Copy Editing, Journalism 301, Spring 2017

(Journalism 201, News Writing, is a prerequisite for this course)
Tuesday-Thursdays: Noon. – 1:15 p.m. Weinstein Lab, Room 418.
Mike Spear, Instructor. Office: 427 Weinstein Hall
Hours: 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays
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Course Objectives: Journalism 301 teaches the fundamentals of copy editing, as they apply to all publications, whether online, magazines or newspapers. The course emphasizes word understanding, accuracy, style and the fundamentals of Standard Written English. You will edit news and feature stories and write headlines. Emphasis is given to verification of facts, libel and ethics. Follow The Associated Press style on everything connected with this class. If you apply yourself, you will leave this course prepared to edit well in a number of media. You will find this skill invaluable.

Required Publications:
1. The New York Times online, daily and Sunday. (There will be a short true-false news quiz each Tuesday.)
3. Course text will be on Blackboard. You can make editing suggestions for clarity while reading it and gain extra points on grades.

Grading Policy: Classroom and homework exercises begin with a raw score of 100. Plus points may be earned for making improvements in the copy beyond those normally expected of a copy editor. They may be earned for a particularly effective job of simplifying clearly a complex point, the strengthening of a local angle, improvements in the lead or in the story’s organization. Their values vary, depending on the quality and extent of the improvements. What I will be asking you to do is look at words, meanings and sentences in a way that has never been required of you. If you happen to be a natural nitpicker, your adjustment in the course should go quickly.

Remember: A copy editor’s job is not to rewrite. It is to help the writer. Ideally, a copy editor with any publication would contact the writer about any significant changes that need to be made in copy. You are expected to work to the best of your
ability. Plus points will be added when the work is clearly superior. An automatic F comes with misspelled names, misquotes or other major factual errors. These Fs are worth 59 points, not zero, so they are not totally devastating. Zeros come with missed assignments. It is understood that you will come to the first class with all the words on the F-word list committed to memory. Overlooked words from this list have been the primary reason for Fs over the years. Grade deductions may increase when new errors are edited into the copy.

Course Grades: Course grades are based on performance in the classroom, on homework and on a series of quizzes on subjects, including style, grammar, syntax and usage. Editing is a craft. It requires skills that can only be developed and improved through extensive practice. You will be required to edit until you are ready to emit primordial screams. (The lab is soundproof. No one will hear you.) To help you develop, I will evaluate your work closely. These time-consuming critiques are for your benefit, to help you learn and improve. If you do not look at them closely, you will not improve.

Out-of-class expectations: To be successful in this course, you will have to devote an average of 10 to 14 hours each week to prepare for class, participating in class sessions, studying course-related materials and completing course assignments.

Final course grades will be distributed this way:
Class work, quizzes -- 65 percent
Progress and attitude -- 5 percent
Midterm -- 5 percent
Final -- 25 percent

The “progress and attitude” portion of your grade is based on a careful evaluation of your work throughout the semester, considering your application of principles, responsibility in meeting deadlines, attendance and participation, among other factors.

Grade Values: Here are the grades and their values for this course:
A = 90-100 (Clearly Superior Work)
B = 80-89 (Above Average Work)
C = 70-79 (Average Work)
D = 60-69 (Below Average Work)
F = 59 and below (Failing)

Note: The grading system applies to all homework, classroom exercises, tests and
Responsibility: Grading in this course is based on the assumption that the copy editor is the last person able to catch any problems in stories before they go to readers. At the very least, spelling and grammatical errors must be eliminated by the copy editor, and AP style must be consistent. Each time an error in spelling, grammar or anything else appears in the copy, the publication loses credibility among readers. The grading system, therefore, is designed to encourage careful and accurate editing. Note: When a source such as a name or a historical date can be looked up in a reference source, you must do this.

Important: To help you develop as a professional journalist, I will evaluate your work according to professional standards, regardless of your experience, appearance or personality. Grading is based on performance. Criteria include accuracy, clarity, thoroughness, language usage, news judgment, balance and fairness, story organization, conciseness and simplicity, proper use of AP style and avoidance of libel.

