

JOMC 153: Writing and Reporting  
Fall 2015  
Mondays and Wednesdays, 2 p.m. to 5:30 p.m.; Carroll 142

**Instructor**

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Office hours: By appointment

**About this class**

Welcome to Writing and Reporting. In this class, you will learn how to write and report a wide variety of news articles on deadline. You'll learn how to use language correctly, with a particular emphasis on spelling and grammar, style consistency, accuracy and clear writing. We'll also talk about bias, libel, ethics, research, interviewing – and the journalism world beyond UNC.

**REQUIRED TEXTS:**

Reaching Audiences, Sixth Edition.

The Associated Press Stylebook, 2014 edition.

UNC-CH School of Media and Journalism Stylebook:

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

**You will need to bring your laptops to class with you every day**, since our classroom no longer has PCs. You'll use these to complete in-class assignments.

You'll also need to create a professional Twitter account, if you don't already have one. You'll use this to follow media news and complete a semester-long assignment.

**RECOMMENDED TEXTS:**

Journalists of all kinds know what's in the news. A great way to keep up with a wide variety of news sources is to follow their accounts on Twitter or to subscribe to a daily email newsletter like The Skimm, Bit of News or FiveThirtyEight's Significant Digits. Locally, The Point newsletter covers big Triangle news.

You should read daily newspapers or news sources (either in print or online) that cover both national and local news. I recommend The New York Times or the Wall Street Journal for national news and the News and Observer, WRAL and The Daily Tar Heel for local news. You should also read sources that keep tabs on the media industry, like Poynter, Jim Romanesko, Nieman Lab or the Columbia Journalism Review.

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:** You must adhere to the University's honor code. Some assignments will be collaborative, but in general, there should be no sharing of information while you are working on assignments.

Journalists should strive to be independent and transparent in their work. (After all, that's what they ask of their sources.) If you get information or an idea from someone else, you must credit that person.

**ATTENDANCE:** Show up and be on time. Period.

Most of the work we do in JOMC 153 is done in class. That makes it almost impossible to make up effectively. Make-up work will only be accepted for excused absences, which are determined at my discretion. To get an absence excused, you must notify me in advance of your intended absence OR provide documentation of illness (like a doctor's note). Email me, call me, talk to me after class.

If you have an ongoing situation that could affect your attendance, let me know as soon as possible.

**ETIQUETTE:** You will be using your laptops during this class, but you should be using them for class assignments – not outside Facebooking, tweeting, checking email or iMessaging. Come to class ready to participate in discussions and exercises, and put your phones on silent. You may leave the room to take a break at any time, and we'll also often take breaks as a class.

**ASSIGNMENTS:** We'll do the bulk of our work in class. Most of it will be what you would do at a news organization: reporting, writing and editing stories.

You have two out-of-class assignments:

- + Covering the **Park Lecture** with a partner from class. You'll tweet about the lecture and write a story about it using Storify.
- + Covering the UNC vs. N.C. State volleyball game on Nov. 18. We'll do this as a class, and we'll talk more about it later in the semester.

We will also have a handful of guest lecturers throughout the semester. On these days, you should come prepared with at least one question about the speaker's career or his or her advice for a young journalist.

## GRADING

All JOMC 153 classes use the same grading system, and the system here will also be used in public affairs reporting and PR writing.

Your grade is broken down this way:

**70 percent:** All in-class work, including but not limited to exercises in class; quizzes, including those on copy editing, AP and UNC-CH style, news names and events, language use and other subjects at the instructor's discretion; outside-of-class stories; book reports or reports on communications professionals, if assigned.

**10 percent:** First competency exam

**10 percent:** Second competency exam

**10 percent:** Third competency exam (final exam)

Below is a guide to how writing assignments are evaluated in JOMC 153. Because we use a point system, you may earn a grade higher than 100 on an exceptional assignment.

