verbs; ability to write leads that invite and get to the point; ability to write tightly and organize information in logical, compelling sequences.
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 this writing and reporting course serves as a foundation for students in all subsequent Hussman School classes. At the end of the course, students should be better writers who are able to effectively gather, evaluate, organize, and clearly present information in writing.

**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. In addition, you are expressly forbidden from presenting material that has been substantially edited by a professor as your own work, because that can constitute plagiarism.*

III. General Course Requirements

Required Materials

Required Texts

Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing (Sixth Edition) by Yopp and McAdams

Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law (55th Edition - published in 2020) available online at apstylebook.com

The Hussman School of Media and Journalism Stylebook, available online at jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu

Webster's New World Dictionary

Recommended for Further Readings

The Elements of Journalism by Kovach, Bill and Tom Rosentiel

Elements of Style by Strunk, William Jr. and E.B. White

Talk to Me: How to Ask Better Questions, Get Better Answers, and Interview Anyone Like a Pro by Nelson, Dean.

Webster's New World Dictionary

Books are sold in the textbook division of Student Stores, and all reserve reading materials can be accessed online through the course's Sakai website.

Reference Materials: All students have access to online reference materials, such as dictionaries and stylebooks. Use these materials before, after, and during class to double-check accuracy. If you

are having problems understanding or using reference materials, please contact the Director of the Park Library, librarian Stephanie Willen Brown (swbrown@unc.edu).

Computers: Please attend class on a computer or tablet with a keyboard, so that you can type and do assignments during class time. I prefer you not call in via your phone unless necessary.

Course Requirements

News Reading	<p>As a journalism student, you are expected to be a regular consumer of news. All Hussman students have access to the Washington Post and the New York Times through the School. Please stay on top of national news. We will discuss news in class and there will be several topical news quizzes sprinkled throughout the semester.</p> <p>Americans consume news from a variety of sources, including Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, news websites, the radio, and maybe even an old-fashioned television set. In this class, you are expected to be a critical consumer. If you read news critically, you may be circling words, writing notes, highlighting passages or analyzing how any particular story could be done more effectively.</p> <p>For commentary on current issues in U.S. journalism, it is useful to read trade periodicals such as the <i>Columbia Journalism Review</i> or <i>Editor & Publisher</i>. There are also trade publications on public relations, advertising and other communications professions: <i>Advertising Age</i>, <i>Adweek</i>, <i>Broadcasting & Cable</i>, <i>News Photographer</i>, <i>O'Dwyer's PR Report</i>, and <i>PRWeek</i>. Access can be obtained through UNC libraries and the Hussmans School's Park Library.</p>
Attendance	<p>Attendance is required, and punctuality is essential. The majority of work in MEJO 153 is done during class while working individually in break-out groups. Make-up work will be accepted only for pre-excused absences at my discretion. It is your responsibility to notify me in advance of any intended absence. Should an emergency occur, advise me as soon as possible. All students are required to "sign in" for every single class session, of which I will take attendance at the beginning. Failing to sign in results in an attendance grade of zero for the day in question.</p>

Assignments and Deadlines	<p>All writing assignments must be single-spaced, copyedited and turned in on time. Assignments must be submitted via Sakai.</p> <p>Late work is not accepted. The ability to work on deadline is crucial for journalists. If you fail to submit work by the deadline, you will receive an F.</p> <p>Reading assignments should be completed before the appropriate class sessions for which they are assigned. There will be pop quizzes.</p>
Outside Assignments	<p>During the course, you may be expected to gather information and write stories about events outside of regularly scheduled class sessions. I will give you specific guidelines for each of those assignments.</p>
Research	<p>Stories, whether news articles or persuasive pieces, are based on 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 guides.lib.unc.edu/mejo153. To improve your research skills beyond the information in the textbook, Google has two self-paced online courses (Power Searching and Advanced Power Searching) at powersearchingwithgoogle.com. Attribution is required for all information acquired and used, whether your source is a human or a document.</p>
Honor Code	<p>The University's Honor Code is in effect in MEJO 153 as in all other courses. The Honor Code (catalog.unc.edu/policies-procedures/honor-code/) forms a bond of trust among students, faculty and administrators. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill operates under a system of self-governance, as students are responsible for governing themselves. As such, our University is transformed into a powerful community of inquiry and learning. The Honor Code embodies the ideals of academic honesty, integrity, and responsible citizenship, and governs the performance of all academic work a student conducts at the University. Acceptance of an offer of admission to Carolina presupposes a commitment to the principles embodied in our century-old tradition of honor and integrity.</p>

The Code of Student Conduct can be found at instrument.unc.edu/basicframe.html. 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.

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

Success:

Copy Preparation

Please copyedit all stories before turning them in. Copy is evaluated based on whether it would be ready for professional publication according to the grading rubric defined in this syllabus.

Copiediting and Style

Editing is part of the writing process. All writers review 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, use the *UNC-CH Stylebook* first, then the AP, then finally the dictionary.

You will need to become familiar with both stylebooks. Allow time to make sure your assignments conform to style requirements. This is important: you will lose points on your work if there are deviations from the stylebooks. Think of them

as *The Rules Of Journalistic Writing*. There will be AP style quizzes throughout the semester.

You may find it useful to use Twitter to ask questions about AP style. You can either tag your post with the #apstyle and/or send your question to @APStylebook.

