

**JOUR 207, Editing**  
**MW 12 – 1:45 p.m.**  
**Weinstein 418**

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*“A writer is the person in the hospital wearing one of those gowns that’s open in the back. An editor is walking behind, making sure that nobody can see their ass.”*

This quote from famed editor John Bennet offers some guidance and clarity about the role of an editor in journalism. This course will build on your foundation in news writing and help you to develop editing skills that will serve you in any newsroom or any profession where clear communication is essential. You will become the editor that writers want walking behind them.

## **BOOKS**

“The Copy Editor’s Best Friend,” by Michael M. Spear (in Blackboard)  
The free online AP Stylebook through the UR library

## **DAILY AND WEEKLY MEDIA**

Subscribe to The New York Times and Washington Post online editions, which are free through the UR library. Subscribe to Harvard’s Nieman Reports (free). Read The Collegian. Start listening to “The Daily” podcast if you don’t already. Start listening to NPR news shows, if you don’t already. We will have quizzes based on these news outlets. If you miss the quiz, you cannot make it up.

One way to help your editing is to read widely. You should consume good journalism wherever you find it. We will spend time in class discussing and critiquing a wide range of stories. I will frequently distribute good and bad works of daily and non-daily journalism for your review and discussion.

## **ATTENDANCE**

COVID may continue to be an issue this fall, so if you are ill DO NOT COME TO CLASS or try to gut things out. Seek medical care as needed. If possible, let me know in advance if you have to miss a class. I will help you to figure out how to catch up whatever assignments or materials were covered in class. I am reasonable about working with extenuating circumstances, but please communicate with me. Missing class does not mean you can miss a deadline, unless you are dealing with an emergency such as an illness or family crisis. Please keep me informed of such events as best as you can.

“To write is human. To edit, is divine.” – Stephen King

## **COURSE CORE OBJECTIVES**

You will learn the basics of copy editing as they apply to all forms of journalism. In doing so, you will master word understanding, accuracy, style and the fundamentals of Standard Written English. You will develop a passion for checking facts, correcting errors and sniffing out libel. You will look at words, sentences and whole stories in ways that may be new to you. You will be cool under deadline pressure, and we will have deadline work. And if you are a nitpicker by nature, you will quickly get the hang of this. If not, we will work to get you there.

**Remember this: your job as an editor is not to rewrite** entire pieces of work. It is to help the writer, which helps the reader. A newsroom adage is worth keeping in mind: Write Without Fear, Edit Without Mercy.

## **BUT HOW???**

We will closely edit news and feature stories almost daily. You must follow The Associated Press style on **all work** connected with this class. We will have weekly AP quizzes. If you apply yourself, you will leave this course prepared to edit well in any media or profession. You will find this skill invaluable.

## **VOCABULARY**

Editors must have a strong vocabulary in order to fully understand what is being reported and how the language is being used. We will have weekly quizzes to sharpen your skills in this area. Once you have developed to a professional level, you must use your powers for good.

## **SPEAR’S POETRY SLAM**

In the tradition of journalism professor Mike Spear, who developed this course and wrote our text, we will have a poetry slam around the middle of the semester. Reading poetry will improve your vocabulary, writing, editing, sense of language and appreciate for the human condition. You will also impress your family, friends and future coworkers with your ability to recite poetry from memory.

## **HONOR CODE**

You are expected to do your own work for this class unless I tell you otherwise. Failure to do so is an offense with potentially devastating consequences. Presenting fictional interviews, quotes, etc., as factual is an honor code violation that will result in failing the course. Plagiarism is grounds for possible university sanction.

## GRADES

You earn your grades – I don't give them. Your work will be graded according to professional standards, with more tolerance at the start of the course and less as we go along. In other words, your progress will be a good part of your final grade.

**Here are some keys to getting a good grade:** paying attention to AP style; editing clearly and accurately; catching errors and improving copy; participating in discussions; scoring well on quizzes and tests; showing effort and interest.

**Here are some ways to get an automatic F:** misspelling a proper name; failing to catch major factual errors; failing to catch libel or not check a fact; not participating in class; earning poor quiz and test grades; showing little effort or interest; missing a deadline; misspelling the following: accommodate, occurred, a lot, receive and its (as a possessive). Remember, It's only when it is. Also, you will lose five to 10 points if you don't remove the following words in your stories: really, great, very and awesome. Do not use those words unless they are part of a direct quotation. You should not need to ask me why, at this point.

## GRADING KEY

A -- outstanding work that requires minimal additional editing

B -- above average work that requires minor editing with no major errors

C -- average work that requires substantial editing and no more than one rewriting effort before publishing or broadcasting

D -- unacceptable work that contains multiple errors and requires extensive editing and rewriting before possible publication or broadcast

F -- see the note above.

