

Public Relations Writing

PBRL 3212 M50

Fall 2024

Online Fully Asynchronous

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: tckerman@memphis.edu

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

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 3431 / STRM 3210

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 978-1506315737

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

Classroom format

This course is delivered online in an asynchronous format. In other words, there is no required scheduled meeting time for this course. Students are able to work at their own pace throughout the

week, however work will be due on a weekly basis and it is imperative to stay on track with the course schedule to complete all deadlines on time. There will be some weeks with heavier workload and assignments than others - it is up to you to plan accordingly. In some weeks you'll be able to work ahead, if you chose, while other times you'll need to complete certain items/feedback before moving forward.

You will be the most successful in this course if you read all Canvas materials, presentations and required textbook chapters. While at times I will post extra, additional reading materials or resources, they will always be marked and anything part of the regular course module should be consumed. Many of the concepts we'll go over in the weekly presentations/reading will be pertinent for completing your assignments correctly as well as scoring well on your quizzes. Reading the comments and feedback on your assignments is also an important part of your success. There will be times that assignments are linked/related, meaning that you need to take into consideration the feedback I gave you on a previous assignment before you move on to the next item. Part of this class is workshopping your writing to make it more concise, strategic and professional, which is why reading feedback is so important.

Despite being an online class, it can still be helpful to talk to classmates, discuss course concepts and converse online about assignments. As such, weekly discussion questions will be posted to dive deeper into concepts. Discussion questions are not optional and will be counted for a grade. All course discussions should remain respectful and professional, and show respect to all people regardless of background, sex, race, gender or any other factor. Our goal is to foster a positive, encouraging work environment that enables everyone to produce their best work. Hate speech will not be tolerated in any form and could result in a zero on an assignment or dropped from the class for misconduct.

Our class will be based around different aspects of public relations writing. Not only will you produce several quality, advanced level pieces for your portfolio, you will also polish up on the planning and editing stages of writing and accomplish professional certifications through the course. Consider this your personal writing mastermind for the semester - you'll have the chance to expand your skills and grow as well as make yourself more marketable as a professional, but the only way you'll get the most out of it is if you put in effort.

You must have internet access and must turn items in with a ".doc", ".docx" or ".pdf" extension. If video is required, it should be turned in as a ".mp4" file extension or public YouTube link. Failure to turn in assignments in the proper format will result in only one warning for the semester, and then a zero on subsequent assignments.

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

This is a rigorous course with high professional and academic standards. It is the highest 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 and sometimes your writing ability (or lack

thereof) will be what sets you apart from the competition when applying for positions. 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.

Many of the writing projects will require planning, multiple-drafts, strategy and edits. If you find yourself rushing through an assignment in 15 minutes to beat the deadline, it's very likely it's not going to be up to par or result in a good grade. Give yourself time to work on assignments through the week and revisit them with a fresh mindset prior to turning them in. Part of this course is learning more positive writing habits for success. Even though we all cut it a little too close sometimes (fellow procrastinator, here), you'll be surprised at how your work can grow with some planning and finesse.

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 midterm and final exam, we will have a series of tests/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 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, let's set up a Zoom meeting so we can talk about it with clarity. I'm often flexible about allowing students to redo an assignment they may not be satisfied with *if* they come to me about it in a timely manner and show significant improvements in the work and understanding.

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

Discussions	150 points
Writing Projects	400 points
Certifications	100 points
Quizzes	150 points
Individual Assignments	200 points
Total:	1,000 points

Assignment Breakdown

More in-depth guidelines posted to Canvas.

Writing Projects: Throughout the semester, you will turn in a variety of assignments that are meant to demonstrate what you have learned throughout the course. These assignments will vary in nature as well as work required. These projects consist of:

- News release
- Fact sheet
- Speech (written & recorded)
- White Paper

Hootsuite Certifications: Through the class, you will have the opportunity (and requirement) to complete professional platform training through Hootsuite. Turning in these certifications will be for a

grade, and you will also complete a reflection. If you have already completed Hootsuite for a different class, you need to let the instructor know immediately so that they can assign you an alternative assignment. Hootsuite certifications completed in previous semesters will not be accepted for this assignment.

Discussion questions: We will engage in discussions through Canvas almost weekly. In order to receive full credit, you will be expected to make an original post and reply (thoughtfully) to at least two classmates.

Individual Assignments: Throughout the semester there are a number of smaller assignments aimed at making sure you are prepared for/understand class concepts. These assignments will vary in nature and will each have specific instructions.

Quizzes: A total of three quizzes will be provided throughout the semester to check your knowledge on course topics. While you are welcome to use your notes, the quizzes will be timed and require you to have a base knowledge of course concepts. You will have two attempts with the highest grade sticking. Working with another student is prohibited and will result in receiving a zero for the quiz.

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 discussions, 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

Course Schedule

Week 1, August 26 - September 1: Welcome to the course

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: News Release Check In

Introduction

Syllabus Quiz

Week 2, September 2-8: Grammar, inclusive language & successful writing

Readings/Media: Chapter one p. 31 -37

See Canvas for article

Assignments: Discussion - strengths and weaknesses, effective writing

Free write

Week 3, September 9-15: Media relations

Readings/Media: Chapters 10 & 11

Assignments: Planning sheet for speech

Final news release due

Discussion question

Week 4, September 16-22: Persuasion and strategic communication

Readings/Media: Chapter three

See Canvas for article

Assignments: Message map due

Discussion question

Quiz 1

Week 5: September 23-29: Speech writing and building an argument

Readings/Media: Chapter seventeen

Assignments: Discussion question

Find a speech that stands out

Outline & draft

Week 6: September 30-October 6: Complete the speech

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: Speech due (script in .doc and video in .MP4 or YouTube link)

Week 7: October 7-11: Spark the creativity

Readings/Media: See Canvas for Article

Assignments: Fact Sheet due

Fall break begins Saturday, October 12.

Week 8, October 16-20: Social media best practices

We are on fall break through Tuesday, October 15.

Readings/Media: See Canvas for for article

Chapter seven

Assignments: Getting to know your client: Personality, research and listening

Discussion Question

Quiz 2

Week 9, October 21-27: Hootsuite training

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: Complete Hootsuite Platform training & Hootsuite Social Media Marketing Training

Hootsuite Reflection

Week 10, October 28 - November 3: Advocacy & issues management

Readings/Media: Chapter 13

See Canvas

Assignments: Discussion question

Getting clear on your topic & counter arguments

Week 11, November 4 - 10: Research & draft

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: Outline and draft / research

Discussion question

Week 12, November 11-17: Refining the argument

Readings/Media: None

Assignment: Discussion question

Issues management assignment (statement, talking points, contingency)

Week 13, November 18-24: Complete the position paper

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: Position paper due

Week 14, November 25 - December 1: Thanksgiving break

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: None required

Optional extra credit

Thanksgiving break begins November 27 - December 1.

Week 15: December 2 - 8:

Readings/Media: None

Assignments: Quiz 3

Discussion question / reflection

Survey

This schedule will change as needed to suit course needs.

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in STRM 3212

- 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 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.