

MEJO 711: Multiplatform Storytelling

Fall 2023

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Course overview

How do you communicate a message through multiple platforms? How do you balance and navigate today's blurring roles for media professionals, who now serve as producers/consumers, writers/readers and message senders/message receivers?

These questions and the demands that they place on communicators are the focus of this course. Understanding our fragmented audiences and exploring how communicators operate will help you develop content across platforms.

This course is about communicating across platforms — clearly, precisely, accurately, with energy and voice, and for specific audiences. Good writing is valued on screen just as it is on paper. Effective writing is, as an editor at the Los Angeles Times website once said, about putting the right words in the right order.

Whether we are content creators or site editors, we recognize that first and foremost we are storytellers. Throughout history, humans have taught, learned, entertained and communicated with stories. Stories transmit information and transfer experience.

Specifically, this course aims to help you:

- Express yourself concisely and clearly.
- Create stories that can be disseminated through a variety of channels, including social media platforms, audio, video and text.
- Distill and transform relevant, credible information into compelling messages for content marketing, social media or journalistic storytelling.

Course format

MEJO 711 is an asynchronous course. We will not meet together at the same time.

Each week of the semester will include a theme, readings, discussion and an assignment. During that week, it's up to you when you want to complete those tasks, but be sure to manage your time well. A couple of assignments are more complex, and you will have more time to complete them.

Once a week, I will hold an “office hour” via Zoom. Feel free to stop by, but you are not required to do so. I am tentatively setting this meeting for 7 p.m. Eastern each Thursday. I will be available for individual Zoom meetings by appointment. I also respond quickly to questions and comments via email.

Course materials

- *Writing and Editing for Digital Media*, 5th edition (2023) by Brian Carroll
- *Associated Press Stylebook*, 2022 edition (available in print or online at <https://www.apstylebook.com>)
- *Need To Know*, the daily email newsletter of the American Press Institute (subscribe at www.americanpressinstitute.org)

Diversity and inclusion

UNC-Chapel Hill is committed to providing a welcoming environment for all members of our community. The university 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 status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

If you have any disability or other situation, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. You should also contact the Department of Accessibility Resources & Service (AR&S) at 919-962-8300 or accessibility@unc.edu.

Honor code

The UNC honor system and code are in effect for MEJO 711. They are available in full at <https://studentconduct.unc.edu>.

In brief, the Honor Code is the heart of integrity at UNC-Chapel Hill. It says that all students shall “refrain from lying, cheating, or stealing.”

Plagiarism and digital media

We all use the internet for research. With a wealth of information available, including everything from pre-written essays to scientific papers, the potential for plagiarism is enormous. Keep in mind that as easy as it is for students to find and copy information from the internet, it is just as easy for instructors to find the same information.

To avoid plagiarism, remember that the same rules apply to information found on the internet as to information found in print sources:

- When you take ideas or quotes from a source, you must paraphrase accurately and give credit by appropriately citing the original source.
- If you take a sentence or phrase directly from a source, you must indicate it by using quotation marks around the direct quote and citing the source.

Course schedule

Weeks 1 (Aug. 21-27) – Foundations

Objective: Review writing skills and getting started.

Week 2 (Aug 28-Sept. 3) – Writing Well

Objective: Sharpen your skills as a writer.

Week 3 (Sept 4-10) – Writing Well Online

Objective: Get comfortable with writing for screens, and consider how language, like technology, evolves.

Week 4 (Sept. 11-17) – Links, Lists, Video and the History of the Web

Objective: Understand and apply the evolution of digital communication.

Week 5 (Sept. 18-24) – Headlines, Captions, Alt Text and Pushes

Objective: Learn to write attention-getting and informative display type.

Week 6 (Sept. 25-Oct. 1) – Writing for Spaces and Places

Objective: Plan and curate written content for digital spaces.

