

Intro to Strategic Writing

PBRL 3421-001

Spring 2024

M/W 2:20 – 3:45 p.m., Meeman 202

Prof. Kim Marks Malone, APR, Fellow PRSA

Office 334A Meeman Journalism Bldg.

Office hours: M/W, 1 – 2 p.m.; T/R, 3 – 4 p.m.; Other hours 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 978-1-3152-6192-0
- *The Associated Press Stylebook* (from the last 3 years) *Note: You can subscribe to and access the [AP Stylebook online](#).*
- Other readings and supplemental material will be assigned and posted to Canvas

Classroom format

This class will be presented through lectures, multimedia, writing workshops and group activities both in class and utilizing online platforms like Canvas, podcasts, and social media sites. We will meet twice a week in room 202. Regular attendance and class participation are expected and will affect your grade.

Class discussions as well as any written assignments taking place both online and in-person should remain respectful and professional and show respect to all persons regardless of background, sex, race, sexual orientation, or any other factor. Hate speech will not be tolerated

in my classroom. You will be asked to leave the classroom if you violate this boundary. Public relations is about creating and maintaining *relationships* and our classroom should be no different.

This class is meant to build and improve upon your strategic writing skills, as well as build your skills in writing in AP style. In class, you will write a variety of PR and advertising pieces and begin developing a portfolio of relevant collateral. There is an emphasis in this class on media relations, social media, content creation, and developing pieces appropriate for a client or organization.

You will upload all required assignments to Canvas and feedback will be provided to encourage your improvement. Access to a computer or an electronic device and access to Microsoft Word is required. Please be sure to read the instructions for each assignment carefully, as requirements for each assignment will vary. All written assignments – unless otherwise noted in the directions – will be submitted as a .doc or .docx. Some assignments may require you to submit a presentation (.pptx, Canva link, or Google Slides link) or other formats (such as an audio or video file). These exceptions will be noted in the directions. Reach out in class or via email if you are unclear about an assignment. All out-of-class quizzes on Canvas are due on Sunday nights at 11:59 p.m. Central Time unless otherwise noted. To allow time for response and clarification, please reach out with any assignment-related questions at least 48 hours *before* the assignment is due.

To succeed in this class, you must attend class and stay engaged in all coursework. If at any point you are concerned about your grade or struggling to grasp course concepts, I encourage you to make an appointment during my office hours so we can work together to find a solution. It's easier to get caught up when you come to me as soon as there is a problem.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis learning management system home page:
<https://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. On your course dashboard, click on the course card for PBRL 3421-001.

GRADING

Written assignments will be graded based on [AP style](#), grammar, spelling, and punctuation (GSP), as well as content and presentation. When an assignment calls for sources to be cited, use [APA \(7th edition\) style](#) for in-text citations and reference lists.

Grading

- Course quizzes, 10%
- AP quizzes, 10%
- In-class activities & participation, 15%
- Writing projects, 45%

- Assignments, 20%

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

Grading philosophy

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

B = good to excellent work and exceeds requirements but would require revision to be used professionally

C = satisfactory work and adequately meets requirements but would need significant revision to be used professionally

D = barely satisfies minimum requirements and below average quality

F = unsatisfactory work that does not meet minimum requirements

Questions about grades

If you would like to ask about a grade, please make an appointment to meet with me outside of class time, I will not discuss your grade via email or during class.

You are responsible for tracking your grade and meeting with me early in the semester if you are concerned about your grade(s). Meeting early and often can help us find ways to address any issues or misunderstandings you may have.

Plagiarism policy

I expect your work to be good and to be original, meaning it is yours. If you quote anything or get information from other sources, they should be fully cited. Cite your sources using [APA style](#) (7th edition). If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources.

If you commit plagiarism by presenting the ideas, representations or works of another person(s) as your own or by knowingly submitting your work for multiple assignments or classes without explicit permission, the following policy applies:

First offense: warning, redo the assignment for no more than 50% credit.

