MEJO 711: Writing and Editing for Digital Media
Fall 2017

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Course overview

Digital media combine and converge skill sets, tools and technologies. They also blur the traditional roles of producer and consumer, publisher and reader, message sender and message receiver.

These transformations and the demands that they place on writers and editors are the focus of this course. Understanding our increasingly fragmented audiences and exploring how different media behave will help you develop content for digital formats. You will analyze the possibilities of online environments, including interactivity, hyperlinking and social media. You will also learn practical skills to help you succeed in writing for digital media.

This course is about writing — 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.

Course philosophy

The point of view taken in this course is that we all may be part of a larger content development and management team. We are principally writers, therefore, though at times the point of view is that of a site editor, someone charged with maintaining consistent editorial, graphic design and management policies for a website or group of sites. As editors, we are agents for the reader as well as the writer.

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:

- further develop your abilities to write clearly, precisely, accurately, with energy and voice, and for specific digital audiences;
- teach you practical skills for writing and developing content for digital publishing and delivery;

- teach you how to purposefully blend text, graphical content, multimedia and links;
- explore how trends in personal publishing and social media are transforming journalism and public relations.

The course is divided into three sections:

- Foundations, a section devoted the fundamentals of writing well and the elements of journalism;
- Practice, a section that breaks down the individual skill sets, questions and considerations important when planning and creating content for digital environments and online publications;
- Contexts, a section that looks at personal publishing, citizen journalism, social media and society, and business communication and its environments.

Required materials

- *Writing and Editing for Digital Media*, 3rd edition, by Brian Carroll
- *Associated Press Stylebook*, 2017 edition (available at https://www.apstylebook.com)
- *Need To Know,* the daily email newsletter of the American Press Institute (subscribe at www.americanpressinstitute.org)
- Other weekly readings (listed in each week's folder on Sakai)

Diversity

The university's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is found at http://eoc.unc.edu/our-policies/ppdhrm/. UNC-Chapel Hill is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community, and 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's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

If you have any disability or other special situation that might make it difficult to meet the course requirements, please discuss it with me as soon as possible. If you have not done so already, you should also contact the Department of Accessibility Resources & Service (AR&S) at 919-962-8300 or accessibility@unc.edu.

Course schedule

<u>FOUNDATIONS</u>

Weeks 1 & 2 – The Values of Writing Well
Objectives: Review and further develop writing skills applicable to any medium. Identify weaknesses in writing and begin improving in those areas.

Week 3 –Writing Well Online
Objective: Learn how writing for digital environments differs from writing for traditional print media and what remains constant.

<u>PRACTICE</u>

Week 4 – Writing Well Online
Objective: Learn to adapt style and specific writing techniques for digital formats.

Week 5 – Social Media and Society
Objective: Explore the effective use and ethical implications of social media, which offer exciting opportunities for digital writers and editors.

Week 6 – Display Copy
Objective: Learn to write headlines, subheads, captions and lists.

Week 7 – Writing for Spaces and Places
Objective: Plan and curate written content for digital spaces.

Week 8 – Online Public Relations
Objective: Learn how PR is changing in the digital era.

<u>CONTEXTS</u>

Week 9 – Blogito Ergo Sum
Objective: Further explore the fields of personal publishing.

Week 10 – We the People, Part I
Objectives: Explore how democratic digital media are transforming communications. Learn how to add value in this era of pro-am communication.

Week 11 – We the People, Part II: News as Conversation
Objectives: Learn what organizations are doing to engage readers into a conversation and to build and maintain community online.

Week 12 – Writing for Spaces in Business
Objective: Explore how businesses and institutions are embracing online information spaces and using them to communicate both internally and externally.

Week 13 – The Future of Digital Storytelling
Objective: Discuss what the future holds for the media landscape and ecosystem, whose current form would have been unimaginable even a decade ago.

Week 14 – Reflection, Contemplation and Closure
Objectives: Contemplate learning experiences. Complete revisions. Wrap up loose ends. Say our goodbyes.

Members of a community

Students in this course should recognize their membership in a learning community. We are partners exploring issues in a digital environment.

I am a Sakai user like you, but I'm not an expert. I am a WordPress user, but I am not a software developer. Technical or computer-related issues or challenges, therefore, are yours to overcome, though certainly I (and your classmates) will help any way we can. We are all in this together.

In this course, we do not have the benefit of body language or face-to-face contact, so we have to work a bit harder at understanding and at being understood. We perceive only what is typed on the screen.

Weekly discussions

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

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

Submit your reactions to the questions and post new questions, thoughts and ideas. These posts can and should include thoughts and opinions, additional research and information about the topic, helpful websites, journal and newspaper articles and other related sources from which the class might benefit. One-line, "I agree!" or "Me too!" posts fail to push the discussion forward.

Finally, please do not use the forums for anything other than class-related discussion and assignments.

Sakai

All course materials and links will be available on the class Sakai site at
http://sakai.unc.edu. Folders for each week contain a list of items to be read/viewed
during that time. You also will find details of assignments due and links to weekly
discussion questions. We will use the Sakai forums for discussions.

The ITS Response Center provides 24/7 assistance with Sakai requests and
questions via:
- Phone: 962-HELP(4357)
- Submit a Help Request
- Live Chat (M-F 9am - 6pm)

You can also get help with Sakai from Rachel Lillis, director for e-learning at the
journalism school. Contact her at **lillis@email.unc.edu**.

Setting up a blog

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

The recommended blog platform is WordPress, available for free at
http://web.unc.edu. WordPress is open-source software, providing great latitude in
experimenting with code, features and content. It also has user-friendly templates.

