# **Applied Public Relations Writing PBRL 3431 M50**

## **Summer 2024**

**Fully Asynchronous**

## 

## **Prof. Taylor Ackerman, APR, MA**

She/Her

**Office:** Meeman 332

**Office hours:** Via Zoom, available by appointment

*I am available to meet with you via Zoom to discuss assignments, class concepts or concerns and grades as needed! My schedule is flexible. Reach out to me via email (*[*tckerman@memphis.edu*](mailto:tckerman@memphis.edu) *- not through Canvas) to schedule. In most circumstances, I will be able to meet within 72 hours of the appointment request. I am also happy to respond to assignment questions and concerns via email or text message, however please respect professional working hours and don’t text me after 8pm or on Sundays.*

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

**Phone:** 731-225-7656 (Text only please. Phone call appointments to be made upon request only.)

### **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*, 6thEdition. 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

Other readings mayl be assigned and posted to Canvas.

**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.

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.

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. 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 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 assignments and expectations**

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. Consider this class your own personal writing mastermind - we are all here to help one another grow and become more polished.

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 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 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 any 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.

### **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

**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.

### **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 are not allowed to be turned in late, nor are discussion questions**. 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**

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, students will be provided with an updated point to letter grade scale.

**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

Writing Projects: 470 points

Smaller Assignments: 205 points

Quizzes: 150 points

Discussions: 175 points

Specific details for each assignment will be given on Canvas. Please don’t ever hesitate to reach out to me with questions or concerns.

### **Assignments**

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 for Hootsuite Platform & Social Media Marketing

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.

Smaller 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.

### **Other issues**

The best and quickest way to contact me is via email (tckerman@memphis.edu). Please do not send an email through the Canvas platform as I will not see these as quickly. I’m happy to meet with you via Zoom or phone call to discuss course matters as well - simply schedule a time with me via email or text.

The syllabus and course schedule are subject to change at the discretion of the professor and needs of the class. Changes will be on Canvas. Assignments will almost always be due on Sunday nights at 11:59 pm.

### **Course & Campus Resources**

**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. 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.

**Resources specific to physical health, wellness and resources:**

[Mental health Services](https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/emergencymentalhealth.php)

[UofM Student Health Center](https://www.memphis.edu/health/)

[Sexual, domestic, and intimate partner violence resources](https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/sexualassault.php)

[Dr. Rosie Phillips Bingham Student Emergency Fund](https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/rosiebinghamemergencyfund.php)

[Emergency Food Resources](https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/emergencyfood.php), which includes [Tiger Pantry](https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/sos/tigerpantry.php)

**Academic Services:**

[Writing Center](https://www.memphis.edu/cwc/)

[Tutoring](https://www.memphis.edu/esp/centers.php)

**Communities & Inclusion:**

[Multicultural Affairs](https://www.memphis.edu/multiculturalaffairs/organizations/index.php)

[LGBTQ+](https://www.memphis.edu/multiculturalaffairs/lgbtq/lbgtq-resources.php)

**Course Schedule**

**Week 1: May 28-June 2** *Hitting the ground running*

No readings

News Release Check

Discussion 1 - Introduction

**Week 2: June 3-9** *Setting up for success, grammar & inclusive writing*

Readings: Chapters 1 & 2

Discussion

Free write

Planning sheet for speech

**Week 3: June 10-16** *Media relations & best practices*

Reading: Chapters 10&11

Discussion

Final news release

Fact sheet

Quiz 1

**Week 4: June 17-23**: *Strategic communication & persuasion*

Readings: Chapters 3&4

Discussion

Message map

*Extra credit available: “Guide to media relations”*

**Week 5: June 24-30:** *Persuasion & speech writing*

Readings: Chapters 9 & 17

Discussions

Quiz 2

**Week 6: July 1-7:** *Work week*

**Speech Due (worth 150 - must submit document and video giving speech)**

**Week 7: July 8-14:** *Advocacy writing & issues management*

Discussion

Pitch your topic & write the position clearly

Starter outline

**Week 8: July 15-21** *Work week*

**White Paper Due (worth 150)**

**Week 9: July 22-28:** *Social media*

Discussion

Social media analysis and ideas

Quiz 3

*Extra credit available: Repurpose white paper or speech for social media*

**Week 10: July 29-August 4:** *Wrapping up the course*

**Hootsuite Due Wednesday, July 31 (worth 120)**

No late work accepted after Wednesday, July 31

## **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 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 are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or SquareSpace. You are also encouraged to purchase a URL if you 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](http://iam.memphis.edu/) 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](https://www.memphis.edu/osa/).

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.