

Intro to Strategic Writing

STRM 3210-M50

Fall 2024

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Office Hours: Virtual, 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.

Prerequisites

None

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

The Associated Press Stylebook 2019 (or later). New York: Basic Books.

Note: You can also access The AP Stylebook as an online publication or through an app. Get these details online at apstylebook.com.

Classroom format

This course is delivered online in an asynchronous format. In other words, there is no scheduled meeting time. This can be convenient for you but also means you must be organized and motivated.

This class is meant to build and improve your strategic writing skills, including writing in AP style. You will write various strategic media pieces and develop a portfolio of relevant documents and creative pieces. There is an emphasis on media relations, social media, and content creation.

You will upload all required assignments to Canvas, and feedback will be provided to help you improve. You must have internet access and Microsoft Word or other word processing software that generates a ".doc" or ".docx" extension. All assignments MUST be filed in a ".doc" or ".docx" format; the type must be double-spaced with indented paragraphs. Be sure to read the instructions for each assignment carefully, as requirements for each assignment may vary.

I must be able to open your work and review it using track changes to grade it. Work submitted in a software package that is not noted as acceptable may result in point deductions.

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 STRM 3210-M50.

Course assignments and expectations

Coursework will be completed every week. Each assignment must be completed by its due date and time. Double-check each due time to ensure that you submit it on time.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn is a tool for professionals looking for strategic communications jobs and for professionals looking to hire pros. As a rising strategic communications professional, you should have a digital profile to showcase your skills and experience. We will look at your LinkedIn profile as part of our focus on your professional brand development. If you don't have one yet, don't worry; we'll set it up.

Discussion forum

You are expected to participate actively in class through Canvas discussion posts. Most weeks will include one or more discussions about topics covered in the reading or the industry in general. Discussion may take the form of written, audio, or video requirements. If written, your response should be well-articulated and substantial. Indicate your main idea or point of view and support it with appropriate facts, logic, and references. When asked to provide feedback on your peer's discussion posts, simply stating, for example, "Yes," or "No," "I agree," or "I don't agree or think so" is not acceptable and will not be considered participation. As a guideline, I recommend that your original written post be at least 150 words and that replies to your peers be at least 100. I expect regular participation in class. You will demonstrate this through regular posts that meet the requirements and the deadlines.

Quizzes

Throughout the semester, there will be both AP (Associated Press) Style quizzes and quizzes on the course content to ensure you keep up with the readings and other assignments. Quizzes must be completed by Sunday at 11:59 p.m. (Central Time) of the week they are due. Quizzes are timed, and you must complete the quiz in the time allotted. **Missed quizzes cannot be made up.**

The use of AI tools to generate content is prohibited.

Some assignments may ask you to use generative AI (such as ChatGPT). Unless specified, you must obtain permission before using these tools to assist with assignments in this course. You may use the AI tool only as directed if permission is granted. Assignment submissions may be rub 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 used for assignment with your assignment and the original AI-generated output and be able to explain/show how you fact-checked and improved upon the AI's work to make it your own.

Questions about Grades

If you have questions about a grade, you must contact me within 48 hours of the assignment being returned to you. After that, the grade stands.

You are also responsible for tracking your grade online and meeting with me if you are concerned about your overall grade.

Deadlines and late work

In our industry, deadlines are imperative. As such, learning to work within deadlines for this course is expected. As we all know, life circumstances arise that are out of our control. That said, extensions may be granted on a case-by-case basis.

Missed quizzes and discussion posts may not be made up. Late assignments will be accepted, but an automatic 2% deduction from the final grade will be applied for each day the item is late up to a score of zero.

Grading

AP style quizzes, 5%

Course quizzes, 10%

Writing assignments, 60%

Other assignments, 25%

A = 90% - 100%; B = 80% - 89.9%; C = 70% - 79.9%; D = 60% - 69.9%; F = Below 60%

A = Professional quality work that could be used with little or no modification.