You will use your blog to publish most of the assignments, putting into practice the
skills and techniques we will be discussing. The blogs also provide a kind of diary for
the learning experiences this course will create, making them useful beyond the
semester. The important thing now is to set up your blog and add the URL to the
Class Blogroll folder in Sakai. You'll find instructions on how to do that on our
course site on Sakai.

Grading

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

1) Weekly assignments that you will post to your blog by midnight Sunday night
   (50%).
2) Class participation, which refers to our weekly discussions of the readings.
   Students are required to post a minimum of **five meaningful posts per
   week**, with "meaningful" excluding one-line posts. Fewer than five
   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" (50%).

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 a B or C. It is a different system. A grade of P in no way communicates deficiency. As UNC graduate students say: "P is the first letter to get to Ph.D."

Workload

1. Weekly assignments: Detailed instructions on these are on Sakai. Weekly assignments are due by 11:59 p.m. Sunday nights so that we are ready to reset Monday morning for the next topic. Late work will not be accepted.

2. Leading discussion: When it is your week to lead class discussion, make sure you have done all of the assigned readings for that week and that you understand the material. This will mean reading ahead. The assigned readings are posted on Sakai sorted by week. Discussion leaders are responsible for coming up with questions to generate and sustain discussion on that week's topics.

3. Class participation and professionalism: Imagine that we share a pristine and beautiful swimming pool. Your instructor will serve as a lifeguard looking for danger, but we all have to work to keep the water clean and the pool safe and fun. **Go out of your way to be nice**. More specifically, you are expected to make at least five substantive posts per week to the Sakai discussions for the week, or one each business day.

 "It's too much! I can't keep up! Information overload!" These are familiar refrains. The "ounce of prevention" for this problem is to allocate a fixed amount of time each week to read the discussion threads, to make posts and to participate in the discussion. As the instructor, I will do the same.

Honor Code

The UNC honor system and code are in effect for MEJO 711. They are available in full at http://honor.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," but the Honor Code means much more. It is the guiding force behind the students' responsible exercise of freedom, the foundation of student self-governance at UNC, which subscribes to the view that members of the UNC community should be responsible for upholding the values that have been agreed upon by the entire community.

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

- When you take ideas or quote from a source, you must paraphrase accurately and give credit by appropriately citing to 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 original source.
- Citing digital sources can be confusing. For more information on how to cite Web-based sources, see the Citing Information tutorial (http://www.lib.unc.edu/instruct/citations/) or contact a reference librarian (http://www.lib.unc.edu/ask.html).

Academic integrity

Because academic integrity is the foundation of college life, academic dishonesty will result in automatic failure on the assignment in question. Academic dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, the following: cheating, unauthorized collaboration, plagiarism, fabrication, submitting the same work in multiple courses and aiding and abetting.

Online class statement

1. By enrolling as a student in this course, you agree to abide by UNC-Chapel Hill policies related to the Acceptable Use of online resources. Please consult the Acceptable Use Policy (http://its.unc.edu/about-us/how-we-operate) on topics such as copyright and privacy protection.

2. When using online resources offered by organizations not affiliated with UNC-Chapel Hill, such as Google or YouTube, please note that the Terms and Conditions of these companies apply. These third parties may offer different degrees of privacy protection and access rights to digital content. You should be aware of this when posting content to sites not managed by UNC-Chapel Hill.

3. When links to sites outside of the [unc.edu](unc.edu) domain are inserted in class discussions, please be mindful that clicking on sites not affiliated with UNC-Chapel Hill may pose a risk for your computer due to the possible presence of malware on such sites.

4. Online courses may at times require Web-based assignments that are public in nature and may be viewed by third parties online. This is especially true in social media and blogging platforms. Be mindful of the information you choose to share publicly as part of your assignments. Under the Federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) a student's education records are protected from disclosure to third parties. However, FERPA protection does not extend to material shared publicly by students.

Need help? If you have special needs or challenges of any kind, including learning disabilities, please let me know.

Finally, I believe we are here for a good time, not a long time, so let's have some fun this semester!

Core values and competencies

This course covers the following competencies required by the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communication:

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the country in which the institution that invites ACEJMC is located, as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of gender, race ethnicity, sexual orientation and, as appropriate, other forms of diversity in domestic society in relation to mass communications;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society;
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity;
- Think critically, creatively and independently;
- Conduct research and evaluate information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work;
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve;
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness;
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work;
- Contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.

MEJO 711 Fall 2017 Schedule At A Glance

Week	Due date	Topic	Assignments due Sundays at midnight*
Week 1	Aug. 27	Writing Well, Part I	1. Blog setup 2. Twitter account 3. Blog post 4. Need to Know subscription
Week 2	Sept. 3	Writing Well, Part II	Writing sample: where you're from
Week 3	Sept. 10	Writing Well Online	Writing partner critique
Week 4	Sept. 17	More Writing Well Online	1. Revising your writing sample 2. Writing a local wiki post
Week 5	Sept. 24	Social Media and Society	Live tweeting
Week 6	Oct. 1	Display Copy	Headline writing
Week 7	Oct. 8	Writing for Spaces and Places	Email newsletter
Week 8	Oct. 15	Online PR	Digital press release
Fall Break			
Week 9	Oct. 29	Blogito, Ergo Sum: Trends in Personal Publishing	Liveblogging
Week 10		We the People, Part I: Distributed (or Participative/Citizen/Web 2.0) Journalism	
Week 11	Nov. 12	We the People, Part II: News as Conversation	Digital news story
Week 12	Nov. 19	Writing for Spaces in Business	Interactive FAQ
		Thanksgiving	
Week 13	Dec. 3	The Future of Digital Storytelling	Storify
Week 14	Dec. 10	Contemplation and Closure	Final revisions

*All assignments are submitted to your blog. See specific assignment instructions in each week's folder for more details.