

# INTRODUCTION TO DIGITAL STORYTELLING

MEJO 121 | UNC-Chapel Hill | Hussman School of Journalism and Media

Syllabus sp.unc.edu/fall23 Materials can be found on our class Canvas site, [sp.unc.edu](#)

Welcome to this introductory media technology skills class at the UNC Hussman School of Journalism and Media. Our simple goals are to introduce you to some of the tools and skills needed to engage in multi-platform storytelling in online environments. We aim to demystify the technical aspects of audiovisual information packaging by engaging in basic hands-on video, design and web exercises.

However, what distinguishes this class from a skills-only course is its focus on *storytelling*. We ultimately intend to provide familiarity with the tools and an understanding of how to develop a narrative story with all these tools. These are the skill sets needed for various professions in journalism and media.

For this semester,, let's look at these next 16 weeks as a time to create a video you are proud of, a design element that enhances a solid story and a basic website that will impress a potential employer. It is a lot to cover, but if we take it step-by-step. We can do this!

## The essentials

- **Class time:** Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-1:45 pm
- **Class location:**
  - Carroll Hall, Room 268
  - Any remote classes will be announced in advance.
- **Instructor:** Associate Professor Laura Ruel, 919-448-8864, [lruel@unc.edu](mailto:lruel@unc.edu)
- **Office hours:** Wednesdays from 9:30-11:30 am and by appointment
- **Office location:** CA 212 and/or @ [go.unc.edu/ruel](https://go.unc.edu/ruel) (Zoom office link)

## Required supplies

There are no textbooks for this course. However, video recording supplies, a domain name and server space are among the required purchases. These supplies include:

## Smartphone

For your video assignments, you will record with your smartphone. Please contact the instructor if you do not own a smartphone. NOTE: If you will be using an iPhone 7 or higher, you also need [a 3.5 mm headphone jack adapter](#) (usually included with your iPhone purchase) to be able to use the lavalier microphone.



## Headphones

Must have a standard mini jack ( $\frac{1}{8}$ ”). Any wired (non -Bluetooth / not wireless) headphones you might use with your phone will work. [Here is a recommended option](#), although standard earbuds with a mini jack also will work.

## Lavalier microphone

A lavalier will be needed for the best audio quality. Here is the link to an option on Amazon: [Lavalier microphone](#). The cost for this one is approximately \$25. [Additional microphone option here](#).

## Tripod with smartphone mount

You will need to purchase a tripod and mount for your phone. Cost: About \$23. You may find an [example here](#) (pictured below). **Please note, the linked tripod also has a built-in level for stability.** This is an essential part of your tripod.



## Domain name & hosting space.

You will need to purchase these products for the Web portion of this class for approximately \$30- \$40 for your first year. More details will be provided in class. You should not purchase this before receiving in-class instruction about this. *If you already have these products, you may reuse them for this class. Please inform the instructor if this is the case.* Also note that it is your responsibility to cancel this service once the course is complete.

## Recommended Supplies

The **ProShot video app** is optional – but recommended. The ProShot app provides the features of professional DSLR video cameras for iPhone and Android. The cost of this app is \$6.99.

[ProShot app for android](#)

[Pro/Shot app for iOS](#)

More information here: [ProShot app video introduction](#)

*When shooting videos (with or without the ProShot app), students will be expected to create high-quality videos; 1080p HD, good lighting and colors, and clear audio with adequate levels. Should a student choose not to use the ProShot app, it is their responsibility to achieve the expected standards using only their internal phone video recording device.*

## A way to back up your work

You are responsible for backing up your work. You can use whatever method you choose -- either cloud storage or an external hard drive. If you choose to use an external hard drive, we recommend a minimum 64GB flash drive, with USB 3.0 for fastest file transfer speeds.

## Required Digital Access

### LinkedIn Learning

Follow the instructions here to access LinkedIn Learning with your onyen. [LinkedIn Learning - Software Distribution -](#)  
You also will need to access YouTube and other online instructional videos to complete your work in this class.

### Adobe Premiere

Follow the instructions at the link below to create an Adobe ID and install the required software for free: [Adobe Creative Cloud - Software Distribution](#).

### YouTube or Vimeo account

You must use or create an account to publish your videos for this course. A YouTube account is included with any Gmail account, and there is no storage limit on YouTube accounts. A Vimeo account is free to create, but free accounts have restrictions on the total GB you can upload each week. Publishing your work on YouTube is easy and free, but Vimeo can have a more professional reputation.

You can download some of the required software to your own laptops for the projects required in this course. You may find that Adobe Premiere runs slowly on your laptop, depending on its hardware, so take this into account when planning your projects.

## Generative AI

Generative AI tools such as ChatGPT are now widely available and incredibly powerful. These new tools are important for you to master; however, they must be used appropriately and ethically, and you must understand their limitations.

