

Applied Public Relations Writing

PBRL 3431 001

Spring 2024

Tuesday/Thursday 9:40 - 11:05, Meeman 206

Prof. Taylor Ackerman, MA, APR

She/Her

Office: Meeman 332

Office hours: Monday, 10:30 am - 12:30 pm

Tuesday, 11 am - 12 pm

2:30 pm - 3:30

Thursday, 11am - 12 pm

If you'd like to meet for the office hours listed, please reach out via text (731-225-7656) prior to dropping by so I can make sure I'm in my office. I'm also available via Zoom outside of the listed office hours upon request.

Email: tckerman@memphis.edu

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 will be assigned and posted to Canvas.

Classroom format

Our class will meet in person in room 206 in the Meeman Journalism building twice a week. Attending class in person is imperative and necessary for your success in this class, as part of your grade will depend on in class activities. Our class will be based around the many types 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. Additionally, you will prepare for your future career through Hootsuite Certifications (or equivalent certification if already completed), talking with a professional in the field, and polishing your online portfolio.

Through lectures, slide decks, multimedia examples, special guests, course activities and class discussions, you will further develop your writing and understanding of public relations materials. Your learning will be assessed through writing samples, quizzes, assignments, and activities.

Some in class activities will require giving classmates feedback on their assignments as well as group brainstorming. Class critiques and conversations should remain respectful at all times. Hate speech, threatening language or offensive statements will not be tolerated and will result in being asked to leave the class. If it happens multiple times it could result in you being dropped from the course for misconduct.

You must have internet access and Microsoft Word to generate a “.doc” or “.docx” extension. All assignments MUST be filed in a “.doc” or “.docx” format unless otherwise noted.

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

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.

School in general can be stressful, and I know that you have many things going on outside of this course. I am here to help make sure that you have everything possible that you need to succeed. However, this requires open communication from you as early on in the semester as possible. I am happy to meet with you outside of class, hop on a Zoom call, or provide support over email. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to me if you find yourself falling behind, feeling overwhelmed, or struggling. 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.

Meeman Lab Availability: Open labs 9:30-4:30 Monday-Friday. In addition to Meeman, labs are available in the Tech Hub and the Library. In addition, equipment rentals are available on the third floor of the Meeman Journalism building. Check your email for the equipment room schedule.

Resources specific to physical health, wellness and resources:

Mental health Services

UofM Student Health Center

Sexual, domestic, and intimate partner violence resources

Dr. Rosie Phillips Bingham Student Emergency Fund

Emergency Food Resources, which includes Tiger Pantry

Academic Services:

[Writing Center](#)

[Tutoring](#)

Communities & Inclusion:

[Multicultural Affairs](#)

[LGBTQ+](#)

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 and tests are not allowed to be turned in late, nor is the portfolio or final assignment. 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 Assignments	600 points
Hootsuite Certifications	100 points
Tests/Quizzes:	160 points
In Class Activities:	140 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.

A+ = 96.5-100%; A = 92.5-96.4%; A- = 89.5-92.4% B+ = 86.5-89.4%; B = 82.5-86.4%; B- = 79.5-82.4% C+ = 76.5-79.4%; C = 72.5-76.4%; C- = 69.5-72.4% D+ = 66.5-69.4%; D = 59.5-66.4% F 0-59.4%

Assignments

Writing Assignments: 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.

Smaller assignments (50 points or less): News Release (2), Pitch, Fact Sheet, Planning Sheets, Message Maps, & Reflections

Larger assignments (80 points or more): Speech, White Paper, Professional Interview

In Class Activities & Class Participation: Throughout the semester we will do a number of writing workshops and activities targeted at improving your writing, brainstorming and developing good writing habits. In addition to being present for in class activities, you will be expected to participate when providing critique and feedback to classmates in a respectful manner.

Hootsuite Certifications: You will be required to complete and earn certifications from the Hootsuite Platform Training as well as the Social Marketing Training courses. Both of these trainings will be provided online and at no cost using a student code. Students should plan on putting aside several hours to complete both trainings. If you have already completed one or both of these trainings for a previous class, an alternative assignment will be provided. (The date on the certification must be current.)

Quizzes: A total of four quizzes will be provided throughout the semester to check your knowledge on course topics. These quizzes will be administered through Canvas. 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 (tkerman@memphis.edu). I will respond to email with 24 – 48 hours. If the email is sent over the weekend or on a school break, the response time may be delayed. I'm happy to meet with you during office hours in my office or via Zoom, or arrange for an alternative time that works for us both. Please do not hesitate to reach out, and please don't let an issue snowball.

The syllabus is subject to change at the discretion of the professor and needs of the class. Changes will be communicated in class and on Canvas. Assignments will almost always be due on Sundays, with the exclusion of in class assignments.

Course Schedule

Week 1, January 16 - 21: Introductions

Readings/Media: Get your textbook! We'll use it often and it's shockingly helpful.

Assignments: News Release Check In

Week 2, January 22 - 28: Grammar & Setting Up Writing for Success

Readings/Media: Chapters 1 & 2

Assignments: Planning Sheet

In Class Activities - Kahoot, Free Writing Exercise

Week 3, January 29 - February 4: Media Relations

Readings/Media: Chapters 5 & 6, Chapters 10, 11

Assignments: Final News Release

Pitch

Quiz 1

In Class Activity: Piecing Together a News Release

Week 4, February 5 - 11: Strategic Communication & Persuasion

Readings/Media: Chapters 3 & 4

Assignments: Fact Sheet

Week 5: February 12 - 18: Persuasion & Speech Writing

Readings/Media: Chapters 9 & 17

Assignments: Message Map for Speech

Planning Sheet for Speech

Quiz 2

Week 6: February 19 - 25: Writing the Speech

No class Thursday - work on speech

Readings/Media: No readings this week

Assignments: Speech

In class Activity: Workshop

Week 7: February 26 - March 3: Owned & Shared Media

Readings/Media: Chapters 7 & 8

Assignments: In Class Activity: Shared Media

Week 8, March 4 - 10: Spring Break! No Class.

Week 9, March 11 - 17: Advocacy Writing

Readings/Media: No readings this week

Assignments: Hootsuite Certification

Hootsuite Reflection & Ideas

Week 10, March 18 - 24: Advocacy & White Papers

Readings/Media: Chapter 13; check Canvas

Assignments: Message Maps for White Paper

March 25 - 31: Paid Media

Readings/Media: Chapter 18

Assignments: Planning Sheet for White Paper

In Class Activity: Advocacy Writing

Quiz 3

Week 12, April 1 - 7: Research & Work

No class Thursday - work on White Paper

Readings/Media: No reading this week

Assignments: White Paper

Week 13, April 8 - 14: Brochure & Newsletters

Readings/Media: Chapter 15

Assignments: Send portfolio link

In class activity - newsletter & brochure layout

Week 14, April 14 - 21: Transmedia News & Writing

Readings/Media: Chapter 12

Assignments: Interview with a Professional

Week 15: April 22 - 28: Review & Goodbyes

Study Day is Thursday, April 25. Tuesday will be our last class.

Readings/Media: No readings!

Assignments: Quiz 4

In Class Activity: Kahoot

This schedule will change as needed to suit course needs. Professor reserves the right to change the syllabus. Any changes will be communicated in class and on Canvas.

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 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.