

Intro to Strategic Writing

STRM 3210-M50

Fall 2025

Prof. Audrey Firrone

Office hours: By appointment, please email to schedule.

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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.

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

No official textbook is required for the class; various articles and resources will be uploaded to Canvas. Please check weekly for required readings and media resources. Though not required, a copy of the *Associated Press Stylebook* will aid in all assignments (preferably 2020 or newer). You can also access *The AP Stylebook* as an online publication through apstylebook.com

Classroom format

This course is delivered online in an asynchronous format. In other words, there is no required scheduled meeting time for this course. You can work at your 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. The workload will vary from week to week.

This class is focused on writing for advertising and public relations, as well as learning the proper form, strategy, and technique for various document types. Concepts such as content marketing, target audiences, copywriting, AP Style, and media relations will be discussed. You will write a variety of pieces and begin to develop a portfolio of work.

It is imperative for you to read all instructions, announcements, and assignments carefully. Please be sure that your completed work responds to all aspects of the assignment prompts. You will be completing projects for an organization of your choosing. The organization must be a nonprofit or a small business. No Nike, Taco Bell, or other well-known brand. Be sure to always read modules and directions carefully, and feel free to reach out to clarify any details.

In addition to course presentation files, video/transcripts of the lectures are provided for each of the major topics in the course. Feel free to use the version of the lecture that best fits your learning style. Many of the concepts we'll go over in the weekly presentations/reading will be pertinent for completing your assignments correctly, as well as scoring well on your quizzes.

Discussing course concepts and comparing/critiquing work with peers can be helpful for both idea generation and growth within writing. As such, "writing workshops" will occasionally take place in the form of discussion questions. These discussion questions will be counted for a grade, and to receive full credit, you will be required to both make an original post and respond to at least **two** classmates. 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 being dropped from the class for misconduct. Remember the "workshop" aspect to these discussions. In your replies, you should build on a classmate's idea, offer a suggestion, or present a new way of looking at a concept. Simply stating you agree or disagree or complimenting a post without substance will not count as an acceptable reply.

You will upload all completed assignments to Canvas, and feedback will be given to help you improve. Access to a computer or an electronic device with internet access is required. Please be sure to read the instructions for each assignment carefully, as requirements for each assignment will vary. Assignments being turned in must be submitted as a .doc, .docx, or .pptx file unless otherwise noted. 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 submitted in the wrong format.

Reach out via email or text if anything is unclear to you. All class assignments and quizzes will be due 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 questions at least 48 hours prior to the deadline.

Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page:
<http://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. Click on the link for STRM 3210.M50 to enter the course

Quality of Work

All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar, and language. A large part of public relations and advertising 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, especially in published client work.

I expect your work to be good and original, meaning it's yours. If you quote anything or get information from any other source, it should be fully cited. If you need help with writing and citing sources, please see me for resources.

Chat GPT/AI

Any AI/Chat GPT use should be disclosed on each assignment. I encourage you to use all tools available to you to better your work - including AI tools - but the tools should be used ethically. 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. Using tools for AP style/grammatical checking, idea generation, and assistance in research is encouraged, but using them to complete assignments without revision and effort is not permitted. Most assignments will be run through TurnItIn and other AI detection software. You could be asked to redo a project/given a warning if there is repeated AI abuse or significant matching percentages.

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 same general idea, that may be permissible **upon discussion with and written approval** from the professor of the current course. When in doubt, ask. If I catch work that seems eerily like something from a previous class and you have not discussed it with me, it will be an automatic zero. 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 your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the resume and logo).

Questions about Grades

If you would like to ask about a grade, let's set up a Teams or office meeting so we can talk about it with clarity. I'm often flexible about allowing students to redo an assignment they may not be satisfied with *if* they come to me about it in a timely manner and show significant improvements in the work and understanding.

I will not discuss grades or disputes via email. This must be done in a scheduled meeting or phone call setting where we can have a conversation.

Additionally, you are responsible for tracking your assignments and meeting with me early in the semester if you are concerned about your overall grade. Meeting early and often can help both parties involved find ways to improve student-instructor understanding and quality of work.

Course & Campus Resources

Students with disabilities & accommodations

If you will need accommodations through [Disability Resources](#) to meet any of the requirements of this course, please let me know as soon as possible. I'm happy to work with you to help you succeed in this course.

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 by communicating with me and keeping me informed about any issues. It's impossible for me to help if I don't know there's a problem.

I am happy to hop on a Teams 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.

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. We also have equipment rental available. Check your university email for details.

Campus and Community Resources: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/>

Resources specific to physical health and wellness:

[Mental health Services](#)

[UofM Student Health Center](#)

[Sexual, domestic, and intimate partner violence resources](#)

Academic Services:

[Writing Center](#)

[Tutoring](#)

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, the letter scale will be adjusted.

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

Assignment Breakdown

More in-depth guidelines posted to Canvas.

Individual Assignments: 150 points
Quizzes: 200 points
Discussion: 200 points
Writing Projects & Usage Guides: 450 points

Total: 1,000 points

Assignment Breakdown

More in-depth guidelines posted to Canvas.

Writing Projects: The biggest part of your grade in this class will be the independent writing projects you do. These projects will include, but not be limited to, a creative brief, media pitches, news releases, fact sheets, blogs, and social media posts. In addition to writing projects, you'll complete a couple of "usage guides" for our nonprofits explaining how to best use the tools/strategies you are providing them with/learning in this course.

