

Public Relations Writing

STRM 3212-M90

Fall 2025

Online/UofM Global

Professor: Tori Cliff

Office Hours: by appointment via Teams

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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 3431 / STRM 3210

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

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

Other readings will be assigned and posted to Canvas.

Classroom Format

This course is delivered online in an asynchronous format. In other words, there is no required scheduled meeting time for this course. This can be convenient for students juggling several responsibilities, but it also means you must be organized and motivated. Students are able to work at their own pace throughout the week, however, work will be due on a weekly basis, and it is imperative to stay on track with the course schedule to complete all work on time. The course content is organized by week. Students should complete each week's work by the Sunday concluding that week NLT 11:59 p.m. CST. I advise students to use a physical planner and set notifications on their tech for all deadlines. This helps me stay on track. I also recommend setting up notifications in Canvas for your course calendars.

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. In the Fall 2025 course list available to you, click on the link for STRM 3212-M90 to enter.

Course Requirements & Expectations

Weekly Folder Content. Each week of the semester has a folder in Canvas that contains that week's content. You are responsible for all content within each week's folder.

Software and Internet Needs.

You must have Internet access and Microsoft Word for this class. All work must be submitted in .doc/.docx format unless otherwise indicated in the assignment spec. As a UM student, you have free access to Office 365, which includes programs like Word, PowerPoint, and Excel, and free cloud space through OneDrive. Click [here](#) to learn more. Backup all your work in a cloud space such as OneDrive or Google Drive and then perhaps on a thumb drive. Better yet just create your work within the cloud. If you work straight from the cloud, the chances of losing your work are minuscule since autosave is a feature. Google Drive automatically saves changes as you work, and OneDrive has a toggle on/off autosave located at the top left of the screen.

Some assignments will need to be completed using a design program such as Canva, Adobe Spark, or Adobe InDesign. Canva and Adobe Spark can be accessed for free online. Adobe InDesign or Adobe Illustrator can be accessed using University software and in some University labs. Click [here](#) for more details. Design projects will need to be in .PDF or .PNG format depending on the assignment. Read each assignment spec carefully in order to submit the correct file type.

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

Plagiarism policy

First offense: Redo for 50%, warning

Second offense: Automatic 0, no redo

Third offense: Automatic class fail

*Any instances of plagiarism may result in a note being added to your department file.

Late work

Meeting deadlines is essential for media professionals. Late work will not be accepted unless there are extraordinary circumstances that are verifiable, like an emergency surgery. If an emergency occurs, it is the student's responsibility to provide necessary verification to the professor ASAP. If a student knows about an absence in advance, arrangements may be made with the professor to turn in the work early at the professor's discretion.

You are permitted to use ChatGPT and other AI tools to assist you in gathering information, writing drafts, and revising your writing in this course. 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 output and to be able to explain/show how you fact-checked and improved upon the AI's work.

Activities. Each activity must be completed by Sundays at 11:59 p.m. central standard time on the weeks they are due except for the final week of classes. The semester ends on Wednesday, Dec. 3 and so all work for that week will need to be submitted NLT 11:59 p.m. on that day. These assignments will vary in nature, and assignment sheets will need to be read carefully for instructions. If specs aren't adhered to, the item may not be graded. All work in this course should follow AP Style, including proper spelling, grammar and language.

The work you create in this course should be professional and ready for publication, which means it is well-written, suits the purpose it was created for, has been thoroughly edited, AP style is spot on, and it meets the requirements and formatting outlined for each assignment. NEVER submit work that has not been properly edited and polished. If a piece is riddled with errors or shows a disregard for quality work, it will not be copyedited by the professor, and instead will be returned for a grade of zero.

Writing Process and Feedback. Writing is a skill. As with skills-based items, you learn about how to do it, then you do it. Repeatedly. That is how you (and anyone else) become a better writer. It also helps to read great writing. In this public relations writing-focused class, our mission is to use strategic writing to tell our clients' stories. This adds an additional layer to the writing process.

In order to create these pieces, you will need to gain inspiration and insight from course content, current events, and by considering the big picture—what are you really trying to say and do with each piece? Also, the writing should always be relevant, audience-specific, timely, and culturally appropriate. Research will be required as you seek to understand and build relationships with audiences.

Written work will mostly be submitted once and graded unless labeled as a draft assignment. Resubmission will not be utilized (unless an assignment is listed as a draft) in our learning process. You will receive feedback on each piece. It may come in the form of rubric grading, [track changes](#), hard copy edits using AP editing marks, or audio feedback recording. Use the feedback to improve your writing. If it appears that you are not using the feedback provided, and the same mistakes continue to occur, additional points will be deducted. If you do not understand the feedback that you receive, feel free to reach out to me for clarification.

