

Writing for Strategic Media

JRSM 7422-M50

Spring 2026

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Catalog Description

Writing for all aspects of public relations and advertising, with a specific focus on writing for audio/visual and social media platforms, including translating one message across multiple technologies and platforms. Focus will be on writing in an active, engaging voice that aligns with the organization's mission and profile.

Prerequisites

Graduate status

Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

There are no required textbooks. Course readings and other resources will be available on Canvas.

Recommended

The Associated Press Stylebook 2024 (or earlier). New York: Basic Books

*You can also access The AP Stylebook as an online publication or through an app. Get details about these options online at apstylebook.com

Class Format

This class is delivered online in an asynchronous format. There is no required meeting time.

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 JRSM 7422-M50 Writing for Strategic Media.

This course is designed as a graduate-level strategic writing studio grounded in theory and professional practice. This semester, you will build a portfolio of strategic writing for a self-selected case-study organization across key genres, including voice/style, audience insights, adaptation, earned media, social, authority content, multimodal storytelling, and crisis writing. Each week's module pairs foundational concepts and theories related to strategic communication with applied writing assignments. You'll be expected to be able to explain not

only *what* you wrote, but *why* the approach fits the audience, context, and ethical constraints presented. You are expected to synthesize readings, apply course concepts, and articulate a clear rationale for strategic writing decisions. Weekly learning happens through instructor-recorded lectures and presentations, academic and professional readings, practical examples, targeted discussion activities, and studio deliverables (writing assignments).

Grading emphasizes theory-informed strategic judgment (purpose, audience, message strategy, framing, ethics, etc.), writing (clarity, structure, tone/voice, etc.), and professional standards (accuracy, sourcing, accessibility, and revision).

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND RESPONSIBLE AI USE

All writing must meet professional standards for accuracy, attribution, ethical framing, and respect for the audience. Generative AI tools (like ChatGPT, Claude, and Gemini) may be used when appropriate (or prescribed) as part of a professional workflow (e.g., brainstorming, outlining, first drafts, tightening style), but AI output must be treated as unverified until you check it. If you use AI on any major deliverables, you must include a brief AI Use & Verification Appendix identifying the tool, how it was used, the prompt/process (or summary), and the verification steps you completed (fact-checking, sourcing, voice alignment, accessibility considerations, etc.). A template is provided on Canvas. You remain responsible for the final work, including any errors introduced by the tools.

LATE WORK AND FLEXIBILITY POLICY

Assignments are due on the posted deadline to keep discussions and peer review/responses meaningful. However, I understand that life happens. You have two 48-hour grace passes to use on *most* assignments. No explanations needed. If the assignment is submitted within 48 hours of the deadline, I will grade it as if it were submitted on time. Grace passes cannot be used for peer reviews (different from peer responses on discussion posts), the final podcast + script, or podcast peer feedback assignments that are due at the end of the semester. After you have used your two grace passes, late work will be accepted with a 10% deduction per day for up to three days; after three days, no credit will be given. If you find yourself in a situation that puts you behind, please reach out to me as early as possible to discuss options.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND AUTHORSHIP

You should submit work that reflects your own thinking, judgment, and writing, and give appropriate credit when you draw on outside sources. Any use of generative AI must follow the course policy: AI may support parts of your process, but you are responsible for the final product, including accuracy, sourcing, and voice alignment. Misrepresenting AI-generated or copied text as your own, submitting fabricated citations or evidence, or using AI to produce work you cannot explain and defend violates academic integrity and professional standards. When in doubt, cite, disclose, or ask.

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

This is a general guideline for assignments. More details will be provided on Canvas. All work should be turned in as a Word document via Canvas by the deadline specified in the assignment, unless otherwise noted.

“Blog” discussion posts. This semester, you will write six blog-style discussion posts connected to the week’s topic. The idea is not to summarize the readings but to analyze them by providing insights and comments that demonstrate knowledge and deep thinking about the theories, methods, and concepts in the week’s readings and resources. You may connect ideas to other course readings, professional experience, current events, or relevant examples from media or industry practice if the connection is explicit and purposeful. This assignment also aims to help you develop your writing voice throughout the semester. The blog format allows maximum flexibility in finding creative, engaging, and fun ways to synthesize the readings and develop killer content. These 300- to 400-word blog posts are due NLT 11:59 p.m. on THURSDAY of the week assigned to allow everyone time to reply to at least two peers’ blog posts before the SUNDAY deadline. Details about blog post requirements are on Canvas.

