

Welcome to this Online Course & Seminar

# MCOM 3364 NEWS EDITING

A.J. "ALEX" AVILA, PHD • SHSU FALL 2017



## What Major Things Will We Learn?

- Discern newsworthiness of stories for assignment and layout purposes.
- Develop mechanical editing skills through proof-reading basic copy.
- Correct copy according to specific (Associate Press) style rules.
- Sharpen grammar, spelling and punctuation skills.
- Acquire effective fact-checking strategies.
- Recognize and use basic proofreading edit marks.
- Ascertain basic journalistic story-structures and determine when different media platforms require different structures.
- Develop and use resources necessary for editing including dictionaries, top misspelled word lists, online references, calendars, and style guides.
- Develop strategies for visual edits of page layouts, web publishing, and video stories.

## Contact Info!

As this an online class, you are expected to maintain contact constantly throughout this course and to regularly keep up with work.

In addition to email, you can access course materials through Blackboard.

Phone: 936.294.1387

Office: DRCB 318

Office Hours WED 3:30 – 5 p.m.

Monday availability by appointment.

## Principal Email Contact

[aja044@shsu.edu](mailto:aja044@shsu.edu)

I should respond within 24 hours.

If not, try my backup email address:

[alexavila@utexas.edu](mailto:alexavila@utexas.edu)

## About the Professor

A.J. "Alex" Avila, PhD, a native of Austin, Texas, spent 25 years as a professional journalist, writer and editor.

He began in print working for community newspapers and later was an editor at a national news magazine. He later moved into radio broadcast where he won various national journalism awards. He ended his journalism career as an online editor.

He has also written, produced and edited a feature film.

His higher education degrees – B.S. in Radio-TV-Film; MA in Journalism; and PhD in Journalism – are all from the University of Texas at Austin.

## REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS



- ***The Art of Editing in the Age of Convergence* by Brian S. Brooks, James, L. Pinson (11th Edition)**
- This is NOT a cheap book but it is the principal textbook for this course. Must have. Rent it. Its cheaper (but still expensive).
- ***Associated Press Guide to News Writing: The Resource for Professional Journalists* by René J. Cappon (ANY Edition).**
- This can be found online from \$3-11. This is an excellent resource you may wish to keep. Buy it.
- ***Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law 2014* by Associated Press Staff.**
- I've seen this online for \$0.01. You NEED this book. We will have open book AP Exams and you need the book for them.

## A Word About Online Classes

by Dr. Avila

The only "B" I ever earned when I was in graduate school was an online class. (I think the subject was Advertising.) When discussing it with my colleagues in grad school, one asked me who the professor was and I drew a blank.

"I don't know," I said. "I never met her."

When a family member asked about a tutor to help with statistics courses, I went to Craigslist and did a search for "math tutors." The results shocked me. So many ads offered to do the homework for students (for a fee, of course). Some offered to just take the online math course for them, guaranteeing an "A" in the course.

Needless to say, these things did not endear the concept of online courses to me.

But I have internalized these and other

experiences in trying to develop an online class that works with a News Editing course.

The obvious difference between a traditional class and an online one is the class does not physically meet face-to-face. This means no class lectures and no classroom discussions. This also means no in-class quizzes or exams. For many online classes, weekly professor videos paired with online discussion boards are attempts to recreate these things in a virtual setting.

But I think they are weak substitutes.

One of the first things I decided to eliminate for this online course was the seemingly ubiquitous "discussion board." I remember being forced to post comments in an online class discussion board.

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### NEWSU.ORG ONLINE PAID SUBSCRIPTION REQUIRED

NewsU is the online resource for journalistic training developed by the Poynter Institute. ALL students are required to enroll in a paid subscription to NewsU for a series of four online course modules required for this class.

The modules are mostly self-paced and range in difficulty and engagement. Some modules are quick, taking about 15 minutes to complete. Other modules are more complex and could take as long as 4-5 hours to complete.

The NewsU modules will be ready beginning Sept. 1 and, at this moment, costs \$29.95 although I am negotiating to see if they will reduce the rate to \$24.95.

You will receive notification by email when the online modules are ready along with a link where you may access them and purchase your subscription.

# Continued – A Word About Online Classes

Other students confirmed what I suspected. “I just post my two items – an original thought and a response to someone else’s post – and then I’m out,” said one student.

I don’t see the educational efficacy of that.

And the weekly professor videos are meant to replace the class lectures. Of course, the beauty of class lectures is the interactions. Students can ask questions or have reactions that the professor can pick up. Not so online.

So, I have simplified the format for this online class. This does not, however, mean this will be an easy class. In fact, because it is online, I think this makes the class that much more difficult.

