

# Public Relations Writing

PBRL 3431-M50

Fall 2023

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog Description

Connects students with real-world clients to plan, write and produce public relations writing materials. Students critically engage with research, ethics, and planning to develop tactical PR materials on behalf of the client to include position papers, podcasts, blogs and special event materials.

### Prerequisites

PBRL 3421

### Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Smith, R.D (2020). *Becoming a Public Relations Writer: Strategic Writing for Emerging and Established Media*, 6th Edition. New York: Routledge  
ISBN 978-0367281571

The Associated Press stylebook. New York: Basic Books. Note: Any edition from the last five years.

\*You can also access The AP Stylebook as an online publication or through an app. Get details about these options online at <https://www.apstylebook.com>

Other readings will be assigned and posted to Canvas.

### Classroom format

This course is delivered online in an asynchronous format. In other words, we have no scheduled meeting time. This can be convenient for you, but it also means that it is essential for you to be organized and motivated.

You must have internet access and Microsoft Word to generate a “.doc” or “.docx” extension. All assignments MUST be filed in a “.doc” or “.docx” format; type must be double-spaced with indented paragraphs.

### Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis Canvas login page: <https://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. On the Dashboard, click on the course card for PBRL 3431-M50.

### Course assignments and expectations

This is a rigorous course with high professional and academic standards. It is the major writing course for PR majors and, as such, is your gateway into the professional world. Careers in public relations demand the very best in writing ability. PR is a highly competitive field; dozens of qualified applicants seek every job available and sometimes your writing ability (or lack thereof) will be what sets you apart from the competition. Keep this in mind as we work our way through the various writing assignments and don't ever hesitate to ask me for help or guidance when you need it. Consider me your personal writing coach this semester.

Course work will be accomplished every week to check your learning and comprehension. Each assignment must be completed by its due date and time (Central Time), which may vary by assignment, so make sure to check each individual due date and time to ensure that you post by the deadline.

Most of your writing assignments will be graded with feedback, but some will be marked for being complete and on time. In lieu of a mid-term and final exam, we will have a series of test/quizzes throughout the semester. These will all be administered via Canvas.

As an asynchronous online class, your interaction your peers will be done via discussion posts. While not assigned every week, there will be a series of discussion posts assigned throughout the semester designed to practice your writing skills and to allow you to learn from your peers' experiences and ideas on the topics we cover. I expect your original posts and any feedback provided to your peers to be well-thought and constructive. Harassment will not be tolerated.

### Quality of Work

All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar, and language. A large part of public relations is having a polished written concept of what you are communicating. This includes all class work and presentations. Problems in these or other areas will result in the deduction of points.

I expect your work to be good and to be yours. What is not yours should be fully cited. In documenting sources, you must use APA formatting. If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources. In addition, Purdue University's Online Writing Lab is an excellent resource, and can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>

## Repetition of Courses and Coursework

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. If you wish to substantially rework the original submission, or to work with the same general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from the professor of the current course. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the resume and logo).

## Questions about Grades

If you have a question or problem with a grade, exam question, or assignment, you have 48 hours after the assignment is returned to you to contact me, or the grade stands. Your question or appeal must be stated in writing, citing your position and why you feel the mark is incorrect. The appeal should be turned in to me or sent via email within the stated time frame.

Additionally, you are responsible for tracking your grade online and meeting with me early in the semester if you are concerned about your overall grade.

## Plagiarism policy

First offense: Redo for 50%, plus meet with me.

Second offense: Automatic 0, no redo

Third offense: Automatic class fail

Final assignment, regardless of which offense: Automatic 0 on the assignment.

## Grading

Assignments	45%
Discussion posts	15%
Portfolio	10%
Tests/Quizzes	30%

A+ = 96.5-100%; A = 92.5-96.4%; A- = 89.5-92.4% B+ = 86.5-89.4%; B = 82.5-86.4%; B- = 79.5-82.4% C+ = 76.5-79.4%; C = 72.5-76.4%; C- = 69.5-72.4% D+ = 66.5-69.4%; D = 59.5-66.4% F 0-59.4%

## Contacting me

The best and quickest way to contact me is via email ( [ksmarks@memphis.edu](mailto:ksmarks@memphis.edu) ). I will respond to email with 24 – 48 hours. You can also drop in during my office hours or make an appointment to meet with me in my office or via Zoom. If you have a problem, do not let it snowball. Contact me ASAP.

## ChatGPT/AI

You must obtain permission from the instructor before using ChatGPT or other AI tools to assist with assignments in this course unless otherwise noted in the assignment. Once permission is granted, AI may only be used as directed. Assignment submissions may run through AI detection software. Unauthorized use may result in a failing grade or a request to resubmit an

assignment. If you received permission to use ChatGPT (or other AI), you will be required to submit the prompts you used for assistance with your assignment as well as the original ChatGPT output and to be able to explain/show how you fact-checked and improved upon the AI's work.

## Class Schedule

The schedule is subject to change. The class schedule on Canvas is the most up-to-date and will always take precedent over the schedule posted below.