Cheating and Dishonesty: Personal integrity is an essential part of good journalism. Therefore, I expect all work done in this class to be your own, except in instances in which I ask you to work with a class member collaboratively. Sign the pledge on all work. The word “pledge” is sufficient.

Plagiarism: The easy access to sources provided by the Internet has brought about a rash of plagiarism cases on campuses across the country. This involves taking someone else’s words and using them as your own. Not only is this illegal but it is unethical and an honor-code violation. If you are involved in plagiarism on any paper in this course, you will automatically flunk the course. It is fine to use material--narrative, quotes and indirect quotes--as long as you provide sources for each so that it is clear to the reader where the information comes from.

Attendance: You must be punctual. You cut class at your peril. There can be occasions when you are too sick to come to class. Even so, you should find out from a classmate what was covered in class, the homework assignments and send your homework to me by email at the beginning of the class in which it is due. I don’t accept late assignments. If you fail to do this, you will get a zero on the missed homework assignment.
Note Carefully: At the end of the semester, if you have perfect attendance, I will drop your two lowest grades earned during the course and increase your course grade by a half level. If, for example, you have earned a B, I will raise your grade to B+. If you miss three classes during the semester, you will lose a letter grade for the course. If you miss five classes, you will lose two letter grades. If you miss six or more classes, you fail the course.

Vocabulary: Copy editors must have a strong vocabulary in order to fully understand what is being reported and how the language is being used. I will give you vocabulary words to learn each week. You should come up with a system for learning each word so you will know how to use it. I leave that responsibility up to you. I suggest that you always learn the part of speech for each word so you will know how to use it.

You can earn extra points on the vocabulary quizzes each Tuesday by knowing the 100 vocabulary words of the optional assignment I gave you to complete during break before the semester started. From this list, I will select five words on your regular vocabulary quizzes each week. Each is worth two points. But you must get 100 on the main test in order to get the extra credit. This makes it possible for you to get 110 on each of the vocabulary tests if you get all correct.

These listserves are useful for helping you improve your vocabulary. word@m-w.com; join-wordoftheday@lists.lexico.com

AP Stylebook Study Guide for Thursday tests:
Sections covering A through D should be mastered by Jan. 19. Look especially at abbreviations and acronyms; academic degrees; departments/titles; accused; A.D.; addresses; adopt, approve, enact; adverse/adverse/Al Fatah; adviser; affect/effect; ages; aid/aide; Alaska; allege; allude/refer; altar/alter; all right; amok; among/between; annual; anticipate/expect; apostrophes; apposition; Arabic numerals; arbitrate/mediate; arctic; army; arrest; assassin, killer, murderer; as if; assault/battery; attorney/lawyer; attorney general/attorneys general; author; awhile/a while; bad/badly; because/since; bail; biannual/biennial; bloc/block; blond/blonde; burglary, larceny, robbery, theft; capitalizations; Capitol; chairman/chairwoman; cellphone; chief justice; Chinese names; collective nouns; collide/collision; the colon; comma; complement/compliment; composition titles; compared to/compared with; compose/comprise/constitute; continual/continuous; couple/couple of; courtesy titles; court-martial; dangling modifiers; the dash; datelines; demolish/destroy; dilemma; dimensions; directions; discrete/discreet; diseases; disinterested/uninterested; and duel.
Sections covering E through J should be mastered by Jan. 26. Pay close attention to each other/one another; earth; ecology; either...or/neither...nor; ellipses; email; emigrate/immigrate; ensure/insure; entitled; espresso; essential clauses-phrases/nonessential clauses-phrases; euro; ex.; extra; execute; false titles; Fannie Mae; farther/further; faze/phase; feather bedding/featherbedding; felony/misdemeanor; fewer/less; figuratively/literally; first lady; fiscal/monetary; flack/flak; flair/flare; flaunt/flout; flier/flyer; flounder/founder; following; forcible rape; forego/forgo; fractions; fulsome; gamut/gantlet/gauntlet; gibe/jibe; gourmand/gourmet; governmental bodies; grade/grader; grisly/grizzly; guerrilla/gorilla; habeas corpus; hang/hanged/hung; highway designations; historic/historical; holidays; hopefully; hyphen; imply/infer; in/into; indiscreet/indiscrete; input; injuries; irregardless; junior/senior; judgment; jury.

