

**MEJO 153 Writing and Reporting
General Requirements, Testing and Grading
Summer 2023**
(The daily course schedule is available in Canvas.)

Instructor: Rhonda Gibson, Ph.D.

(please call me Rhonda; my pronouns are she/her/hers)

Class Day & Time: Monday-Friday, 1:15-2:45 p.m. EST

Phone: 919 699-6567

Office Hours: Because this is an online course, I will not hold office hours in Carroll Hall. If you'd like to meet, please email me, and we'll set up a time to Zoom. Don't hesitate to ask for a one-on-one meeting!

E-mail: gibsonr@email.unc.edu

Course Zoom link: <https://unc.zoom.us/j/94183375721>

Key Dates: Competency Exam 1 May 31; Competency Exam 2 June 13;
Competency Exam 3 (final exam) June 23

I. INTRODUCTION

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

MEJO 153 concentrates on teaching students how to gather and organize information and how to write news articles, press releases, broadcast scripts and digital stories on deadline according to acceptable professional standards. The course emphasizes respect for and correct use of the language, with particular stress on spelling and grammar, style consistency, accuracy and clear writing. Attention is also paid to bias, libel and ethical considerations. Students will use research and interviewing in their work.

The faculty of the Hussman School of Journalism and Media at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill believes that anyone interested in a career in any communications field must be able to write clear, tight copy with care and precision. The key words for any writing are full, fair and accurate. MEJO 153 is required of all journalism majors, regardless of whether their intended careers are in newspapers, advertising, public relations, electronic communication, strategic communication, visual design, multimedia, social media or other communications fields. Communicators in all fields report or gather and assess information; consider audiences and language; write copy; and deliver the story or message.

II. PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

MEJO 153 abides by standards the communications professions follow and expect of graduates of a professional school such as the Hussman School of Journalism and Media. These skills are expected of a professional practitioner of journalism in any field.

Writing ability — Grammar and spelling; ability to tell a good story well; use of quotes, anecdotes and descriptive detail; use of active voice and strong verbs; ability to write leads that are inviting and that get to the point; ability to write tightly and to organize information in logical, compelling sequence.

Reporting ability — Pursuit, digging, enterprise, diligence; ability and eagerness to see and pursue promising angles; ability to seek and obtain anecdotes, details and quotes that provide documentation and add liveliness to copy; ability to see the need for and to get all sides of the story; ability to cultivate good sources.

Speed, productivity and efficiency— Speed on deadline; speed and efficiency in completing non-deadline assignments; ability and willingness to manage more than one assignment at a time; ability and willingness to make frequent, substantive contributions to the organization.

Accuracy — Skill with basic factual information such as names, addresses, dates and figures; ability to identify and make use of the best sources, whether they are documents, references or people.

Work habits — Punctuality, reliability, readiness to go beyond the minimum requirements of the job; interest in assuming and ability to assume more than minimum responsibility; ability and willingness to anticipate and fulfill the demands of an assignment without prompting; ability to deal even-handedly with peers and supervisors, to accept constructive criticism and to offer constructive suggestions; interest in all areas of the operation; knowledge of community, regional, national and international events; regular and thorough reading of the news.

Judgment — Commitment to fairness and balance; ability to recognize and assess possible adverse consequences of actions; knowledge of, respect for and observance of the organization's policies.

The work accomplished in the writing and reporting course will be the basis for students in subsequent courses in the School, whether they are skills or conceptual courses. At the end of the course, students will be better writers and better able to gather and evaluate information.

NOTE: Although we adhere to professional standards in this course, the stories and releases you write in class should NOT be posted on the Internet or given to a potential employer as examples of your writing/reporting ability. The exercises are for class use only and sometimes will not represent real events. In addition, you should not present material that has been substantially edited by a professor as your own work, as that might constitute plagiarism.

III. GENERAL COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Course Materials

1. Required Texts.

Access to the Associated Press Stylebook online: <https://www.apstylebook.com>

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

2. Reserve Readings. Instructors may file materials in the School's Park Library.

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>.

