

Precision Language

JRSM 1750-M50

Summer 2025

Dr. Matt Haught

Email: mjhaught@memphis.edu

Virtual office appointments are available upon request. Email to set up an appointment.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Catalog description

Introduction to grammar and writing style for use in journalism and mass communication, foundations of research and information gathering, media literacy, and plagiarism.

Prerequisites

None

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Required: Kessler, Lauren & McDonald, Duncan. (2016). *When Words Collide: A Media Writer's Guide to Grammar and Style, 9th ed.* Cengage Learning.

ISBN: 9781305549166

Very strongly recommended: *Associated Press Stylebook*. 2019 Edition (or newer).

Note: The latest electronic version of the AP Stylebook is available for a yearly subscription fee, and it comes with your purchase of the print version from the Associated Press store. The iPhone/Android app will serve you well.

Classroom format

This course teaches the basic skills of writing and grammar. Sometimes, this will be a review for you. Other times, this will address new material. Weekly quizzes also coincide with each chapter. Students may take quizzes twice. The highest score will be recorded.

Assignment instructions and all deadlines are posted in Canvas at the beginning of the semester. There are no surprises. You are expected to follow instructions and submit work on time.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the online learning platform: <http://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the course list, click on the link for JRSM 1750-M50 to enter the course and read the instructions on the welcome page.

Note: Please do not use the internal Canvas email system on the course web page. Use your regular

University of Memphis email to correspond with me. I may not see these emails, as they do not alert me in a manner that allows me to see your message as it comes through.

Course Requirements

- Exercises and writing assignments to be completed via Canvas
- Weekly quizzes

Grading

A+ = 96.5-100%; A = 92.5-96.4%; A- = 89.5-92.4%
B+ = 86.5-89.4%; B = 82.5-86.4%; B- = 79.5-82.4%
C+ = 76.5-79.4% ; C = 72.5-76.4%; C- = 69.5-72.4%
D+ = 66.5-69.4%; D = 59.5-66.4%
F 0-59.4%

Grading Breakdown

Writing and classroom assignments: 50%
Quizzes: 50%

Other issues

This course is essential to your success in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media. It builds the grammatical skills necessary for clear and effective writing. Although some of these concepts might seem elementary to a university student, a perfect sense of grammar is essential in our profession.

Audio and video lectures coincide with the assigned textbook chapters. You must take the time to read the book and be prepared to study the online content. These assignments, along with instructions and examples of how to successfully complete them, are available in Canvas on the first day of class.

Time management is crucial in a summer course. None of the assignments should be particularly difficult or time-consuming but waiting until the last minute to attempt them is not advised.

DEADLINES: Unless otherwise specified, all assignment deadlines are Sunday at 11:59 p.m. **The final week of class is an abbreviated week that will end on Friday, not Sunday.** Please keep this in mind. Deadlines for this course are firm and posted from the first day of the semester. All work must be turned in via Canvas not via email or in the comments section.

LATE WORK: I will not consider any requests for deadline extensions received less than 48 hours before the assignment deadline, and requests will only be approved in extenuating circumstances. Your first approved extension will be granted without penalty if your work is received within three days of the published deadline. Subsequent late assignments will be penalized 10 points per calendar day for up to four days. After the fourth day, I will not accept your work.

TECHNICAL SUPPORT: Computers and network access can be finicky. Unfortunately, providing tech support is beyond my capabilities. As a University of Memphis student, you can ask for help

from the IT helpdesk. It is best to call as soon as you are aware of the problem and not wait until the last minute to begin your work. There are two ways to access the University of Memphis IT helpdesk: call 901-678-8888 or log in to the website (umhelpdesk.memphis.edu) to open a ticket.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Each week's assignments are due at 11:59 p.m. on Sunday unless otherwise noted. Keep in mind that the final week is an abbreviated week.