Quizzes: Quizzes will be given throughout the semester to test your understanding of course concepts, as well as one final comprehensive quiz. Quizzes will be given on Canvas with a time limit of 45 minutes. You will have two attempts for each quiz, and the highest grade will be taken. You are welcome to use your notes or book to help you on the quiz, but working with another student is prohibited.

Individual Assignments: Students will work independently on assignments to demonstrate understanding of course concepts and present individual client ideas. These assignments will vary in nature and be assigned via Canvas.

Discussion Questions: Discussion questions will occasionally be assigned to give students an opportunity to discuss different course concepts more deeply, exchange ideas, and engage with classmates. To receive full credit, students should answer all parts of the discussion prompt in an

original post and then thoughtfully reply to at least two classmates. Making your original prompt response by Thursday of each week is encouraged so that the class has time to respond to one another.

Miscellaneous Policies

Late Work: In strategic media, deadlines are imperative. In the field, we are often creating work for clients or pitch meetings with hard deadlines. As such, try to turn everything in on time. I do recognize life happens, and as such, if you must turn something in late, the following late policy will apply, except for quizzes and discussions, which will not be accepted late. Canvas will automatically deduct 2% of the maximum score every day your assignment is late, up to a grade of zero.

Student Responsibility: This is college; you must have responsibility and a work ethic to succeed at this level of your academic career. It will be your responsibility to keep up with work, double-check assignment requirements, and use all the resources that are given to you. If you have questions, concerns, or any confusion regarding any class requirement, announcement, assignment, or concept, it is your responsibility to reach out and ask the question in a timely manner. “I was confused” will not be an accepted excuse for not performing at the appropriate level (nor will it be when you enter your career). *Please, please* clarify anything you are uncertain about.

Additionally, it will be your responsibility to stay in communication with me over the course of the semester if you encounter any issues that are hindering your ability in my class. I cannot extend grace or help if I don’t know about something until the end of the semester.

I reserve the right to make changes to the course calendar as needed. Changes will be communicated in Canvas via announcements. Please don’t hesitate to reach out with any questions if you are ever unsure of an announcement.

Course Calendar

Week 1, Aug. 25 - 31: Welcome to strategic media!

Read/Listen/Watch: Syllabus, strategic media lecture

Activities & Assignments: A strategic media precursor (individual assignment)

Syllabus quiz (individual assignment)

Introduction discussion question

Pick your organization for approval

Week 2, Sept. 1 - 7: AP style & ethical AI

Read/Listen/Watch: AP lecture

Activities & Assignments: Organization assessment

AP style/AI discussion question

Week 3, Sept. 8 - 14: Wrapping up strategic media

Read/Listen/Watch: Strategic media lecture

Canvas articles

- Activities & Assignments:** Tenets of strategic media
Quiz one over strategic media and AP rules
- Week 4, Sept 15 - 21:** Paid media and copywriting
Read/Listen/Watch: Paid media presentation
Buyer persona best practices article
Activities & Assignments: Newsletter paragraph (writing project)
Buyer persona discussion
- Week 5: Sept. 22 - 28:** Appropriate creative briefs
Read/Listen/Watch: AIDA techniques and customer journey articles
Activities & Assignments: AIDA discussion
Quiz two over paid media
Creative brief (writing project)
- Week 6: Sept. 29 - Oct. 5:** Journalist relationships
Read/Listen/Watch: Earned media presentation
Good v. creepy pitch exploration
Activities & Assignments: Good media relationship/incorporating AIDA discussion
Media pitch (writing project)
- Week 7: Oct. 6 -12:** Earned media and the art of the release
Assignments due Friday, Oct. 10 (Start of Fall Break)
Read/Listen/Watch: News release examples
Activities & Assignments: News release (writing project)
- Week 8: Oct. 13 - 19:** Creating an earned strategy
Monday & Tuesday is fall break
Read/Listen/Watch: Review earned media presentation for quiz
Activities & Assignments: Earned media guide (writing project)
Quiz three over earned media
- Week 9: Oct. 20 - 26:** Shared media
Read/Listen/Watch: Social media presentation
Brand voice article
Activities & Assignments: Brand voice and style guide (writing project)
Example/social role model discussion
- Week 10: Oct. 27 - Nov. 2:** Social media post creation
No class Wednesday
Read/Listen/Watch: N/A
Activities & Assignments: Social media posts
Quiz four over shared media
- Week 11: Nov. 3 - 9:** Digital media collaboration & content marketing
Read/Listen/Watch: Posted articles
Activities & Assignments: Partnerships and user generated discussion
Digital guide (writing project)
- Week 12: Nov. 10 - 16:** Owned media

Please note that spring registration begins Nov. 10. You will need to meet with your advisor about a spring schedule and be cleared to register.

Final drop day for full-term classes is Nov. 15.

Read/Listen/Watch: Owned media presentation

Activities & Assignments: Blog (writing project)

Week 13: Nov. 17 - 23: Strategic storytelling

Read/Listen/Watch: Posted articles

Activities & Assignments: Fact sheet (writing project)

Week 14: Nov. 24 - 30: Eat and be happy

Thanksgiving Break Nov. 26 - 30; Nothing is due this week

Read/Listen/Watch: N/A

Activities & Assignments: N/A

Enjoy a reprieve! You're almost to the end.

Week 15: Dec. 1 - 7: Wrapping it up

Last day of class is Wednesday, Dec. 3. Study day is Dec. 4

Read/Listen/Watch: TBD

Activities & Assignments: Final quiz (comprehensive with emphasis on owned media)
Reflection

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in STRM 3210

- 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 always remain respectful and professional.

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.