

JOU 2005, Writing Mechanics

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



Instructor for fall 2014, section 018B

Earlesha Butler

Doctoral student, UF College of Journalism and Communications

Office: G038, Weimer Hall

E-mail: etbutler@ufl.edu

Contact the instructor through the Sakai email function for this course. If you have a grammar question, post it to the General Discussion board. That way, others can benefit from seeing the question and answer – and you will learn more by taking a stab at answering others' questions.

Course Purpose

The purpose is to ensure you have sufficient skill 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.

Any Gator Can Take This Course

This course is a JOU (journalism) course because it was created in the fall of 2011 to better enable students to pass a stressful, three-credit-hour skills course in reporting, JOU 3101. This course is often taken along with JOU 3109C, multimedia writing.

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

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" construction.
- 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 following word.
- 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 with 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 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* and *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.
2. A computer that either has (a) a built-in webcam with a microphone and speakers or (b) a webcam as an attachment and headphones with a microphone.

No Textbooks Required

No textbooks are required for this course. Everything you need to succeed will be taught you 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 is targeted media writers but is useful for anyone.
2. The Associated Press Stylebook, updated annually. It can be purchased as a book, a subscription [website](#) or 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 only through the UF Bookstore or directly from the [Associated Press](#).

Course Structure

The course has 12 modules that are roughly equivalent to what would occur in a regular 50-minute class period. Each module also has a downloadable study guide summarizing the applicable grammar principles.

Each module has between two and nine chapters, for a total of 61 chapters. Each chapter has an instructional video, usually less than 10 minutes long. After you watch the video for each chapter, you can take a practice question. At the end of each module, you will take a short quiz.

After finishing all 12 modules, you will take the final exam. You can have two tries at the final.

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 can always work ahead – weeks or even months ahead.

Deadlines Are Firm; No Extensions or Makeups Allowed

Deadlines are firm. Because you can work ahead in this course, extensions or makeups are never allowed, no matter the reason – whether illness, emergency, court dates, death in the family, etc. 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 as a quiz score to be dropped. No extensions are possible, no matter the reason.

Or let's say the midterm deadline falls on a religious holiday you observe. Take the test before that religious holiday. The fact that the religious holiday happens to coincide with the last possible day to complete the assignment does not mean the deadline will change.

Again: Deadlines are firm.

Assignments: Pre-Test

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

Assignments: Quizzes

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

The highest 10 of 12 possible scores will count for 20 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.

Assignments: Final Exam

The final exam is 80 percent of the grade. You will have 60 minutes to answer 40 questions worth 2.5 points each and drawn at random by Sakai.

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

Each time you take the final (whether once or twice), you will take it through [Proctor U](#).

Proctor U 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.

As long as you contact Proctor U at least four days before when you want to take each exam to schedule a time, the fee Proctor U charges is included in your course fees. However, if you wait until less than four days to schedule an exam or if you choose to reschedule it for any reason, you will have to pay a \$5 fee directly to Proctor U.

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 as well as a reflective surface to show the edges of your monitor to the proctor.

When taking an exam, no books, handouts, cheat-sheets, notebooks, scratch paper, cellphone, PDA, tablet, music player or anything else will be allowed. You will not be allowed to use your computer to see or reference anything other than the exam.

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

For more information on Proctor U, see the course handbook on Sakai.

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. Above, those two items were 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.

You can see that pattern in the next sample question:

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) 20%

Final (best out of two tries) 80%

Grading Scale

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

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

The grading scale is firm. The minimum score to enter JOU 3101, reporting, is 70, not 69.

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. You get to drop two of the 12 quizzes for any reason. No makeups are possible.

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, work ahead rather than tempting Murphy’s Law by waiting until the last minute.

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 or 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. Besides, your grade is already boosted by being able to drop the two low quiz scores and having two tries at the final exam.

Q. But I'm not having much luck with the quizzes and am worried about my grade. Can I retake some quizzes or do something else?

A. Sorry, but only the 10 highest quizzes out of 12 and the better of two tries on the final can count toward your grade. No extra credit or retakes are possible.

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.

Q. I got an 89 and need an A to keep my scholarship. Isn't an 89 close enough?

A. Sorry about the scholarship, but the grading scale is firm.

Q. What if I end up with a 69 and just miss a C by one point? Isn't there something I can do?

A. Sorry, but the grading scale is firm.

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 all students involved for the course 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](#) as early in the semester as possible. The center will provide documentation so appropriate accommodations can be made. The center is in Reid Hall, 392-8565.

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.