Week 1

Unit One: Writing with Accuracy and Precision

Module 1: Course Introduction

Course Intro, Best Practices and Writing Tips

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 1-2 Assignments: A Short Description

1.1: Welcome and Introductions, Why Grammar Matters

1.2: 8 Parts of Speech

1.2: Writing Assignment 1

Week 2

Module 2: Seeking Clarity

Sentence Structure & You

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 3-4 Assignments: Quiz 1, Other Grammatical Terms

2.1: Words as Varying Parts of Speech

2.2: Verbs and how to Use them

2.2: Quiz 1

Week 3

Module 3: Maximum Verbiage

Nouns & Pronouns

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 5

3.1: Expanding your Repertoire

3.1: Types of Pronouns, Rules of Agreement Assignment

3.1: Quiz 2

Week 4

Module 4: Sentence Building Blocks, Part I

Verbs, Adjectives and Adverbs

Reading Kessler, Ch. 6

4.1: Sentence Building Blocks, Part 1

4.1: Quiz 3

4.2: Coming to a Subject-Verb Agreement

4.2: Quiz 4

Week 5

Module 5: Sentence Building Blocks, Part II

Punctuation & Powering Your Sentences

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 7 Assignments: Quiz 5, Quiz 6, Review So Far, Rules of Modification & Unity

5.1: Sentence Building Blocks, Part 2

5.1: Quiz 5

5.2: Punctuation and Powering Your Sentences

5.2: Quiz 6

Week 6

Module 6: Sentence Building Blocks, Part III

Putting It All Together: Prepositions. Conjunctions. Interjections. Sentences and Syntax.

Reading: Kessler, Ch. 8 Assignments: Quiz 7, Quiz 8, Recognizing Prepositional Phrases, Conjunctions

6.1: Sentence Building Blocks, Part 3

6.2: Word Choice

6.2: Quiz 7

Week 7

Module 7: Breathing Life into Your Words

Style, Substance & Appealing to the Senses in Writing.

Readings: Kessler, Ch. 9 Assignments: Quiz 9, Quiz 10, Grammar True & False

7.1: Common Grammar Pitfalls

7.1: Quiz 8

7.2: Giving Power to your Words

7.2: Quiz 9

Week 8

Module 8: Making the News

Newsworthiness Presentation

Periodic Table of Newsworthiness

8.1: Writing Assignment: Five articles on Newsworthiness

AP Style Sheet

Week 9

Module 9: News Judgment & The Elements of Newsworthiness.

9.1: The Elements of Newsworthiness & Where News Comes From

9.1: Writing Assignment

9.2: Anatomy of a News Article & News Judgment

9.2: Finding Sources (Part 1 and Part 2)

Week 10

Module 10: News Summary Leads

How to Write a Lead: A Simple Approach

10.1: Writing News Summary Leads

10.1: Writing Assignment: News Summary Leads

10.2: AP Style

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press globally and in the United States.

- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences, and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically to pursue truth, accuracy, fairness, and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style, and grammatical correctness.

How professional values and competencies will be met

Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, and think critically)

- Develop an advanced understanding of grammar as used in mass communication.
- Establish a working knowledge of the Associated Press style.
- Understand media language respectful of a diverse audience.
- Critically examine the language used in media as persuasive and communicative.
- Distinguish between fact and opinion.
- Expand knowledge of the resources available for communications professionals.

Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)

- Examination of grammar skills specific to journalism and mass communication
- Examination of Associated Press writing style
- Examination of understanding of current events
- Examination of research techniques and available resources.

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Becoming aware of specific language for journalism and mass communication.

Understanding

- Use of grammar and style to communicate, precisely, and succinctly.

Application

- Passage of examinations concerning grammar, style, AP preferences, and basic information-gathering skills.

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

Portfolio requirement

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you must develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system but are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or SquareSpace. You are also encouraged to purchase a URL if you use the portfolio long-term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files, or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

Email

You must activate your UofM email account. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you must forward all UofM emails to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop, or smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

AI/Chat GPT

In Journalism & Strategic Media, artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others. Please refer to the specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission or working with the same general idea may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

Academic integrity

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. For more information about the University's policy on academic integrity, visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to university-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses, or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws. You must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com or a similar electronic detection method for rating your ideas' originality and evaluating the proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely to detect plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or not accepted.

Online SETEs

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, you must understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor before the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missed assignments if the absence was due to illness or a catastrophic emergency, such as a documented death in the family.

AP Style and grammar

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted grammar and punctuation rules. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

Disability and accommodations

If you need accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Diversity and inclusivity

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. These include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to contribute to fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires understanding various perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional.

Weather policy

Always check with local media and the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather.

Student support

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to, food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors can assist in connecting you with campus or community support.