

# Public Relations Writing

## PBRL 4321-M50

### Summer 2020

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#### Catalog Description

Emphasis on communication tactics; plan, write, and produce public relations tools; audience and media selection; print and electronic media and new media.

#### Prerequisites

JRSM 2121, PBRL 3400

#### 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 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 eCourseware.

#### Classroom Format

This course is delivered online in an asynchronous format. You must have Internet access and Microsoft Word or other word processing software that generates a ".doc" extension.

You must have Microsoft Word software. I must be able to open your work to grade it. Work submitted in a software package not noted as acceptable in this syllabus (Microsoft Word) may result in point deductions being assessed to your work.

#### Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis eLearn home page: <http://elearn.memphis.edu>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Summer 2020 course list available to you, click on the link for PBRL 3421-M50 to enter

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Assignments.** Course work will be completed every week. Each assignment must be completed by its due

date and time (Central Standard Time), which will vary by assignment. Double check each due time to ensure that you post by the deadline.

**Hootsuite Certification.** As part of this class you will be required to earn your Hootsuite Platform Certification. The Hootsuite Platform Certification is industry-recognized and demonstrates your expertise with the social media management platform Hootsuite. The normal cost of this certification is \$99 but as a member of this class, you will be able to access the training materials and the exam FREE. Details about this process will be provided separately.

**LinkedIn.** LinkedIn is a frequently used tool for professionals looking for PR jobs and hiring PR pros. As rising PR professionals, you should have a digital profile to showcase your skills and your experience. As part of our focus on your professional brand development, we will be looking at your LinkedIn profiles. If you don't have one yet, don't worry, we'll be setting it up.

**Discussion forum.** Despite being an online course, students are expected to have active class participation. Participation will be evaluated by your response and activity in eCourseware discussion forums. Each week will include one or more discussions about topics covered in the readings or the PR industry in general. Discussion may take the form of written, audio or video requirements. If written, your responses should be well articulated and substantial. Clearly indicate your main idea or point of view and support it with facts, logic and references as appropriate. When asked to provide feedback on your peer's discussion posts, simply stating, for example, "Yes," "No," "I agree," or "I don't think so" is not acceptable will not be considered participation. As a guideline, I recommend your original written posts should be at least 150 words and replies to your peers should be at least 100 words. I expect regular participation and active students will demonstrate that by regular posts that meet the requirements and deadlines.

**Portfolio.** You will be required to update your online portfolio to showcase your work and to continue to build your professional online presence. Specific requirements will be provided separately.

**Quizzes.** There will be both AP (Associated Press) Style quizzes and quizzes on the content throughout the semester to ensure that you are keeping up with the readings and other assignments. Quizzes must be completed by Sunday night at 11:59 p.m. (CST). Check the course schedule for specific dates. Quizzes are timed and you must complete the quiz in the time allotted. Missed quizzes cannot be made up.

## Grading

There are 1,265 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, you will be provided with an updated point to letter grade scale.

## Individual Assignments

AP Quizzes	120 (8 quizzes x 15 points each)
Quizzes	120 points (6 quizzes x 20 points each)
Syllabus quiz	15 points
Hootsuite Certification	100 points

LinkedIn activity	100 points
News release	100 points
Media Pitch	75 points
Backgrounder	50 points
Brochure	100 points
Fact Sheet	100 points
Bio Sketch	25 points
Email exercise	15 points
SEO exercise	25 points
Portfolio	50 points
Blog	50 points
Twitter Chat & Collection	100 points
Discussion boards	120 points
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,265</b>

**A** = 1,138 – 1,265 points  
**B** = 1,012 – 1,137 points  
**C** = 885 – 1,011 points  
**D** = 759 – 884 points  
**F** = 758 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 requirement.

### Other issues

**Contacting me.** The best and quickest way to contact me is via email ([ksmarks@memphis.edu](mailto:ksmarks@memphis.edu)). Do not use the email within eCourseware, use my Memphis.edu email. I will respond to email with 24 – 48 hours. If you have a problem, do not let it snowball. Contact me ASAP.

**Deadlines.** Understanding and working with deadlines is a critical part of the public relations process. **No late assignments will be accepted.**

## COURSE SCHEDULE

This is a basic schedule for topics and major assignments over the course of the summer semester. Changes to the schedule may occur. All changes will be announced as soon as possible. All assignments are due on the date indicated (typically a Sunday) at 11:59 p.m. CDT. Each 'new' week will begin on Monday.