B = Good to excellent work that exceeds requirements but would require revision to be used professionally.

C = Satisfactory work that adequately meets the requirements but would need significant revision to be used professionally.

D = The work barely meets the minimum requirements and is of below-average quality.

F = The work is unsatisfactory and does not meet the minimum requirements.

Other issues

Contacting me. The best and quickest way to contact me is via my Memphis.edu email. I will respond to your email within 24 – 48 hours. You can also make an appointment to meet with me via Teams or phone. If you have a problem, do not let it snowball. Contact me ASAP.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1, Aug. 26 – Sept. 1

Module 1: PR writing & the PR professional

Assignments

- Introduction discussion post
- Course quiz 1
- Pick an organization

Week 2, Sept. 2 - 8 (Monday, Sept. 2 is Labor Day)

Module 2: Storytelling

Assignments

- AP style quiz: Abbreviations
- Course quiz 2
- Write a backgrounder

Week 3, Sept. 9 - 15

Module 3: Telling *your* story

Assignments

- Bio sketch
- Fact sheet

Week 4, Sept. 16 - 22

Module 4: What does your social media presence say about you?

Assignments

- AP style quiz: Addresses
- LinkedIn personal branding activity

Week 5, Sept. 23 - 29

Module 5: News writing & writing to persuade

Assignments

- AP style quiz: Capitalization
- Write a news lead
- Course quiz 3

Week 6, Sept. 30 – Oct. 6

Module 6: News releases

Assignments

- Find a news release & post to the discussion board
- Course quiz 4
- News release #1

Week 7, Oct. 7 - 13

Module 7: Blogs & blogger relations

Assignments

- AP style quiz: Numerals
- Identify a blogger
- Critique a news release
- Write a blog

Week 8, Oct. 14 – 20

No new content. Fall Break Oct. 12 – 15 (Sat – Tue)

Week 9, Oct. 21 - 27

Module 8: Media pitches, advisories & alerts

Assignments

- AP style quiz: Time
- Course quiz 5
- Write a media pitch

Week 10, Oct. 28 – Nov. 3

Module 9: Circling back to news releases

Assignments

- Optional – revise & resubmit news release #1
- News release #2

Week 11, Nov. 4 - 10

Module 10: Brochures

Assignments

- Brochure

Week 12, Nov. 11 - 17

Module 11: Writing for social media

Assignments

- Course quiz 6

Week 13, Nov. 18 - 24

Module 12: Writing for events

Assignments

- Talking points

Week 14, Nov. 25 – Dec. 1

No new content. Thanksgiving Break Nov. 27 – Dec. 1 (Wed-Sun)

Week 15, Dec. 2 – 4 (last day of class is Wednesday, Dec. 4)

Wrapping Up

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in STRM 3210

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press globally 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 to pursue 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 various disciplines and careers.
- Recognize the importance of understanding the diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) of stakeholder groups and audiences to developing content for public relations products
- Structure messages on the appropriate channels to reach diverse target audiences.
- Explain how the writer's purpose, intended public, and medium requirements 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, appropriate use of AP style, and 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 of 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 differences 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 and others' 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, draft a personal bio, and complete the necessary engagement exercises (quizzes, 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 for the selected media channels.

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

Portfolio requirement

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you must 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 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. You are 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 activate your UofM email account. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you must forward all UofM emails 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 smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

AI/Chat GPT

In Journalism & Strategic Media, artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others. Please refer to the 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. For more information about the University's 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. You 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 your ideas' originality and evaluating the 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 a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely to detect plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or not accepted.

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, you must 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 before the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missed assignments if the absence was due to illness or a catastrophic emergency, such as a documented death in the family.

AP Style and grammar

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

Disability and accommodations

If you need 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. These 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 contribute to 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 understanding various 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.

Weather policy

Always check with local media and 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 can assist in connecting you with campus or community support.