English 503, Theory and Practice of Editing: Course Information

Spring 2009 — Thursdays, 4:30-7:10
Prof. E. Shelley Reid

Contact Points

Robinson A420: Mon. 11:00-2:00
Tues. 3:00-4:30
Thurs. 12:00-1:15 — and by appointment

Office Phone: 703-993-2772

Online: ereid1@gmu.edu
http://mason.gmu.edu/~ereid1
http://courses.gmu.edu (Blackboard) and http://esreid.pbwiki.com

Goals

This class is designed to provide both an introduction to and intensive practice in the wide-ranging activities of contemporary editing, from proofing and copyediting to assembling a multi-text document, and from designing layout to negotiating with authors in editorial contexts. Assignments in this class will focus particularly on non-fiction textual editing, but you will have the opportunity to extend and apply those skills to other kinds of editing.

The class will be highly collaborative, allowing us to draw on the wide range of skills and meet the wide range of interests that you and your peers bring to our meetings.

By the time you finish this class, you will better be able to do the following:

- Describe the many roles editors assume in their workplaces, and their ethical and professional responsibilities
- Connect the work of editors to core principles in professional writing and rhetoric
- Articulate editing objectives and provide a rationale for each objective
- Anticipate authorial responses to editing and make adjustments as necessary
- Distinguish between proofreading, copyediting, and comprehensive editing and demonstrate your skills in all three
- Edit both hard copy and electronic documents, attending to both alphabetic and visual elements, using both manual copymarking and online editing tools
- Decide upon and implement macro-level editorial decisions, including criteria-setting, design, selection, and arrangement of texts into a larger collection

Tools

Textbooks

Copyediting: A Practical Guide (3rd ed.) by Karen Judd

The Non-Designer's Design Book (2nd ed.) by Robin Williams

Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace (9th ed.) by Joe Williams

> ***Note***: Several slightly different titles, versions, & editions of this book exist; please try to purchase the one listed above

Also: You need to own an up-to-date, comprehensive style/grammar book, such as *The Hodges Harbrace Handbook* (14th ed.) by Glenn & Gray.

Additional readings will be made available through our E-Reserves site or via Blackboard; see syllabus.

Software: You need access to MS Word or other program that allows change-tracking.

Grading Overview

(See the Assignment Descriptions for full details)

Short Editing Projects	**25%**
1. Edited "Schooling" essay + commentary	5%
2. Revised "Schooling" essay + commentary	5%
3. Selection Memo	5%
4. Informational Layout + commentary	5%
5. Editor's Choice Project **OR** Significant Revision, SP 1, 3, or 4; + commentary	5%
Shared Expertise Reports	**15%**
Includes Area of Interest Report, Style Report, 5 Rules Report + Exam Questions	
Journal, Homework, Participation	**15%**
Includes journal entries, writing-bank essays, copyediting, homework, and contributions to in-class workshops	
Final Collaborative Project	**35%**
Includes work plan, style sheet, letter to author, edits with explanations, final project, and final report (split grade, individual and group)	
Final Exam	**10%**
Sentence- and document-editing	

Completion Policy: You must complete all projects and the final exam to pass the class.

Grading Expectations for Class Assignments

To earn "A"-level grades, your work will need to be
- ***complete***, including all steps or pieces, and responding to all designated questions
- ***correct at the sentence/mechanics level***, according to current standards of Edited American English
- ***stylistically appropriate***, according to the audience and purpose of the piece—this may include visual as well as textual style
- ***demonstrative of best practices in editing***, including standard editing marks/processes, design or layout elements, and editorial ethics
- ***rhetorically adept***, with attention to the needs of the individual author and the general context, purpose, genre, and/or professional situation
- ***aware of complexities***, alternatives, contradictions, and/or multiple variables, as demonstrated in reflective or explanatory writing as well as in editorial comments

Other Policies of Note:

Attendance is expected. This is a collaborative, workshop- and participation-intensive class, so missing more than one meeting may affect your participation grade. (And we'll miss you!)

Late work will be penalized one letter grade for each calendar day beyond the due-date. Lateness due to rare, uncontrollable, natural disasters won't be penalized; please contact me as soon as possible to work things out. You have one ***emergency pass*** for the semester: the chance to turn in any assignment up to five days late without penalty. (Passes may not be used for an assignment your group was depending on or for the Final Project.)

Classroom conduct: Although it goes without saying, sometimes saying it is important, especially for an interactive class: you should maintain an attitude of professional respect and courtesy—though certainly not always agreement—toward other class members. Your collaborative team will also set group-expectations for the Final Project, by which you'll be expected to abide.

Professional conduct: As an editor, you also need to demonstrate respect and courtesy toward the authors whose texts you review. They are real people who have trusted you with their work. You should not discuss or distribute it outside class without their permission. We'll talk this semester about how to balance your own reactions of humor, frustration, and/or confusion with the need not to speak disrespectfully about the texts or the authors who created them. Generally, though, professional conduct goes ***beyond "the golden rule"***: *you* might not mind if someone said/did X or Y concerning your writing, but your author might.