Sections covering K through O should be mastered by Feb. 2. Look closely at ketchup; kidnap; Kmart; knot; Korean names; Ku Klux Klan; lady; late; latitude/longitude; lay/lie; lectern/podium/pulpit/rostrum; legislative titles; legislature; like/as; livid; magazine names; machine gun; Medal of Honor; middle initials; miles per gallon per hour; milquetoast; millions/billions; minus sign; mishap; months; mph; mujahedeen; mullah; names; nautical mile; naval/navel; nicknames; none; numerals; obscenities/profanities/vulgarities; oral/verbal/navel; organizations/institutions; and over.

Sections covering P through T should be mastered by Feb. 9. Here you should look especially at parentheses; pardon/parole/probation; part time/part-time; party affiliation; pedal/peddle; penitentiary; people/persons; percent; percentages; personifications; Peter Principle; Ph.D/Ph.Ds; Philippines; pica; plead/pleaded/pleading; plurals; p.m./a.m.; political parties and philosophies; polls and surveys; pore/pour; port/starboard; possessives; presently; pretense/pretext; presently; principal/principle; prior to; prison/jail; professor; prove/proved/proving; quotation marks; quotations in the news; ratio; ravage/ravish; rack/wrack; rebut/refute; reign/rein; revolver; rifle/riffle; scurrilous; semiannual; the semicolon; shall/will; should/would; sizes; slang; smartphone; sneaked; spokesman/spokeswoman; sic; space shuttle; sports utility vehicle; state names; straight-laced/strait-laced; subjunctive mood; Taliban; teenager; temperatures; that/which/who/whom; time element; time of day; times; titles; toward; troop/troupe; and trustee/trusty.

Sections covering U through Z should be mastered by Feb. 16. Look closely at ukulele; under way; unique; United Kingdom; United Nations; upstate; upward; Vaseline; versus; vice; Virginia; vote tabulation; weapons; weather terms; website; weights; weird/weirdo; whiskey; who's/whose; widow/widower; -wise; women; Xerox; X-ray; years; yellow journalism and Zionism.
Proposed Schedule:
Jan. 10, Week 1: Editing symbols; vocabulary assessment; how to edit.
Jan. 17, Week 2: Grammar; Bremner test; sequence of tenses.
Jan. 24, Week 3: More on grammar and editing.
Jan. 31, Week 4: Style and usage; punctuation mechanics.
Feb. 7, Week 5: Style and usage; wordiness and redundancies.
Feb. 14, Week 6: Clichés; quotes and attribution.
Feb. 21, Week 7: Headline writing; Introduction to InDesign.
Feb. 28, Week 8: U.S. court system; localizing leads.


March 7, Week 9: Polls and weapons.
March 14, Week 10: Legal and ethical issues.

Midterm will fall on or about March 16.

March 21, Week 11: More on legal issues.
March 28, Week 12: Using photos; writing cutlines.
April 4, Week 13: Principles of design.
April 11, Week 14: Review.
Last day of classes is April 21.

Useful web sites:
http://www.copydesk.org; http://www.theslot.com
CJR’S LANGUAGE CORNER: http://www.cjr.org/tools/lc; WEBSTER’S UNABRIDGED: http://www.m-w.com

GUIDE TO GRAMMAR AND STYLE: http://www.westegg.com/cliche/
BASIC STATISTICS: http://nilesonline.com/stats/
COMMON ENGLISH ERRORS: http://www.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/errors.html