

MEJO 153-005 Reporting and Writing | Spring 2023

When: MW 2-3:15 p.m.

Where: Carroll Hall 132

Instructor: Andrea Lorenz, alorenz@unc.edu

Office hours: Carroll Hall 370, MW 3:30-4:30 p.m. or by appointment via Zoom

Course Description

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 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 news, 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.

Course Materials

1. **Required Texts.**

- Yopp and McAdams, *Reaching Audiences: A Guide to Media Writing*, Sixth Edition
The digital edition will be available for purchase when you report for the first day of class.
- *The most recent Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*
- *The Hussman School stylebook* accessible at <http://jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu/>
- *Webster's New World Dictionary*

2. **Additional Readings.** These will be located in Course Resources and attached to Sakai lessons.

3. **Reference Materials.** All classrooms have reference materials, such as dictionaries and stylebooks. Many references can also be accessed online. Use these materials during class to double-check accuracy. You are also free to use materials in the School's Park Library during class time as instructors allow.

4. **Computers.** All undergraduate students, including students enrolled in Hussman 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.**

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. (We will not do news content quizzes in this section, but you will be responsible for one “beat” or area of news to keep up with.)
2. **Attendance.** MEJO 153 is a professional course. You are expected to assume a professional attitude as a participant. Attendance is required and counts as part of your grade. 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. (The university attendance policy is located at the end of this syllabus.)
 - That said, if you’re not feeling well, or something is going on that you can’t make it to class that doesn’t count as an excused absence, send me an email saying you can’t make it, and you can make work up (no details necessary.) More than 2 unexcused absences will impact your grade, however, and per UNC policy, 5 or more unexcused absences can result in failing the course. Please see me sooner rather than later if anything comes up for you during the semester that will impact your attendance and/or completion of assignments.
3. **Assignments and Deadlines.** All writing assignments must be double-spaced, copyedited and turned in on time via Word doc or PDF. Every effort is made to simulate realistic professional conditions in class. **All assignments must meet deadlines.**
 - If accepted, late papers will receive 10% off for every day late, 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.**
 - If you have ARS accommodations, please send me an email at the beginning of the course or when accommodations are applied if in the middle of the semester to ensure I have received the appropriate notice from the ARS office.

***Before every class, you will need to complete the online lesson for that day. Lessons will become visible on Sakai under the Lessons tab about two weeks before the class. Lessons could include a reading or two, a short video on grammar, AP Style, and/or topic of interest, an online “quiz” on the video, and some other short assignments. Budget an hour and a half for each lesson.*
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. I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the University honor system (<https://studentconduct.unc.edu/honor-system>). All academic work should be done with the high levels of honesty and integrity that this University demands. 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 acceptable. The Code of Student Conduct can be found at <http://instrument.unc.edu/basicframe.html>.
- 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 “academic 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.

Grading in 153

70%: All in-class and Sakai quizzes and writing assignments. Quizzes are on copy editing, AP and UNC-CH style, language use and other subjects we cover. Quizzes are open book unless otherwise specified. **Please complete assigned Sakai Lesson prior to each class.**

10%: First competency exam

10%: Second competency exam

10%: Third competency exam (Final)

**Undergraduate majors must pass the course with a C- to receive credit. Graduate students must earn at least a B-.

94.0 – 100 = A

90 – 93.99 = A-

87 – 89.99 = B+

84 – 86.99 = B

80 – 83.99 = B-

77 – 79.99 = C+

74 – 76.99 = C

70 – 73.99 = C-

66 – 69.99 = D

<65.99 = F

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

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.

If you have to miss an exam, contact me before the exam to schedule a make-up. 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.

1. First competency exam: Wed. March 8

- The first exam 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 this 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.

2. Second competency exam: Wed. April 19

- The second exam 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.

3. Final exam (Third competency exam): Tues. May 9 from 4 to 6 p.m.

- 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.

4. Grammar and Usage Test: Mon. April 24 (Taken online, starting at 2 p.m.)

- ***In addition to coursework and exams, you will take the Usage and Grammar Test.*** It is a timed 40-minute test given electronically through Sakai that consists of 100 multiple-choice questions on grammar and word usage.
- Passage of the test with a 70 or higher is required for graduation from the school.
- Does not count as a grade in this course, but you must take it during 153. Consider this first time as a practice test because you can take the exam as many times as you need to over the course of your time at Hussman until you pass.

Schedule

Part 1: Prepping for first Comp Exam. Students should be able to demonstrate the following when writing a news story based on a set of facts: (1) Select appropriate information from a set of facts to write a concise summary lead; (2) Organize the story properly, accurately and completely; (3) Copyedit the story according to AP and UNC-CH style; (4) Use proper spelling and grammar; (5) Use quotes and attribution appropriately. The following is a general schedule. Please see the Sakai lesson for readings and assignments to complete before each class.