Second offense: automatic 0, no option to redo the assignment.

Third offense: automatic class fail.

Final assignment: regardless of which offense: automatic 0 on assignment, no option to redo the assignment.

Note that any instances of plagiarism may result in other disciplinary sanctions which may be imposed through the regular University of Memphis academic misconduct process.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Expectations

Coursework will be accomplished every week including readings, assignments, and quizzes to check your learning and comprehension. Each assignment must be completed by its due date

and time (Central Time), which may vary by assignment so be sure to read each assignment's directions including the due date and time to ensure it is posted by the deadline.

You will be the most successful if you come to class, ask questions about assignments, carefully read assignment prompts and rubrics, and stay engaged with class activities.

Quality of work

All work in this course should follow AP style and be well-written, adhering to grammar, spelling, and punctuation rules (GSP). AP style may be new to some of you. There will be quizzes throughout the semester to help you learn and practice AP style and you are encouraged to use your AP Stylebook to check your work as you complete your assignments. A large part of public relations, advertising, and other strategic communications jobs is writing – whether that's pitching your ideas to your boss or client or communicating with your audiences through digital and traditional media channels. You should be honing these skills in class. Problems in these and other areas of your work will result in the deduction of points.

ChatGPT/AI

Some assignments this semester may direct you to use ChatGPT. You will follow the directions for these assignments posted on Canvas for these assignments and how to "show your work" with the AI tool.

For all other assignments, you are permitted to use ChatGPT and other AI tools for gathering information, writing drafts, and revising your writing. However, you are expected to include a disclosure statement at the end of your assignment describing which AI tool you used and how you used it. For example, "ChatGPT was used to draft about 30% of this assignment and to provide revision assistance. AI-produced content was edited for accuracy and style." Be prepared to submit any prompts you used for assistance with your assignment as well as the original ChatGPT/AI tool output and to be able to explain/show how you fact-checked and improved upon the AI's work. Your work will be run through AI detection software.

Repetition of courses and coursework

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. If you wish to substantially rework the original submission or to work with the general idea, that may be permissible upon discussion with and written approval from me. All written work will be checked via TurnItIn.com. All creative work will be judged against previous submissions and other professors may be consulted. The only exception to this is your online portfolio where you are expected to use the work you have written and created in the program (like your logo, resume, and other creative pieces).

Late work

The policy below applies only to assignments submitted outside of class. In-class work/activities, discussions, surveys, questions, and exams **will not** be accepted late.

Work submitted in Canvas that is not from an in-class activity is subject to a 2% per day reduction in your grade on the assignment. The deduction is automatic in Canvas.

I will not accept work after three weeks beyond the due date. At that point, the work is no longer helpful to current course concepts. Waiting until the end of the semester and submitting everything at once is not an option – please do not even propose it.

If you feel like you are falling behind or if life circumstances are causing you to miss assignments, please reach out to me as soon as possible so we can work together to plan for you to get caught up. I'm happy to help each one of you stay current and not fall behind. I want to see you succeed in this class but that requires you to take on the responsibility of communicating with me. If I don't know, I can't help.

Assignment descriptions

More in-depth guidelines are posted on Canvas. This is not inclusive of all assignments and changes may be made with notice.

In-class assignments. In-class activities will be completed individually and in groups to build on course concepts through experiential learning. You must be present in class to complete the in-class assignment and receive credit for the assignment. Class assignments will vary in nature but may include quizzes, surveys, writing workshops, and impromptu presentations.

Writing projects. As a writing-focused class, our mission is to use strategic writing to tell our clients' or organizations' stories. Often the best way to learn is by experience. We will be creating the documents (collateral) that we are learning about in class to refine our skills and exercise our creative "muscles." We will create a variety of collateral including, but not limited to, news releases, pitches, ad copy, fact sheets, blog posts, creative strategy statements, and newsletters.

