

MEJO 557: News Editing

Spring 2024

Meeting time: Monday/Wednesday 2 p.m. to 3:45 p.m.

Meeting place: Carroll 142 or on Zoom (<https://unc.zoom.us/j/95776766201>)

Instructor: Andy Bechtel

Email: abechtel@email.unc.edu

Website: editdesk.wordpress.com

Office hours: Tuesdays 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Carroll 213 or via Zoom (<https://unc.zoom.us/j/2132660379>)

Overview: Welcome to MEJO 557! Here, you will learn how to edit news stories and how to write photo captions, push notifications, alt text and headlines. You'll become an expert in Associated Press style and gain an appreciation for accuracy of information and fairness in language. The goal is to help you become a better communicator, for your career and for your life.

Required texts:

- The Associated Press Stylebook, 2022 edition (available at www.apstylebook.com)
- Stylebook of the UNC Hussman School (available at jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu)

About your instructor: I am a journalist with about a dozen years of newspaper experience. Much of my newsroom career was at The News & Observer, where I worked in sports, at the Chapel Hill bureau and as the lead editor on the Nation & World desk.

Assignments: The work in this course will be what you would do at a news organization: editing stories, writing headlines, etc. You will also take a series of quizzes on AP style. You will also edit and post stories that were written and reported by students in other MEJO courses.

Grading: Your assignments will be graded on a point system. The more complex the assignment, the more it's worth. The final exam is worth 200 points. Most assignments are worth 100 points. At the end of the semester, I will divide the number of points you earned by the total possible points (typically about 1,600) and use the following scale to calculate your grade:

A = 93-100
A- = 90-92
B+ = 87-89
B = 83-86
B- = 80-82
C = 70-79, with +/- ranges the same as for B
D = 60-69
F = 0-59

University attendance 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 attendance policy: Attendance and punctuality are crucial because nearly all of the work you do in this course will take place in class. If you miss an assignment because you are late, you may not make it up. If you miss class, you may make up assignments only if you provide documentation of illness or other cause for your absence. If you cannot attend class because of a university-related trip, please let me know ahead of time so we can make arrangements.

Title IX: Any student who is affected 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 eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident.

ARS: UNC-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 for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: ars.unc.edu or email ars@unc.edu.

Counseling and psychological services: CAPS is 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 the website caps.unc.edu or contact [Carolyn Eberling](#), the CAPS embedded counselor in the Hussman School.

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, or online to the EOC at eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident.

Diversity: I strive to make our classroom an inclusive place for all students. The journalism 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 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.

Honor code: Students are expected to conduct themselves 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. You are expected to produce your own work in this course. 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 Jules Dixon-Green.

Tentative schedule

Wednesday, Jan. 10

Topic: Introductions.

Monday, Jan. 15

No class; MLK holiday.

Wednesday, Jan. 17

Topics: What editors do; getting down to basics.

Reading: Punctuation section of AP Stylebook.

Assignment: Punctuation exercise.

Monday, Jan. 22

Topic: Eliminating redundancy, misspellings and other miscues.

Readings: AP Stylebook A-G.

Assignments: Conciseness/editing exercise; AP style quiz.

Wednesday, Jan. 24

Topics: Story editing and linking.

Assignment: Editing a news story; AP style quiz.

Reading: AP Stylebook, H-R.

Monday, Jan. 29

Topic: Watching out for bias and avoiding stereotypes.

Assignments: Settling a style question; AP style quiz.

Reading: AP stylebook, S-Z.

Wednesday, Jan. 31

Topic: Editing for accuracy and credibility; checking facts, maps and charts.

Assignment: Fact-checking exercise.

Monday, Feb. 5

Topic: Editing with ChatGPT.

Guest: Erin Servais.

Wednesday, Feb. 7

Assignment: Editing for the Durham VOICE.

Monday, Feb. 12

No class; well-being day.

Wednesday, Feb. 8

Reading: <http://jschoolstylebook.web.unc.edu>

Assignments: Quiz on MEJO stylebook; story editing in WordPress.

Monday, Feb. 19

Topic: Headline writing.

Assignment: Critiquing headlines.

Wednesday, Feb. 21

Topic: More headlines.

Assignment: Headline/editing exercise.

Monday, Feb. 26

Topic: Photos and captions.

Assignment: Caption-writing exercise.

Wednesday, Feb. 28

Topic: Layering information — headline, image and words.

Assignment: Story package in WordPress.

Monday, March 4

Topic: Layering information — headline, image and words.

Assignment: Story package in WordPress.

Wednesday, March 6

Assignment: Editing for the Durham VOICE.

Monday, March 18

Topic: Photo galleries.

Assignment: Putting together a photo gallery.

Wednesday, March 20

Topic: Alternative story forms.

Assignment: News site critique.

Monday, March 25

Topic: Audience engagement.

Guest: Ely Portillo, senior editor at WFAE.

Wednesday, March 27

Topic: Email newsletters.

Assignment: Curating an email newsletter.

Monday, April 1

Topic: Editing beyond news.

Guest: Laura Poole, freelance editor

Wednesday, April 3

No class; ACES conference.

Monday, April 8

Topic: Editing opinion writing.

Assignment: Editing an opinion piece.

Wednesday, April 10

Topic: Editing for the Durham VOICE.

Monday, April 15

Topic: Observing the editor-writer relationship.

Viewing: "Spotlight" or "Shattered Glass"

Wednesday, April 17

Topic: Pushing the news.

Assignment: Writing push notifications.

Monday, April 22

Assignment: Work on critiques.

Wednesday, April 24

Assignment: Editing for the Durham VOICE.

Monday, April 29

Topics: Presentation of critiques and review for final exam.

Thursday, May 2 (8 a.m.)

Topic: Final exam

Guidelines for grading your story editing

Misspelled proper name: -50

Missing first reference: -15

Other fact error: -25

Misspelled word: -10

Style error: -5

Wordiness and redundancy: -5

Grammar error: -5

Punctuation error: -3 to -5

Guidelines for grading your headlines, tweets and captions

Headlines, push notifications and captions are worth up to 25 points. Here's how grading works:

25: Shows unusual flair and cleverness. Represents the story or photo clearly and forcefully. A caption or headline that's truly exemplary.

23: Solid and publishable. Reflects the story or photo and attracts reader interest.

21: Usable but lacks precision and action.

18: Vague or difficult to understand, or has structural problems that hinder comprehension.

15: Contains a major flaw. Fails to use keywords that reflect the news or misses the major angle of the story. Contains a punctuation error, such as use of a semicolon where a comma is needed. Has unintended double meanings.

0: Contains an obvious grammar error, such as subject-verb disagreement. Has a misspelled name, fact error or libelous content.

ACEJMC values and competencies relevant to this course

The Hussman School of Journalism and Media's accrediting body outlines several 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://www.acejmc.org/policies-process/nine-standards/>

No single course could possibly give you all of these values and competencies; but collectively, our courses are designed to build your abilities in each of these areas. In MEJO 557, we will address several the values and competencies, with special emphasis on the competencies listed below.

- demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts;
- present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies;
- write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- effectively and correctly apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- critically evaluate your own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.