Students with disabilities: Students with documented disabilities are legally entitled to certain accommodations in the classroom. Students requesting such accommodation should present me with a contact sheet from the Disability Resource Center (703-993-2474). I will gladly work with students and the DRC to arrange fair access and support.

A few notes about emailing me

I spend a lot of time on email, and would much prefer to answer your question when you have it (and while it's still a small question) than to have you forget the question or have it turn into a large frustration! You can help me to help you if you can . . .

- **be specific** in your question or comment: what have you already tried or considered, and what are you now concerned about?

- put the **course number**—"Engl 503"—in the Subject line, along with a short description of your reason for writing, and take the extra minute to write a professional piece of communication (salutation, message, signature, absence of glaring errors, etc.).

- use or include your **GMU address** in the email; for privacy reasons, I will respond only to that address.

I read email daily, but I don't always respond immediately; I usually do email catch-up on Friday or Saturday. If your question is **time-sensitive**—you need a response soon to meet a deadline—please indicate that in your message. If I don't get back to you in my catch-up time, please send me a quick reminder in case I've forgotten.

Course Assignments

Assignment sheets and grading rubrics will be provided for these assignments later in the term.

Short Projects

Project 1: Edit a "Schooling" Essay

Review the "schooling" essay you have been assigned. Use copy/paste to print out a double-spaced MS Word version of it with 1.25" margins, and complete a **medium-level copy-edit** with the goal of publishing this essay in an orientation booklet given to undergraduates when they declare their _____ major.

In addition to editing for correctness and style, you need to suggest four substance revisions: note where *and why* the author should substantively **change, move, expand,** and **delete** a section (at least 1-2 sentences) of the text. (These should be different sections.)

Use proofreaders' marks on hard copy, and attach any additional comment(s) for the author (for these, you may use a separate page and/or sticky notes). Submit two copies of the edited version ("signed" with your own first pseudonym): one for Prof. Reid, and one for the author. To Prof. Reid's copy, attach a commentary (1-2 paragraphs) explaining any guiding principles you used and/or difficulties you encountered.

Project 2: Revise and Respond to Edited "Schooling" Essay

Review the editorial comments you received on your essay. Before making any changes, write an initial ***response commentary*** to share with Prof. Reid: a paragraph or so noting your reactions to both the general experience of having this piece edited and/or to specific suggestions, agreeable or less so.

Revise your essay per the editorial comments. (This is not the time to turn it into a brand new masterpiece; you may make a few authorial emendations beyond the editor's suggestions if you deem it necessary.) Write a ***short memo*** to the editor noting/explaining any edits you did not accept and any additional changes you made. ***Post*** the revised essay and the memo to the Wiki, using your first pseudonym.

Expand your commentary for Prof. Reid, including any additional reflections or concerns about revising this essay; please also briefly note what would have made this experience better for you as an author, and what might have made it worse. Turn in (hardcopy) the originally edited copy and your reflective paragraphs.

Project 3: Selection Memo

Create the basic concept for a newsletter, journal, or other collection related to one of our Writing Banks: a publication advising college students who have just declared their major, one providing general how-to assistance, or one explaining what editors do. In a paragraph or two, give the journal title and describe the target audience and mission of your publication, and outline your top 4-6 criteria for choosing articles to go into it.

Choose 3-4 essays for your next issue from among our submissions. Briefly explain the merits of each essay you selected with regard to your criteria, and note what order you'd put them in (why?). Note the degree/type of editing that each might require. Also, note one essay that "came close" but that you did not choose: briefly explain why.

Submit one copy, in memo format, to Prof. Reid.

Project 4: Edit and Format an Informational Document

Review the informational document you have chosen for this assignment. Save and double-space a copy of it and use Track Changes and Comment to perform a ***light copy-edit***. Be sure to query any information that does not seem correct. Print this out.

Next, envision a target audience in their "natural habitat," and produce a ***neat mock-up*** of a single-page document (or equivalent) that incorporates the key information. Use at least four visual design elements (such as font size/type, layout, graphics, illustrations, color) that are appropriate for that context and that support the transfer of information. Condense and/or re-organize information as needed.

This is a rough design: do not spend time agonizing over getting all the details exactly right. Depending on your level of facility with design software, you may choose

to use placeholders ("add picture of X here"), design notes ("dark green font"), and/or collage or hand-drawn elements to indicate what you envision. If you are "ballparking" textual elements and it appears that you will need to substantially cut or reorganize the original text, you may do so and/or separately indicate how/why you plan to do so.

Submit two copies of the copyedited document and the mock-up: one for Prof. Reid, and one ("signed" with your own second pseudonym) with the author's pseudonym only on an attached sticky note. (This second copy need not be full color.) To Prof. Reid's copy, attach a commentary explaining any guiding principles you used and/or difficulties you encountered.

Project 5: Editor's Choice OR Significant Revision/Expansion of SP 1, 3, or 4

Editor's Choice: Choose a short real-world document to edit: fact or art, hard-copy or online, text-only or text+visual design. You may edit an entire short document, or edit 1-3 pages' worth (or equivalent) of a longer document. You may choose a document from work, find one in the outside world, or solicit one from a friend or peer; be sure you have any necessary permission to use and share this document. It should be in need of enough editing to show off your skills, and need a kind of editing you can and wish to undertake. You should provide at least a medium-level of copyediting.

