

JOU 2005, Writing Mechanics

1 credit hour

Spring 2013 / Section 065C / Period 7 Wednesdays, Turlington L007



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If office hours are inconvenient, make an appointment. Or if my door is open, drop in.

Course Purpose

The purpose of this course is to ensure you have sufficient skill in grammar and punctuation to write with clarity and precision. 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.

This summer, the publisher of iFixit.com [wrote](#) that he administers a grammar test to everyone who seeks a job with his Internet publishing site – and he rejects anyone who cannot pass it. Those who have solid grammar and punctuation skills have an advantage in the marketplace.

Any Gator Can Take This Course

This class is a prerequisite for enrollment in JOU 3101, reporting. The course was created in the fall of 2011 to give students enrolling in reporting a better foundation in grammar and spelling before entering a stressful, three-credit-hour skills class. (Students on that track can take this course before, after or with JOU 3109C, multimedia writing.)

The course also 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 or public relations.

Course Focus

At the heart of this course is a grammar and punctuation test. You will be able to take the test thrice during the semester. All the teaching in the course is designed to help you pass that test. Everything on the tests is covered in class.

Textbooks

No textbooks are required for this course. I have written a guide to grammar and punctuation that is available free for you on Sakai so you don't have to buy a textbook.

If you are a journalism or a public relations student, however, other courses in our college require two books that would be helpful for you in this class. These books can be useful for any student in any major. They are recommended but not required:

1. "When Words Collide" by Lauren Kessler and Duncan McDonald, currently in its eighth edition. This book is targeted for journalists but is useful for any writer. ISBN: 049590144X. [Amazon](#) sells it for about \$130.
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 in this course. If you want a printed copy, the best version to get is spiral-bound (ISBN: 978-0-917360-56-5), which is usually available only through the UF Bookstore or directly from the [Associated Press](#) for \$29 with shipping.

Course Grade Options

You have two possible tracks for a grade in this course.

Quick Track allows you to count the score of Test 1 on Jan. 16 as your sole grade in the course. If you are satisfied with the score you get on that test, you can accept that score as your grade for the course – and you're done for the semester. You won't take any quizzes. And you will not take Test 2 or Test 3 at the end of the semester.

Quick Track is intended for students fortunate enough to have had good instruction in grammar and punctuation before college. This option can also apply for those willing to study the course Grammar Guide and other materials to diligently prepare for Test 1.

Regular Track counts your grade in the class as a combination of the highest score on up to three tries at the exam (80%) plus weekly quizzes in class (20%).

The vast majority of students will take Regular Track, which gives you two more chances at the big test after a semester of instruction and which includes scores from quizzes during the semester.

Your choice of track is up to you. However, your choice cannot be reversed. You cannot wait until the end of the semester and pick the track that would give you the better grade.

If after taking Test 1 on Jan. 16 you are satisfied with your score and you choose Quick Track, you can still come to class. But you cannot take any quizzes, and you cannot take Test 2 or Test 3. Once a student has taken one quiz, or Test 2 or Test 3, that student is automatically on the Regular Track grading scale. Thus, you won't have to tell me which track you choose. Anyone who takes *any* quiz or a test beyond Test 1 will be on the Regular Track.

Quick Track Course Grade

Score on Test 1 100%

Regular Track Course Grade

Highest score on Test 1, Test 2 or Test 3 80%

Seven highest quiz scores out of 10 given 20%

No Extra Credit

No extra credit is available for this course, no matter the circumstances, because the course allows three dropped quiz scores and three chances at one test.

Quizzes

The primary purpose of the quizzes is to encourage you to keep current with the course material and thus retain more of what you’re learning. They also will help you gain confidence for Test 2 and/or Test 3.

Quizzes will offer questions just like those on the exams. They will cover the material covered in the previous week’s class and are cumulative. Each quiz will have five questions.

Because this is a relatively large class, the following schedule will be followed to encourage academic integrity:

- Quizzes will be given promptly at the start of each class, 1:55 p.m., starting on Jan. 30. (See course schedule below.)
- Because the quizzes will be scored by a Scantron, come early so you can grab a Scantron and fill in the bubbles for your name and ID before the quiz begins.
- Bring a pencil and eraser. (The Scantron interprets a black ink pen as a wrong answer.)
- The questions will appear on the screen for one minute each. I will not go back to review questions for those who arrive late.
- After the fifth question, you will immediately turn the Scantron over and immediately pass it to the aisle. I will not wait for students to fill in the bubbles for name and ID. Do that before the quiz is over.
- No talking is allowed during the quiz or while the Scantrons are being collected. If anyone talks while the Scantrons are collected, everyone’s quiz can be scored as a zero.

