

# Applied Public Relations Writing

PBRL 3431-M50

Spring 2023

Online

## Prof. Taylor Ackerman, MA, APR

She/Her

**Office:** Meeman 332

**Office hours:** Monday, 10:45 a.m. - 12:45 pm

Tuesday, 10am - 11am

Wednesday, 11:45 am - 12:45 pm

If you'd like to meet for the office hours listed, please reach out via email prior to dropping by so I can make sure I'm in my office. I'm also available via Zoom outside of the listed office hours upon request.

**Email:** [tckerman@memphis.edu](mailto:tckerman@memphis.edu)

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog Description

Emphasis on the strategic aspects of public relations writing and further development of writing skills for a wide variety of public relations vehicles including preparation of more complex materials such as speeches, feature stories, white papers, videos and materials for special events and crises.

### Prerequisites

PBRL 3421

### Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Smith, R.D (2020). *Becoming a Public Relations Writer: Strategic Writing for Emerging and Established Media*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. New York: Routledge

ISBN 978-1506315737

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 [apstylebook.com](http://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 unless otherwise noted.

### 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 & Campus Resources

#### Students with disabilities & accommodations

If you will need accommodations through [Disability Resources](#) to meet any of the requirements of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. I'm happy to work with you to make sure you are able to be successful in this course. Remember, this is not a reflection on your ability nor is it giving special treatment, but rather making sure you are equipped to do your best in this course.

**Support:** If at any point in the semester you are struggling with the course load or a specific assignment, please reach out to me for a meeting so we can work to get you back on track. I'm happy to help in any way I'm able, but you must be an advocate for yourself. It's impossible for me to help if I don't know there's a problem.

School in general can be stressful, and I know that you have many things going on outside of this course. I am here to help make sure that you have everything possible that you need to succeed, and advocate for you. However, this requires open communication from you as early on in the semester as possible. I am happy to meet with you outside of class, hop on a Zoom call, or provide support over email. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me if you find yourself falling behind, feeling overwhelmed, or struggling. Please remember that the earlier I'm aware of the problem, the more likely it is that we'll be able to get things turned around.

**Meeman Lab Availability:** Open labs 9:30-4:30 Monday-Friday. In addition to Meeman, labs are available in the Tech Hub and the Library. In addition, equipment rentals are available on the third floor of the Meeman Journalism building. Check your email for the equipment room schedule.

For students that may not have access to a computer, the McWherter Library has laptops on loan. Please visit the Checkout desk in the library or visit:

<https://www.memphis.edu/libraries/technology/laptop.php>

**Campus and Community Resources:** <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/>

#### Resources specific to physical health and wellness:

[Mental health Services](#)

[UofM Student Health Center](#)

[Sexual, domestic, and intimate partner violence resources](#)

**If you are affected financially because of COVID-19:**

There are many resources available through the Dean of Students including:

[Dr. Rosie Phillips Bingham Student Emergency Fund](#)  
[Emergency Food Resources](#), which includes [Tiger Pantry](#)

**Academic Services:**

[Writing Center](#)

[Tutoring](#)

**Communities & Inclusion:**

[Multicultural Affairs](#)

[LGBTQ+](#)

**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.

**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).

## 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 assignment

## Late work

**Late Work:** In the field of public relations, deadlines are imperative. As such, learning to work within deadlines for this course will be expected. Quizzes and tests are not allowed to be turned in late, nor is the portfolio or final assignment. Other assignments will follow the below late policy:

<24 hours late: 5% off

<48 hours late: 10% off

<One week late: 20% off

One to three weeks late: 30% off

Over three weeks late: No credit

## Grading

Assignments	50%
Portfolio	10%
Hootsuite Certification	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%

## Course Schedule

### Week 1, January 17 - 22: Welcome to the course!

Readings/Media: Get textbook!

Assignments: "Dust off the cobwebs" News Release

Pick your organization for the semester

### Week 2, January 23 - 29: Refreshers of Writing

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments: Prepare a Planning Sheet

### Week 3, January 30 - February 5:

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments: Effective Message Starters

Quiz

Week 4, February 6 - 12:

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments: Thinking About the Messages We Create

Quiz

Week 5: February 13 - 19:

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments: Develop a Message Map

Week 6: February 20 - 26:

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments: Quiz

Week 7: February 27 - March 5:

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments: Research Org & Develop Scenarios (due March 3rd)

Week 8, March 6 - 12: Spring Break! No Class or Assignments. 😊

Week 9, March 13 - 19:

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments: Resume

Writing Leads

Week 10, March 20 - 26:

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments:

Digital Newsroom

Quiz

Speech Release

Week 11, March 27 - April 2:

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments: News Release

Quiz

Blog Post

Week 12, April 3 - 9:

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments: Position Paper Topic

Quiz

Week 13, April 10 - 16:

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments: Hootsuite Certification

Interview a PR Practitioner

Quiz

Week 14, April 17 - 23:

Readings/Media: Check Canvas

Assignments: Portfolio Requirements

Week 15: April 24 - 30:

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: Position Paper

This schedule will change as needed to suit course needs. Professor reserves the right to change the syllabus. Any changes will be communicated in class and on Canvas.

## Other issues

The best and quickest way to contact me is via email ([tkerman@memphis.edu](mailto:tkerman@memphis.edu)). I will respond to email with 24 – 48 hours. If the email is sent over the weekend or on a school break, the response time may be delayed. I'm happy to meet with you during office hours via Zoom, or arrange for an alternative time that works for us both. Please do not hesitate to reach out, or let an issue snowball.

## 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.

### **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.