

# Intro to Strategic Writing

PBRL 3210\_001

Fall 2024

Class Meeting: T/Th 2:40-4:05pm, Meeman Journalism 212

## Prof. Taylor Ackerman, APR, MA

She/Her

Office: Meeman 332

Office hours: Tuesday, 10am-11am, 1:30 pm - 2:30 pm

Wednesday, 10:30 am - 1:30 pm

Thursday, 1pm - 2pm

If you'd like to meet for the office hours listed, please reach out via text or email prior to dropping by so I can make sure I'm in my office and not in another meeting.

I'm also available via Zoom outside of the listed office hours upon request.

Email: [tkerman@memphis.edu](mailto:tkerman@memphis.edu)

Phone: 731-225-7656 (Text only please)

## 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, multimedia, writing workshops and group activities both in class and utilizing online platforms. This class will meet in person twice a week in room 212. Regular attendance and participation in class is expected and will affect your grade.

Class discussions as well as any written assignments 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 strategic writing skills as well as build your skills in writing in AP format. In class, you will write a variety of public relations and advertising pieces as well as 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, it's easier to get caught up the faster we recognize the problem.

### **Accessing the course website**

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page: <http://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. Click on the link for STRM 3210 to enter our course

### **Course Requirements**

Course work will be accomplished every week, including readings, assignments and quizzes 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.

### **Quality of Work**

All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar, and language. A large part of public relations and advertising 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 original, meaning it's yours. If you quote anything or get information from any other source, it should be fully cited. If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources.

## **Chat GPT/AI**

You must obtain permission from the instructor before using ChatGPT or other AI tools to assist with assignments in this course. 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. Be prepared to submit any 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.

## **Repetition of Courses and Coursework**

Students 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 students 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. When in doubt, ask. If I catch work that seems eerily similar to something from a previous class and you have not discussed it with me, it will be an automatic zero. All written work will be checked for policy adherence via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be checked for policy adherence by the professor and judged against previous submissions. The only exception to this policy is the student's online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the resume and logo).

## **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 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.

## **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.

**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 by communicating with me and making me aware of any problems. It's impossible for me to help if I don't know there's a problem.

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.

**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. We also have equipment rental available. Check your university email for details.

**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+](#)

## Grading

There are 1,000 possible points in this class. At the end of the semester, your class points will be calculated and rounded up to the nearest whole number. Letter grades will be determined according to the scale below. If additional points are added or subtracted from this possible point total, the letter scale will be adjusted.

**A+** = 967 – 1,000 points, **A** = 934 – 966, **A-** = 900 – 933 points

**B+** = 867 – 899 points, **B** = 834 – 866 points, **B-** = 800 – 833 points

**C+** = 767 – 799 points, **C** = 734 – 766 points, **C-** = 700 – 733 points

**D** = 667 – 600 points

**F** = 600 and fewer points

**Grading Philosophy.** A=Professional quality work that could be use 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 minimum requirement and below average quality

F=Unsatisfactory work and does not meet minimum requirements

## Assignments

Attendance & In Class Activities	<b>200 points</b>
Writing Projects	<b>400 points</b>
AP Style Practice & Assignments	<b>150 points</b>

Quizzes	150 points
Individual Assignments	100 points
<b>Total: 1,000 points</b>	

## Assignment Breakdown

More in-depth guidelines posted to Canvas.

**Attendance & In Class Activities:** We will do several in class activities in order to explore different examples of the writing concepts we are discussing and explore the topics deeper. These in class activities are meant to be fun as well as deepen your connection with the learning material. Due to the nature of the in class activities, these cannot be made up outside of class.

Each student will get three, no-questions-asked absences. After three, each absence will start to affect your grade.

**Writing Projects:** The biggest part of your grade in this class will be the independent writing projects you do. These projects will include, but not be limited to, a creative brief, media pitches, news releases, backgrounders, fact sheets, blogs and social media posts.

**AP Style Practice & Assignments:** A number of exercises will be done to deepen your understanding and memory of AP format. These activities will be done both independently and as a group.

