

## JOU 2040, Writing Mechanics

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

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### Instructor Information

Michael Stone

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Office hours: Most questions and issues can be addressed in a few quick emails, but we can also set up a time to work through them via another medium should it be needed.

### 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 likely get back with you much 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 set up office hours to discuss 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 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 many 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**

This is an online course, and 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 Firefox, which works best with Canvas.
2. The requirements for Honorlock, which is the proctoring service for the exam. (Please review the “Honorlock” section on the course’s homepage, and follow the links there.)

### **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 and attempting 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 work ahead by weeks or even months. In other words, you could have the course wrapped up near the beginning of the semester, by the very final deadline or any time in between.

### Deadlines and Extensions

As stated above, Writing Mechanics is a work-as-you-please course, meaning the 12 modules, quizzes and final exam are available to complete as soon as you want. The course does still have deadlines to keep you on pace, and they represent the final times by which you can complete the quizzes/exam, not necessarily when you should. Do not wait until the last minute: If you start a quiz at 11:55 p.m., for example, and the final deadline is 11:59, Canvas will kick you out four minutes into the quiz. The same goes for the final exam.

Many if not all of us do, though, run into unforeseen circumstances that prevent us from completing work on time, so everyone's two lowest quiz scores (two zeros, for example) are dropped, no questions asked. These drops are for most circumstances: work, a conference, computer/internet problems, using a browser other than Firefox (please use Firefox to help ensure Canvas functions properly), accidentally clicking the wrong button in Canvas, not taking into account a change in time zone, falling asleep, simply needing a break, etc.

Two and only two circumstances could result in a quiz deadline being extended (and the instructor should receive no emails requesting an extension unless you meet these criteria):

1. **You have a DSO letter excusing you from school.** The letter is typically provided for those who are severely ill or have a family emergency. To possibly receive the letter, please fill out [the online form](#). Simply filling it out, though, doesn't guarantee that the CARE team will excuse your absence, so the best practice for the course remains working ahead. If your

absence is excused, the CARE team will email your instructors your excuse letter, and for this course, the missed quiz's deadline will be extended by the number of excused days noted in the letter. For example, if you missed a March 2 deadline and your letter excuses you for five days (March 1 to March 5), the deadline would be extended by five days, becoming March 7 at 11:59 p.m. Regardless of the circumstances of your absence, you have to quickly – i.e., immediately – take care of filling out the form (and filling out that one form should be much, much easier than trying to juggle various emails with your instructors). If you don't take care of this quickly, you will likely not receive an extension.

2. **A technical problem in Canvas prevented you from taking the quiz.** *This rarely if ever happens*, and it doesn't include problems with your own computer or internet or you using a browser other than Firefox – which, again, are what the two drops are for. If, however, you feel it was indeed a problem in Canvas not of your own creation that prevented you from taking a quiz, you have to immediately [contact the Computing Help Desk](#), and you have to start a ticket number. You should provide the ticket number to the instructor, who will then use it to verify with the help desk that there was indeed a problem in Canvas and will adjust the impacted deadline accordingly. Again, though, *this thankfully rarely if ever happens*.

### **Assignments: Pre-Test**

The course begins with an ungraded pre-test so you can get a feel for the examination format.

### **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. As stated above, the two drops cover computer glitches, personal conflicts, etc. No other drops will be given, no matter the circumstances.

If you simply don't take a quiz, the grade book doesn't register it and gives you a "-" instead of a 0. At some point before the course concludes, the instructor will manually go through to enter any zeros (so don't be surprised if your grade drops later on because you didn't take a quiz).

### **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 [Honorlock](#).

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.

### 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.

### Sample Questions

The questions are multiple-choice ones 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](#).

### **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 detailing the accommodations, and this documentation should be provided to the instructor well in advance of the first deadlines.

### **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 is at 3190 Radio Road on campus and 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, and [summary results of these assessments](#) are available to students and to the public.