For example, during production of your micro-documentary in our class, you will be asked to read the transcript from a long, often rambling interview and condense it into a 90-second “radio cut,” e.g., a series of interview soundbites that tell the story and evoke a theme, with a hook, middle and conclusion. ChatGPT can essentially do this for you. But chances are, it will not produce results worthy of a good grade (yet). This is because AI bots are not sentient, they do not have emotions, and they do not understand what they are creating. So can you use them? Absolutely. In fact, I encourage it. But AI should be used honestly and ethically. In short, AI should only help you think, not do the thinking for you. And you must document your use of AI when submitting your work. For example, you might add the following caveat in your Canvas submission: “ChatGPT was used to generate ideas for the radio cut and B-roll shots.”

Also, please do not copy and paste any personal data into an AI chatbot while working on your projects. This includes any information that might identify yourself or your interview subject.

- *AI guidelines by Scott Geier, Teaching Assistant Professor of Digital Storytelling*

## 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:

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).

### **Class Policy:**

We will meet in person this semester. Attending class via Zoom is only to be used when you have an excused reason for not attending in person. All classes will be recorded using Zoom and made available on the class Canvas site once class is complete. If you cannot attend in person, please let the instructor know as soon as possible. Also, be aware that you are bound by the Honor Code when making a request for a class absence and a University approved absence.

Class will be handled like a job. You are responsible for being in class on time each day. Consistent late arrivals or early departures will be reflected in your in-class exercise grade. Timeliness matters in media and journalism.

Attendance will be taken at the start of each class session, and occasionally at the end of each class. Similar to having personal time off (PTO) at work, you are allotted TWO absences without need to justify or explain your reasons for the missed classes. Similar to extending beyond one's allotted PTO, any additional absence past the two allotted days will result in a half-grade deduction (e.g., a B becomes a B- at three absences) for each additional day of absence. As this course is project-based and cumulative in its delivery of technical information, it is important to attend each scheduled course day to receive new information, work collaboratively and practice new skills. Students who choose to miss class are responsible for understanding the TOPICS taught that day. Bottom line, attendance is required.

**NOTE:** In the case of any unforeseen circumstances or emergencies, please notify the instructor as soon as you can.

### **Late Assignments**

Completing assignments past the deadline will immediately put you behind in this fast-paced class. Accepting late assignments also is unfair to the students who have sacrificed to turn their work in on time. An automatic 10 percent deduction will be applied to any assignment turned in after the time it is due, provided the assignment is turned in on the same day it is due. An additional 10 percent deduction will be applied for each subsequent 24 hours that pass after the due date/time (i.e., 10 percent is taken off for each day).

### **Independent Online Research**

To teach you the necessary software tools to create your stories, this course will require learning with online tutorials and videos. As beginners, it is inevitable that questions and technical problems will arise as you work with these tools. It is also not possible to cover every detail of a tool through in-class demos or assigned videos. The assignments will require you to learn how to learn new things independently, outside of direct instruction. While your instructor is always available to answer your questions and clarify any topic, this course will challenge you to troubleshoot your technical problems and figure out answers to your questions through independent online research. Before asking your question a technical or software-related question like “how do I...” or “... isn’t working”, it is expected that you will research your question online. Invest some time looking at manuals, forums and documentation sites to see if someone else has addressed your question or problem before. If you have conducted independent research online and still can’t find your answer, reach out to your instructor through email, in class, or during office hours. In addition to asking your question, share what you learned during your research, a description of your problem, and any relevant screenshots.

## Final video resubmission

The final project will contain your previous video project. The video project will not be re-evaluated with the final project. However, you may choose to respond to graded feedback on the video project, and re-submit the updated version along with the rest of your final project -- along with a detailed log of your edits, an updated reflection on the project, and how you responded to the feedback. If you meet these requirements, I will re-grade your project, and I will update the score of that project to be an average of your new (hopefully-improved) score with the previously assigned score.

## Grading

Work is graded according to the highest professional standards. Grades in percentages are:

- |                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                              |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● A = 93-100%,</li><li>● A- = 90-92%,</li><li>● B+ = 87-89%,</li><li>● B = 83-86%,</li><li>● B- = 80-82%,</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● C+ = 77-79%,</li><li>● C = 73-76%,</li><li>● C- = 70-72%,</li><li>● D = 60-69%,</li><li>● F = 59% or below</li></ul> |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

Below is a guideline for how grades are described within this course:

- A: nearly perfect in execution, quality of work is professional and exceptional
- A-: work is impressive in quality, very few problems in any area
- B+: very good performance, did more than required, might struggle in one area only
- B: solid effort, met all requirements, solid application of skill
- B-: needs a bit more polish, pretty good handle on things overall
- C+: good in one area of work, but consistent problems with another area
- C: followed instructions, seems to understand basics but did the minimum to pass
- C-: has glimpses of potential in a limited range
- D: did not demonstrate understanding of the basics but tried
- F: did not demonstrate effort or understanding of basics, incomplete

## Grading Criteria

<b>Class participation and in-class work</b> (see description below, includes student survey)	approximately 10%
<b>Video course work</b> (includes 3 exercises, video project and impromptu video-related assignments)	approximately 40%
<b>Web/Design course work</b> (includes a web exercise, portfolio project, graphic exercise(s) and impromptu web/graphic-related assignments)	approximately 35%
<b>Final project</b> (final web page design and story/package integration)	approximately 15%

In-class participation is your engagement and contribution within the scope of each live class period, including arriving to class on time, asking questions, offering insights during class discussions, sharing feedback with peers, and general engagement with the material during our live class sessions. Your student survey and any other course surveys also count as participation. The quality of your participation will be assigned a grade based on the guidelines above at the end of the course. You may check in with your instructor at any time during the course for individual feedback about the quality of your participation.

Exercises are assigned to familiarize you with skills needed to complete the projects and are graded on completion and execution quality. Engagement with the exercises and quizzes will prepare you to achieve better work on your projects.

The video, graphic and web projects are assigned for you to demonstrate a mastery of the skills and storytelling techniques learned in class and with the exercises.

Impromptu assignments will be assigned in class to address a specific issue or clarify a concept students need to work on. Attendance in class is necessary to receive instruction for these assignments.

The final project is an integrated package delivered via text, design and video and housed on your portfolio website. The package must contain integrated elements (story text, video and any additional elements you may choose).

## 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.

## Seeking help

If you need individual assistance, it is 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. Please feel able to contact the course instructor as soon as you perceive any warning signs of things that might adversely affect your class performance or final grade.

## Additional resources

- **Link to honor code document:** <https://studentconduct.unc.edu/about-us/forms-documents/instrument/>
- **Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office and documents:** <https://eoc.unc.edu/>
- **Heels Care Network:** compilation of mental health and well-being resources and assistance <https://care.unc.edu/>.
- **Dean of Student's Care Referral Form** if you have a concern about a fellow student <https://care.unc.edu/im-concerned-about-a-student-what-should-i-do/student-care-team/>

## Honor Code

Each student will conduct himself or herself within the guidelines of the [University honor system](#). 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 Associate Dean Julie Dixon-Green, or you may speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.



## 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

Our school has a embedded CAPS counselor:

Carolyn Ebeling, MSW, LCSW

Embedded Counselor – School of Journalism and Media

[cebeling@email.unc.edu](mailto:cebeling@email.unc.edu)

Pronouns: they/them

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. Email Carolyn, go to the CAPS 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](https://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](https://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 harrassment 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.

## Course Goals and Accreditation Requirements

The Hussman School of Journalism and Media'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 place our emphasis on the last six bullet dots under "Professional values and competencies" in the link above.

In particular, we focus on the last competency listed, regarding the application of tools and technologies.

- You will become familiar with the functions and limits of the equipment and software introduced in class.
- You will develop an understanding of how to evaluate technical quality and story flow.
- You will be able to plan and execute a short, clean, logically-flowing video product.
- You will be able to understand the tools needed to create a graphic story

You will be able to use a variety of strategies and tools to create a standards-based website .

## Semester topics

The outline below provides a rough idea of class topics by week. Based on the availability of guest speakers, topics and exercises are subject to change. **For the current calendar see the class Canvas site.**

Readings/Viewings also are linked from the class Canvas site.

Weeks (approximate)	Topics
<b>Unit 1</b> (weeks 1-8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Welcome, understanding course requirements.</li><li>• Thinking about final project ideas.</li><li>• Working in Adobe Premiere</li><li>• Audio and video storytelling</li><li>• Interviewing, a-roll, b-roll, sequences, etc.</li><li>• Final video project ideas</li></ul>
<b>Unit 2</b> (weeks 9-12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Understanding how the web works</li><li>• Coding, creating and designing websites</li><li>• Learning Wordpress.</li></ul>

<b>Unit 3</b> (weeks 13-14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Researching and developing graphic story components.</li> <li>● Structuring your ideas.</li> <li>● Principles of design</li> <li>● Learning design software</li> </ul>
<b>Unit 4</b> (weeks 15-16)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Creating your final project page from start to finish.</li> <li>● Building an effective multimedia package</li> <li>● Packaging your materials</li> <li>● Selling and pitching your story</li> </ul>

**FINAL PROJECT PAGE PRESENTATIONS:** Noon - 3 pm on Friday, Dec. 8 in Carroll Hall Room 268