### *Week 1, June 1 – 7: Overview: What is PR Writing*

Readings:

- CH 1 Lehmann: Purpose, Process, Style, Form and Tone
- Ethical & Legal Responsibilities of the PR Writer (eCourseware)

Assignments:

- Introduction Video Discussion Post – DUE June 7
- Discussion Post – DUE June 7
- Pick your organization – DUE June 14 (must be approved by me before you can complete next week's News Release assignment that is due June 21)
- Syllabus quiz – DUE June 7
- Hootsuite Certification – DUE July 26
- Online Portfolio – DUE Aug 2

### *Week 2, June 8 - 14: News releases*

Readings:

- CH 2 Lehmann: News Releases and Other Types of Releases
- CH 3 Lehmann: Media Pitches

Assignments:

- Discussion Post – DUE June 14
- Quiz 1 – DUE June 14
- AP Style Quiz: Abbreviations – DUE June 14
- News release – DUE June 21

DUE – Organization (Discussion Post)

### *Week 3, June 15 – 21: Media relations & Bloggers*

Readings:

- CH 4 Lehmann: Media Advisories/Alerts
- CH 6 Lehmann: Media Kits

Assignments:

- Discussion Post (Blogger & Media Pitch) – DUE June 21
- AP Style Quiz: Addresses – DUE June 21
- Quiz 2 – DUE June 21
- Blog – DUE June 28
- LinkedIn – DUE July 19 (in preps for our discussion on Personal Branding)

DUE – News Release (in Dropbox)

#### *Week 4, June 22 - 28: Storytelling*

Readings:

- CH 8 Lehmann: Background Materials and Backgrounders
- CH 9 Lehmann: Fact Sheets
- CH 10 Lehmann: Bio Sketches

Assignments:

- Discussion Post (Bio Sketch) – DUE June 28
- Quiz 3 – DUE June 28
- AP Style Quiz: Capitalization – DUE June 28
- Fact Sheet – DUE July 2
- Backgrounder – DUE July 12

DUE – Blog (in Dropbox)

#### *Week 5, June 29 – July 2: Writing for Digital Media (July 4<sup>th</sup> break: July 3 – 5)*

Readings:

- CH 12 Lehmann: Email and Writing for the Web

Assignments:

- Discussion Post (feedback on a peer’s Bio Sketch) – DUE July 2
- AP Style Quiz: Numerals – DUE July 2
- Email – DUE July 12

DUE – Fact Sheet (in Dropbox)

#### *July 4<sup>th</sup> break: July 3 – 5*

#### *Week 6, July 6 – 12: Writing for Social Media*

Readings:

- CH 14 Lehmann: Writing for Social Media
- Social Media Writing (eCourseware)

Assignments:

- Discussion Post – DUE July 12
- Quiz 4 – DUE July 12
- AP Style Quiz: Time – DUE July 12
- SEO – DUE July 19

DUE – Backgrounder (in Dropbox)

DUE – Email (in Dropbox)

#### *Week 7, July 13 – 19: Brochures*

Readings:

- Brochures (eCourseware)

Assignments:

- Quiz 5 – DUE July 19
- AP Style Quiz: Comprehensive 1 – DUE July 19
- Brochure – DUE July 26

DUE – LinkedIn (in Dropbox)

### *Week 8, July 20 – 26: Personal Branding*

Readings:

- TBD (eCourseware)

Assignments:

- AP Style Quiz: Comprehensive 2 – DUE July 26
- Discussion Post – DUE July 26
- Twitter Chat & Collection – DUE Aug 6

DUE – Hootsuite Certification (Screenshot of certificate in Dropbox)

DUE – Brochure (in Dropbox)

### *Week 9, July 27 – Aug 2: Writing for Events*

Readings:

- CH 17 Lehmann: Talking Points and Run of Show
- CH 18 Lehmann: Shot Lists and Photo Captions

Assignments:

- Quiz 6 – DUE Aug 2
- AP Style Quiz: Comprehensive 3 – DUE Aug 2
- Discussion Post – DUE Aug 2

DUE – Online Portfolio (link in Dropbox)

### *Week 10, Aug 3 – 6: Organizational Voice & Internal Communication*

Readings:

- Examples of Voice & Tone Guides (eCourseware)
- Resources for Organizational Voice (eCourseware)

Assignments:

- Discussion Post (Your organization’s voice) – DUE Friday, Aug 7

DUE: Twitter Chat & Collection (as Discussion Post that includes link to Tweet Collection)

## **ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES**

### **Five Pillars in PBRL 3421**

- *Critical Thinking*: Students must demonstrate an understanding of writing for a specific public, writing from a specific point of view for an organization and how to choose the best media.
- *Media Literacy*: Students learn how to engage with both traditional and social media; how relationships and communities are built with these channels; and how to choose appropriate media channels based on their desired target audience.
- *Multimedia*: Students look at the use of social media in public relations, including the potential for community engagement and management, the importance of consistent organizational voice across multiple platforms and how to translate one message into a variety of social media platforms. Students work on their personal portfolio sites as a way of establishing their personal brand.
- *Professionalism*: Students learn the professional and ethical standards of the public relations industry by discussing ethics statements from a variety of professional organizations, working through simulated ethical scenarios from a variety of perspectives and learning how and why legal ramifications may exist within the field. Students work on their personal portfolio sites as a way of establishing their personal

brand.

- *Writing:* Students focus on writing for a variety of public relations formats, including press releases, fact sheets, statements, brochures and newsletters, and various social media platforms. Students edit and critique not only their own work but also the work of their peers.