Writing assignments are graded with three main categories in mind:

### **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 or other major factual error. Writing Presley Baird would be -50. Until the first competency exam in JOMC 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)

### **3. Reporting**

These reporting criteria apply to stories for which you gather the information, including outside-of-class assignments and also to your selection of material furnished for in-class assignments:

+ 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

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

This schedule could change. If that happens, you will be notified in advance, and I'll post an updated version of the schedule on our Sakai site. Don't expect due dates of major assignments or exams to change.

Guidelines for assignments listed here will be posted on Sakai under the Assignments tab.

### **I. Weeks 1-8: Competencies**

At the end of eight weeks of classes, students should be able to demonstrate the following competencies when writing a news story based on a set of facts:

1. Select appropriate information from a set of facts to write a solid, concise summary lead;
2. Organize the story properly, accurately and completely;
3. Copyedit the story according to AP and UNC-CH style;
4. Watch for any libelous material;
5. Use proper spelling and grammar;
6. Develop interviewing techniques;
7. Use quotes and attribution appropriately; and
8. Develop basic research skills using the Internet and other resources

<b>Week #</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings</b>
1	Aug. 18-20	Introduction; AP Style; Copyediting; nature of news	Course syllabus AP Stylebook; UNC Stylebook; Reaching Audiences 1, Appendix A
2	Aug. 24-28	Leads, organization	Reaching Audiences 4, 5; Appendices A, B; UNC Stylebook
3	Aug. 31-Sept. 4	More leads; organization; editing as part of writing	Reaching Audiences 3-5, 6
	<b>Sept. 7</b>	<b>Labor Day Holiday</b>	
4	Sept. 8-11	Organization; spot news; quotes; attribution	Reaching Audiences 2, 5-6

5	Sept. 14-18	Interviewing; traditional and Internet research	Reaching Audiences 8-9
6	Sept. 21-25	Libel; bias; ethics; localizing copy	Reaching Audiences 10-11 NewsU modules accessed at <a href="http://www.newsu.org/courses/online-media-law-basics-bloggers-and-other-publish">http://www.newsu.org/courses/online-media-law-basics-bloggers-and-other-publish</a> and at <a href="http://www.newsu.org/courses/newsgathering-law">http://www.newsu.org/courses/newsgathering-law</a>
7	Sept. 28-Oct. 2	Review for Comp 1; more difficult stories	Reaching Audiences 5-6
8	Oct. 5-9	Prep for first competency exam	
	<b>Oct. 7</b>	<b>Competency Exam I</b>	

## II. Weeks 9-16: Competencies

At the end of 16 weeks of classes, students should be able to demonstrate the following competencies while conceptualizing, reporting and writing an event-based news story:

1. How to research, organize and write a variety of types of news stories;
2. Techniques of good writing and editing;
3. Interviewing techniques;
4. Knowledge of libel and its protections;
5. Ethics in newsgathering;
6. How to report poll stories and numbers;
7. How to cite sources and evaluate Internet sites; and
8. Familiarity with public records and documents.

<b>Week #</b>	<b>Dates</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings</b>
9	Oct. 12-16	Reporting polls	Reaching Audiences pp. 47-49; Appendix C

***Fall Break begins 5 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 14  
Classes resume 8 a.m. Monday, Oct. 29***

10	Oct. 19-23	Obituaries; Intro to speeches	Reaching Audiences 7
11	Oct. 26-30	More on speeches; news conferences	Reaching Audiences 7-9
	<b>Oct. 26</b>	<b>Competency Two Exam</b>	
12	Nov. 2-6	News conferences	Handouts, Reaching Audiences 10
13	Nov. 9-13	News conferences and other assignments	
14	Nov. 16-20	Writing for Twitter, Wikis and Storify	
15	Nov. 23-24	Final exam practice	
	<b>Nov. 25-29</b>	<b>Thanksgiving break</b>	
16	Nov. 30-Dec. 2	<b>Final exam (Competency Exam III) given in class</b>	