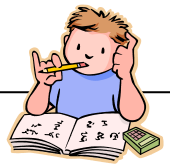
JOU 2040, Writing Mechanics

An online, one-credit-hour course in grammar, punctuation and word use



Instructor Information

Michael Stone
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Twitter: @Michael__Stone (two underscores)
Office hours: Most all questions and issues can be addressed in a few quick emails, but we can also set up a time to Skype, FaceTime or meet in person if you would prefer.

Contacting the Instructor

The easiest way to contact me is by email. You'll have a guaranteed reply within 48 hours on weekdays, but I will get back with you usually more quickly.

Because we don't meet face to face, students occasionally vent frustrations abrasively over email. If you haven't already, you'll be entering a professional setting soon, so to make sure you don't send emails after college that might cost you opportunities, I will want to discuss with you any unprofessionalism in your emailing and how to make it professional.

Course Purpose

This course is meant to ensure that you have sufficient skills in grammar and punctuation to write with clarity. This is applied grammar and punctuation. You won't have to define an intransitive verb, but you will need to understand how a comma can change the meaning of a sentence.

The course covers only grammar and punctuation. It does not cover spelling. And it does not cover style, such as whether to abbreviate *August* or capitalize *president* as a title.

Anyone Can Take This Course

This course is classified as a JOU (journalism) course because it is meant to better enable students as they look to JOU 3101 Reporting.

However, this course is useful for any student of any major who wants to improve her or his job prospects in careers that value writing or who desires a better foundation for graduate school. The course does not presume any prior knowledge of journalism, and students from about 25 majors have taken it.

Learning Outcomes

By the conclusion of the course, you should be able to:

- Identify basic parts of speech required to know agreement and pronoun use: adjective, adverb, antecedent, conjunction, noun, preposition and pronoun.
- Differentiate between an action verb and a linking verb.
- Detect run-on sentences and sentence fragments and know how to fix them.
- Avoid passive voice.
- Avoid "dead" constructions.
- Spot sentences without parallel construction and know how to fix them.

- Detect sentences with pronouns that lack clear antecedents and know how to fix them.
- Ensure modifiers such as *only*, *not* and dates are correctly placed in a sentence.
- Use introductory clauses correctly.
- Spot ambiguous comparisons and fix them.
- Determine when to use a colon and when to capitalize the word after the colon.
- Use dashes, ellipses, parentheses and semicolons properly.
- Convey meaning with quotation marks.
- Place punctuation inside or outside closing quotation marks.
- Use an apostrophe properly for possession, omitted letters and plurals.
- Determine whether one or two apostrophes are used for a compound subject.
- Correctly place an apostrophe involving plural possessives.
- Form plurals of common and proper nouns.
- Form a possessive involving common and proper nouns.
- Handle apostrophes involving businesses names.
- Distinguish between descriptive (no apostrophe) and possessive (apostrophe).
- Use commas correctly with conjunctions, appositions, introductory phrases, "free" modifiers, quotation marks, equal adjectives and a series.
- Distinguish between essential and non-essential clauses.
- Differentiate among *that*, *which* and *who*.
- Identify when to use a hyphen in compound modifiers.
- Discern agreement errors.
- Determine whether a collective noun, such as *family* or *class*, is singular or plural.
- Ensure a pronoun agrees with its antecedent.
- Ensure a verb agrees with its subject.
- Determine pronoun use based on whether it is used as a subject or an object.
- Determine which pronoun to use for compound subjects and objects.
- Determine which pronoun to use in comparisons.
- Determine when to use *who* or *whom*.
- Discern when to use *lay* or *lie*.
- Correctly use *affect* and *effect*.
- Avoid the use of incorrect phrases such as "try and catch the fish."
- Correctly use word pairs such as *fewer* vs. *less*.

Required Equipment

Because this is an online course, you must have:

1. A Macintosh or Windows computer with internet access (be absolutely sure you're in a location with a reliable connection because nothing can be done from the instructor's end if the connection is lost during a quiz or exam). For the whole course but especially for the quizzes and the final exam, please use Chrome or Firefox, which work best with Canvas.
2. Either (a) a built-in webcam with a microphone and speakers or (b) a webcam as an attachment and headphones with a microphone. (This is necessary only for the final exam because it is required by the ProctorU test-monitoring service.)