B. Course Requirements

1. News Reading. Your instructor may require you to read specific news publications and may quiz you on the content during the semester. In this class you will learn to become a more critical consumer of news from all sources.

2. Attendance. MEJO 153 is a professional course. You are expected to assume a professional attitude as a participant. Attendance is required, and punctuality is essential. **There are no free cuts.** Make-up work will be accepted only for excused absences at the discretion of the instructor. To be excused, you must notify the instructor **in advance** of your intended absence. (University attendance policy is below.)

3. Assignments and Deadlines. All writing assignments must be double-spaced, copyedited and turned in on time. Every effort is made to simulate realistic professional conditions in class. **All assignments must meet deadlines.**

If accepted at all, late papers will receive a reduced grade unless you and your instructor agree BEFORE the assignment is due that a delay is justified. On some assignments, the grade will be an F for failure to meet the deadline. Even if an assignment is excused as late, **no assignment will be accepted later than one week after its deadline.**

All reading assignments must be completed before the appropriate class sessions for which they are assigned.

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 all students will conduct themselves 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 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.

C. Editing, Format and Style of Writing Assignments

1. Copy Preparation. Your instructor will provide specific details on how to format and submit your written assignments. As the writer, it is your responsibility to copyedit all stories before turning them in. Instructors will evaluate copy as if the writer has made it ready for publication.

2. Copyediting and Style. Editing is part of the writing process, and any good writer reviews his or her work carefully to check for style, spelling, grammar, punctuation and accuracy. Latest editions of *The UNC-CH Stylebook* and *The Associated Press Stylebook* are the final authorities on style in MEJO 153. *Webster's New World Dictionary* is the dictionary on which AP bases its stylebook and should be your reference when either stylebook fails to cover a point in question. If any of the stylebooks are in conflict on a point, the *UNC-CH Stylebook* will prevail, the AP is next, then the dictionary.

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.

IV. TESTS AND ASSIGNMENTS — THE COMPONENTS OF GRADES

A. 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 daily schedule 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 daily schedule in Canvas.

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, class lectures and any other material from the instructor. The exam will be multiple-choice questions.

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-copyedited 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.

B. 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*.

C. Written Assignments

You should expect to be assigned one writing assignment in nearly every class session. 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. You will also be expected to do research to supplement your information-gathering. Your instructor will set guidelines for those assignments.

You may have some written out-of-class assignments. 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.

D. Grade 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 class work, including participation in discussions; 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:

50 percent: All graded writing assignments.

20 percent: AP and UNC style quizzes

10 percent: First competency exam

10 percent: Second competency exam

10 percent: Third competency exam (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.

B. 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:

93 and above	= A
90-92.9	= A-
87 – 89.9	= B+
83 – 86.9	= B
80 – 82.9	= B-
77 – 79.9	= C+
73 – 76.9	= C
70 – 72.9	= C-
67 – 69.9	= D+
60 – 66.9	= D
below 60	= F

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

The faculty believes strongly that it is absolutely essential for anyone planning a career in mass communication to demonstrate at least minimum competency in MEJO 153. Undergraduate journalism majors must pass the course with a C to receive credit. Graduate students must earn at least a B-.

C. Evaluation of Writing Assignments

Your instructor devotes a great deal of time and effort to evaluating your papers. In courses in which students write frequently, instructors try to return graded papers as soon as possible, often before assigning a new writing exercise. Review your papers immediately and thoroughly. It's an important part of your learning.

Grades are determined by plus and minus points on each assignment. Plus 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. Minus points will be deducted for each error and from work that falls below the minimum level of acceptability.

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 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, inaccurate time element, or other factual error. Writing the School of Medias and Journalism would be a -50 because there is no "s" on the end of Media. (Besides, it's the Hussman 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, Brwon on second reference) or some other second-reference error that follows a correct first 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.

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. (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), 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.

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) or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](https://eoc.unc.edu), 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.