Students in an online course need to be that much more vigilant. They need to be self-motivated. And they need to work well on their own.

And there is a LOT of work to do for this class.

Our main text is Brooks & Pinson’s *The Art of Editing in the Age of Convergence* (11<sup>th</sup> Edition). We will work at a pace of one chapter a week. Every week you need to read one chapter from this book, study it. Understand the chapter. And then you must take either an online quiz by the end of the week or a major module exam based on the chapter readings.

Instead of online discussion, you will need to create a blog. If you have a personal blog site already, that’s fine. Use that. If not, create a free blog from any of the free blog sites that pop up on a Google search. You need this blog to post your weekly assignments.

Our secondary text is René J. Cappon’s *The*

*Associated Press Guide to News Writing* (any edition). Again, most weeks (except two) we will read one chapter from this text. And by the end of the week you are required to post a 100-150 word review and/or critique of the chapter onto your public blog.

*“... Because it is online, I think this makes the class that much more difficult. Students in an online course need to be that much more vigilant. They need to be self-motivated. And they need to work well on their own...”*

The main textbook is divided into four themes called modules. These modules range from two-to-six chapters. At the conclusion of each module, a paper exam is required. This means students will have to go to the Testing Center, either in Huntsville or The Woodlands, to physically take these exams. You will be given a three-day window to take the exams. If you miss the window, you will have to schedule a make-up exam at a

reduced grade (academic penalty).

In addition to textbook modules, four online modules are required through the Poynter Institute’s *NewsU.org* site. This requires purchasing a subscription. I will be able to monitor your progress through the modules. The modules range from 15 minutes to four hours long. For the longer modules, these are “self-directed” courses. You will have a two-week window to complete the modules.

Finally, you are required to pass two AP style exams. This is why a third book, *Associated Press Stylebook and Briefing On Media Law 2014* by Associated Press Staff, is required. Once you begin the exam, you will have 2 hours to complete it. It is an open-book exam. But you need the book. This exam is not meant to get you to learn how to memorize AP Style. It’s designed to get you to know how to look up AP Style when necessary.

So, overall, it is a LOT of work. A substantial portion of the grades is based on completion. You get all your online module points if you complete the modules. You get all your blog points if you post your blogs — unless it’s obvious from reading the blog that you did not read the chapter. And the shorter quizzes are true or false.

In my experience, the students that have struggled did not keep up with the workload.

Here is a major piece of advice about grades for this class: Do the Work! The Grades Will Take Care of Themselves. It’s a lot of work so you cannot fall behind.

On the other hand, do schlocky, missing, late, or half-hearted work and your grade will reflect that, as well.

# GRADING OUR WORK THIS SEMESTER!

## • 4 Textbook Modules.

The principal textbook, *The Art of Editing in the Age of Convergence*, is broken down into four thematic sections called modules. Modules range from two to six chapters long. Four paper exams, taken in the testing centers, will cover the four text module.

*4 PAPER EXAMS • Pt Values Vary total 200 PTS [20%]*

## • 15 Brooks Chapters

The principal textbook, *The Art of Editing in the Age of Convergence*, is written in 15 chapters, meaning that this class will proceed focusing on one chapter per week. Except for Thanksgiving week, every week will end with either a chapter quiz given online or a module exam.

*10 ONLINE QUIZZES • 20 pts each 200 PTS [20%]*

## Late Work

Any and all assignments are due by the due date and time as seen on Blackboard. Modules, exams, quizzes, and assignments close automatically at due times. If a student misses the deadline, he/she will have to schedule a make-up with an academic penalty (reduced grade).

## Grading (Final Grades Based on Accumulated Work)

A = 1000-900

C = 799-700

F < 599

B = 899-800

D = 699-600

(MCOM majors receiving a grade of D or lower will be required to repeat the course for credit.)

## • 13 Cappon Textbook Chapters

The secondary textbook, *The Associated Press Guide to News Writing*, is presented in 13 chapters. Except for Thanksgiving week, every week students will post a blog consisting of a 100-150 word review and critique of a chapter from Cappon's book. This means students will have to create a blog if he/she does not currently have one.

*12 BLOG POSTS • 25 Pts each 300 PTS [30%]*

## • 4 NewsU.org Online Modules

A series of six online modules on NewsU.org by the Poynter Institute are required. Completion of the modules takes from 11 minutes to three-hours. Most of them take about an hour to complete. Performance of the modules can be tracked online by the professor.