No Textbooks Required

No textbooks are required for this course because everything you need to succeed will be taught online. However, if you prefer a textbook to supplement your learning, these two are useful:

1. "When Words Collide" by Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald. This book targets media writers but is useful for anyone.
2. "Associated Press Stylebook," updated annually. It can be purchased as a book, from a subscription website or as an app for the iPhone and iPad. The punctuation guide at the end of the book is especially helpful. A spiral-bound print version is usually available through the UF Bookstore or directly from the Associated Press.

Course Structure

The course has 12 modules, each of which is roughly equivalent to what would occur in a regular 50-minute class period. Each one comes with a downloadable study guide summarizing the applicable grammar principles.

Between two and nine chapters are in each module, and the course has 61 chapters overall. Each chapter has an instructional video, usually less than 10 minutes long. A strategy you might find valuable is pausing the videos when examples come up to attempt to solve them before the correct answers are revealed. After you watch the videos, you can answer practice questions at the bottom of the module pages, and at the end of each module, you will take a short quiz.

After finishing all 12 modules, you will take the final exam. You have two tries at the final, but if you're satisfied with your first score, you don't have to take it the second time.

Pacing: You Can Work Ahead

Each module has a deadline (posted on the course website) by which the material must be viewed and the quiz taken to keep you on track. However, you could always work ahead by weeks or even months. In other words, you could have the entire course wrapped up at the very beginning of the semester, by the very final deadline or any time in between.

Deadlines Are Firm: No Extensions or Makeups Allowed

The course provides no wiggle room when it comes to deadlines. Because it doesn't have limitations to how far you can work ahead, extensions or makeups are never allowed, no matter the reason — whether it's illness, an emergency, a court date, a death in the family or otherwise. Instead of waiting until the last minute and getting derailed by an unplanned event, work ahead.

Let's say that you wait until an hour before a quiz module closes only to discover that the internet is down or your computer has died. Deadlines are firm, so you'll have to count that quiz as one of the two dropped scores. Again, no extensions are possible, no matter the reason.

Or let's say a deadline falls on a religious holiday you observe. Take the quiz or exam beforehand. The fact that the religious holiday coincides with the last possible day to complete the assignment does not mean the deadline will change. Again, no extensions are possible, no matter the reason.

Assignments: Pre-Test

The course begins with an ungraded pre-test so you can see what's expected in the course.

Assignments: Extra Credit
For details, please see the assignments "Extra Credit 1" and "Extra Credit 2" on Canvas. These opportunities, which follow the same instructions, are each worth one point that is added to your final score at the end of the semester.

Assignments: Quizzes
At the end of each of the 12 modules, you will take a quiz of five questions drawn at random from a question bank. You'll have seven minutes to take each quiz. Each quiz is cumulative.

The highest 10 of 12 possible scores will count for 30 percent of the grade. The two drops are allowed to cover computer glitches, personal conflicts, etc. No other drops will be given, no matter the circumstances. And no do-overs are allowed, no matter the reason.

If you simply don't take a quiz, the grade book doesn't register that and gives you a "—" instead of a 0. So I then have to manually go through to enter the 0. I'm not constantly monitoring who is and isn't taking quizzes, so be aware that, if you don't take a quiz, your overall grade in the grade book won't drop right away and/or won't instantly count as one of your two dropped quizzes. But they will once I eventually go through to insert the 0. In other words, your score is fine right after you don't take a quiz, but it'll eventually change once I plug in the 0.

Assignments: Final Exam
The final exam is 70 percent of the grade. You will have 60 minutes to answer 40 questions worth 2.5 points each and drawn at random from a question bank on Canvas.

You can take the final exam twice if you desire. If you take it twice, only the better of the two scores (not the average of the two) will count toward your grade. You cannot take the final exam more than twice.

When you take the final, whether once or twice, you will take it through ProctorU.

ProctorU is an online test-taking service that requires you to take the exam on a Windows or Macintosh computer with a web browser running Adobe Flash Player. Your computer must either have a webcam, microphone and speaker built in, or you must have a webcam along with headphones and a microphone. If you're unsure whether your computer and webcam setup are suitable, you can run a test ahead of time.

ProctorU's testing fee is included with the course, so you won't be charged when you take the final — unless you wait to schedule within four days of your testing time. If you do this — or if you choose to reschedule it for any reason — you might be charged $5.

