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JRNL 330.03: News Editing

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Recommended Citation

Eaton, Joseph L., "JRNL 330.03: News Editing" (2015). *Syllabi*. 2760.

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Journalism 330 Editing

Meets Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:40 p.m. – 2 p.m., in DAH 004

Instructor

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Office Hours

Monday and Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

And by Appointment

Course description

Good editors are hard to find. Editors push reporters to report and write the best story possible. They help reporters get it right, hold their hands, talk them down from the ledge, clean up their messes, keep them from getting sued and make them look better than they really are.

The goal of this class is to help you develop those skills. The first half of the course focuses on the fundamentals of fixing copy, which is often called line editing. We'll spend our days drilling AP style, grammar and usage. Once we get that down (hopefully by the midterm) we'll shift gears and begin the heavy lifting that saves terrible stories and turns good ones into prizewinners. Along the way, we'll learn how to check facts, how to keep a reporter out of legal trouble and how to evaluate pitches. The class will also emphasize general news literacy.

Every class will include a quiz and hands-on work. Quizzes and in-class work cannot be made up outside of class.

Grades, the syllabus, class notes, some readings and assignments can be found at the UM Online/Moodle listing for this course. All email communication will happen through Moodle to your university-assigned addresses. It's your responsibility to check the Moodle site and your student email regularly. Not checking this address will not be an acceptable excuse for missing information about this course.

Required Reading

1. The AP Stylebook
Edition must be no older than 2009. Online editions not acceptable.
2. AP Guide to Newswriting

Also listed as
The Word: An Associated Press Guide to Good News Writing
By Rene J. Cappon

3. This class requires that you read and think like a journalist. Before class, you are expected to have digested the front pages of the Missoulian, the Kaimin and The New York Times. To keep up with media news, you are required to read Poynter's MediaWire.
4. Additional readings as provided and/or assigned.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you will be better editors---and, by extension, writers---than you are right now. You will also:

- Learn key areas of the AP Stylebook and how to use it as a resource.
- Copy-edit on deadline.
- Become proficient fact-checkers.
- Learn the difference between a mediocre headline and one that grabs both online and print readers.
- Write captions that go beyond obvious information.
- Understand the fundamentals of story structure.
- Learn how to address issues of race and diversity in news copy
- Learn how to correctly use numbers and math in news copy

Structure of the first half of the course

An editing test given on the first day of class will assess your skill-level and knowledge of AP Style, usage, grammar and punctuation. Subsequent classes will focus on weak areas and general copy skills that include, but are not limited to:

- Clauses, use of commas
- Subject/verb agreement
- Proper use of that, which, who and whom
- Punctuating quotes
- Proper use of titles, addresses, abbreviations
- Common errors and misspellings

We won't dwell on minutiae of grammar, but you will learn useful tools, tricks and fundamentals of copy-editing.

The midterm exam will cover the all of the first half of the course.

Structure of the second half of the course

Students will focus on headlines, captions, line- and structural-editing, writing cleaner copy and editing other writers' work and story pitches. Quizzes and lectures will follow chapters and topics outlined in Cappon's The Word/AP Guide to Newswriting as well as additional assigned readings. We'll also cover the

basics of libel law. General copy-editing work will continue in and out of class. Final exam will cover all aspects of the course.

Grading

- Attendance, Participation: 20 percent
- Quizzes, assignments and in-class work: 50 percent
- Midterm: 10 percent
- Final: 20 percent

ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS

- Attendance and participation: *The only excused absence is one communicated to and accepted by the instructor via e-mail at least one hour prior to class.* Unexcused absences will factor into the final grade. Missed in-class quizzes and work cannot be made up.
- Professionalism: Journalism is deadline-driven. A late assignment is a failed assignment. In rare instances involving documented circumstances, such as hospitalization, I may grant an extension or make an alternative assignment.
- Academic honesty: Misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the university. Cheating will not be tolerated. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code at http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php.

In addition: You may not submit for this course any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class unless you receive prior approval from the professor of this course. To do so without permission will result in an F for the assignment, and could result in an F for the course.

- Plagiarism. Submitted work must be entirely original; you may not copy or borrow phrasing or sentence structure, unless you attribute clearly. If you are uncertain about what is or is not appropriate, ask me. Submitting the work of someone else as your own is a serious violation of journalistic ethics and the University of Montana Student Conduct Code. An act of plagiarism will result in an F for the course and possible disciplinary sanction by the university.

A note on paying attention in the digital age

Except when otherwise noted, this classroom is a device-free zone. Please put all gadgets (computers, phones, etc.) in your bag. Active participation requires your attention to the topic at hand. Travelling in the online world will harm our discussion and hinder your grade.

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities

This course is accessible to otherwise qualified students with disabilities. To request reasonable program modifications, please consult with the instructor. [Disability Services for Students](http://life.umt.edu/dss) (<http://life.umt.edu/dss>) will assist in the accommodation process.