Submit an original copy and the marked-up document (include a memo to the author if that seems appropriate). Attach a commentary explaining any guiding principles you used and/or difficulties you encountered; also note how this work demonstrates your knowledge and/or growth and/or interests as an editor.

Significant Revision/Expansion: Return to SP 1, 3, or 4, and bring your ever-increasing comprehension of and facility in the editing process to bear upon it. You should choose a project that you believe you can significantly improve and/or expand your work, not just one where you'll tidy up a few things. Your goal is to demonstrate not just better core skills, but a more nuanced understanding of what is expected from and possible for an editor in this situation.

Submit all relevant early drafts & responses along with your revised draft. In a new commentary, a crucial part of a revision exercise like this, you should describe not just what you revised and why, and how these revisions reveal challenges/principles, but also how these revisions reveal your current editorial skills and rhetorical thinking. You might reflect on the difference between your thought processes then and now; you might reference readings, discussions, and/or feedback that has helped you.

Shared Expertise Reports

Area of Interest Report (Oral presentation: 5 minutes)

Browse the books and articles on editing that are on reserve at the JC library (or others that you own or locate). Choose one or more selections that are of interest to you as an editor or professional and prepare an informal but lively and focused five-minute report. You should discuss the "sticky points" that make this topic worth considering carefully; to emphasize the usefulness of the information for a broad range of editorial professionals, you should include direct recommendations to help guide your peers in their work (for this class and beyond). If you have chosen to report on a specialized issue or subfield, be sure to draw parallels and contrasts with other more-common elements of editing work, so that your report connects with ongoing class discussions.

Stylista Report (Print report)

Review the stylistic principles noted by Williams or another guidebook, and choose 3-5 to focus on. This assignment will benefit you most if you choose guidelines about issues that challenge you as a writer, issues that are particularly relevant to your current or future workplace, and/or issues that come up in the Anthology Project editing.

Find *5 instances of stylistically ineffective writing* that exist in documents to which you have access: anthology submissions, writing-bank essays, workplace documents, public documents (print or online), documents you've written, etc. Revise each sentence, and offer a brief explanation about which principle(s) you're following and why the new sentence is more effective, in context, than the first one. For at least one sentence, create a second revision, nearly or equally as good as the first.

5 Rules Report (Print report)

Choose 5 copyediting rules, rule-clusters, or guidelines to master and/or explore in depth this semester. At least one should be word-level, one punctuation-related, and one sentence-related. This assignment will most benefit you if you choose rules about issues that trip you up, that are common to your workplace or area of interest, and/or that aren't as straightforward as they (first) seem. To that end, you should choose at least one rule that varies from one style sheet to another, from one rhetorical situation to another, or from one version of editorial preference to another.

You may consult multiple texts that discuss each rule. Then assemble explanations and examples of well-edited prose that involve the rule. You'll need to construct 2-3 original sentence-pairs for each rule that can help other editors learn how to spot and correct problems, even in tricky cases; your pairs should include incorrect and correct versions, and demonstrate complex as well as simple sentence constructions where appropriate. These sentences plus your brief explanations of the rules will comprise the report you prepare for your classmates; thus, where appropriate, you should explain how/when editors should apply each rule as they revise sentences in others' work.

Journal & Homework

Reading Journal: For **five** classes this semester—three before spring break, two after—you need to compose and post a three-point journal entry. Choose and copy out any three short quotations (from a phrase to a couple sentences) from something we read recently. For each, write a short response (2-5 sentences): you could query the meaning or logic of the idea; note how/whether it could be applied to real-world editing; connect it or contrast it to another editing principle; describe an actual example of this idea in practice; and/or reflect on how it illuminates or complicates your own work as an editor.

Journal entries will be marked as check-plus, check, or incomplete. They are designed to prepare you for class discussion and for the final exam. They are also "write to learn" assignments: articulating our thinking helps us refine it and synthesize new knowledge.

Homework will generally will be marked as check-plus, check, or incomplete, and count toward this part of your final grade.

Final Project Overview

For your final project, you will work with an editorial team to select, edit, arrange, and publish a short anthology (3-5 pieces) of work from GMU English graduate classes, to be shared with future English students as exemplary documents. You will be responsible, individually and/or with a partner or group members, for the following tasks:

- Reviewing submissions
- Selecting submissions
- Creating a working plan for editing the anthology
- Creating a style sheet for the anthology
- Editing 10-15 pages' worth of prose (longer essays may be shared by partners)
- Writing the author concerning your edits
- Formatting, arranging, and proofreading the final documents
- Writing a final report on the project

Your final project (40% of your final grade) will earn a group grade (20%), an individual editing grade for the text that was primarily your responsibility (10%), and a participation grade (10%) that is determined in part by your and your peers' evaluation of your contributions.

Additional information about this project will be given to you later in the semester.

Final Exam

The final exam will be open book/open note; it will contain an online copyediting exercise and a real-world editing task for you to analyze and respond to in the context of our discussions and readings this semester.