You can take the exam at home or in any quiet, well-lit, private room. You'll need to have a photo ID to take the exam and a reflective surface to show the edges of your monitor to the proctor.

When taking the exam, no books, handouts, cheat-sheets, notebooks, scratch paper, cellphones, PDAs, tablets, music players or other items will be allowed. Also, you will not be allowed to use your computer to see or reference anything other than the exam.

When you take the exam through ProctorU, the online proctor will verify your identity and then release the exam to you.

For more information on ProctorU, read the ProctorU section on our course's homepage on Canvas or call the service at 855-772-8678. The representatives are always helpful and will get any issue quickly squared away.

Sample Questions
All graded questions are multiple-choice with four answer options. Here's an example:

1. Choose the best answer.
    a. The quart of strawberries are on the table, ready for whoever wants a snack.
    b. The quart of strawberries are on the table, ready for whomever wants a snack.
    c. The quart of strawberries is on the table, ready for whoever wants a snack.
    d. The quart of strawberries is on the table, ready for whomever wants a snack.

Usually two items are manipulated in each question; in this case, they are: are/is and whoever/whomever. A and B answers offered "are" while C and D offered "is." The second item, whoever/whomever, was manipulated so that A offered "whoever" and B offered "whomever," and the pattern was repeated for C and D. The options were given in alphabetical order.

Here is that pattern again:

2. Choose the best answer.
    a. Mary felt bad about asking her sister to work full time this summer.
    b. Mary felt bad about asking her sister to work full-time this summer.
    c. Mary felt badly about asking her sister to work full time this summer.
    d. Mary felt badly about asking her sister to work full-time this summer.

By the way, the correct answers are 1c and 2a.

Grading
Pre-test (ungraded) 0%
Quizzes (top 10 out of 12 scores) 30%
Final (best out of two tries) 70%

Grading Scale

	Percent		Percent		Percent		Percent		Percent
A	100-90%	B+	89-87%	C+	79-77%	D+	69-67%	E	0-59%
		B	86-80%	C	76-70%	D	66-60%		

Scores are rounded to the nearest whole point: 89.4, for example, rounds down to 89 (B+) while 89.5 rounds up to 90 (A).

Details on the university's grading policy can be found in the undergraduate catalog online.

Grading FAQs

Q. What if I have a really good reason for why I missed a quiz?
A. The missed quiz won't affect your score because you get two dropped quiz scores, regardless of the reason. No makeups are possible because you can work ahead to compensate.

Q. I missed a quiz because the internet went out just before the midnight deadline, so it's not my fault. Can I retake it?
A. No extensions are possible in a course in which everything can be done weeks ahead. Next time, take the quiz in a location with reliable internet and work ahead rather than tempting Murphy's Law.

Q. I was on a cruise when the internet went out in the middle of the quiz. Please reset it.
A. Sorry, but technical glitches are why the two low quiz scores drop. No makeups, resets or do-overs are possible, no matter the reason.

Q. What can I do for extra credit to boost my grade?
A. No extra credit is available, no matter the circumstance. Your grade is boosted by being able to drop the two lowest quiz scores and having two tries at the final exam.

Q. I was sick a lot of the semester and unable to keep up with my work. Can I get an incomplete?
A. An incomplete doesn't apply to a course like this in which no final papers or projects are due. If an extended illness precludes you from attending to your coursework, you can petition for a medical withdrawal through the Dean of Students Office.

Academic Integrity

University of Florida students live by an honor code that prohibits academic dishonesty, such as cheating. Students have an affirmative obligation to know what those policies prohibit. If you are unsure, ask the instructor in advance. When cheating is discovered, the policy is to fail the students involved and refer the details to the Dean of Students Office.

Students with Disabilities

If you would benefit from disability-related accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center in Reid Hall at 352-392-8565. The center will provide documentation so appropriate accommodations can be made. So we can make accommodations, this documentation should be provided to me within the first two weeks of the semester.

Help with Coping

The UF Counseling and Wellness Center is a terrific, free resource for any student who could use help managing stress or coping with life. The center at 3190 Radio Road on campus is open for appointments and emergency walk-ins from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. To make an appointment or receive after-hours assistance, call 352-392-1575.

Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course based on 10 criteria. These evaluations are conducted online. Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester. You will be given specific times when evaluations are open. Summary results of these assessments are available to students and to the public.