### **Professional values and competencies for PBRL 3421**

- Understand and apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press for the United States as well as receive instruction in and understand the range of systems of freedom of expression around the world, including the right to dissent, to monitor and criticize power, and to assemble and petition for redress of grievances.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the diversity of peoples and cultures and of the significance and impact of mass communications in a global society.
- Understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Think critically, creatively and independently.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposed they serve.
- 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, and to understand the digital world.

### **How professional values and competencies will be met**

#### *Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)*

- Recognize the importance of understanding the diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) of stakeholder groups and audiences to developing content for public relations products and appropriate channels to reach the 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 the potential problems and solutions in media relations.
- Understand the differences between writing for various mediums.
- 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 how to use appropriate software and hardware to create public relations products, as well as how to effectively utilize social media channels to communicate with the target audience.

#### *Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)*

- Earn a passing score on written assignments, quizzes and exams.
- Identify an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate with and engage them.
- Identify appropriate images/graphics to accompany public relations products based on the medium, platform and target audience.
- Identify common legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing.
- Write a press release, fact sheet, statement, brochure and newsletter for an organization and assemble a press kit, including required images and graphics.

- 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 for 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.
- Learn about the importance of understanding the diversity and cultural differences of an organization's stakeholders and target audiences when developing public relations products.
- Learn about the ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Learn about the different public relations products, which tools are used to create them, and what media each is best suited for.

##### *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.
- Recognize potential ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Understand how to proofread their own work and other's writing for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Understand which public relations products are appropriate based on the platform and how to create specific public relations products.

##### *Application*

- Identify an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate with and engage them.
- Write a press release, fact sheet, statement, brochure and newsletter for an organization and assemble a press kit, including required images and graphics.
- 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 selected media channels.

## **JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES**

### **Portfolio requirement**

All students in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of their work. Undergraduate students are to begin the portfolio in JRSM 3900 and graduate students are to begin in JRSM 7002. Students are to contribute to it in every skills course thereafter. The portfolio should contain samples of the student's work from courses and/or professional experiences and should develop as the student builds skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while students are enrolled in their capstone courses.

Students may use any type of web hosting for their portfolios, but it must have an independent and professional URL. Students may use any content management system, but students are encouraged to



use WordPress, Wix or SquareSpace. Students are encouraged to consider purchasing a URL and hosting if they plan to use the portfolio for a long term, but they must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

Students should have a professional email address they plan to use throughout their professional lives, 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
- Social media links

Students might wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, SoundSlides presentations, design PDFs, audio files and writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career the student seeks after graduation. Thus, each student's portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

### **Email**

Students must have their UofM email accounts activated. Students using another provider, such as Google, are required to have all UofM email forwarded to that account. Students should go to the <http://iam.memphis.edu> website to implement forwarding of UofM email. Students are required to check their email daily. They are responsible for complying with any email sent to by professors or others in the University.

### **Electronic devices**

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

### **Attendance**

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism and Strategic Media. Students may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual late arrival. No late work will be accepted without prior arrangements with the class professor. Students may not be permitted to make up any missing work unless it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented (e.g. with a doctor's note or a copy of the newspaper obituary).

Journalism and Strategic Media is a professional program, and students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students who have some problem making it to class on time should make arrangements to correct the problem or consider taking another class. Students should consider this class as a "job" in the educational process and be on time just as they would elsewhere.

### **Course repetition**

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade ("C-") in a class required by their program of study in Journalism and Strategic Media more than three times will be dropped from the program.

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. 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 résumé and logo).

### **Academic integrity**

In addition to University-wide policies stated in the Code of Student Rights and Responsibilities, the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or students receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on their own, as acts of cheating 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, as this is a journalism and strategic media class, students are expected to comply with copyright law 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. Also, to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. As part of this process, you may be required to submit electronic as well as hard copies of your work. Other instructions to follow may also be given. 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. (*Office of Legal Counsel, October 11, 2018*)

### **Online SETEs**

Students are urged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. Once the instructor has posted grades, student can immediately see that grade, provided they have completed a the SETE for that class. To access evaluation forms, students should log in to MyMemphis using their UUIDs and email passwords; click on the gray "Student" tab; 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 very seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Student feedback is essential and is appreciated.

### **Deadlines**

All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and strategic media. 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.

### **AP Style and grammar**

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

### **Disability and accommodations**

Students who need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office for

Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

### **Diversity and inclusivity**

Students are required to respect the differences of others and treat all persons with respect. Discriminatory, derogatory and threatening language or behavior will not be tolerated. Further, students are expected to consider their work through a diverse mind. Media reach a mass audience, and students should be aware of how those messages are received by a diverse audience.

### **Weather policy**

Always check with local media and the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather. If the University is closed or classes are canceled, this course will not meet. However, students will still be responsible for that day's work.

### **Student support**

Students who are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, should visit the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/saos/sos/crisis-resources.php>. Any student who faces personal challenges including, but not limited to securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Office of Student Accountability, Outreach & Support (901-678-2187) located in the University Center, Suite 359 for assistance. Students may also talk with course instructors about the challenges they are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting with campus or community support.