

**Opinion Writing
MEJO 358.1
Spring 2023**

Tuesday and Thursday, 11 a.m. to 12:15 pm

Instructor: Angelia Herrin

Class website: <https://sakai.unc.edu/portal/site/opinionwrite>

Classroom: Carroll Hall 11

Email: angelial@email.unc.edu (BEST WAY TO REACH ME)

Phone: 857 753 6766 (I'm not great on texts)

Office Hours: by appointment (Do it often!)

Join Zoom

<https://unc.zoom.us/j/94643233791?pwd=aitKNU9kVkVtdzhWWU9xYlJJQUJ1UT09>

Meeting ID: 946 4323 3791

Passcode: 319085

Opinion writing in the form of editorials, columns, reviews and letters to the editor has been part of journalism as long as newspapers have been published. But with the explosion of social media platforms, anyone with a device and a little attitude can now publish their opinion on Joe Biden, Tar Heel Basketball or the latest Avenger movie.

In this “real time” media era, we get bombarded by way too many opinions that are based on falsehoods. And those seem to travel faster than the facts.

So good opinion writers are needed now more than ever. In this class we are going to focus on building opinion pieces that argue from the facts, with the passion for ideas and issues – large and small – that impact the daily lives of our readers. You will develop your skills in finding topics, doing research, picking the right tone and style and delivering a compelling, persuasive piece.

Like all the good journalism, great opinion pieces depend on great reporting, thinking and writing: Studying opinion writing should enhance those skills! As good journalists, you need to be able to pick up the rocks in your head and look under them to understand just what’s behind your own opinions/beliefs/biases.

It’s demanding work, but it won’t be boring. As the great editor William Allen White said in 1923, an opinion writer has only one obligation: [“To comment upon the truth as](#)

candidly as possible, never forgetting to be merry, for after all, the liar and the cheat and the panderer are smaller offenders than the solemn ass.”

What You Will Learn

- How to build arguments with facts, not insult and innuendo, in ways than can lead readers through competing ideas
- How to identify topics that resonate with your readers and conduct the research that will help you not just describe the issue, but possible solutions
- How different devices and structures used in writing editorials, columns and reviews create impact
- How to develop the “personal” in writing opinion and when to get out of the way
- How America has been arguing about - and making fun of- the same things for the last 300 years

How We Will Work

This class is based on discussion of readings, in-class interviews with experts in the field, as well as lecture, workshoping of assignments and your own presentations. Some assignments are in-class and team-based. That means well-prepared attendance is mandatory. Failure to participate in the debates and critiques in our meetings will lower your grade. Failure to promptly turn in assignments, which will be used in class discussion, will lower your grade.

There is no required textbook. I expect you to use the AP Stylebook and JOMC Stylebook, <http://jschoolstylebok.web.unc.edu>. Much of the reading will come from articles, and links posted on our class site, as well handouts, so check Sakai often.

This is a writing AND reading class. To write well you must study models; You need to figure out what you want to imitate and what you hate. You are expected to read not just the assignments, but opinion writing in many outlets. Focus on the News and Observer, New York Times and Washington Post: A quick look at these should find at least one piece each day to get your juices going! One student will be assigned to make a presentation on an editorial/or column each class.

As an instructor, I think each student arrives in my classroom with particular traits, needs and skills. When I work with you, I’m a reporter, trying to figure out what the story is behind each person, what are they struggling with, what they really want to do, and how can I help take them to the next level. That means I’ll be talking to you a lot, as a group and individually. READ MY EMAILS!! And take advantage of my standing offer to meet, in person and on Zoom to talk about your work. Or Harry Styles. Or life its own self.

Assignments

There are five graded assignments and a final project. The assignments are:

- Group topic editorial and Personal choice editorial
- First person narrative column
- Assigned review and Personal choice review

THE FINAL: A 1200-word op-ed piece ready for publication!

You will get specific word count and direction for each assignment. Editorials cannot be written in the “I” voice: Other assignments will be identified for First Person use. We will talk in class about just how powerful the “I” voice can be and how /powerful/distracting/dangerous/dumb a focus on “me” can be.

If you want to be successful, start thinking NOW about the issues and ideas that you care about and want to explore with research and interviewing. DON'T expect to focus on nuclear disarmament. Focus on issues that have local angle and impact, issues you can get your reporting arms around and your heart cares about.

