

## MEJO 153.4 Writing and Reporting Syllabus Fall 2022

*Instructor: Ryan Thornburg*

MW 12:30 – 1:45 p.m., CA 141

E-mail: [ryan.thornburg@unc.edu](mailto:ryan.thornburg@unc.edu)

*Office: 215 Carroll Hall*

Office Hours: <https://calendly.com/rtburg/meet-with-ryan>

### I. INTRODUCTION

A 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.

### II. PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

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

Writing & reporting for the media, 12<sup>th</sup> Edition. By Bender, Davenport, Drager & Fedler, Digital: EISBN13: 9780190649456, Paper: ISBN-13: 978-0190649425

Cross-Cultural Journalism: Communicating Strategically About Diversity, By Len-Rios & Perry. Chapters on electronic reserve and available in the Park Library.

The Fourth Estate documentary, available on Amazon Prime or Showtime:  
<https://www.amazon.com/Fourth-Estate-The-Season-1/dp/B07D9C9R7M>

Materials on digital reserve and freely available online, including access to The New York Times and The Washington Post

- Set up your free student account with washingtonpost.com at <https://guides.lib.unc.edu/washington-post>
- Set up your free student account with nytimes.com at <https://guides.lib.unc.edu/nyt-academic-pass>

A free subscription to the weekly email N.Y. Times News Quiz.

- Subscribe to the weekly email at <https://www.nytimes.com/newsletters>

*The 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.** One of the best predictors of success is reading news every day — not just to learn what’s going on in town and across the world, but also with a critical eye about writing and

reporting choices. News is a manufactured version of the world. Being a good citizen requires an understanding of how it's made.

## 2. Attendance.

- a. Please don't come to class if you suspect you could get other people sick.
- b. Class is where you can ask questions, share ideas and make sure you understand instructions. Absences will likely make it harder for you to learn the material you need to complete the assignments.
- c. If you know you'll be absent for any reason, it will be easier for me to help you with more advance notice.

Unless your absences become chronic, I won't ask you for an explanation.

I am not able to recreate these experiences for students who miss class. If I'm able to record class sessions I will post them to the course Sakai page.

### 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).

**3. Assignments and Deadlines.** Deadlines for all assignments this semester are posted to Sakai. Assignments that are not submitted to Sakai by deadline will receive at least a 10% reduction in grade. For some assignments, late assignments are given an automatic 0. For other assignments, I've posted a grace period during which you can submit your work subject to that 10% reduction. For the assignments with a grace period, failure to submit within that time will cause an assignment to earn an automatic 0.

Final stories that are not submitted by Dec. 5 at 3 p.m. ET will result in an incomplete grade in the course that will become an F on a student's transcript until the final story is submitted.

If you know you have other obligations that might interfere with deadlines for a class assignment, feel free to work ahead and submit any assignment early.

**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.** Most assignments will be uploaded to Sakai as Word documents. The file name for each assignment should be your last name followed by the due date of the assignment, in this format: lastname-YYMMDD. For assignments that require research or reporting outside the class, you will use Word's commenting feature to show the source for each fact in your story.

**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.

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

### A. Writing Exercises & Quizzes: 40%

Throughout the semester, you will have regular writing exercises as well as quizzes on AP style and reading comprehension.

### B. Current Events Quizzes: 10%

This grade will have two components – questions you create each week and questions you answer on three quizzes. You will begin creating quiz questions on Aug. 18. The quizzes will be Sept. 21, Oct. 17 and Nov. 14.

### C. Comp 1 Objective Test: 10%

This will be 100 true/false questions on textbook readings as well as 10 questions reviewing AP style. It will be given in class on Oct. 17.

### D. Comp 2 Mid-term Story: 10%

On Oct. 19, you will be given a set of facts and asked to write a brief news story from those facts on deadline during class.

### E. Advanced Stories: 15%

In October and November, you will report and write three basic news stories outside of class.

### G. Final Exam Story: 15%

By the end of the semester, you will come up with your own story idea, report it and write it on deadline. You will complete a story pitch, a story draft and a final version. The final version will be due at Dec. 5 at 3 p.m. ET. This is the final exam.

## 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.

Grading rubrics for each writing assignment are posted with that assignment's instructions on Sakai.

## B. Course 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 ([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).

### **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.