Reply requirements. In each blog week, you must reply to at least two of your peer’s blog posts. Replies must move the conversation forward; posts that say, “I agree,” “Great job,” or similar will not receive credit. Replies are due NLT 11:59 p.m. on Sunday of the week assigned. Details about reply requirements are on Canvas.

“Portfolio” assignments. This semester, you will complete a series of portfolio-quality assignments for a case-study organization of your choice.

The portfolio assignments include:

- Organizational Voice + Style Snapshot (Week 3)
- Audience Insights Triad (Weeks 4 – 5)
- LinkedIn Long-Form Post (Week 5)
- Message Strategy One-Pager (Week 6)
- Proposal Excerpt (Week 7)
- Audience Adaptation Exercise (Week 9)
- Earned Media Package (Week 10)
- Social + Accessibility Content Set (Week 11)
- Authority Content + Discoverability Package (Week 12)
- Podcast Package (Weeks 13 and 15)
- Crisis Writing + Rapid Response Package (Week 14).

Organization selection criteria and specific assignment details are on Canvas.

Grading

There is a total of 1,200 points available this semester. Points-to-letter grade conversion is:

1,164 – 1,200 points = A+

1,116 – 1,163 points = A

1,080 – 1,115 points = A-

1,044 – 1,079 points = B+

996 – 1,043 points = B

960 – 995 points = B-

924 – 959 points = C+

876 – 923 points = C

840 – 875 points = C-

804 – 755 points = D

754 and below points = F

CONTACTING ME

The best and quickest way to contact me is via email (ksmarks@memphis.edu). I will respond to your email within 24 – 48 hours. You can also visit my office hours or schedule an in-person or Teams meeting. If you have a problem, do not let it snowball. Contact me ASAP.

SEMESTER SCHEDULE

This schedule is subject to change. Any updates will be provided via email and Canvas announcements.

Week 1, Jan. 19 – 25 (Tuesday start, Monday, Jan. 18, is MLK Day)

Strategic Writing as Strategy

Assignments:

- Introduction blog post
- Case-study organization selection + rationale

Week 2, Jan. 26 – Feb. 1

Ethics + AI Governance

Assignments:

- Blog post 1 (due Thursday, Jan. 29)
- Two blog post replies
- Ethics/AI decision memo

Week 3, Feb. 2 – 8

Voice, Tone, and Style Systems

Assignments:

- Blog post 2 (due Thursday, Feb. 5)
- Two blog post replies
- Voice + style snapshot

Week 4, Feb. 9 – 15

Audience Insights + Research

Assignments:

- Blog post 3 (due Thursday, Feb. 12)
- Two blog post replies
- Human-led audience insight brief

Week 5, Feb. 16 – 22

Professional Voice + Credibility

Assignments:

- LinkedIn post (no replies required, this will be due on Sunday, Feb. 22)
- AI insight + comparison (to complete Triad)

Week 6, Feb. 23 – March 1

Persuasion, Framing, and Message Strategy

Assignments:

- Blog post 4 (due Thursday, Feb. 26)
- Two blog post replies
- Message strategy one-pager

Week 7, March 2 – 8

Proposal Writing

Assignment:

- Proposal excerpt

Week 8, March 9 – 15

Spring Break

Week 9, March 16 – 22

Inclusive + Accessible Writing

Assignment:

- Message adaptation exercise

Week 10, March 23 – 29

Earned Media Writing

Assignments:

- Blog post 5 (due on Thursday, March 26)
- Two blog post replies
- Earned media package

Week 11, March 30 – April 5

Social + Community Writing

Assignment:

- Social + Accessibility Set

Week 12, April 6 – 12

Authority Content + Discoverability

Assignment:

- White paper outline + source checkpoint (peer review)

Week 13, April 13 – 19

Multimodal Storytelling

Assignments:

- Authority package
- Podcast checkpoint

Week 14, April 20 – 26

Crisis Writing + Rapid Response

Assignments:

- Blog post 6 (due Thursday, April 23)
- Two blog post replies
- Crisis writing + rapid response package

Week 15, April 27 – 29 (Wednesday)

Wrapping Up

Final podcast + script due Wednesday, April 29

Podcast peer feedback due Friday, May 8