### **Week 1 Aug 28 – Sept. 3**

Module 1: Laying the foundations

Introductions

PESO refresher

Dusting off the cobwebs: News release assignment

Hootsuite certification (DUE Oct. 29)

### **Week 2 Sept. 5 – 10** (Monday, Sept. 4 is Labor Day)

Module 2: Setting the stage for success

CH 1, 4 & 5

CH 2 & 6

Messages & message maps

Media literacy for PR professionals

GSP refresher quiz

Planning sheet assignment

Event release assignment (DUE Oct. 1)

### **Week 3 Sept. 11 – 17**

Persuasive & ethical communication

CH 3

Discussion post: What event is your release about?

Effective message sources assignment

What appeal did they use? assignment

### **Week 4 Sept. 18 – 24**

Persuasive writing in practice: speeches

CH 17

Discussion post: Pick your organization

Hootsuite check-in

Write a speech (DUE Friday, Oct. 13)

### **Week 5 Sept. 25 – Oct. 1**

Speeches, cont'd

DUE Event news release

Persuasion planning sheet (DUE Wednesday, Oct. 4)

Message map (DUE Wednesday, Oct. 4)

\*The Wednesday due date allows me to give you feedback to incorporate into your speech as you work toward an Oct. 13 due date

**Week 6 Oct. 2 – 8**

Interviews & presentations

CH 17 (cont'd)

Keep working on your speech! Watch for feedback on your planning sheet and message map to incorporate into the final product.

**Week 7 Oct. 9 – 13** (Friday) (Saturday, Oct. 14 – Tuesday, Oct. 17, is fall break)

Portfolio

DUE Speech

**Week 8 & 9 Oct. 18** (Wednesday) – 29 (Saturday, Oct. 14 – Tuesday, Oct. 17, is fall break)

Writing for owned media

CH 8

Content map assignment (DUE Oct. 29)

Planning sheet for blog/website (DUE Oct. 29)

Write a blog post (DUE Nov. 12)

DUE Hootsuite Certification

Interview PR practitioner (DUE Dec. 3)

**Week 10 Oct. 30 – Nov. 5**

Writing for shared (social) media

CH 7

Writing for YouTube assignment

**Week 11 Nov. 6 – 12**

Issues & Advocacy Writing

CH 13

Position paper assignment (DUE Wednesday, Dec. 6)

Position paper organization + topic discussion post

DUE Blog post

**Week 12 Nov. 13 – 19**

No new content – work week

Position paper outline (DUE Nov. 19)

**Week 13 Nov. 20 – 26** (Thanksgiving break)

Break

**Week 14 Nov. 27 – Dec. 3**

Looking ahead: The future of PR writing

DUE Interview PR practitioner

\*Watch for feedback on your position paper outline and be sure to incorporate feedback into your final position paper that is due on the last day of class, Wednesday, Dec. 6.

**Week 15 Dec. 4 – 6 (Wednesday)** \*Dec. 6 is last day of classes

Wrapping up

DUE (Wednesday, Dec. 6) Position paper

## ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

### Professional Values and Competencies in PBRL 3431

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, both in a global context and in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

### How professional values and competencies will be met

*Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)*

- Understand how public relations writing tactics can tell stories and build relationships across a variety of disciplines and careers.
- Recognize the importance of understanding the diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) of stakeholder groups and audience to developing content for public relations products
- Structure messages on the appropriate channels to reach diverse target audience.
- Explain how the writer's purpose, intended public and requirements of the medium affect style and content.
- Recognize legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing, including within the freedoms of speech and the press.
- Understand the differences between writing for various media.
- Evaluate their own and other's public relations writing for accuracy, clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style, as well as suitability for specific medium.

- Understand their role as a content creator influences culture, norms and discourse.

*Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)*

- Earn a passing score on written assignments, quizzes and engagement exercises.
- Define an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.
- Identify appropriate multimedia components to accompany public relations writing based on medium, platform and target audience.
- Name and illustrate common legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing.
- Write PR collateral for an organization including press releases, speeches, media pitches, message maps, blog posts and position papers.
- Apply Associated Press guidelines to written public relations materials.
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

## How assessment of student learning will be met

### *Awareness*

- Learn the important role of writing in public relations, including journalistic news values, AP style and the various forms of writing for different media.
- Associate successful outcomes with the importance of understanding the diversity and cultural differences of an organization's stakeholders and target audience when developing public relations content.
- Give examples about the ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.

### *Understanding*

- Understand how to be strategic in public relations writing.
- Recognize how the diversity and cultural difference of an organization's stakeholders and target audience inform the development of public relations content.
- Examine potential ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Understand how to proofread their own and other's writing for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Identify which public relations products are appropriate based on the platform and how to create specific public relations products.

### *Application*

- Write PR collateral for an organization including press releases, speeches, media pitches, message maps, blog posts and position papers.
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

## JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

### Portfolio requirement

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or Squarespace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

### Email

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

### Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

### AI/Chat GPT

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

### Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.



## Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

## Academic integrity

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

## Online SETEs

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

## Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

### **AP Style and grammar**

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

### **Disability and accommodations**

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### **Diversity and inclusivity**

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

### **Weather policy**

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website and the LiveSafe App regarding inclement weather.

### **Student support**

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.