

# Intro to Public Relations Writing

PBRL 3421-001

Spring 2023

MW 2:20 – 3:45 p.m.

Meeman 208

**Prof. Sheri D. Neely**

**Office:** 330 Meeman Journalism Building

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 7-11 a.m. or by appointment

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog description

Bridges information-based reporting with strategic writing. Students will learn how to use research, ethics, and critical thinking to develop their storytelling to fit the goals and objectives of each writing tool (e.g., media pitch, fact sheet, news release) while considering their client's needs and intended publics.

### Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

*The Public Relations Writer's Handbook*. Lehmann, W. (2020). New York: Routledge. ISBN: 978-0-8153-6528-0 eBook ISBN: 978-1-3512-6192-0

\*Available in hard copy or eBook. eBook is available for rent via Amazon for approximately \$25

*The Associated Press Stylebook 2019 (or 2018)*. New York: Basic Books ISBN: 978-0-917360-68-8

\*You can also access *The AP Stylebook* as an online publication or through an app. Get details about these options online at [apstylebook.com](http://apstylebook.com)

Other readings will be assigned and posted to Canvas.

### Classroom format

This class will be presented through lectures, discussions, multimedia, and group activities both in class and utilizing online platforms including Canvas, podcasts, and social media sites. This class will meet in person twice a week. Regular attendance and participation in class is expected and will affect your grade. Part of academic success at the collegiate level is being able to add to discussions with informed ideas and thoughts, as well as being willing to ask questions if you are unsure about anything. There will be many opportunities to contribute, engage, or explore topics that may be confusing or unclear in class, and I encourage each and every one of you to speak up when appropriate. Remember there is no such thing as a stupid question.

Class discussions taking place both online and in person should remain respectful and professional, and show respect to all people regardless of background, sex, race, or any other factor. Hate speech will not be tolerated in my classroom and I reserve the right to ask any

student to leave if they violate this boundary. Remember: Public relations is all about creating and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships and our classroom should be no different. This class is meant to build and improve your public relations writing skills as well as build your skills in writing in AP format. In class, you will write a variety of public relations pieces and begin developing a portfolio of relevant documents and creative pieces. There will be an emphasis on media relations, social media, and content creation.

Students will upload all required assignments to Canvas, and feedback will be given to encourage student improvement. Access to a computer or an electronic device will be required. Please be sure to read the instructions for each assignment carefully, as requirements for each assignment will vary.

Assignments being turned in will all need to be submitted as a .doc, .pdf or .pptx file unless otherwise noted. Reach out in class or via email if anything is unclear to you. All out-of-class assignments and quizzes will be due Sunday nights at 11:59 p.m. central time unless otherwise noted. To allow time for response and clarification, please reach out with any assignment questions at least 48 hours prior to the deadline.

In order to succeed in this course, it's imperative to attend class and stay engaged in all coursework. If at any point you are concerned about your grade or struggling to grasp course concepts, I encourage you to make an appointment during my office hours so we can work to find a good solution. Remember that in order for me to help you, communication is key. Also remember that much more can be done if you reach out early on in the semester - if you wait until the middle of April, there likely isn't much we can do to turn things around.

### **Accessing the course website**

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page:  
<https://memphis.instructure.com/>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for PBRL 3421-001 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

## Course Requirements

### Individual Assignments

- Writing projects 380 points
- Personal branding assignments 180 points
- In class assignments 120 points
- Weekly Assignments 140 points
- Quizzes 150 points
- AP Quizzes 130 points
- Class attendance & Participation 100 points

**Total: 1,200 points**

### In Class assignments

In-class activities will be completed to build on course concepts through experiential learning. Students must be present in class to complete the in-class assignment unless a special circumstance has been cleared with the instructor *prior* to class. The lowest in class assignment grade will be dropped.

### Weekly Assignments

Weekly assignments will vary in nature as well as points and be used to build on the concepts we are learning each week in class, as well as gauge your progress in the course.

### Writing Projects

As a writing-focused classes, our mission is to use strategic writing to tell our clients' stories. Often the best way to learn can be learning by experience, creating the documents we are learning about in this class to refine our skills and exercise our creative muscles. You will create a total of 8 communication pieces, worth a total of 380 points. These writing projects will be featured within your online portfolios. The following pieces will be created:

Media Pitch: Two media pitches worth a total of 60 points  
News Release: Two news releases worth a total of 80 points  
Backgrounder: 40 points

Fact Sheet: 60 points

Radio Spot: 40 points

Piece of Choice\*: 100 points

\*\* Students will have a choice of different writing projects for the piece of choice, which will also count as the final project.