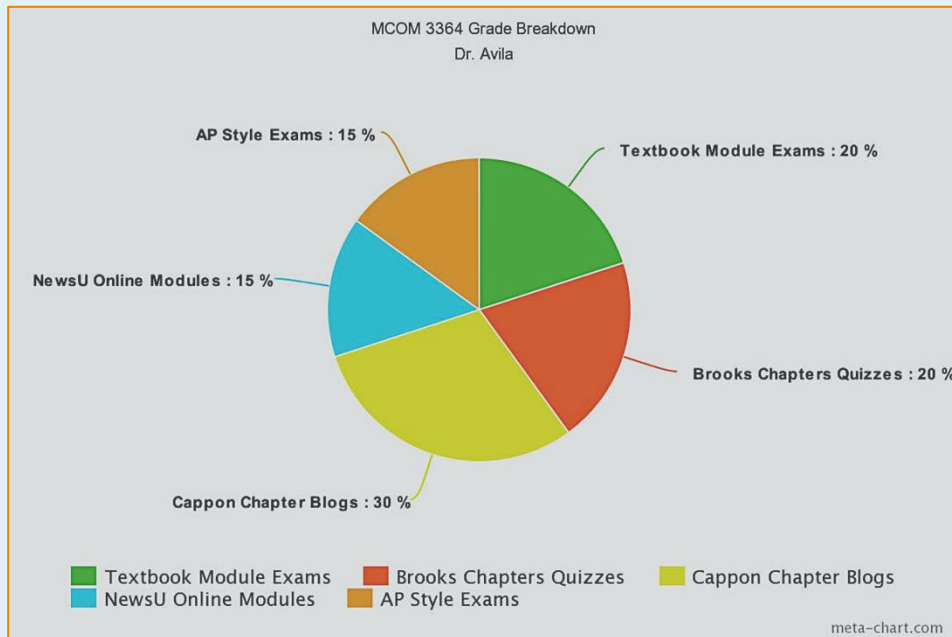
*4 ONLINE MODULES • Values vary 150 PTS [15%]*

## • 2 AP Style Exams

Two online AP style exams will be required for this course. The exams are open book but limited by time.

*2 AP EXAMS • 75 Pts each 150 PTS [15%]*

**TOTAL 1000 PTS [100%]**





## ACADEMIC HONESTY

This institution of learning has a strict policy regarding academic honesty, and I encourage you all to familiarize yourself with it. It is printed below. For the sake of this class and future classes in this department, carefully consider the following:

It is easy in today's environment of ready-made, touch-of-a-button information to confuse what we read, download and write. Make a real investment in your future this semester by developing the following habit and following it religiously: Every time you download **ANYTHING** from the Web, highlight it and apply a bright color (red, orange, neon green etc.) to it.

Then, when you begin to write, do so in black text so that your words and writing will stand apart and not be easily confused with that of others. When you are finished, submit your work through an online writing tool (*Grammarly* or *PaperRater* are good places to start) to double check that you have not inadvertently copied someone else's work without credit.

If you are lazy or sloppy in your work, you might as well say you don't care whether you steal or not. But others will, and eventually you will be punished for your indifference. Better writers than you have lost jobs, careers and influential appointments for nothing more than a few words or ideas "borrowed" from another without reference.

Once your record and reputation are marked, it's there for life, and there's nowhere you can go that it will not follow and haunt you. Whether plagiarism is deliberate or just a product of laziness or sloppiness, it is theft, and it is stupid and inexcusable. Don't think you can get away with it in this class. You will pay for it with a failing grade or worse.

### A Few Words on Ethics and Honesty

The profession into which you are seeking entrance requires that you observe a clear understanding and practice of journalistic ethics. The credible exchange of information is based on this foundation, and any cracks in that foundation endanger everyone who works in the field. You risk your reputation, your credibility and your career if you engage in

unethical behavior, and the best way to avoid it is to be absolutely honest. My criterion for academic honesty is as follows:

**Do your own work.** This includes daily work as well as tests. If you cheat or are dishonest about your work, you will earn a failing grade for this class. This includes "tag-teaming" this class with a friend or classmate.

We will be looking at a lot of copyrighted materials this semester. These resources are the product of others' hard work and time. **DO NOT** copy or share resource materials with anyone not enrolled in this class. This includes assignments, tests, quizzes and lab materials. If you share materials with others, it constitutes theft, and you will be subject to disciplinary action if you do so.

**DO NOT** plagiarize. This means, in essence, that you do not copy anything, from any source, and pass it off as your own work. It also means that you do not use an idea, argument, thought or theory formulated by someone else as your own. It means that if you do reference someone else's work, that you give them full credit for their contribution to your writing. Plagiarism will not only earn you disciplinary action, or a failing grade. It could very well earn you permanent expulsion from this institution.