Assignments. Weekly assignments will vary in nature and will be used to build on concepts we are learning each week in class, gauge your progress in the course, and, in some instances, these assignments will be incorporated into your writing project.

Contacting me

The best and quickest way to contact me is via email (ksmarks@memphis.edu). Do not use the email in Canvas, use my memphis.edu. I will respond within 24 – 48 hours. You may also text me. If you text me, please include your name and the class. If you have a problem, do not let it snowball. Contact me ASAP.

Course schedule

This is a basic schedule for topics and major assignments for the semester. We will try to adhere to this schedule, but changes may happen, and assignments/due dates may shift. All changes will be announced in class, via email, and on Canvas as soon as possible. *Note that all required readings/assignments for each week may not be listed here. Always defer to Canvas for the most up-to-date list of readings & assignments for each week.*

Notes:

- We meet M/W, 2:20-3:45 p.m. in Meeman 202
- In addition to textbook readings, most weeks will also include supplementary material on Canvas that you need to read *before* class meets on Monday of that week.
- Textbook readings for the week should be done *before* class meets on Monday of that week.

Week 1, Jan. 16 – 21 (Monday, Jan. 15 is MLK Day)

Introduction to Strategic Writing

Do you have your textbook?

Overview

- What to expect
- What is strategic writing?
- PR vs. Advertising vs. Marketing + IMC
- PESO review
- Ethics & strategic writing

Assignments:

- Opening survey (A1) – due on Jan. 21
- Writing sample (A2) – due on Jan. 21

Week 2, Jan. 22 – 28

Why & How We Write

Read: CH 1 (textbook) + Canvas readings

- Understanding your client/organization
- Who's your audience?
- Writing process
- AP Style
- Persuasion & strategic writing

Assignments:

- AP Style practice (A3) – due Jan. 28
- AP Style Presentations (A4) – multiple due dates

Week 3 + 4, Jan. 29 – Feb. 11 – NO CLASS on Monday, Feb. 5
News Releases & the Art of Pitching

Read: CH 2, CH 3 & CH 6 (textbook) + Canvas readings

Assignments:

- Media Pitch 1 (WP1) – due Feb. 5
- Find a news release – due Feb. 6 (as a discussion post)
- News Release 1 (WP2) – due Feb. 11

Week 5, Feb. 12 – 18

Media Relations: Tying it all together.

AP Style Presentations Begin

Feb. 12: Morgan Cannon – Time (due Feb. 11)

Feb. 14: Orvell Williams – Addresses (due Feb. 13)

Read: Canvas readings

Assignments:

- Media Pitch 2 (WP 3) – due Feb. 18

Week 6, Feb. 19 – 25

Blogs & Fact Sheets

AP Style Presentations

Feb. 19: Caleb Morgan – Money (due Feb. 18)

Feb. 21: Steven Dillihunt – Proper Use (due Feb. 20)

Read: CH 9 (textbook) + Canvas readings

Assignments

- Blog post (WP 4) – due March 3
- Fact sheet (WP 5) – due March 11

Week 7, Feb. 26 – March 3 (Note, it's Leap Year!)

Interviews & Bio Sketches

AP Style Presentations

Feb. 26: Kortney Meesomboon – Nature (due Feb. 25)

Feb. 28: Jordan Ford – Capitalization (due Feb. 27)

Read: CH 10 (textbook) + Canvas readings

Assignments:

- In-class activity – Interview
- Bio sketch (WP 6) – due end of class Feb. 28

Week 8, March 4 – 10 – NO CLASSES, Spring Break

Week 9, March 11 – 17 (Note: Daylight Savings Time started on Sunday, March 10)

Social Media: Personal branding, PR & Advertising

AP Style Presentation

March 13: Anna McCormack – Diversity (due March 12)

Read: CH 14 + Canvas readings

Assignments:

- In-class activity – LinkedIn review
- Social media posts – due March 24

Week 10, March 18 – 24

The Strategic Message Planner

AP Style Presentations

March 18: Kyla Garrison – Abbreviations (due March 17)

March 20: Deborah Gilbert – Inclusive Storytelling (due March 19)

Read: Canvas Readings

Assignments: Strategic Message Planner (WP 7) – due March 31

Week 11, March 25 – 31 – NO CLASSES This Week (IMC Connect)

AP Quizzes

Assignments:

- Complete AP Quizzes (Canvas)

*Interested in attending [IMC Connect at the University of Mississippi](#)? Ask me about it!

Week 12, April 1 – 7

Writing the Creative Brief and Creative Strategy

Read: Canvas Readings

Assignments: TBD

Week 13, April 8 – 14

Copywriting & Scripts

Read: Canvas Readings

Assignments: TBD

Week 14, April 15 – 21

Putting Together the Ad

Read: Canvas Readings
Assignments: TBD

Week 15, April 22 – 24 (Wednesday) – Last week of classes
Wrapping Up

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in PBRL 3421

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, both in a global context and in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Apply critical thinking skills in conducting research and evaluating information by methods appropriate to the communications professions in which they work.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

How professional values and competencies will be met

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

- Understand how public relations writing tactics can tell stories and build relationships across a variety of disciplines and careers.
- Recognize the importance of understanding the diversity (gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) of stakeholder groups and audience to developing content for public relations products
- Structure messages on the appropriate channels to reach diverse target audience.
- Explain how the writer's purpose, intended public and requirements of the medium affect style and content.
- Recognize legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing, including within the freedoms of speech and the press.
- Recognize potential problems and solutions in media relations.
- Understand the differences between writing for various media.
- Evaluate their own and other's public relations writing for accuracy, clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style, as well as suitability for specified medium.
- Understand their own role as a content creator influences culture, norms, and discourse.

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

- Earn a passing score on written assignments, quizzes and engagement exercises.
- Define an organization's stakeholders and target audiences and the channels that can be used to communicate and engage with them.
- Identify appropriate multimedia components to accompany public relations writing based on medium, platform and target audience.
- Name and illustrate common legal and ethical problems associated with public relations writing.
- Write a press release, fact sheet, media pitch, and email, in addition to participating in a Twitter chat, drafting a personal bio, and completing the necessary engagement exercises (quizzes and introductions and reflection pieces).
- Apply Associated Press guidelines to written public relations materials.
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

How assessment of student learning will be met

Awareness

- Learn the important role of writing in public relations, including journalistic news values, AP style and the various forms of writing for different media.
- Associate successful outcomes with the importance of understanding the diversity and cultural differences of an organization's stakeholders and target audience when developing public relations content.
- Give examples about the ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.

Understanding

- Understand how to be strategic in public relations writing.
- Recognize how the diversity and cultural difference of an organization's stakeholders and target audience inform the development of public relations content.
- Examine potential ethical and legal problems associated with public relations writing.
- Understand how to proofread their own and other's writing for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Identify which public relations products are appropriate based on the platform and how to create specific public relations products.

Application

- Write a press release, fact sheet, media pitch, and email, in addition to participating in a Twitter chat, drafting a personal bio, and completing the necessary engagement exercises (quizzes and introductions and reflection pieces).
- Proofread and edit their own work and the work of others for clarity, grammatical correctness and appropriate use of AP style.
- Create public relations products using appropriate software and hardware ensuring that products are formatted correctly selected media channels.

JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

Portfolio requirement

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or SquareSpace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

Email

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

Electronic devices

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

AI/Chat GPT

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-specific part of the syllabus.

Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

Academic integrity

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

Online SETEs

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.

Deadlines

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the

student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

AP Style and grammar

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

Disability and accommodations

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

Diversity and inclusivity

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

Weather policy

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website regarding inclement weather.

Student support

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.