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%

The minimum score to enter JOU 3101, reporting, is 70. 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 cutoff for a passing grade is 70, not 69. (Note: It used to be 73.)

Missed Quizzes

No makeup quizzes are given under any circumstance. That's why the three low quiz scores are dropped. You can miss a quiz for any reason: illness, emergency, death in the family, religious observation, military obligations, late bus, insufficient sleep, car won't start, happy hour lasted too long the night before, etc. The three drops cover all possible reasons for missing class. No additional drops are allowed no matter how legitimate the reason, and no makeups can be given.

Missed Tests

A makeup is possible if and only if a student falls ill during Test 3. Such a student would have to call my office phone (352-392-5137) no later than 30 minutes before the exam (or by 1:25 p.m. on April 24) and promptly provide written documentation from a medical professional.

No makeups for Test 1 or Test 2 are possible. The reason is that the course does not have three exams. It has three versions of one exam. You are given three opportunities to pass the test. You can determine whether you take the test once, twice or thrice.

Test FAQs

Q. What will be on the test?

A. The learning outcomes (listed below) and the material described in the Grammar Principles handout on Sakai.

Q. Will I be tested on something in a book that isn't discussed in class?

A. No. Everything on the test will be discussed in class.

Q. How long is the test?

A. You will have 50 minutes to answer 40 questions, each of which is worth 2.5 points. That allows you one minute per question with 10 minutes to review.

Q. What is the test style?

A. It is a multiple-choice test. Each question will have four possible answers.

Q. What is the testing procedure?

A. You will mark your answers on Scantron sheets. Bring a mechanical or two sharpened wood pencils (in case one breaks) with an eraser. Come early to fill in your name and student ID on the Scantron. You will write your name on the test booklet you receive and return it with your Scantron when you complete the exam. Results will be posted on Sakai.

Q. Will I get any test back?

A. No. However, I will be happy to review your answers to any test with you if you come to office hours or make an appointment.

Q. If I take the test all three times, are they averaged?

A. No. Only the single highest score counts.

Q. Why is Test 1 so early in the semester, on the second day we have class?

A. The first test lets you know what's expected and serves as a benchmark for your progress during the semester. If you were fortunate enough to be raised in a school system that emphasized grammar and punctuation, the test offers a chance to get a high score right away and opt out of the rest of the course.

Q. How can I prepare for Test 1?

A. Study the Grammar Principles handout on Sakai. Read the punctuation guide in the AP Stylebook. Look through "When Words Collide." Try the free websites linked from this syllabus.

Q. What if I'm content with my grade after Test 2? Do I have to take Test 3?

A. No.

Q. Are the three tests identical?

A. They are similar in scale and difficulty. However, slight variations will occur because 40 questions are insufficient to cover all of the grammar and punctuation issues addressed in class. Thus, one test may cover the ellipsis but not the dash. So be familiar with all the topics covered in the course, and not just what you recall was on the previous test.

Q. Are the tests tailored to my major?

A. Two answer keys exist for each test. One is for journalism (JOU) and public relations (PUR) majors. The second is for all other majors. The reason for the two answer keys is that, as we will discuss in class, punctuation rules differ for the serial comma and possessives of singular proper nouns. Thus, on several quizzes and on all three exams, you will be asked to fill in form code A or B according to your major:

- A. JOU and PUR majors
- B. All other majors

Sample Test Questions

About 80 percent of the test questions read like this:

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.

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.

About 20 percent of the questions are of this style:

3. Joel collects beer steins and Nicole collects ceramic figurines. Evaluate this sentence and choose the best answer: **Although Joel's and Nicole's collections were lost in the fire, the family was grateful that its home appeared to be salvageable.**
 - a. The word **Although** should be **While**
 - b. The word **Joel's** should be **Joel**
 - c. The word **its** should be **their**
 - d. The sentence is correct as written

(The correct answers are 1c, 2a and 3d)