There will be workshopping of each assignment, and you will rewrite each piece for your final grade. If you have a question or a concern about the direction of an assignment or instructor, don't wait until the last minute to clarify.

A NOTE ON THE Final There is no exam for this class. The final will be a 1,000-to-1,200-word op-ed based on research and original reporting that tackles an issue and promotes a solution. Like all the assignments, this will be judged on the basis of the selection of a compelling topic, the depth of reporting, the construction of a convincing argument and the strength of the writing. Don't go after the easy, simple and obvious: Pieces that engage readers, connect them to the issues and explain the need for action will get the top grades.

You MUST submit a writing memo for the final topic that is approved by your instructor. This will help tighten your focus and get advice on research and reporting. These first draft pieces will be workshopped last weeks of class, and you will receive instructor comments, along with comments from your fellow students.

Grading

Grading on stories is to a great extent subjective, just like the opinions of editors and readers. You will be graded on your reporting, research, enterprise, clarity of writing, precision and style, as well as your ability to engage the reader. Style and grammar mistakes take points off, no matter how good the piece. The writing exercise assignments will be graded pass/fail. Your attendance matters, as does your preparation. It is easy for me to see when you don't do the reading, since so much of this class depends on smart discussion.

Grade breakdown

Classwork - 15 percent

Editorial One -10 percent

Editorial Two -15 percent

Column 10 percent
Review- 10 percent

Review – 10 percent
Final - 30 percent

You will be getting feedback on assignments and article memos, as well as in class and one-on-one discussion. You get TWO grades on every assigned, which are averaged for final grade. So don't expect to turn in a weak first version and improve it enough to get an A! You should always know how you are doing in class at all times, and where you are headed. IF YOU DO NOT KNOW OR ARE PUZZLED BY THE GRADES, ASK ME!!!!!!

Generally speaking, the grades on assignments work this way:

A = Strong, publishable engaging piece, well-written with context and logic for conclusion, no fact or style errors

B = Near publishable piece, with minor errors of style or logic, needs revisions for readability, but no fact errors

C = Not ready for publication piece, with serious errors of style, reporting gaps and readability

D = Sub-par, unpublishable, with major errors in style, logic, approach, reporting gaps and low level of reader engagement

F = Unacceptable work that ignores requirements of the assignments; style and fact errors, minimal reporting, lazy writing.

Each assignment will be awarded points that translate into grades above. Points add up!

A: 93-100

A-: 90-92

B+: 87-89

B: 84-86

B-: 80-83

C+: 74-79

C: 73-78

C-: 70-72

D: 72 -64

F: Below 64.

Honor Code:

I expect that each student will conduct himself or herself 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. Using a set-up sound bite is a violation of the honor code. 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.

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.

Week-by-Week, Day-by-Day CLASS SCHEDULE

Week One

Tuesday, January 10

OPENING DAY!

How does this class work? Find out more and all the answers to your questions. And buy play tickets for later in the semester.

Response to Assignment Due THURSDAY 5 a.m. in Sakai.

FOR NEXT CLASS, READ: What Great Opinion Writing Can Do overview package on Sakai in WEEK ONE FOLDER.

Thursday, January 12

What Is the Job of (Great) Opinion Writing?

Let's look at the history of objectivity and opinion in American journalism and the failure of what some readers call "The View from Nowhere." In MEJO 153, you learned objectivity. Now, how do you write a great opinion piece? As a reader, you already know when you read a great opinion piece, whether it is an editorial, a column or a review—you just need a vocabulary to describe it. Let me help.

FOR NEXT CLASS, READ: Assigned reading: Editorial Building Blocks and That's Your Opinion) package In Week Two Folder in Sakai.

Post a response in Sakai Forum

Week Two

Tuesday, January 17

If You Research a Good Editorial, They Will Read It

We discuss your reading and move to talking about the building blocks of a great editorial. Let's discuss a topic, run a group brainstorm and start writing your first editorial. We also review requirements for the weekly student presentation.

Editorial exercise: Write a brief summary of your editorial including our premise, evidence and conclusion. Hyperlink your sources. Due in Sakai 5 a.m.