Numerically, this is how I will break down your grades:

A+ = 98-100; A = 92-97; A- = 90-91

B+ = 88-89; B = 82-87; B- = 80-81

C+ = 78-79; C = 72-77; C- = 70-71

D+ = 68-69; D = 62-67; D- = 60-61

F = 59 and below

Pluses and minuses may be added to your grade based on several factors. For example, a student with letter grade of C+ who has shown progress, enterprise, etc., could get boosted to a B-. Conversely, a student with A grades who does not participate in class, shows up late, etc., could wind up with an A-.

### **Making the grade:**

60 percent: Assignments

15 percent: final exam

10 percent: quizzes

15 percent: progress, participation, effort

## **WHAT IT WILL TAKE**

To be successful in this course, expect to devote an average of 10 to 14 hours each week preparing for class and your participation in class sessions, studying course related materials and completing assignments.

## **NOTE WELL**

We have a no-phones policy in class, which applies whether we are in-person or remote. Violating this policy gets you removed from class for the day and a zero on any assignments that day.

## **NO RECORDINGS**

One of the hallmarks of a University of Richmond education is small classes where faculty and students engage in robust discussions. The goal is always to encourage students with varied perspectives to be heard respectfully.

Recognizing all this, professors in Journalism will not be recording our classroom sessions. Students are also prohibited from capturing, copying, sharing, publishing, and/or posting on social media any recordings (audio or audio/video) in whole or in part or captured images of the class during a Zoom session or images of students or faculty in the course. Violations of this policy will be referred to the Westhampton and Richmond College deans with the possibility of sanctions, including suspension or expulsion.

## **TENTATIVE CLASS SCHEDULE**

Week 1: Editing symbols; vocabulary assessment; how to edit.

Week 2: Grammar; Bremner test; sequence of tenses.

Week 3: More on grammar and editing.

Week 4: Style and usage; punctuation mechanics

Week 5: Style and usage; wordiness and redundancies.

Week 6: Clichés; quotes and attribution.

Week 7: headlines; midterm prep, midterm

Week 8: (fall break); courts; localizing leads.

Week 9: Libel and Privacy, poetry slam

Week 10: Clutter and editing math

Week 11: Legal and Ethical Issues

Week 12: Polls, weapons, review.

Week 13: Thanksgiving break, review

Week 14: Class videos, final exam review

## OFFICE HOURS, ETC.

I am on campus nearly every day, but it is best to send an email a day ahead of time to set up a meeting. I am available during most reasonable hours and some unreasonable hours. I generally respond quickly to emails, but if I don't respond to yours right away, it's personal and I just don't like you. Or I am awash with other emails from other students and I'll respond as soon as I can. Pick whichever explanation is best for your self-esteem and believe that it is true. **Please communicate** – if you are not clear about something or are concerned about something, get in touch with me right away.

## VIDEO PROJECT

You will use your creative powers to produce a video focused on various elements of class, including AP style, F-words and other matters related to journalism.

## F-WORDS?

These are the standard F-words that have been used in our classes, along with 10 of the most commonly misspelled words. If you leave any of the 10 words misspelled in an assignment or an AP quiz, you will earn an F. If you allow any of the 10 F-words to remain in a story, you earn an F.

sergeant (note the first “e”)  
teenage (no hyphen)  
occasion (two “c’s” and one “s”)  
embarrass (two “r’s” and two “s’s”)  
all right (two words)  
site (not sight—for crime site)  
protester (“er” never “or.”)  
accommodate (two “c’s” and two “m’s”)  
receive (“i” before “e” except after “c”)  
occurred (two “c’s” and two “r’s”)

1. **Allege:** You can still be sued for libel; this offers no protection.
2. **Arguably:** Well, who is arguing with whom?
3. **Experience:** This is clutter that gets in the way of clarity and can sound pompous. For example, you would not ask someone if they were experiencing pain – you would ask if something hurt.
4. **Facilitate:** It means to make easy or easier.
5. **Iconic:** This has been overused and rarely used correctly. Leave it out.
6. **Impactful:** Please. Just. Say. No.
7. **Individual:** Why not just “people”? Avoid the jargon here and be direct.
8. **Upcoming:** “Coming” is enough.
9. **Utilize:** use is shorter and more direct.
10. **Very:** this is a qualifier that weakens the power of your writing.

## **THE KICKER**

Remember, I will work with you at every step. On most assignments, I will coach you by e-mail or in person before your work is due. Ask for assistance and you will receive it. Do not wait until the last minute.

I will work with you like an editor on your work before anything is graded. I will work with you like an editor in my grading. I care about good journalism and I want you to do well in this class. If you are eager to help yourself, I am eager to help you.