Any student in MCOM 3364 who plagiarizes or is dishonest in his/her work for this class will receive a failing grade on the assignment for the first offense. A second offense will result in a more severe final semester grade penalty, up to and including an F for the course and/or disciplinary referral to the dean.

### SHSU's Policy on Academic Honesty

All students are expected to engage in all academic pursuits in a manner that is above reproach. Students are expected to maintain complete honesty and integrity in their academic experiences, both in and out of the classroom. Any student found guilty of dishonesty in any phase of academic work will be subject to disciplinary action. The university and its official representatives may initiate

disciplinary proceedings against a student accused of any form of academic dishonesty including, but not limited to, cheating on an examination or other academic work which is to be submitted, plagiarism, collusion and the abuse of resource materials.

### STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

It is the policy of Sam Houston State University that individuals otherwise qualified shall not be excluded, solely by reason of their disability, from participation in any academic program of the university. Further, they shall not be denied the benefits of these programs nor shall they be subjected to discrimination. Students with disabilities that might affect their academic performance are expected to visit with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities located in the Counseling Center. They should then make arrangements with their individual instructors so that appropriate strategies can be considered and helpful procedures can be developed to ensure that participation and achievement opportunities are not impaired.

SHSU adheres to all applicable federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and guidelines with respect to providing reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. If a student has a disability that may affect adversely his/her work in this class, then the student is encouraged to register with the SHSU Counseling Center and to talk with the instructor about how best to deal with the situation. All disclosures of disabilities will be kept strictly confidential. NOTE: no accommodation can be made until the student registers with the Counseling Center.

### Q-DROPS

Students are allowed no more than five Q-drops during their academic career at Sam Houston State University. Classes that are dropped prior to the Q-drop date will not count toward the limit. Students who have used their limit of five Q-drops will need to petition their respective dean to drop a class. If the dean refuses to

grant permission to drop the class, the student will be required to remain in the class.

The Q-drop limit took effect with the start of the fall 2004 semester. Any drops accumulated prior to the fall 2004 semester will not be included in the five Q-drop limit. Neither will Q-drops from other universities.

NOTE: A Q-drop is a drop made after the last day for tuition refunds (12th class day for fall/spring; 4th class day for summer) but before the date for which a drop would result in a grade of 'F' - as published in the Academic Calendar.

### COURSE/FACULTY EVALUATIONS

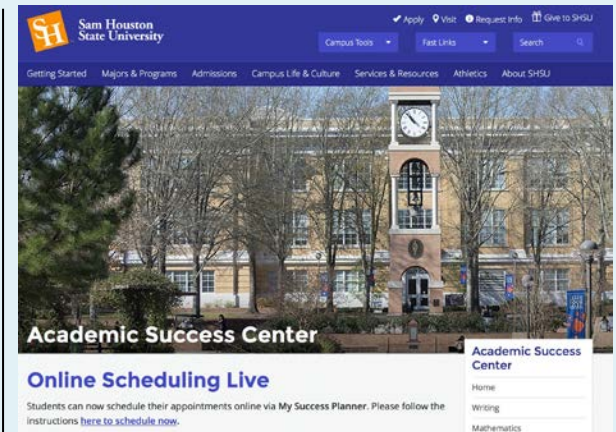
Students will be asked to complete a course/instructor evaluation near the end of the semester. Students are encouraged to participate in evaluations and be fair and honest in their responses.

### ATTENDANCE

Your "online" attendance is required. Obviously, this does not mean a set date and time nor a physical place to meet. However, you will need to regularly check emails, log into Blackboard, take online modules and quizzes, and take exams online by the posted deadlines.

### COMPUTER USE

As you have elected to take this class online, you have implicitly agreed that you have access to the hardware and software resources needed to fulfill the requirements of this class. There are campus computer labs available to you. Beyond the labs, it is your responsibility to access online course materials and requirements in whatever manner necessary and proper to, blah, blah, blah....



## THE SAM HOUSTON WRITING CENTER

The Writing Center is now part of the Academic Success Center. The Academic Success Center supports student learning and success in a university that enrolls a diverse student population. Programs and services are available to all SHSU students, although particular attention is given to first year freshmen, new transfers, nontraditional students, and students who come from families that traditionally have not had the resources to pursue an advanced education.

Writing tutors will work with you at any stage of the writing process (brainstorming, generating a draft, organizing a draft, or revising a draft) for any written assignment. The Writing Center operates on an appointment system, so you must call in advance to schedule a session with a writing tutor. See the Academic Success Center website for more information:

<http://www.shsu.edu/centers/academic-success-center/index.html>.

The Academic Success Center has locations on the Main campus and at the Woodlands campus and each has different business hours. To schedule appointments, do so online or call (936) 294-3680 and select option 1.