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, pronoun and verb (linking verb).
- Identify basic parts of a sentence required to know agreement and pronoun use: subject, verb, object and prepositional phrase.
- Spot common sentence errors and know how to fix them: ambiguity, “dead” construction, passive voice and run-on.
- Determine when to use a colon and when to capitalize the following word.
- Distinguish a hyphen from a dash and know when to use each.
- Correctly use an ellipsis, parenthesis and semicolon.
- Use quotation marks correctly and avoid “scare” quotes
- Correctly place punctuation (periods, question marks, etc.) inside or outside quote marks
- Use a comma correctly with an apposition, conjunction and items in a series.
- Discern when a phrase is essential and whether it takes a comma.
- Know when to use *that*, *which* and *who*.
- Use an apostrophe correctly with compound subjects, plurals and proper nouns.
- Distinguish between possessive (apostrophe used) and descriptive (no apostrophe).
- Identify compound modifiers and determine whether a hyphen is used.
- Ensure pronouns and verbs agree with nouns and subjects.
- Determine when compound subjects joined by *and* or *nor/or* are singular or plural.
- Recognize words that are often incorrectly treated as plural such as *everybody*.
- Fix sentences in which words are not parallel.
- Correctly use pronouns with compound subjects and comparisons.
- Determine when *none* is singular or plural.
- Correctly use *who* and *whom*.
- Correctly use *lay* and *lie*.
- Correctly use *affect* or *effect*.
- Correctly use 20 other commonly misused words such as *because/since* and *unique*.

Free Online Resources

- Hundreds of questions from a retired journalism professor at [Newsroom 101](#).
- Take more than 50 [quizzes](#) on the American Copy Editors Society website.
- At [Free Rice](#) (English grammar section) you also help feed the hungry.
- Take a free [grammar course](#) from Poynter Institute's News University.
- If you like blogs, try [After Deadline](#) from the New York Times copy desk.
- For podcasts, try [Grammar Girl](#) (Mignon Fogarty) or [Grammar Grater](#) (Luke Taylor).

How to Succeed in This Course, Step One

Read.

We struggle to get grammar and punctuation correct because we hear mistakes so often they sound right. Thus, we have to train our brain to spot errors. And the only way to do so is to read.

In particular, read well-written material. Read a quality magazine or a newspaper in print or online. Read Harry Potter or the Twilight series. Read a textbook. Read "War and Peace." Read something good for 20 minutes every day.

Why is reading so important? Consider how people are trained to spot counterfeit money. Are they trained by seeing forgeries or fakes? No. They are trained by repeatedly inspecting genuine money until they *know* what the real thing looks like. Only then can they recognize counterfeits.

The same applies to grammar and punctuation. We have to train our brain to know the genuine article before we can spot mistakes

So if you're having trouble recognizing errors, it's because you're not reading enough.

How to Succeed in This Course, Step Two

Write.

Write a sentence every day that applies something you learn in class. Compose a sentence with a correctly placed "only" and post it to someone's Facebook wall. Write a sentence with an introductory clause correctly used and send it to your Twitter followers. Create a sentence with parallel construction and include it in a text message to your mother. Write a note on the back of a cocktail napkin using *that* or *which* correctly.

When you apply what you've learned in class to something you write, your brain retains the lesson.

Research shows that the time-honored methods used by students - drills and cramming - are nearly worthless. You can master material only by putting it into practice. And the way you put grammar and punctuation into practice is to write.

So if you're struggling to absorb what we discuss in class, it's because you're not writing enough.

No Cellphones in Class

Cellphone use in class is verboten. My duty is to create a learning environment in which you have the greatest chance of success. Because the cellphone is a distraction, it hurts your chance of success. Research has [disproven](#) the claim that students today can listen *and* text. The brain can concentrate on one task amid chaos (it’s why you can [focus](#) on one conversation at a loud party) but it cannot simultaneously do two things well. Multitasking is a myth.

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 me in advance.

When I discover cheating, I fail all the students involved – not just for that quiz or test, but for the entire course. I also send the details of the case 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.

Tentative Schedule

	Date	Topic	Quiz
1	Wednesday, Jan. 9	Introduction	
2	Wednesday, Jan. 16	Test 1	
3	Wednesday, Jan. 23	1. Parts of speech	
4	Wednesday, Jan. 30	2. The sentence	Quiz 1
5	Wednesday, Feb. 6	3. Minor punctuation	Quiz 2
6	Wednesday, Feb. 13	4. Apostrophe	Quiz 3
7	Wednesday, Feb. 20	5. Comma	Quiz 4
8	Wednesday, Feb. 27	6. That, which & who	Quiz 5
	Wednesday, March 6	No class; spring break	
9	Wednesday, March 13	7. Hyphen	Quiz 6
10	Wednesday, March 20	8. Agreement	Quiz 7
11	Wednesday, March 27	9. Pronoun case (who/whom)	Quiz 8
12	Wednesday, April 3	10. Lay & lie / affect & effect	Quiz 9
13	Wednesday, April 10	11. Other commonly misused words	Quiz 10
14	Wednesday, April 17	Test 2	
15	Wednesday, April 24	Test 3	