FOR NEXT CLASS, READ: Editing package on Sakai Week Two and Course Reserve

Post a response in Sakai Forum

Thursday January 19

If You Write a Good Editorial, They Will remember it. But It Can Be Better

Let's review that first editorial memo AND talk about how to build an argument with analogic, inductive and deductive reasoning While we are at it, let's talk about the fine art of workshop editing and critique and how we will partner this semester.

And get ready to write your first editorial, with a second brainstorming that digs into an idea.

FIRST EDITORIAL. Due SUNDAY January 23, 8 p.m. in Sakai.

Post Question on Assignment and Comment on Student Presentation in Sakai Forum

Week Three

TUESDAY, January 24

Workshop that editorial!!! Then let's talk about how to improve these jewels. We will also talk about how links help or hinder you and the reader. How do you use them to distill information in persuasive writing: Hint: Determining which links to include is a challenge for many starting writers. What can links do for reader? Let's take apart

YOUR REWRITE IS DUE FRIDAY, JANUARY 27

FOR NEXT CLASS, READ NEWS AND OBSERVER PACKAGE IN SAKAI Week Three

Post Comment on Student Presentation piece in Sakai's Forum

THURSDAY, January 26

The Hard Work of Editorial Pages

Discussion with Sara Pequeno, editor writer at the News and Observer and a proud Tar Heel Mejo grad! We are lucky to get her to talk with us about the challenges of running an op-ed section at a time of great challenges in his city and state that have created great clashes of opinion. Let talk with her about how she focuses on topics and how she thinks about writing for her audience.

FOR NEXT CLASS, READ: Structure package in Week Four —start thinking about using different structures in your choice next editorial

Post Comment on Student Presentation piece in Sakai's Forum

Week Four

Tuesday, January 31

Build it Like a Brick House

We look at structures and devices for editorial writing. There are tricks every writer should have up their sleeves to use at the right time. Let's brainstorm your personal editorial ideas too

Next Editorial memo: Due Thursday 5 a.m.. in Sakai.

Post Comment on Student Presentation piece in Sakai's Forum

THURSDAY, February 2

Groundhog Day

Special Writing Exercise in Class

Post Comments on Student Presentation in Sakai Forum

Week Five

TUESDAY, February 7

WORKSHOP EDITORIAL Number Two

FOR NEXT CLASS: Read Op-Ed package in Sakai

Post Comments on Student Presentation in Sakai Forum

THURSDAY February 9

WHAT'S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT OP-ED? And WHO DECIDES!!!

Opinion pages—which feature articles that are not staff written, but rather penned by experts, politicians, and cultural lights—have become increasingly important on media sites. But they also are increasingly controversial. Let's start talking about op-ed pieces that work—and those that fail. And shouldn't commentary flow in both directions.

Your editorial rewrite is due Friday, February 10 by 8 p.m.

FOR NEXT CLASS, READ: Fighting over the Opinion of Op-ed pages in Sakai.

Post Comment on Student Presentation piece in Sakai's Forum

Week Six

TUESDAY, February 14

Don't Go Breaking My Heart! No Class! Wellness Day

THURSDAY, February 16

May the Force Be with You

We are going to explore the battle over just what appears an op-ed page and the furor that debate has caused in newsrooms across the country.

And we explore these questions: How is a good op-ed piece like Star Wars? Do you know how to identify and take down your Evil Opponent! Let's talk about that and review your final project memo requirements. **THIS IS AN IMPORTANT DISCUSSION: Your memo is due in two weeks.** We review them in class, and you need feedback!

FOR NEXT CLASS, READ: 1619 Project and Criticism package, also the Reparations package in Sakai. NOTE this is a large package.

READ STUDENT PRESENTATION AND COMMENT IN SAKAI

WEEK SEVEN

TUESDAY, February 21

What They Were Arguing About

Reviewing the 1619 Project and Reparations: This project, spearheaded by a UNC graduate, Hannah Nikole-Jones, has created an important discussion in our country—and stirred some furious backlash. It won the Pulitzer Prize for Commentary and won attacks from people the right wing like former president Donald Trump, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo etc.) Let's talk about the work and how it cracked open debate.

FOR NEXT CLASS. READ: Uses of First Person and Columns packet in Sakai.