Communication. Email will be the official communication channel used in class. Email me ASAP if you are experiencing trouble or have questions at tmcliff@memphis.edu. I will do my best to respond to messages received during the workweek within 2 days, and those sent over the weekend as soon as I am able during the workweek. If you would like to book an appointment with me via phone or Teams, use this [link](#) to schedule it.

Discussion forum. There will be a discussion board created for students to communicate with each other. This is optional, with the exception of the Team Roles post in Week 3 content. Other than that, feel free to use it as a communication space if you want to use it with your team. It will not be monitored by your professor. If any discussion prompts happen to be added by your professor for a grade, there will be a link with instructions within that week's content folder.

Grading

Each item submitted is worth 100 points unless otherwise indicated, but different categorical weights exist depending on the time and skill-level required to complete the assignment and how important it is to your growth in the course.

The grading is categorical percentage based as such:

PR Writing Assignments: 60%

Other Assignments: 25%

AP Style Quizzes: 5%
Course Quizzes: 10%

A: 100-90%
B: 89-80%
C: 79-70%
D: 69-60%
F: 59-0%

Grading Philosophy

A=Excellent work that could be used with little or no modification
B=Good 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

Citation policy

For this class, we'll use AP Style (<https://www.apstylebook.com>) and APA style (https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/apa_style/apa_formatting_and_style_guide/general_format.html).

If you are including information from outside sources, you need to include full citations in APA formatting. Purdue University's Online Writing Lab is an excellent resource and can be found at <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>.

Plagiarism policy

First offense: Redo for 50%, discussion of ethics and department expectations
Second offense: Automatic 0, no redo, report filed with department
Third offense: Automatic class fail and report filed with department

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 provide the tools you need to succeed in this course.

Stress, coursework, and resources

If you start to feel yourself falling behind or feeling overwhelmed for any reason, please don't hesitate to reach out. I'm happy to work with you to find solutions that help you succeed.

Also, the University of Memphis offers a number of excellent resources that you may find helpful in several different situations. Below are some links that you may find helpful:

Counseling and Mental Health: [Mental health Services](#)
Health & Corona Virus Information: [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
Emergency Housing
Specific COVID-19 relief funds

Course Schedule

This is a tentative schedule for topics and major assignments over the course of the semester. Although we will try to stick with this schedule, please understand that changes to the schedule may occur. All changes will be announced as soon as possible. All assignments are due on Sunday at 11:59 p.m. C.T. unless otherwise noted. We will start each week on Monday.

Week 1, Aug. 25-Aug. 31: Getting Started

This week we will explore Week 1 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Acclimate to course content / Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 2 folder in Canvas

Week 2, Sept. 1-7: PR Writing and the PR Professional (Sept. 1 Labor Day, no classes)

This week we will explore Week 2 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 2 folder in Canvas

Week 3, Sept. 8-14: Storytelling

This week we will explore Week 3 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 3 folder in Canvas

Week 4, Sept. 15-21: Telling Your Story

This week we will explore Week 4 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 4 folder in Canvas

Week 5, Sept. 22-28: What Does Your Social Media Presence Say About You?

This week we will explore Week 5 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 5 folder in Canvas

Week 6, Sept. 29-October 5: News Writing and Writing to Persuade

This week we will explore Week 6 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 6 folder in Canvas

Week 7, Oct. 6-12: News Releases / Fall Break begins Saturday, October 11)

This week we will explore Week 7 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 7 folder in Canvas

[Week 8, Oct. 13-19: \(Fall Break Oct. 11-14\)](#)

This week we will catch our breath and focus on personal wellness.

[Week 9, Oct. 20-26: Blogs and Blogger Relations](#)

This week we will explore Week 9 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 9 folder in Canvas

[Week 10, Oct. 27-Nov. 2: Media Pitches, Advisories and Alerts](#)

This week we will explore Week 10 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 10 folder in Canvas

[Week 11, Nov. 3-9: Writing Professional Emails](#)

This week we will explore Week 11 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 11 folder in Canvas

[Week 12, Nov. 10-16: Circling Back to News Releases](#)

This week we will explore Week 12 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 12 folder in Canvas

[Week 13, Nov. 17-23: Writing for Social Media](#)

This week we will explore Week 13 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 13 folder in Canvas

[Week 14, Nov. 24-30: Brochures / \(Nov. 26-30 Thanksgiving Break\)](#)

This week we will explore Week 14 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 14 folder in Canvas

[Week 15, Dec. 1-3 \(all deadlines for this week are Wednesday, Dec. 3, the last day of classes\): Writing for Events](#)

This week we will explore Week 15 content in Canvas.

Readings: Check Canvas

Assignments: Read, view, listen to content, and complete any work within Week 15 folder in

ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

Professional Values and Competencies in STRM 3212

- 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.