### Quizzes

A total of three quizzes will be given throughout the semester to test your understanding of course concepts. Quizzes will be given on Canvas. You will have three attempts for each quiz with the highest grade taken. You are welcomed to use your notes or book to help assist you on the quiz, but working with another student is prohibited.

### AP Quizzes

There will be five AP quizzes throughout the semester to check your understanding of AP style rules. Quizzes will be given on Canvas. You will have three attempts for each quiz with the highest grade taken. You may use your notes or book to help assist you on the quiz but working with another student is prohibited.

### Personal Branding Assignment

Each student will complete a series of activities to begin building their own brands. More details will be given in class.

### Attendance & Participation

Students are expected to attend class regularly and contribute to class discussions, and this participation will count for 100 points in class. Students are allowed up to four absences before it begins to affect their grade.

## Questions About Grades

If you would like to ask about a grade, please make an appointment to meet with me outside of class time, as I will not discuss grades via email or during class.

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. Meeting early and often can help both parties involved find ways to improve student-instructor understanding and quality of work.

### Plagiarism policy

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

Second offense: Automatic 0, no redo

Third offense: Automatic class fail

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

\*\*Any instances of plagiarism may result in a note being added to your department file.

### Late work

<24 hours late: -5% (perfect = 95% A)

24-48 hours late: -10% (perfect = 90% A)

1 Week late: -20% (perfect = 80% B)

Final call: Up to 30% credit (perfect = 70% C)

## Grading

Assignment categories and points or percentage weights.

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%

A=Professional quality work that could be used with little or no modification  
B=Good to excellent work and exceeds requirement, but would require revision to be used professionally  
C=Satisfactory work and adequately meets requirement, but would need significant revision  
D=Barely satisfies the minimum requirement and below average quality  
F=Unsatisfactory work and does not meet minimum requirements

## COURSE SCHEDULE

*Week 1, JAN 16, 18: PR Writing and the PR Professional*

**No Class Monday: MLK Holiday**

Order textbook  
Check Canvas assignments  
Survey in-class activity

*Week 2, JAN 23 & 25: Storytelling, Backgrounders*

Chapter 1  
Check Canvas assignments

*Week 3, JAN 30 & FEB 1: Storytelling, Bio Sketches & Fact Sheets*

Chapter 2, 3, check Canvas for additional materials  
Check Canvas assignments

*Week 4, FEB 6 & 8: What Does Your Social Media Presence Say About You*

Chapter 4, 6  
Check Canvas assignments

*Week 5, FEB 13 & 15: Newswriting and Writing to Persuade*

Chapter 11  
Check Canvas assignments

*Week 6, FEB 20 & 22: News Releases*

Chapter 2  
Check Canvas assignments

*Week 7, FEB 27 & MAR 1: Blogs and Blogger Relations*

Chapter 13, 14  
Check Canvas assignments

*Week 8, MAR 6, 8: SPRING BREAK*

No Readings

*Week 9, MAR 13 & 15: Media Pitches, Advisories, and Alerts*

Chapter 3,4

Check Canvas assignments

*Week 10, MAR 20 & 22: Writing Professional Emails*

Chapter 13, 15

Check Canvas assignments

*Week 11, MAR 27 & 29: Circling Back to News Releases*

Chapter 2

Check Canvas assignments

*Week 12, APR 3 & 5: Writing for Social Media*

Chapter 14

Check Canvas assignments

*Week 13, APR 10 & 12: Brochures*

Chapter 7, 12

Check Canvas assignments

*Week 14, APR 17 & 19: Writing for Events*

Chapter 17,18

Check Canvas assignments

*Week 15, APR 24 & 26 : Course Wrap Up*

No readings

Chapter 17,18

Check Canvas assignments

*APR 26            LAST DAY OF CLASS*

*APR 27            STUDY DAY*

*APR 28 – MAY 4            EXAMS*

## **ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES**

### **Professional Values and Competencies in PBRL 3421**

- 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.
- Recognize potential problems and solutions in media relations.
- 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 specified medium.
- Understand their own 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 a press release, fact sheet, media pitch, and email, in addition to participating in a Twitter chat, drafting a personal bio, and completing the necessary engagement exercises (quizzes and introductions and reflection pieces).
- 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 a press release, fact sheet, media pitch, and email, in addition to participating in a Twitter chat, drafting a personal bio, and completing the necessary engagement exercises (quizzes and introductions and reflection pieces).
- 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.

### 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.