Week	Day	Topic	Grammar and Style Lesson
Week 1	Mon. Jan. 9	Introduction	Sentences, commas/ Names
	Wed. Jan. 11	News values	
Week 2	Mon. Jan. 16	MLK Day—No class	
	Wed. Jan. 18	Leads	Semi-colons, more commas/ States, cities, datelines
Week 3	Mon. Jan. 24	More Leads	More commas (phrases)/ UNC style
	Wed. Jan. 26	Story organization	
Week 4	Mon. Jan. 31	Editing as part of writing	Final commas/ Attribution
	Wed. Feb. 1	Quotes and attribution	
Week 5	Mon. Feb. 6	Interviewing	Lists, hyphens and dashes/ Abbreviations, compositions
	Wed. Feb. 8	Traditional and internet research	
Week 6	Mon. Feb. 13	Wellbeing Day—No class	
	Wed. Feb. 15	Story formats	Apostrophes/ Days, weeks, months, years
Week 7	Mon. Feb. 20	Traditional news values	Subjects/ Numerals and money
	Wed. Feb. 22	Libel and bias	
Week 8	Mon. Feb. 27	Writing for digital/social media	Pronouns/ Tech and sports
	Wed. Mar. 1	Writing for digital/social media	
Week 9	Mon. Mar. 6	<i>Review for Comp 1</i>	
	Wed. Mar. 8	Competency 1 Exam	
Week 10	Mon. Mar. 13	No Class—Spring Break	
	Wed. Mar. 15		

Part II: Prepping for 2nd and 3rd Competency Exams.

Students should be able to demonstrate the following while conceptualizing, reporting and writing an event-based news story: (1) Develop interviewing techniques; (2) Develop basic research skills using the Internet and other resources; (3) Techniques of good writing and editing; (4) How to research, organize and write a variety of types and formats of news stories; (5) How to avoid and identify libelous material and ethical issues.

Week 11	Mon. Mar. 20	PR writing	Common usage and style errors
	Wed. Mar. 22		
Week 12	Mon. Mar. 27	Broadcast writing	Occasional recap videos and/or quizzes
	Wed. Mar. 29		
Week 13	Mon. Apr. 3	More difficult stories	
	Wed. Apr. 5	Speeches and news conferences	
Week 14	Mon. Apr. 10	Public records	
	Wed. Apr. 12	Gender, race, and sexuality in news	
Week 15	Mon. Apr. 17	<i>Review Day</i>	
	Wed. Apr. 19	Competency 2 Exam	
Week 16	Mon. Apr. 24	Grammar and Usage Exam (Not for a grade)	
	Wed. Apr. 26	<i>Review Day</i>	
FINAL	Tues. May 9	Competency 3 Exam 4-6 p.m.	

Grading Rubric

This course is graded differently from others. Each assignment begins with a raw score of 100. Points are added or subtracted from that according to the standards listed below. 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. 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
- 2 for each error or inconsistency in style
- 2 for excessively long or complicated sentences or paragraphs
- 5 for each spelling error, and typos are considered spelling errors
- 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 misplaced modifier
- 10 for a minor factual error, such as an inaccurate street address
- 50 for a misspelled name of a person, business, agency or institution on first reference, a misquote or other major factual error. Writing the Hussman School of Journalism and Medias would be a -50 because there is no "s" on the end of 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. After the first competency exam, such errors will receive the 50-point deduction. 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 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.

D. Key to Writing Assignment Comments

As your instructor grades papers, he or she indicates 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		

E. Preparing assignments

1. Copy Preparation. All writing assignments must be typed, double-spaced, copyedited and turned in on time via the Sakai Assignments section. 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. Allow time to make assignments conform to style requirements. Points will be deducted from papers containing deviations from the stylebooks.

3. Consideration of Audience. When you write, you must consider your audience. For each assignment, your instructor will tell you the intended audience.

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.

UNC and Hussman Policies

Nondiscrimination: I strive to make this classroom an inclusive space for all students. 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. 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.

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:

<https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (Elizabeth Hall, interim–titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Accessibility: 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.

Counseling and Psychological Services: CAPS addresses the mental health needs through 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. The LGBTQ Center also offers services. Make an appointment here: https://lgbtq.unc.edu/programs__trashed/support/ta1k/

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).

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.

Accreditation: The Hussman School of Journalism and Media's accrediting body outlines a number of values that will be covered in your courses at this school and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate. 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" at [this link](#).