If you are caught copying or plagiarizing, you will automatically fail the entire course. Please, don't do it.

The *UNC-CH Stylebook* contains a guide to punctuation rules. The Online Writing Lab at Purdue University and Newsroom 101 offer additional grammar help.

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

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.

If you have to miss an exam, it is up to the individual instructor to schedule a make-up exam. 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.

Quizzes: Current Events, Language, Use, Style

Your instructor might quiz you on current events. 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. Your instructor might choose to give quizzes 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.

Written Assignments

MEJO153 is a laboratory class. You should expect to complete at least one writing assignment in nearly every class session. The writing requirements for in-classroom and classroom-online sections are the same.

Your instructor might give you a handout with information from which to write an assignment, or he or she might read a set of facts to you. For almost all assignments, you will have 60 to 90 minutes to write and edit your work (NOTE: times may vary during summer session sections). You will also be expected to do

research to supplement your information-gathering. Your instructor will set guidelines for those assignments.

In addition to the in-class writing assignments, you will have some written out-of-class assignments during the course, as noted earlier in the handout. 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.

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

Usage and Grammar Test

The instructor will schedule the Usage and Grammar Test to be administered in the class. 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://mj.unc.edu/usagegrammar>.

V. Grading

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.

Grading Scale

Grading throughout the semester in MEJO 153 and in other writing and reporting courses in the School is conducted on a numerical scale. Each student begins each assignment with a raw score of 100. Points are added or subtracted from that according to the standards listed below. You may determine your approximate grade standing in the course by converting your numerical grades to letter grades on your assignments according to this scale:

A = 90 and above

B = 80-89

C = 70-79

D = 60-69

F = Below 60

If the instructor chooses, grades may be assigned pluses and minuses, using this scale: A numerical grade of 80-82.9 is a B-; 83-86.9 is a B; and 87-89.9 is a B+. The same applies to all letter grades except there is no A+ or D-. Check with your instructor if you are unsure about the grading scale.

Under the definitions established by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, students who receive the following letter grades are considered to have reached the level of attainment defining that letter. Thus, letter grades received for reporting and writing courses may be interpreted this way:

A = highest level of attainment / suitable for publication in a professional news source with minor edits

B = high level of attainment / acceptable work from an undergraduate intern at a professional news organization
C = adequate level of attainment / but not yet appropriate for submission to a professional news source
D = minimal level of attainment
F = failed; unacceptable performance

Grading Percentages

The aim of the course is to make students competent in the basic writing skills needed for a successful communications career and for further studies in communications. Competency will be tested in the manner described in Part A of this section. Your overall course grade will be based on all in-class work, including participation in discussions, as well as your out-of-class work throughout the semester; on quizzes; on your scores on the first two competency exams; your score on the final exam; and your participation in the weekly news discussions. This is the way your grade will be computed:

70% - All in-class work, including but not limited to exercises in class: quizzes, including those on copy editing, AP and UNC-CH style, news names and events, language use and other subjects at the instructor's discretion; outside-of-class stories; book reports or reports on communications professionals, if assigned.

10% - First Competency Exam

10% - Second Competency Exam

10% - Third Competency Exam (Final Exam)

Evaluation of Writing Assignments

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

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, Brown on second reference)

Reporting

These reporting criteria apply to stories for which you gather the information, including outside-of-class assignments and also to your selection of material furnished for in-class assignments:

+ 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 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.

Key to Writing Assignment Comments

As your instructor grades papers, they might indicate specific observations and problems on the paper. Here are some of the abbreviations commonly used in grading MEJO 153 papers:

ag	= agreement error	AP or UNC	= style error
awk	= awkward phrasing	ce	= copyediting error
gr	= grammatical error	pct	= punctuation error
red	= redundancy	rep	= repetition
sp	= spelling error	tense	= incorrect verb tense
tr	= transition problem		
wc	= incorrect or inappropriate word choice		
wordy	= excessive language that could be tighter		

Seeking Help

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability, or an illness.

Diversity

The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2011-2012 Undergraduate Bulletin <http://www.unc.edu/ugradbulletin/>. 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.

Special Accommodations

If you require special accommodations to attend or participate in this course, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. If you need information about disabilities visit the Department of Disability Services website at <http://disabilityservices.unc.edu/>

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. 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 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.

VI. Class Schedule

Week	Topics	Readings
Week 1 (June 20 - 24)	Techniques for good writing; news judgment; leads; inverted pyramid; copyediting.	Course Syllabus; <i>Yopp & McAdams</i> Chpts. 1-6
Week 2 (June 27 - July 1)	Organization; interviews; quotes/attribution/libel.	<i>Yopp & McAdams</i> Chpts. 5-6, 10, 12
July 1	Competency Exam 1	
Week 3 (July 5- 8)	Avoiding bias/stereotypes. Feature Writing	<i>Yopp & McAdams</i> , Ch. 11 <i>Yopp & McAdams</i> , Ch. 7
Week 4 (July 11-15)	Writing for Broadcast; Digital Delivery	<i>Yopp & McAdams</i> , Chpts. 8, 13
July 15	Competency Exam 2	
Week 5 (July 18 - 22)	Strategic Communication; Speech Stories	<i>Yopp & McAdam</i> , Chpts. 7, 14

Week 6 (July 25 - 26)

Review for Final