Week 7 (Oct. 2-8) – Journalism in the Digital Space

Objective: Brainstorm story ideas for text, audio or video.

Week 8 (Oct. 9-15) – Social Media and Society

Objective: Explore strategies for effective use of social media and consider ethical implications.

Week 9 (Oct. 16-22) – Fall Break

Week 10 (Oct. 23-29) – Digital Communication and the Law

Objective: Understand some legal issues regarding the internet.

Week 11 (Oct. 30-Nov. 5) – Digital Public Relations

Objective: Learn how PR is changing in the digital era.

Week 12 (Nov. 6-12) – Digital Marketing

Objective: Explore how digital media are changing marketing.

Week 13 (Nov. 13-19) – Optimizing for Search

Objective: Understand tools to help readers find information.

Week 14 (Nov. 20-26) – Thanksgiving Break

Week 15 (Nov. 27-Dec. 3) The Future of Digital Storytelling

Objective: Examine trends with an eye toward what's ahead.

Week 16 (Dec. 4–10) Reflection, Contemplation and Closure

Objective: Contemplate learning experiences and say our goodbyes.

Canvas

Course materials and links are available on our course site at <http://canvas.unc.edu>. Modules for each week contain items to be read/viewed during that time. You also will find details about assignments and links to weekly discussion questions.

For general assistance, use the Help menu within Canvas for 24/7 chat and phone support. For help specific to the MADC program, contact Casey Hart at caseyhart@unc.edu.

Weekly discussions

Each week we will discuss issues related to the readings. The readings will come from the textbook, links to articles on Canvas and updates from the API newsletter.

Discussion questions will be on Canvas each week, and the discussions are critical to your learning experience. We do not have the benefit of synchronous classroom lectures and discussion, instead putting a focus on our regular participation online. Your involvement is essential.

Submit your reactions to the questions and post opinions, thoughts and ideas. “I agree!” or “Me too!” posts fail to push the discussion forward. Approach this part of the course with an eye toward substance and specifics.

Setting up a website

In the first week of the semester, you will create a website specifically for this course. If you have never created a site, have no fear. It is easy. Even if you already have a personal website, please create a new one for this course.

The recommended platform is WordPress, available for free at tarheels.live. WordPress has easy-to-use templates, but feel free to modify your site as you see fit.

You will use your site to publish most of the assignments, putting into practice the skills and techniques we will be discussing. The sites also provide a portfolio for the learning experiences that this course will create.

Grading

Here are the components used to determine your grade for the course:

- 1) Assignments that you will post to your website (50%).
- 2) Class participation in our weekly discussions. (50%). You are required to post a minimum of **four meaningful posts per week**, with “meaningful” excluding one-line posts. Fewer than four substantial posts results in a weekly participation mark of “L” or “Low Pass,” unless the total is zero, in which case the weekly mark is “F.”

A word about UNC’s graduate school grading system: It is different from the traditional A/B/C/D +/- system you are probably familiar with. Per the UNC Graduate School handbook, the grade scale used for graduate-level courses is:

- H for High Pass
- P for Pass
- L for Low Pass
- F for Fail
- IN for work incomplete

This grade scale does not equate with the A/B/C/D scale. An H is rare throughout UNC’s graduate-level programs. It is not the equivalent of an A, nor is a P the equivalent of a B or C. It is a different system. Don’t fixate on grades and think instead about what you are learning in the course.

Workload

Completing assignments: Detailed instructions on these are on Canvas. Weekly assignments are due by 11:59 p.m. Eastern on Sunday nights. Two larger assignments — a news story and a digital press kit — are more complex, so you will have more time to complete them. Late work will not be accepted.

Budgeting your time: “It’s too much! I can’t keep up! Information overload!” You may feel this way on occasion. Don’t panic. The “ounce of prevention” for this problem is to allocate a fixed amount of time each week to participate in the discussion and complete assignments. As the instructor, I will do the same.

Best wishes for a successful semester!