**Quizzes:** Quizzes will be given throughout the semester to test your understanding of course concepts. Quizzes will be given on Canvas with a time limit of 30 minutes. You will have two attempts for each quiz with the highest grade taken. You are welcome to use your notes or book to help assist you on the quiz, but working with another student is prohibited.

**Individual Assignments:** Students will work independently on assignments in order to demonstrate understanding of course concepts and event purpose. Additional details will be provided in class and on Canvas.

## Miscellaneous Policies

**Late Work:** In strategic media deadlines are imperative. In the field, we are often creating work for clients or pitch meetings with hard deadlines. As such, try to turn everything in on time. I do recognize life happens, and as such if you have to turn something in late, the following late policy will apply with the exception of quizzes and in class activities which will not be accepted late.

- <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

**In Class Activities & Attendance:** A big part of this class is writing workshops and activities within class to help result in stronger writing in a fun and memorable way. As such, it's imperative you come to class. Each student will have an allotted three absences to use as they need. Each absence over three will be 15 points off their attendance grade. Coming to class more than 15 minutes late will result in a ½ absence (more than 30 minutes late will count as a full absence.)

In class activities cannot be made up outside of class, as most of them will require collaboration and/or specific instructions from the class.

**Virtual Meetings:** On the off chance that we decide to have any of our class meetings over Teams this semester, you will be required to attend with your camera on. Failure to attend the class, or having your camera off for more than half of the call, will count against your allotted absences for the course. While virtual meetings can be fantastic for flexibility, it doesn't discount the importance of the class nor permit you to attend while going through a drive-thru, grocery shopping, driving a boat, etc.

## Course Schedule

### Week 1, August 26 - September 1: Introduction to strategic writing

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: Writing sample that moves you and why  
Survey

### Week 2, September 2-8: Being persuasive + why we write

Readings/Media: Chapter One

See Canvas for articles

Assignments: In class activity (AP Style)  
Independent assignment

### Week 3, September 9-15: Paid media - approaching copywriting

Readings/Media: See Canvas for articles

Assignments: In class activities (Copywriting activity; creative brief activity)

### Week 4, September 16-22: Paid media - writing a creative brief

Readings/Media: See Canvas for articles

Assignments: Creative brief due  
In class activity (AP Style)  
Quiz 1

### Week 5: September 23-29: Earned media - what it is and why

Readings/Media: Chapter three

See Canvas for articles

Assignments: Independent assignment - Pitching for "Nora's Cheesecakes"  
Building relationships with journalists  
In class activity (AP Style)

### Week 6: September 30-October 6: Writing a news release

Readings/Media: Chapters two and six

Assignments: In class activity (News release)  
AP Style quizzes

### Week 7: October 7-11: Perfecting a pitch and news release

Readings/Media: Chapter 9

Assignments: Final Pitch

Final News Release

*Fall break begins Saturday, October 12.*

**Week 8, October 16-20: Creating a fact sheet**

*We are on fall break through Tuesday, October 15.*

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: Fact Sheet

Quiz 2

**Week 9, October 21-27: Planning for success + shared media**

Readings/Media: See Canvas for article

Assignments: In class activity

Baby planning sheet

**Week 10, October 28 - November 3: Shared media**

Readings/Media: Check Canvas for article

Assignments: Social media assignment

Quiz three

**Week 11, November 4 - 10: Owned media, content marketing, blogs**

Readings/Media: Check Canvas for articles

Assignments: In class activity (blog brainstorm)

Persuade me of anything assignment due

**Week 12, November 11-17: Presentations (persuade me of anything)**

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: Blog

**Week 13, November 18-24: Biosketches + interviews**

Readings/Media: Chapters seven & ten

Assignments: In class activity

Bio sketch

**Week 14, November 25 - December 1: Backgrounder**

*Class Tuesday on Teams*

Readings/Media: Chapter eight

Assignments: None

*Thanksgiving break begins November 27 - December 1.*

**Week 15: December 2 - 8: End of Semester Wrap up**

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: Backgrounder

Quiz four

This schedule will change as needed to suit course needs.

## **ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES**

### **Professional Values and Competencies in STRM 3210**

- 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.

## 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 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.