Post Comment on Student Presentation piece in Sakai's Forum

THURSDAY, February 23

Is It ALL About You?

Let's talk about column writing and first-person. Your instructor is opinionated on this topic. She expects you will be, too. Let's talk about when it works and when it doesn't!

For NEXT CLASS Read writing package in Sakai

Post Comments on Student Presentation in Sakai Forum

WEEK EIGHT

TUESDAY, February 28

Bring the Reader's Heart Along

We will do an in-class first-person exercise. Then, let's talk about your first-person column ideas and how to blend facts and emotion. As Anne Lamott says, You must risk placing real emotion at the center of your work...Write toward vulnerability. Don't worry about appearing sentimental, worry about being unavailable, worry about being fraudulent."

Your first person column memo is due THURSDAY 8 pm.

Read Speaker Package in Sakai

Post Questions for Speaker and Comment on Student Presentation piece in Sakai's Forum

THURSDAY March 2

You Think Writing a Weekly Column is Easy?

GUEST SPEAKER

Note: Your first-person column draft is due Monday, March 5 8 p.m

NOTE: Your final project memo is due Friday, March 9

Post Comment on Student Presentation piece in Sakai's Forum

WEEK NINE

TUESDAY March 6

Workshop That Fabulous Column Piece

Rewrite Due FRIDAY, March 10 !!!

READ in SAKAI: Political Columns and Who is Funnier, the Right or the Left?.

Post Comment on Student Presentation piece in Sakai's Forum

THURSDAY March 9

It's All Political

We are going to also discuss endorsements, letters to the editor and reader comments. Then the whole thing devolved into name-calling. So how should we deal with differing points of view? Should readers boycott a paper over a columnist? Since we also take a look at the impact of editorial page endorsements.

Post Comments on Student Presentation in Sakai Forum

WEEK TEN

How Can You Miss Me if You Don't Go Away

TUESDAY March 14

Spring Break

Thursday March 16

Spring Break

Week Eleven

TUESDAY, March 21

Spitball WEEK

These two classes are dedicated to pressure testing your op-ed plan. You will give a brief presentation. We diagram a game plan, and the class will figure out to help you – or get you to change ideas! It's a useful exercise every time

Post Comments on Student Presentation in Sakai Forum

THURSDAY, March 23.

MORE SPITBALL

Post Comments on Student Presentation in Sakai Forum

Week Twelve

TUESDAY March 27

My Brilliant Reviews

We start look at some great reviews, so we can talk about how you will tackle your next two writing projects! There are so many ways to tackle reviews, but your guiding light will be reporting that leads you to insight about the book, movie, play, restaurant that you want to write about.

FOR NEXT CLASS: Read Story package in Sakai Week Twelve

Post Questions and Comments on Student Presentation in Sakai Forum

THURSDAY March 30

A Reviewer Reviews the Good, the Bad, the Ridiculous

SPEAKER TBA

Post Comments on Student Presentation in Sakai Forum

TUESDAY April 4

WORKSHOP FIRST REVIEW

And prep for next week's play

Post Comments on Student Presentation in Sakai Forum

THURSDAY, APRIL 6

NO CLASS WELLNESS Day

WEEK FOURTEEN

TUESDAY April 11

ATTEND PLAY THE LEGEND OF GEORGIA MCBRIDE at Playmakers Theater

You may also attend WEDNESDAY Night performance

THURSDAY April 13

Workshop Play Review – Start Writing Final Version Due Friday 8 a.m.

Post Comments on Student Presentation in Sakai Forum

Rewrite Due NEXT Thursday

Week Fifteen

TUESDAY April 18, NO CLASS

STUDENT CHECK IN FOR PROJECTS. You will have a sign up

THURSDAY April 20

Speaker TBA: What I love – and hate - about Opinion Writers (a University View)

TUESDAY APRIL 24

WORKSHOP FINAL PROJECTS

THURSDAY, APRIL 27

ENJOY the last lecture! AND YOUR LAST IN CLASS WRITING ASSIGNMENT

Your FINAL IS TENTATIVELY SCHEDULED FOR TUESDAY, May 2. THAT IS WHEN YOUR FINAL PAPER IS DUE. We will meet at our agreed final review site at 5 p.m and discuss final thoughts and celebrate the amazing work you have done.